

The effect of journal writing on students' writing ability and self-efficacy

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of journal writing on students' writing ability and self-efficacy. A mixed-method research design was employed utilizing quantitative and qualitative data analysis. A one-group pre-post-test experimental study involving 33 students of tenth-grade students was administered in one public senior high school in Bandung. The quantitative data were gathered through a pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire. Meanwhile, qualitative data analysis was conducted on the students' writing in the pre-test, post-test, and interview. Students' writing was analyzed based on The ESL Composition Profile proposed by Jacobs et al. (1981). The results showed that content and organization were the most affected, followed by mechanics, vocabulary, and language use. Furthermore, based on the interview, students formed their self-efficacy based on four sources, namely performance outcomes, vicarious experience and verbal persuasion, and physiological feedback, which they acquired from writing journals.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received

7 January 2023

Published

4 April 2023

KEYWORDS

Journal writing; self-efficacy; writing ability

INTRODUCTION

Considered the most difficult skill in English, writing has often been described as the most challenging thing to do in the language (Alwasilah, 2001; Nunan, 1999; Zhang, 2013) and a demanding and sometimes troublesome dimension of academic life (Murray & Moore, 2006). Writing is difficult, even in our native language. More complex writing requires basic skills and strategies, such as planning, goal setting, considering one's audience, synthesizing information, and revising one's writing (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Bruning & Horn, 2000 in Holmes, 2016). Even though it is challenging to master, teachers must help students acquire this skill because writing ability is essential for academic and career success. Consequently, training students to write demands the care and attention of language teachers (Harmer, 2004).

Writing encourages students to focus on proper language use because they think as they write, which may trigger their language development (Harmer, 2004). Besides, having good ability in writing can maintain students' minor skills, namely vocabulary, grammar, spelling, among others. Thus, as educators, teachers should not only trigger students to accomplish all tasks but also develop their personal growth, which means increasing the willingness of the students to

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learn by themselves. Especially in mastering writing, students not only need to master grammar rules, have many vocabularies, and be fluent in organizing sentences, but they also need a belief in themselves that they can revise their own writing, handle the difficulties in writing and avoid distractions during the process of writing. Therefore, the method used by the teacher in the classroom should also improve their motivation and confidence/self-efficacy in writing.

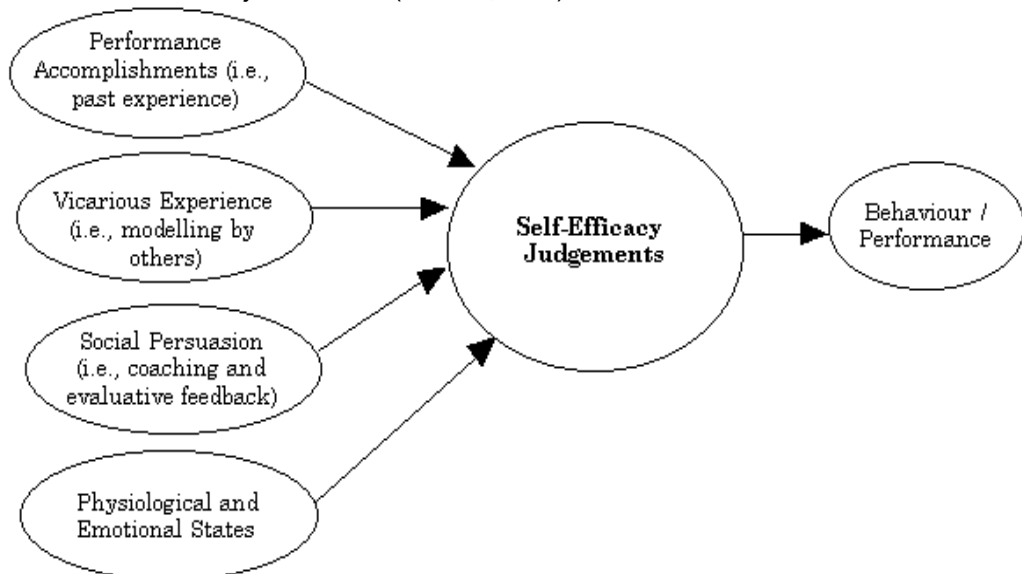
Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, which is defined as people's beliefs that they are capable of carrying out an action to achieve a particular goal (Bandura, 1993 in Bandura, 1997) and a person's ability to perform certain behaviors (Bandura, 2000), is believed to have an impact on student's success in accomplishing specific tasks. Those with high self-efficacy will be able to encounter difficult tasks in academic settings. Conversely, people with low self-efficacy are not motivated (Scott, 1996) and may think that things are tougher than they really are (Pajares, 2003).

Self-efficacy is an individual's assessment of one's ability to succeed in a particular domain or perform a specific task linked to their motivation in that domain or task (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1997, cited in Holmes, 2016). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy comes from four sources that can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure1

Sources of Self-efficacy information (Bandura, 1997)



Sources of Self-efficacy Information

The first source is performance accomplishments which are defined as student consideration of their belief based on successes and failures that happened in the past. Second, vicarious experience is a belief that you are as capable as someone succeeding at a certain task, leading you to believe that you can achieve (Bandura, 1997). The third is social persuasion which means praise from the teacher, encouragement from parents, or positive feedback from friends. Last but not least, physiological and emotional states affect the students' self. Anxiety and worry can affect the level of a student's self-efficacy.

High self-efficacy can allow students to expand their abilities and knowledge by themselves. Perceived self-efficacy is not a measure of the skills one has but a belief about what one can do

under different sets of conditions regardless of the possession of skills. In writing, self-efficacy refers to someone's confidence in completing writing tasks. Some research (Prat-Sala & Redfor, 2012; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Pajares & Valiante, 1999; Shell, Colvin, & Bruning, 1999) indicates that self-efficacy affects students' writing. Those who have strong confidence in writing tend to write better. Thus, it implies that teachers need to pay attention to the students' self-efficacy perception and provide writing tasks that can enhance students' self-efficacy. Most EFL learners consider writing the most challenging skill to master, which implies a low level of self-efficacy in writing.

Considering the problem mentioned above, writing instructors must give students writing activities that can promote their self-efficacy in writing. One of the tasks that is believed to be able to enhance students' self-efficacy is journal writing. Journal, which is often used interchangeably with diary, is free writing where people can express their feelings, recount or respond to past events/certain issues. The nature of a journal that does not emphasize accuracy makes it a non-threatening activity worth implementing. This is because journal writing does not force students to be able to master all the minor skills in language (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, etc.), but its main intention is to make students enjoy writing. When they have fun writing, their self-efficacy for writing may improve, as indicated by Martinez, Kock, and Cass (2011), who found a mildly positive relationship between "leisure writing" and self-efficacy for writing. This is understandable because writing accuracy is not the ultimate goal in journal writing; students should not feel burdened with grammatical correctness issues and thus will find writing enjoyable. Besides, this activity can be done outside the classroom, which can overcome the time-constraint issue commonly faced by EFL learners and teachers.

Journal writing

Journal writing has long been incorporated into language education and is believed to have many benefits for teachers and students. As an informal regular writing activity, journaling is "a means for recording personal thoughts, daily experiences, and evolving insights. The process often evokes conversations with self, another person, or even an imagined other people" (Hiemstra, 2001, p. 19). Harmer (2004) stated that if journal writing is successfully encouraged and if the conditions for journal writing are appropriate – it has a powerful effect on their motivation too, quite apart from promoting learner autonomy in writing. It facilitates students to write freely, utter their feelings, and communicate with the teacher. It also allows passive students to express their ideas when they have no chance in the classroom because it is also impossible for a student not to be engaged with the course material when she is writing and learning in her own notebook (Baxter, 2009).

Journal writing also has several advantages in helping students maintain their writing. First, journal writing will help students develop the habit of thinking on paper and show them how they can discover ideas in the process of writing. A journal can make writing a familiar part of a student's life and can serve as a continuing source of ideas for papers (Tuan, 2010). Second, journal writing gives students an opportunity to acquire writing fluency and experiment with writing words, phrases, and sentences in a non-threatening environment (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Third, journal writing facilitates students and teachers to communicate outside the classroom. Students are accommodated to write their own experiences and thoughts. Then, the teacher has the opportunity to respond to students' writing in the form of dialogue journal writing. This kind of communication may lead students and teachers to have a strong relationship/rapport.

Also, journal writing is the students' freedom of expression, which can help them solve the problem (Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Harmer, 2004). They will have a place to devote their feelings. In addition, it will develop students' writing skills. The more students write, the better and more fluent they become as writers (Harmer, 2004; Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Moreover, journal writing

is perceived positively as a beneficial extensive writing activity that can improve students' writing, build rapport with the teacher, and facilitate students to express themselves (Rodliyah, 2019).

METHOD

This study aims to find out the effect of journal writing on students' writing ability and self-efficacy. To achieve the purposes of the study, a mixed method design was employed because it allows researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative research to provide a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell, 2012). This study combined quantitative research in the form of a pre-experimental research design and qualitative research using data from students' writing and interview. One experimental group was given treatment in the form of journal writing for a month. The subjects were 33 students, thirteen males, and twenty females, in the tenth grade of one public senior high school in Bandung. This class was selected by using random sampling; therefore, all members of the population have the same probability of being selected. The sample of the research is hoped to represent the population. The population of this study is all tenth-grade students in that school. This class is chosen randomly from ten classes to take the test as the sample.

To obtain the data in this study, the researchers used three instruments. The first instrument was students' writing tests on pre-test and post-test. Students' writing on the pre-test and post-test was analyzed using The ESL Composition Profile proposed by Jacobs et al. (1981). The aspects scored in this rubric are content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Students' writing was scored by two raters who had been trained before to maintain the scores' validity and reliability. The result was then calculated by using paired t-test to compare the mean score of the result. By using SPSS 24 for windows, the steps in calculating the data were checking the normality distribution, homogeneity of variance, and paired sample t-test. In addition, to know the level of improvement of students' writing ability in each aspect, the normalized gain was calculated by using the hake formulation (1999). The students' text was also analyzed to support the statistical result.

The second instrument was a questionnaire to measure students' self-efficacy. The questionnaire adapted from Bruning, Dempsey, Kauffman, McKim, and Zumbrunn (2013) consisted of sixteen statements divided into three subscales: ideations, conventions, and self-regulation. The third instrument was a semi-structured interview. From the results of the questionnaire, four students were chosen as the representative to be interviewed.

FINDINGS

The Effect of Journal Writing on Students' Writing Ability

Findings from quantitative data

To find the effect of journal writing on students' writing and self-efficacy (see Table 1 and Table 2), first of all, a normality distribution test was conducted to find out whether the data of student's scores in the pre-test and post-test were normally distributed. Shapiro-Wilk test in SPSS Statistics 24 was used to test the normal distribution. The hypothesis for this normality distribution is as follows:

H₀: the scores of the pre-test and post-test are normally distributed.

H₁: the scores of the pre-test and post-test are not normally distributed.

Table 1

Tests of Normality on Students' Writing Test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	.103	33	.200 [*]	.958	33	.224
Posttest	.115	33	.200 [*]	.963	33	.311

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 2

Test of Normality on Students' Self-Efficacy

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	.103	33	.200 [*]	.958	33	.224
Posttest	.115	33	.200 [*]	.963	33	.311

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The findings showed that students' writing scores and self-efficacy on the pre-test and post-test were normally distributed, which means that it belongs to parametric data. The data was then calculated using Lavene Statistics to test the homogeneity of variances, and it was found that the data was homogeneous, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

The Result of the Homogeneity Test on Students' Writing

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.595	1	64	.443

As the findings showed that the data was parametric, paired t-test was used to measure the difference between the pre-test and post-test. The result of the paired sample statistics is shown in Table 4.

The table showed that the post-test score (M=69.75, SD=9.54) was higher than the pre-test score (M=60.48, SD=8.28) with the Sig. (2. Tailed) is .000<.005. It means that the null hypothesis is rejected, and journal writing is an effective tool to be used in improving students' writing ability. The normalized gain on each aspect was calculated to support the hypothesis testing result. Statistically, content and organization aspects were most affected (NG = 0.25), followed by mechanics (NG=0.23), language use (NG=0.21), and vocabulary (NG=0.20).

Content has the greatest weight on students' writing scores, with a maximum score of 30. It means that the writing is categorized as very good to excellent with characteristics of knowledgeable, substantive, thorough development of thesis, and relevance to the assigned topic. While the minimum score for content is 13, which means very poor, does not show knowledge of the subject, is non-substantive, not pertinent, or not enough to evaluate. The result showed that the average score of students' writing in the pre-test in terms of content was 18.1. While after they were given treatment, the score improved to 21.0.

Table 4
Paired Samples Statistics on Students' Writing

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	60.4848	33	8.28071	1.44149
	Posttest	69.7576	33	9.54277	1.66118

The Result of Paired T-Test on Students' Writing

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-9.27273	8.15197	1.41908	-12.16329	-6.38217	-6.534	32	.000

Organization is the second aspect scored by the rater from the students' writing. The maximal score for the organization is 20, which means very good to excellent with fluent expression, ideas clearly stated or supported, succinct, well-organized, logical sequencing, and cohesive. Conversely, the minimum score is 7, which means very poor, ineffective communication, lack of organization, or insufficient evaluation. On the pre-test, the average score of students' writing in terms of organization was 13.1; on the post-test, the average score of students' writing improved to 15.0.

Vocabulary has the same portion as an organization, namely, 20 out of 100. The maximum score for vocabulary means very good to excellent, indicating that the student's writing has a sophisticated range, effective word/idiom choice and usage, word form mastery, and appropriate register. In comparison, the least score is seven which points out that the writing is essentially translation, with little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, and word form, or not enough to evaluate. The mean score of students during the pre-test was 12.8; after the students were given intervention, the score improved to 14.3.

The fourth aspect measured in students' writing is language use. As writing demands the students to be able to use language appropriately, the maximum score for language use is the second highest, namely 25. The highest score indicates that the writing is very good to excellent with several characteristics, specifically effective complex construction, few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order or function, articles, pronouns, and prepositions. While the minimum score is 5, which means very poor, virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules, dominated by errors, does not communicate, or not enough to evaluate. The mean score of students for language use was 13.3 on the pre-test and 15.8 on the post-test.

Mechanics have the lowest portion on the students writing scoring rubric, which is five for the maximal score and two for the minimum score. The maximal score for mechanics is categorized as very good to excellent, with characteristics demonstrating mastery of conventions and few spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing errors. At the same time, the least score means very poor, which means no mastery of conventions, dominated by spelling,

punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing errors, or insufficient evaluation. The mean score of students' writing for mechanics on the pre-test was 2.9. While on the post-test, the score improved to 3.4.

Findings from Qualitative Data

Students' writing is analyzed by comparing the students' writing in the pre-test and post-test in terms of the aspects of content, organization, language use, mechanics, and vocabulary to see whether there is an improvement from the pre-test to the post-test. The result shows that there is some improvement to varying degrees. For example, a student may have an improvement in the aspects of vocabulary and language use but not in the organization. Others improve in the aspect of content and mechanics but not in language use, etc. However, in general, all of the students experience improvement in the aspect of the content. Possibly this is because of the regular practice in writing journals which makes them get used to expressing their ideas in writing. The following is a sample of students' writing and an analysis of how the student's writing ability has improved in some aspects.

Table 5

Sample of Students' Writing

	Pre-test	Post-test
Orientation	One month ago I was in the field for pray.	Two years ago, I was in home. To celebrated Eid Mubarak, I went to my cousin house.
Series of Events	After that, I was go to the home. Not long after that, my neighbour was came my home. So many people in my home, and many food.	My family and I went to there at 9 o'clock am. My family and I arrived my cousin house at 11 o'clock am. There was so many people. Because, my family was big family. I got a lot of money. The tradition of Eid Mubarak, gave the money for the children who had not been married. Other than that, my family and I ate a lot of food. Like the chicken soup, Risoles, and fried tofu.
Reorientation	I was very happy.	I was very happy, because my wallet and my stomach was full.

Both texts have used the appropriate organization for a recount text, consisting of orientation, series of events, and reorientation. However, we can see some improvement as follow:

Content: The student has made some improvement in terms of content. In the orientation part, for example, the students wrote a little bit in the pre-test about him being in the field. In the post-test, however, she can elaborate on what she did, with whom, when, and where. In the next part, the event is explained in more detail in the post-test. Also, in the reorientation part, she explains her feeling and the reason she had that feelings.

Language use: The student has clearly written more grammatically correct sentences in the post-test. As we can see, in the pre-test, she wrote: I was go...and in the post-test, she wrote: My family and I went...There are still some grammatical errors, though, but she had the courage to experiment with some expressions such as other than that and conjunction (because).

Mechanics: There seems to be no improvement in terms of mechanics, which can be seen from the incorrect use of a comma (,) both in the pre-test and post-test.

Organization: Both texts are written using the correct generic structure of a recount text. However, we can see that the student has been able to smoothly add some transitions to make their sentences well-connected, such as the use of because, other than that, like.

Vocabulary: The student's writing in the post-test is longer, which means that students use more varied vocabulary, such as celebrate, cousin, tradition, etc.

The quantitative and qualitative data findings indicated that students' writing abilities improved. Statistically, it can be seen from the score of paired sample t-test showed that there was a significant difference between students' scores on the pre-test and post-test. The proof is also strengthened by the analysis of each aspect of writing, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. In addition, the fluency of the students' writing also improves. It can be seen from the number of words written by students in the pre-test, during interventions, and post-test.

Above all, the finding is in line with the result of previous studies by Tuan (2010), Chiramanee and Kulprasit (2014), and Rodliyah (2016) that students can improve their writing by regularly practicing through journal writing. Then it also strengthens the statement of Harmer (2004) and Oshima & Hogue (2004) in their book, which stated that journal writing could improve both the quantity and quality of students' writing.

The Effect of Journal Writing on Students' Self-Efficacy

Findings from Quantitative Data

To answer this question, the data from the students' questionnaire was also calculated using paired t-test, which is shown in Table 6.

Table 6

The Result of Paired T-Test on Students' Self-Efficacy

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower				Upper
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-1.54545	5.27429	.91814	-3.41564	.32473	-1.683	32	.102

The table showed that Sig. (2 Tailed) is $0.102 > 0.05$. It means that the null hypothesis was accepted as no significant difference exists between students' self-efficacy on the pre-test and post-test.

Findings from qualitative data

To find information regarding self-efficacy, two students with improving self-efficacy, one with no improvement, and one with decreasing self-efficacy were interviewed. The questions were organized based on four sources of self-efficacy proposed by Bandura to know whether they affected students' self-efficacy. The findings indicated that the four sources affected students' self-efficacy, as elaborated in the following sections.

Performance Outcomes

Based on Bandura's theory, the first source of students' self-efficacy is performance outcomes which mean the student's experience in learning. In practicing writing using the journal, students have written about seven pieces. It can become one of the things that affect their self-efficacy. It is also revealed from students' statements in the interview.

Student 4:

I like it (Journal Writing). Besides adding more vocabulary, then as a writing exercise. I used to be unsure about writing English. After I was asked to practice writing, I became motivated to write. So I like it.

The score of his self-efficacy was 44. While after being given treatment, his self-efficacy score improved to 57. During the process of treatment, he always collected his writing on time. He also stated that his experience in journal writing could motivate him to write. Below is also his additional statement about his confidence in writing.

Student 4:

Absolutely, (I was not confident in writing) because I did not get used to it. Then, I often practice writing. And there is also a proverb that says practice makes perfect. Now because of writing, my confidence increases.

Vicarious Experience

Looking at other people's experience who are at the same level may lead us to think that we are capable of doing the same task. It was also felt by the student who thinks that looking at others' success in submitting a journal can encourage him to write more. It is revealed by students 4 and 20 stated that they were motivated when their friends could do more.

Student 4

Honestly, I am motivated. Because if my friend can do it, why cannot I do it? I think we are the same eating rice (we are in the same level). Well, (specifically) I am motivated because my friend can finish writing recount text a full page and (submit it) on time.

Student 20

I love English. I want to be like them. But, I do not know what it is difficult. But I try because I want to be able (to write)

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion is encouragement from the environment. In journal writing, students were given feedback on their writing. So, it is considered praise from the teacher to the students. It is believed that encouragement from teachers, parents, and friends may affect students' self-efficacy. The proof can be seen in the following statements of the students.

Student 2

"Yes, I like it (the feedback). Because I feel that my writing is given a compliment."

Student 4

"I think it's already good. After I had been given feedback, I also looked at my mistake. So, I could revise it by myself."

Physiological and Emotional State

The condition of students in writing journals can also influence their self-efficacy. Based on the interview, the high self-efficacy student stated that they prefer to practice writing every day. However, students with low self-efficacy think they will not be able to write it daily as it will make them dizzy.

I think every day will be better. But, probably my friend will not think so. I count it as a practice to make my writing better.

Yes, it is enough (to write three times a week). If it comes every day, I will feel dizzy.

This finding implies that despite the quantitative data analysis which shows the non-significant difference in self-efficacy before and after journal writing, the analysis of qualitative data indicates that the activity positively affects students' self-efficacy and this is in accordance

with the result of a study by Friston (2008) which suggests that journaling, regardless of the nature of the journal, may have impacted students' self-efficacy.

CONCLUSIONS

In line with the research question, there are two main conclusions about the effect of journal writing on students' writing ability and self-efficacy. First, students' writing ability improved after they were given journal writing as an intervention. The biggest improvement is in terms of content and organization. Then, it is followed by mechanics, language use, and the last one is vocabulary. Students' writing fluency is also improving because every student can write more in post-test than pre-test. Second, students' self-efficacy is also affected by journal writing to a varying degree. Generally, the average score of students in the post-test is higher than in the pre-test. Of thirty-three students, twelve reduced their self-efficacy, three students were still at the same level, and twenty students improved their self-efficacy. Two things that really influence them are performance outcomes and verbal persuasion. The practice and also feedback provided by the researcher may improve their self-efficacy. Meanwhile, three students in the interview stated that they were affected by friends who can write better and faster, and the other one stated that it did not affect her.

Overall, this study suggests that journal writing improves students' writing in the aspects of content, organization, mechanics, language use, and vocabulary. It also improves students' fluency and affects students' self-efficacy. It is therefore recommended that journal writing be incorporated into EFL writing classes.

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