

## Journaling as Medium for Narrative Discourse Development: A Qualitative Analysis in an Indonesian Efl Setting

Nafi Elmasari

(Pascasarjana Universitas PGRI Semarang, [nafielma826@gmail.com](mailto:nafielma826@gmail.com))\*

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### Abstract

This qualitative study at Mamina English Course in Batam explored how journaling helps first-grade junior high students improve their English narrative writing. Many students learning English in Indonesia often struggle with vocabulary, grammar, and expressing ideas freely. This research aimed to find more engaging teaching methods. Journaling seemed promising because it's a relaxed way to write, reducing anxiety and encouraging practice. Ten students journaled regularly for a month. Data from surveys and writing tests, informed by key language acquisition theories and teaching approaches, showed positive results. Students reported increased motivation, engagement, creativity, self-expression, and writing confidence. To understand this better, our study gathered detailed information from ten students over one month. We used surveys to hear directly about their experiences and also looked at their writing tests. The ideas behind our study come from important theories about how people learn a second language. For example, Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that feeling relaxed helps learning, and journaling certainly offers that. Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis highlights the importance of language production, and journaling offers numerous opportunities for this practice. We also explored the role of motivation in student learning and how Discourse Analysis can reveal students' language usage. On the instructional side, we examined Process Writing, which emphasizes the stages of writing, and Constructivism, which posits that learners actively construct their own understanding. Although the findings do not establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship, they indicate that journaling creates a supportive atmosphere for self-expression and language experimentation. The study underscores the potential of journaling to empower young English learners and advocates for its inclusion in educational curricula, along with suggestions for further research..

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\*Corresponding Author: Nafi Elmasari , email: [nafielma826@gmail.com](mailto:nafielma826@gmail.com)

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### Introduction

Cultivating proficient English writing skills is essential for junior high students. Nevertheless, learners in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context often face challenges. Indonesia frequently encounters significant challenges, including a

limited range of vocabulary, persistent grammatical inaccuracies, and particularly, a notable absence of imaginative or spontaneous expression, as stated by (Hyland, 2016). At Mamina English Course in Batam, the core objective for first-grade junior high students is to address these pedagogical challenges

by exploring innovative strategies that make writing both accessible and genuinely enjoyable, ultimately enhancing their overall competence and confidence in written English.

Learning to write well in English is really important for junior high students. But for many students in places like Batam, where English isn't the main language, this can be tough. They often struggle with not knowing enough words, making a lot of grammar mistakes, and finding it hard to come up with new or interesting ideas on their own. The usual ways of teaching often make these problems worse, turning writing into something boring instead of fun and creative. At Mamina English Course, we want to fix these issues. Our main aim is to find fresh, new ways to teach writing that make it easy to understand and truly enjoyable. We believe this will help our students become better at writing English and feel more confident about it.

In this context, journaling emerges as an effective strategy. Its open-ended and low-pressure format specifically targets the emotional obstacles to language learning. As noted by Krashen (1985) in *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*, emotional factors such as anxiety can hinder language acquisition. Journaling fosters a naturally calming environment that helps lower the "affective filter," allowing students to express themselves more freely and alleviating the typical anxiety associated with grammatical accuracy. By promoting linguistic experimentation and consistent, personal writing, journaling cultivates a more profound and natural connection with the writing process. This method is expected to result in more engaging and meaningful writing experiences, directly fostering student motivation and involvement. Our research intends to provide a detailed qualitative exploration of this "journaling advantage," as observed through students' personal experiences and their perceived improvements in narrative writing.

As noted by Krashen (1985) in *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*, journaling, which is defined as an open-ended and low-

pressure writing activity, offers a promising solution. It naturally facilitates free expression, often alleviates the anxiety related to grammatical accuracy, promotes linguistic experimentation, and encourages regular, personal writing practice. This, in turn, fosters a deeper and more genuine connection to the writing process. This study aims to provide a comprehensive qualitative account of the "journaling advantage" as experienced by students, highlighting observed improvements in their narrative writing skills, along with increased motivation and engagement resulting from its use. The detailed insights gathered are expected to be immensely beneficial for educators looking to genuinely empower young learners in their English writing endeavors.

This idea suggests that while taking in information (input) is valuable, the act of creating language (output) is essential for truly learning it. When students write or speak, they are compelled to actively apply their existing knowledge, which in turn helps them identify areas where their understanding is lacking or incomplete. Journaling, through its consistent and personal nature, offers students frequent opportunities to produce English. This active process of language generation promotes trying out new linguistic forms and reinforces their command of the language, thereby accelerating their acquisition (Swain, 1985 on Lantolf, 2000)

Students learn a new language much more effectively when they feel a sense of ownership over their learning, believe they can succeed, and feel a personal connection to the activity. This concept is rooted in ideas like Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which helps us understand what genuinely drives people.

According to (Dörnyei, 2001 on "Importance of Motivation in Learning English Language," 2022), journaling is a great match for this. Because it's open-ended, students can pick their own topics, giving them control. And since there's low pressure to write perfectly, they gain confidence in their skills. This feeling of control and success naturally helps them connect more deeply with the act of

writing, which powerfully boosts their motivation and engagement in learning English.

This research investigates the impact of journaling on narrative development in English writing among first-grade junior high students in Batam's EFL context, filling important gaps in current literature. It specifically addresses the unique challenges faced by EFL learners in Indonesia and utilizes a qualitative approach to explore their personal experiences and emotional aspects. This study emphasizes journaling as a method to encourage linguistic experimentation and strengthen students' personal connection to learning, particularly in narrative writing. Furthermore, it incorporates various theoretical frameworks, providing practical insights for educators and enhancing the understanding of effective writing instruction in Batam's EFL setting.

While offering valuable insights, the study implicitly highlights several areas for future investigation. Its small sample size and short duration mean the findings can't be broadly generalized or definitively prove journaling as a direct cause for improvement. This study aims to answer the following key questions to understand the benefits of journaling:

How does journaling help first-grade junior high students improve their English narrative writing?

What are the perceived improvements in narrative writing among students engaging in journaling?

What are students' personal experiences with journaling, and how do these experiences relate to their motivation and engagement in English writing?

#### Literature Review

This section lays out the theories and teaching methods that underpin this study on how journaling affects language learning. It first explores into Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, showing how journaling can help by reducing anxiety, encouraging language production, and boosting motivation. It then covers pedagogical approaches like Process Writing and

Constructivism, explaining how they connect to and are supported by journaling. Together, these ideas offer a comprehensive perspective for understanding journaling's benefits in developing narrative writing skills.

## Foundational Theories for Qualitative Exploration

Various theoretical frameworks offer a solid basis for qualitatively examining the advantages of journaling in language acquisition (Qualitative Research in Online Language Learning: What Can It Do?, 2022). These theories highlight the importance of reflective practices in improving language skills and promoting a more profound engagement with the learning content.

### A. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theories:

1. Affective Filter Hypothesis (Stephen Krashen): This theory posits that emotional factors, such as anxiety and motivation, profoundly influence second language acquisition. Journaling's inherently relaxed and personal environment can significantly lower this "affective filter," thereby easing the learning process by reducing inhibition and increasing comfort (Jaramillo & Vera, 2021). This creates an ideal setting for learners to express themselves freely, promoting deeper engagement with the language.

2. The Output Hypothesis, proposed by Merrill Swain, asserts that language production is essential for language acquisition because it compels learners to recognize gaps in their understanding. Journaling offers consistent, low-stakes opportunities for meaningful English output (Sun, 2020). Furthermore, it allows learners to reflect on their language use, thereby enhancing both their declarative and procedural knowledge of the language (Dart et al., 1998) This reflective practice can lead to improved language proficiency by fostering a deeper understanding of grammatical structures and enhancing fluency in communication.

3. Motivation in Second Language Learning: Journaling, through its intrinsic emphasis on personal choice, self-direction, and authentic

expression, has the potential to substantially heighten intrinsic motivation, active involvement, and genuine enthusiasm for writing in a new language (Casanave, 2023). Moreover, the interplay between emotional engagement and language output in journaling can enhance learners' overall communicative competence in their target language.

4. Discourse Analysis in the Classroom for ELT: This approach is particularly relevant for qualitative inquiry as it helps researchers understand how language is used in real, communicative contexts and what it means to users. Journaling, as a form of personal discourse, can be analyzed to reveal students' evolving linguistic and narrative competencies (Susanto et al., 2021). Journaling not only facilitates language production but also enhances students' ability to articulate their thoughts and experiences, thereby fostering greater narrative competence in language learning. Improving students' ability to tell stories is essential for building strong communication skills. This is especially true when learning a new language, as individual experiences greatly impact how a language is learned and used. Additionally, incorporating personal experiences into language education can make the learning process more engaging and relevant, which in turn helps students become better communicators (Dai & Liu, 2013).

## **B. Pedagogical Approaches Informing Qualitative Context**

1. Process Writing Approach (PWA): This methodology emphasizes the dynamic and iterative phases of writing (preparation, composition, revision, proofreading, and publication) rather than solely focusing on the final product. It inherently fosters active participation, encourages creative experimentation, and promotes continuous refinement—all processes that are naturally supported and illuminated through journaling (Abdullah et al., 2020).

2. Constructivism: (Casanave, 2011) Stated that this influential theory proposes that learners actively build their own knowledge and comprehension of the world, with teachers serving

primarily as facilitators and guides. Journaling directly supports individual expression, the personal exploration of ideas, and the development of learner autonomy, making it a powerful tool for qualitative observation of learning. According to (Investigating Cognitive-Linguistic Development in SLA, 2022), incorporating journaling into language learning not only enhances writing skills but also fosters a supportive environment for self-expression and reflection, ultimately benefiting the learner's overall language acquisition journey. This multifaceted approach to journaling underscores its potential to transform language learning experiences by promoting self-awareness and critical thinking among learners.

Previous studies have increasingly explored discourse-based approaches in English language teaching (ELT), particularly in developing students' productive skills. Susanto (2025) highlighted the role of spoken discourse and appraisal in classroom interaction, while Susanto, Bimo, and Pinandhita (2025) examined speaking competence from a discourse perspective in SLA contexts. In line with this, Dias Andris (2025) emphasized the significance of discourse awareness in ELT classrooms. The integration of storytelling (Susanto, Elmasari, & Bimo, 2025) and technology-mediated techniques (Umam, Susanto, & KA, 2025) has also been found to enhance learners' engagement and narrative competence. Furthermore, action-based strategies (Hentihu et al., 2025) and sociopragmatic studies (Rohmadi et al., 2023) contribute to understanding language use contextually. These studies support the idea that journaling, as a reflective narrative activity, can serve as an effective medium for fostering narrative discourse development in EFL learners, particularly in Indonesian junior high school contexts.

Several studies have provided valuable insights into discourse, language learning strategies, and narrative construction in EFL settings. Susanto (2023) explored attitudinal meanings in religious discourse using appraisal analysis, while Susanto and Bimo (2023) investigated evaluative stances in

editorial news, both highlighting interpersonal meaning construction. Cognitive learning strategies were examined by Wardhani and Susanto (2023) and further elaborated by Dias Andris (2023), emphasizing their relevance in mastering English. Blended learning contexts during the pandemic were discussed by Susanto, Egar, and Sumardiyani (2023). Meanwhile, narrative and dialogic elements were analyzed through movie scripts (Salsabillah et al., 2023) and speech texts (Septiana et al., 2023). The role of visual media and affective elements in vocabulary development was addressed by Riswalastika et al. (2023). These findings underscore the importance of discourse awareness and learning strategies in shaping narrative competence, providing theoretical grounding for journaling practices in EFL narrative development.

## Research Methodology

### Design & Participants

1. The study used a descriptive qualitative research approach to closely examine how

journaling influences students' narrative writing skills and their overall experiences with writing. Beyond just improving narrative writing, journaling also encourages students to express themselves openly and builds meaningful connections between students and their teachers ("The Transformative Impact of Journal Writing Strategies on Students' Writing Skills," 2023).

2. The participants consisted of ten first-grade junior high students from Mamina English Course in Batam, Riau Islands, Indonesia, purposefully selected for their engagement in the program. The study's observational and intervention duration was a month, from June 1st, 2025, to July 1st, 2025.

As the participant, 10 first-grade junior high students from Mamina English Course in Batam are involved for this study. These students were specifically chosen because they were already part of our English course program. Below Table 1. Student Names, Grades, and Schools.

Student	Grade	School Name
1. Arjuna Kenzo Suyanto	1st grade junior high school	SMPIT ULIL ALBAB BATAM
2. Muhammad Al Kalifi	1st grade junior high school	SMPIT MUHAJIRIN BATAM
3. Chelsea Aulia	1st grade junior high school	SMPN 20 BATAM
4. Amrizal Harahap	1st grade junior high school	SMPIT QUR'AN CENTER BATAM
5. Zikri Razali	1st grade junior high school	SMPN 20 BATAM
6. Zalika Baiduri	1st grade junior high school	SMPN 20 BATAM
7. Shayna Salsabila	1st grade junior high school	SMPN 3 BATAM
8. Diki Danang	1st grade junior high school	SMPN 20 BATAM
9. Luxio Andy	1st grade junior high school	SMPN 20 BATAM
10. Aulia Maharani	1st grade junior high school	SMPN 20 BATAM

### Intervention & Data Collection

Intervention: All ten students involved in the study regularly engaged in journaling (2-3 times per week) as an integral part of their learning, in addition to their standard curriculum. The journaling focus was on promoting fluency and

genuine expression, with minimal corrective feedback to encourage uninhibited writing.

#### Data Collection Instruments:

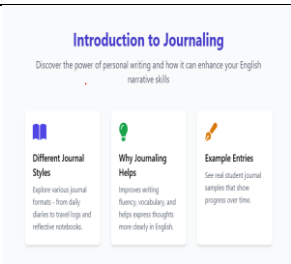

Student Survey: This was the primary qualitative data collection instrument. It included open-ended questions designed to gather rich, in-depth insights into students' subjective



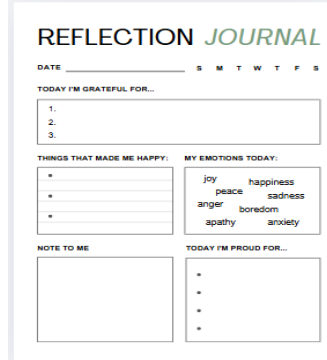
experiences, motivations, levels of enjoyment, perceptions of their own creativity, self-expression, and confidence, specifically related to their journaling practice. The survey aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of how journaling influences students' creative expression and self-actualization (Hayman et al., 2012).

Journaling Activities Schedule: The structured schedule of journaling activities over eight weeks provided a consistent framework for the intervention, ensuring a diverse range of writing experiences (e.g., daily reflection, photo journaling, creative prompts, peer sharing, illustration, and

presentation). According to (Rodliyah, 2019) this method seeks to boost student engagement and promote creative expression during the journaling process. It not only facilitates self-expression but also stimulates critical thinking and reflection, both of which are vital for achieving deeper learning outcomes. Additionally, incorporating various journaling techniques can greatly enhance students' motivation and analytical abilities, consistent with research that emphasizes the advantages of reflective writing in educational environments (Brahmbhatt, n.d.).

Journaling Activities Schedule

Week	Activity Description	Objectives	Materials Needed	Notes/ Photo Idea	
1	Introduction to Journaling	Familiarize students with the concept and benefits of journaling.	Journals, pens, sample journal entries.	Use a slideshow of different journal styles and entries to introduce the concept.	
	Daily Journaling	Encourage daily writing habits; Students write about their day or a specific prompt.	Journals, prompts (e.g., "What made you smile today?").	Students can take a photo of their favourite part of the day to include in their journal.	

2	Photo Journaling	Combine visual and written expression; Students take a photo and write about it.	Cameras or smartphones, journals.	Create a collage of photos taken by students to display in class.	students comments : 
	Creative Writing Prompts	Stimulate creativity in writing; Provide prompts that encourage storytelling.	Journals, creative writing prompts.	Use images related to the prompts to inspire students.	student's comments: 
3	Peer Sharing	Build confidence in sharing writing; Students pair up and share their entries.	Journals, sharing guidelines.	Capture moments of sharing and create a class photo album.	
	Illustrating Journal Entries	Enhance creativity through art; Students illustrate one of their journal entries.	Journals, colored pencils, markers.	Display the illustrated entries in a gallery format.	
4	Reflection on Journaling	Encourage self-reflection on the journaling process; Discuss what they learned.	Journals, reflection questions.	Take a group photo to commemorate the journaling journey.	
	Final Presentation	Students will present their	Journals and materials	Take photos during	

		favorite journal entry to the class to demonstrate their progress and enhance their presentation abilities.	for their presentation.	the presentations to compile into a photo album, showcasing student progress and confidence.	
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3.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis: The comprehensive qualitative data gathered from the student surveys was subjected to a thorough thematic analysis. This process included:

- a. Becoming acquainted with the data.
- b. Creating initial codes.
- c. Identifying themes within the responses.
- d. Evaluating and refining the themes.
- e. Defining and labeling the themes.

The process provided a thorough insight into the students' experiences and viewpoints during the course (Adawiyah, 2017).

3.3 Producing the report of findings, focusing on recurring patterns and insights related to students' experiences, attitudes, and perceived impact of journaling on their narrative development. As stated by (Miller, 2017), journaling plays a crucial role in improving storytelling abilities, promoting greater involvement in learning experiences, and encouraging thoughtful reflection among students.

**Results**

This descriptive qualitative study investigated the influence of journaling on the narrative writing skills of first-grade junior high students at Mamina English Course in Batam. Over one month, from June 1st to July 1st, 2025, ten purposefully selected students regularly engaged in journaling activities.

- **Changes in Writing Proficiency**  
The research noted changes in students' writing proficiency after the journaling intervention, evident in their pre- and post-intervention writing assessments. Although these observations do not prove a direct causal

relationship, the test data offered valuable context for interpreting students' qualitative experiences.

- **Key Qualitative Findings on Journaling's Effects** Consistent themes emerged from students actively involved in journaling:
  - **Increased Motivation and Engagement:** Participants frequently reported feeling "more excited" and "driven to write," indicating a stronger intrinsic desire to engage with English writing. Journaling's open-ended nature allowed students to select their own topics, thereby giving them control and boosting their motivation.
    1. **Enhanced Creativity and Self-Expression:** Students consistently described journaling as a freeing space that fostered their "creativity" and enabled authentic "self-expression" in their narratives, moving beyond strict grammatical limitations. This finding aligns with the idea that journaling encourages linguistic experimentation.
    2. **Improved Writing Confidence:** A prevalent theme was the students' reported rise in "writing confidence," which they attributed to the consistent,

low-pressure practice and the personal aspect of journaling. The relaxed journaling environment helped to lower the "affective filter," alleviating anxiety related to grammatical accuracy.

**3. Increased Willingness to Share Written Work:** An unanticipated finding was the students' greater readiness to share their written work, suggesting improved peer interaction and a more robust classroom community.

Survey results highlighted significant perceived enhancements in several areas crucial for developing writers, including increased motivation, enhanced creativity, improved writing confidence, better self-expression, cultivated critical thinking, and emotional well-being, as depicted in the "Agreement Level (%)" chart.

The descriptive qualitative data strongly suggest a positive correlation between journaling and enhanced writing skills and student engagement. Journaling proved to be a valuable and effective method for influencing narrative English writing skills in first-grade junior high students. The findings support the thoughtful integration of journaling into existing English writing curricula, especially for promoting intrinsic motivation, creativity, and self-expression.

### Discussion

Journaling helps junior high students at Mamina English Course improve their English narrative writing by making writing less stressful and more engaging. Students reported feeling more motivated, creative, and confident in their writing.

This is because journaling creates a relaxed learning environment, which reduces anxiety (known as the "affective filter") and encourages students to practice producing English. It also allows students to choose their own topics, making the process more personal and boosting their motivation. The act of regularly writing helps students experiment with language and strengthens their understanding.

An unexpected benefit was that students became more willing to share their writing, leading to better interaction and a stronger classroom community. Overall, this study found a positive link between journaling and better writing skills and student engagement. As seen on the diagram below:



### Conclusion

In conclusion, this descriptive qualitative study demonstrates that journaling emerges as a highly valuable and effective method for influencing narrative English writing skills in first-grade junior high students at Mamina English Course. The comprehensive qualitative findings robustly support the thoughtful integration of journaling into existing English writing curricula, particularly for fostering intrinsic motivation, creativity, and self-expression.

**Limitations:** The study's primary constraints include its relatively small participant number, which limits the generalizability of findings, and its inherent descriptive qualitative methodology, which, while providing deep insights, precludes drawing definitive causal conclusions regarding direct cause-and-effect relationships.

**Future Research:** Subsequent qualitative or mixed-methods studies could further explore:

1. Longer intervention durations to observe the sustained and evolving effects of journaling on narrative complexity and linguistic sophistication.
2. The nuanced influence of various journaling prompts and feedback techniques on specific aspects of student writing, particularly through detailed discourse analysis of journal entries.

3. Replication of this descriptive qualitative study with a larger and more diverse student population to confirm thematic saturation and transferability of findings.
4. A comparative qualitative examination of journaling's effectiveness across different English proficiency levels to understand varied impacts.
5. The enduring effects of consistent journaling on language acquisition, academic success, and personal development from a qualitative standpoint.
6. Further in-depth qualitative investigation into *how* journaling specifically fosters peer interaction and community within EFL classrooms, perhaps through ethnographic observations.

The process provided a thorough insight into the students' experiences and viewpoints during the course.

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