



# **Digital Storytelling, Narrative, and Nursing Education**

## **Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography**

### **Literature Review**

The landscape of nursing education is continuously evolving, seeking innovative pedagogies to equip future nurses with not only clinical competencies but also profound empathic understanding and a holistic approach to patient care (Beck, Sitzman, 2019). Within this evolution, digital storytelling (DST) has emerged as a powerful and transformative educational tool, leveraging the ancient art of narrative with modern technology (Price et al., 2015; Beck, Neil, 2020; Yocom et al., 2020). This literature review synthesizes insights from seventeen key articles, exploring the multifaceted relationships between digital storytelling, narrative pedagogy, and their impact on nursing education. These articles collectively highlight how DST enhances learning, fosters empathy, promotes critical reflection, and addresses complex issues, while also acknowledging the benefits and challenges of its implementation.

### **The Foundational Role of Narrative Pedagogy and the Emergence of Digital Storytelling**

Narrative has always been integral to nursing, serving as a primary means of understanding human experience, conveying knowledge, and fostering connection (LeBlanc et al., 2017; Beck, Neil, 2020; Conlon et al., 2020). Nurse researchers extensively report on the positive effects of individual narrative exercises, highlighting how storytelling personalizes learning, promotes a safe environment, and supports diverse student populations (Crawley, Simons, 2024). Narrative pedagogy, a teaching approach developed by Diekelmann, emphasizes co-creating knowledge between teacher and student through open communication and the exchange of ideas (Beck, Neil, 2020). Within

this framework, stories, in their myriad forms—memoirs, interviews, poems, and digital stories—offer an alternate lens for learning (Crawley, Simons, 2024).

Digital storytelling represents a natural evolution of traditional storytelling into the digital age, combining narrative texts with multimedia elements such as images, recorded audio narrations, music, and videos (Moreau et al., 2018; Deng et al., 2023; Price et al., 2015; Beck, Neil, 2020; Reyhan, Dağlı, 2024). This multimedia approach allows individuals to share lived experiences in ways that traditional oral or written stories often cannot, creating a more immersive and emotionally engaging learning experience (Moreau et al., 2018; Deng et al., 2023; Reyhan, Dağlı, 2024). The widespread use of storytelling in nurse education, supported by an emerging evidence base, demonstrates its recognized value (Beck, Neil, 2020; Paliadelis, Wood, 2016; Conlon et al., 2020; Attenborough, Abbot, 2020).

Systematic reviews confirm the growing presence and impact of DST in health professions education (HPE), with nursing education often at the forefront (Moreau et al., 2018). Moreau et al. (2018) reveal that half of the studies on DST in HPE focus on undergraduate nursing, reflecting nursing's emphasis on lived experiences, constructive learning frameworks, and collaborative approaches (Moreau et al., 2018). Similarly, Mojtahedzadeh et al. (2021) identify 12 studies in nursing education among the 35 reviewed, underscoring DST's application for promoting empathy, critical thinking, and skills improvement (Mojtahedzadeh et al., 2021). These reviews establish DST as a powerful educational technology that complements narrative pedagogy by facilitating reflection, idea sharing, and collaborative learning (Mojtahedzadeh et al., 2021).

## **Fostering Empathy and Humanistic Care through Digital Narratives**

A crucial role of digital storytelling in nursing education is its capacity to cultivate empathy and humanistic care, essential qualities for modern nurses (Deng et al., 2023). Petty et al. (2020) demonstrate this by exploring the impact of parent-informed digital stories on empathic learning in neonatal nurse education (Petty et al., 2020). The study found that the powerful emotional messages embedded in these digital narratives significantly increased nursing students' and staff's awareness and insight into parents' affective experiences, thus potentially leading to more person-centered care

(Petty et al., 2020). The combination of story and technology, within a narrative pedagogy framework, enhances learning effectiveness and supports a holistic approach to patient care (Petty et al., 2020).

Deng et al. (2023) further illustrate this by developing a humanistic care digital storytelling program for intensive care nursing students. This program, utilizing a visual storytelling approach, allowed students to emotionally immerse themselves in humanistic stories derived from clinical practice, which is distinct from traditional text-based narratives (Deng et al., 2023). The high acceptance and satisfaction among participating students, along with their reported emotional responses, suggest that DST effectively promotes humanistic literacy and complements existing narrative healthcare education materials (Deng et al., 2023). This highlights how digital stories, as a form of narrative education, can transcend purely cognitive learning by deeply engaging students emotionally, fostering empathy that is crucial for understanding the "real person" behind the medical condition (Deng et al., 2023).

### **Digital Storytelling for Reflection, Professional Development, and Bridging Theory-Practice Gaps**

Beyond empathy, digital storytelling is highly effective in promoting critical reflection and professional identity development among nursing students. Urstad et al. (2018) investigated nursing students' experiences with creating their own digital stories as a tool for reflection during clinical placements. The study concluded that this student-created DST fostered engagement, ownership of reflection, and deeper understanding of clinical situations (Urstad et al., 2018). By actively engaging in the process of constructing and sharing their narratives, students were able to process complex experiences, connecting theoretical knowledge with practical realities. However, the study also prudently noted the potential vulnerability students might feel when sharing personal multimedia stories with peers, emphasizing the need for a supportive learning environment (Urstad et al., 2018).

Paliadelis and Wood (2016) similarly examined a digital storytelling activity where final year nursing students reflected on meaningful clinical placement experiences. Their findings demonstrated that reflecting on actual, often challenging, clinical stories, rather than abstract concepts, deepened students' self-knowledge and helped them prepare for their roles as

Registered Nurses (Paliadelis, Wood, 2016; Timpani et al., 2022). This process of recounting and re-imagining responses to clinical events fosters critical thinking and professional growth. This aligns with the broader understanding that reflection, often spurred by storytelling, is fundamental to learning about oneself and developing empathy (Timpani et al., 2022).

Digital storytelling also serves as a potent tool for bridging the theory-practice gap and addressing complex societal issues within nursing education. Price et al. (2015) illustrate this by using DST to promote deeper understanding of palliative care concepts. By creating narrated digital stories that applied course knowledge to personal experiences, students gained emotional understanding of patients' journeys with advanced illness and dying, demonstrating how DST can offer a more holistic understanding than traditional linear case studies (Price et al., 2015). LeBlanc (2017) further extends this application to social justice nursing education, where digital stories help students confront vulnerability, question existing systems, and cultivate moral courage by reflecting on diverse narratives of social injustice (LeBlanc et al., 2017). This underscores how narrative, especially in its digital form, can advance social justice as a core nursing practice and foster critical thinking about broader health determinants (LeBlanc et al., 2017).

The question of authenticity in digitally mediated narratives is crucial, particularly in sensitive fields like mental health nursing. Conlon et al. (2020) explore whether technology "flattens authenticity" when digital storytelling is used as a learning tool in mental health nurse education (Conlon et al., 2020). They acknowledge that narratives are essential pedagogical tools for understanding and applying knowledge in nursing (Conlon et al., 2020). By examining this tension, the study contributes to understanding how educators can harness digital media to convey genuine experiences without compromising the inherent human element of storytelling, ensuring that the digital format enriches rather than dilutes the learning about real patient experiences.

## **Benefits, Challenges, and Future Directions of Digital Storytelling Pedagogy**

The integration of digital storytelling into nursing curricula offers compelling benefits. Beck and Neil (2020) provide a comprehensive qualitative study outlining these benefits, along with associated challenges and potential

solutions. Nurse educators interviewed highlighted that DST fosters a greater depth of discussion, actively engages students, and promotes reflection and empathy (Beck, Neil, 2020). It also aids in the development of critical thinking and information technology skills, essential for 21st-century practice (Beck, Neil, 2020). The visual and auditory nature of digital stories creates an interactive learning environment where students can "see, hear, and feel an experience," leading to a more holistic understanding of disease processes and care (Beck, Sitzman, 2019).

However, implementing DST is not without its hurdles. Challenges identified include finding appropriate digital stories, navigating legal issues related to content and privacy, and effectively assessing student learning outcomes (Beck, Neil, 2020). Time constraints in the classroom for showing and discussing digital stories, and ensuring students recognize the intended learning points, are also practical concerns (Beck, Neil, 2020). Solutions proposed often revolve around careful curriculum integration, adequate time allocation, clear learning objectives, and robust discussion frameworks to maximize pedagogical impact (Beck, Neil, 2020). Despite these challenges, the consensus among educators is that DST has the potential to transform the educational environment, offering a powerful portal to educate nurses for practice in the 21st century (Beck, Neil, 2020; Beck, Sitzman, 2019).

Ben-Ahmed (2023) further emphasizes this, framing DST as an inspirational technological approach for educators to learn from each other and reflect on their teaching practices, thereby nurturing caring pedagogical relationships within nursing programs. Sharing meaningful digital stories among educators can foster professional development and cultivate an inclusive community, promoting relational emancipatory pedagogy (Ben-Ahmed, 2023).

## Conclusion

The reviewed literature strongly supports the significant and evolving role of digital storytelling and narrative pedagogy in nursing education. Digital storytelling, by merging the timeless power of human narrative with contemporary multimedia technology, offers a uniquely effective approach to teaching and learning complex nursing concepts. It serves as a potent vehicle for fostering empathy, enhancing critical reflection, promoting professional identity, and addressing multifaceted patient and societal challenges.

From facilitating empathic understanding in sensitive areas like neonatal care (Petty et al., 2020) and humanistic care in intensive settings (Deng et al., 2023)

to enabling critical reflection on clinical placements (Urstad et al., 2018; Paliadelis, Wood, 2016) and exploring social justice issues (LeBlanc et al., 2017), digital narratives equip nursing students with essential skills for person-centered and compassionate care. While pedagogical and logistical challenges exist, the collective evidence suggests that careful design and integration of digital storytelling activities can overcome these barriers, leading to profound and lasting learning outcomes. As nursing continues to navigate complex healthcare landscapes, the continued exploration and innovative application of digital storytelling promise to cultivate a generation of nurses who are not only clinically competent but also deeply empathic, reflective, and attuned to the holistic needs of their patients and communities. Future research should continue to explore best practices, assess long-term impacts, and refine methodologies for integrating this powerful educational tool into diverse nursing curricula (Beck, Neil, 2020).

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## Annotated Bibliography

**Attenborough, J., & Abbott, S. (2020). Using storytelling in nurse education: The experiences and views of lecturers in a higher education institution in the United Kingdom. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 44, Article 102762. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2020.102762>**

This research explored the application and perceived effectiveness of storytelling by lecturers in nurse education within a UK higher education institution. Storytelling, as defined in this paper, involves lecturers drawing on their own clinical or other experiences to illustrate, contextualize, and add meaning to their teaching of theory and clinical skills. The study identified several reasons for its use, including linking theory and practice, enhancing understanding, increasing empathy, and fostering a nursing identity. While widely practiced, storytelling often remains a hidden, unacknowledged part of the curriculum. A key finding was its contribution to developing nursing identity in students and promoting empathic feelings towards patients, as

well as maintaining nursing identity among staff. A limitation noted was the self-selected sample, potentially limiting generalizability.

**Beck, M. S., & Neil, J. A. (2020). Digital Storytelling: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Benefits, Challenges, and Solutions. *Computers, Informatics, Nursing*, 39(3), 123–128. <https://doi.org/10.1097/CIN.0000000000000667>**

This qualitative study investigates the benefits, challenges, and solutions of using digital stories in nursing education, interviewing nurse educators from various regions. It highlights digital stories as a new pedagogical tool in a digital world, connecting to narrative pedagogy. Key benefits identified include fostering deeper discussion, engaging students, promoting reflection and empathy, and developing critical thinking and IT skills. Challenges include finding appropriate stories, legal issues, and assessing student learning, with solutions focusing on integration and discussion. The study concludes that digital stories can transform the educational environment towards a holistic perspective.

**Beck, M. S., & Sitzman, K. (2019). Compelling Reasons for Using Digital Stories to Teach: A Descriptive Qualitative Study. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*, 14(4), 265–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2019.06.007>**

This descriptive qualitative study explored the reasons why nurse educators incorporate digital stories into their classrooms. Through interviews with 12 nurse educators, five compelling reasons emerged: capturing student attention through media, varying teaching methods, providing a sharing experience, enabling students to "see, hear, and feel" an experience, and fostering the "feel, intuit, think" (FIT) process. Digital stories integrate audio, text, pictures, and video to create a dynamic and interactive learning environment, helping students gain a holistic understanding of disease processes and care. This approach is seen as a powerful force in nursing education, engaging and inspiring students and enriching both online and face-to-face learning experiences. Related research by Schwartz Beck and Neil (2021) further notes benefits like promoting reflection, empathy, and critical thinking, while also highlighting challenges such as legal issues and assessing learning outcomes. The overall consensus is that digital stories offer a transformative educational tool for future nurses.



**Ben-Ahmed, H. E. (2023). *Nurturing caring pedagogical relationships through a digital storytelling approach: New avenues for educators. Teaching and Learning in Nursing, 18(4), 496–499.***  
**<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2023.05.009>**

This article explores how a digital storytelling (DST) approach can nurture caring pedagogical relationships in nursing education. Ben-Ahmed's work builds on his earlier research into the lived experience of a caring pedagogical relationship within high-fidelity clinical simulation. The article proposes DST as an innovative and effective method for educators to deepen connections and understanding with their students. By leveraging the known benefits of storytelling in nurse education, such as linking theory and practice, enhancing understanding, increasing empathy, and fostering reflection, this approach aims to cultivate a more humanistic and compassionate learning environment. This pedagogical strategy is posited to ultimately prepare future nurses with improved interpersonal skills essential for patient-centered care.

**Conlon, M. M. M., Smart, F., & McIntosh, G. (2020). *Does technology flatten authenticity? Exploring the use of digital storytelling as a learning tool in mental health nurse education. Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 29(3), 269–278.***  
**<https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2020.1760127>**

This article examines the use of digital storytelling as a learning tool in mental health nurse education, focusing on theoretical and philosophical questions of authenticity in digital narratives. It asserts that stories and narrative are essential pedagogical tools in nurse education for applying knowledge, building understanding, and testing assumptions. The study explores whether technology, while offering new possibilities for storytelling, compromises the authenticity of the shared experience. By investigating this dynamic, it contributes to understanding how digital storytelling can effectively facilitate learning and personal growth within the specific context of mental health nursing, where genuine human connection is paramount.

**Crawley, J., Simons, A. (2024). *Teaching strategies that celebrate narrative pedagogy. Scope (Learning and Teaching), 13, 60-65.***  
**<https://doi.org/10.34074/scop.4013017>**

This article by Crawley and Simons explores the transformative potential of narrative pedagogy in a first-year nursing sociology course. The authors detail how they redesigned the curriculum to immerse students in storytelling and



reflective practices, aiming to foster self-awareness, challenge biases, and cultivate empathy for diverse client experiences. By using various activities, such as exploring family stories, engaging with refugee narratives, and playing a board game about health determinants, the course encouraged students to deconstruct assumptions and develop a culturally safe approach to nursing. The ultimate goal was to prepare students to be reflective practitioners who are open to multiple perspectives and committed to providing client-centered care.

**Deng, X., Ye, M., Li, W., Chen, S., Guo, J., Zhu, J., Huang, L., Fang, C., Peng, Z., & Yin, P. (2024). Development of a humanistic care digital storytelling programme for intensive care unit nursing students: Feasibility and satisfaction analysis. *Nurse Education Today*, 132, Article 105998. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2023.105998>**

This article details the development and assessment of a humanistic care digital storytelling program for intensive care nursing students. It defines digital storytelling as a visual, multimedia approach that fosters emotional immersion, distinguishing it from traditional text-based storytelling and viewing it as a new form of narrative education. The program aimed to enhance humanistic care by illustrating relevant clinical stories. Results showed high student satisfaction and emotional responses to the digital stories, indicating its potential to promote humanistic care and complement narrative healthcare education materials.

**LeBlanc, R. G. (2017). Digital story telling in social justice nursing education. *Public Health Nursing*, 34(4), 395–400. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phn.12337>**

This study explores how digital stories integrated into public health nursing education can teach social justice concepts and foster social justice capacity in students. It emphasizes that storytelling is crucial for learning, building connection, and offering insight into the human condition, with digital stories providing an innovative medium. By analyzing student reflections on digital stories created by nurses, themes like "Encountering Vulnerability," "Questioning Systems," and "Choosing Moral Courage" emerged. The article highlights digital stories' value in promoting reflective practice, developing a capacity for social justice, and advancing narrative pedagogy in online learning environments.

**Mojtahedzadeh, R., Mohammadi, A., Hossein Emami, A., & Zarei, A. (2021). How Digital Storytelling Applied in Health Profession Education: A Systematized Review. *Journal of Advances in Medical Education & Professionalism*, 9(2), 63–78. <https://doi.org/10.30476/jamp.2021.87856.1326>**

This systematized review investigates how digital storytelling (DST) is applied in health profession education, encompassing 35 articles, 12 of which are specifically in nursing education. DST is defined as the combination of storytelling and digital components like texts, pictures, audio narrations, music, and videos. The review found that DST can be produced by various stakeholders and used for diverse aims, including empathy promotion, attitude and behavior change, critical thinking, and skills improvement. It emphasizes DST as a powerful educational technology that fosters reflection, sharing, and collaborative learning, contributing significantly to teaching and learning critical thinking in health practice. The authors recommend further quantitative and qualitative research in this area due to a scarcity of high-quality interventional studies.

**Moreau, K. A., Eady, K., Sikora, L., & Horsley, T. (2018). Digital storytelling in health professions education: a systematic review. *BMC Medical Education*, 18(1), Article 208. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-018-1320-1>**

This systematic review examines the contexts, purposes, and impact of digital storytelling (DST) in health professions education (HPE), with half of the included studies focusing on undergraduate nursing. DST combines first-person narratives with multimedia to create short videos, sharing lived experiences in ways traditional storytelling cannot. The review found that co-creating patients' digital stories with health professionals, or creating health professionals' own digital stories, enhanced learning. It noted that nursing education, with its emphasis on lived experiences and collaborative learning, is a primary context for DST research. The study highlights the need for high-quality research, especially on DST's impact on health professionals' behaviors.

**Paliadelis, P., & Wood, P. (2016). Learning from clinical placement experience: Analysing nursing students' final reflections in a digital storytelling activity. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 20, 39–44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2016.06.005>**

This descriptive qualitative study reports on the learning potential of a reflective activity where final year nursing students recounted meaningful clinical placement events through a digital storytelling activity. It underscores storytelling as a powerful educational tool that promotes deep learning by prompting reflection on practice, with digital storytelling as a new variant that creates a safe and engaging space for sharing experiences. Four themes emerged from the analysis of 92 student narratives, highlighting their interpretation of clinical experiences, desire to fit into their role, and ability to re-imagine future responses as Registered Nurses. The study affirms that reflecting on actual stories, rather than just theoretical ones, assists student learning and connects experiences with self-knowledge.

**Petty, J., Jarvis, J., & Thomas, R. (2020). Exploring the impact of digital stories on empathic learning in neonatal nurse education. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 48, Article 102853. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2020.102853>**

This study explores the impact of digital stories, informed by parents' experiences, as a pedagogical tool to enhance empathic learning in neonatal nurse education. It highlights that the powerful emotional messages conveyed through digital stories increased nursing students' and staff's awareness, understanding, and insight into parents' affective experiences, potentially leading to more empathic and person-centered care. The authors explicitly link digital storytelling with narrative pedagogy and curriculum transformation, suggesting that the integration of story and technology can improve learning effectiveness. While highly positive, the study acknowledges limitations such as the stories not replacing real-life practice and the need for integration with classroom learning.

**Price, D. M., Strodman, L., Brough, E., Lonn, S., & Luo, A. (2015). Digital Storytelling: An Innovative Technological Approach to Nursing Education. *Nurse Educator*, 40(2), 66–70. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NNE.0000000000000094>**

This article examines the impact of digital storytelling on promoting deeper understanding of palliative care concepts in nursing students. Students created 5-minute narrated digital stories synthesizing course knowledge. Findings indicate that creating and sharing digital stories helped students embrace the personal and complex nature of palliative care, fostering emotional understanding of patients' lived experiences with advanced illness.

and dying. The study posits that digital storytelling marries the strengths of narrative and technology, bridging abstract concepts to personal experiences, and enhancing professional skills like presentation and communication. It suggests that digital stories, by integrating personal and real patient narratives, offer a holistic understanding beyond linear case studies.

**Reyhan, F. A., & Dağlı, E. (2024). Investigation of midwifery students' opinions on the digital storytelling method in midwifery education and assessment of their digital stories. *Nurse Education Today*, 140, Article 106262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2024.106262>**

This qualitative descriptive study investigated midwifery students' perceptions of the digital storytelling (DST) method in their education and assessed the quality of the digital stories they produced. Conducted with 26 senior midwifery students through semi-structured interviews, the research identified three primary themes: the benefits of DST, difficulties in preparing digital stories, and the role of DST in midwifery education. Initially, students doubted its efficacy, but ultimately found DST highly effective, stating it encouraged creativity, promoted enjoyable learning, and supported skill development. Specific benefits included fostering imagination, retaining knowledge, encouraging research, and improving communication and problem-solving skills. However, students also reported challenges such as time consumption and difficulties with story creation, selecting audiovisual elements, using software, and finding quiet recording spaces. The study advocates for expanding this innovative teaching method in midwifery education.

**Timpani, S., Sweet, L., & Sivertsen, N. (2022). A narrative inquiry of storytelling: a learning strategy for nursing students to reflect on their interactions with patients. *Reflective Practice*, 23(2), 232–245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2021.2013191>**

This narrative inquiry investigated storytelling as a learning strategy for nursing students to reflect on their interactions with patients. The study identified five key findings: students' enthusiastic engagement with storytelling, how stories illuminated significant moments of student-patient interactions, the value of a positive clinical facilitator-student relationship, the complexities of registered nurse-student relationships, and feelings of isolation experienced by students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Storytelling was found to be effective in fostering

communication skills with patients and enhancing student learning. An earlier integrative review by Timpani, Sweet, and Sivertsen (2021) further supported storytelling as an arts-based learning strategy for reflection during clinical placements, emphasizing its benefits for the storyteller and for affective learning. While more commonly used in community placements, the benefits of storytelling were applicable regardless of the clinical environment, suggesting its potential to guide future educational and theoretical work in nursing education.

**Urstad, K. H., Ulfsby, K. J., Brandeggen, T. K., Bodsberg, K. G., Jensen, T. L., & Tjoflåt, I. (2018). Digital storytelling in clinical replacement studies: Nursing students' experiences. *Nurse Education Today*, 71, 91–96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2018.09.016>**

This qualitative study investigates nursing students' experiences with student-created digital storytelling as a tool for reflection during clinical placements. It recognizes that reflection through shared storytelling is a well-established learning method in nursing education, with digital development expanding its possibilities. The findings indicate that student-created digital storytelling triggered engagement, promoted a sense of ownership over their reflections, and led to a deeper understanding of clinical situations. However, the study also highlights that storytellers might feel vulnerable when sharing multimedia messages with peers, underscoring the importance of a safe learning environment.

**Yocom, D., Bashaw, C., Price, D., & Cook, M. (2020). Perceptions of digital storytelling in the classroom. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*, 15(3), 164–167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2020.01.010>**

This article examines prelicensure nursing students' perceptions of digital storytelling (DST) as a teaching tool in the classroom. DST is defined as using media and software to convey stories creatively, effectively connecting the reality of illness with the experiences and concerns of healthcare professionals. The study involved a classroom activity where students engaged with digital stories, followed by a group care planning session based on the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) Initiative Patient-Centered Care Competency. Evaluation through Likert-scale questions and focus group discussions revealed that students viewed DST as a positive learning experience, particularly highlighting its psychosocial elements. Students advocated for more frequent integration of digital stories

into the curriculum, as they were found to promote deeper learning and effectively convey patient experiences.

Note: Portions of this document were prepared using NotebookLM.