THE IMPACT OF DIALOGUE JOURNAL WRITING ON THE WRITING SKILLS OF JORDANIAN EFL LEARNERS AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS WRITING

Murad Al Kayed¹, Majd Alkayid², Mohareb Ali Alsmadi³

¹²³Al-Balqa Applied University, Jordan; ²³Applied Science Private University, Jordan.

Email: ¹murad.alkayed@bau.edu.jo, ²m_alkayed@asu.edu.jo, ³d.mohareb@bau.edu.jo

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of dialogue journal writing (DJW) on learning the vocabulary, organization, and grammar of English. It also explores the impact of DJW on the attitudes of students towards writing in English.

Methodology: The sample of the study consists of 50 undergraduate Jordanian students divided equally into an experimental and control group. The control group was given traditional writing instruction while the experimental group was taught using dialogue journal writing. The study used a pre and post-test to investigate the impact of DJW on writing skills, while a questionnaire was used to unveil the attitudes of students to writing.

Main Findings: The results of the research revealed that the vocabulary, organization, and grammar learned by the experimental group were significantly improved (p<0.05) compared to the control group. The study also found out that students taught using DJW developed positive attitudes towards writing better than students exposed only to conventional teaching methods of writing.

Applications of this study: The present study is beneficial in providing teachers of English as a foreign language with new methods to teach writing skills.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The current study is significant since the impact of dialogue journals on writing is under-researched in the Jordanian context.

Keywords: Dialogue Journal Writing, EFL, Learning, Writing Skills, Attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Writing is one of the main skills that learners of a second or foreign language aim to master. Unfortunately, learning writing is not an easy job; for example, Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 303) state that "writing is the most difficult skill for second language learners". Thus, EFL learners still commit many mistakes regarding the use of grammar, organization, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and style. To solve these errors, teachers and policymakers, suggest different methods to improve the writing proficiency of EFL learners. One of these methods is dialogue journal writing (hereafter called DJW).

DJW was defined as a “written conversation in which a student and teacher communicated regularly that could be conducted daily, weekly, or depending on the educational setting” (Peyton, 2000, p. 3). According to this method, the job of the teacher is not to evaluate the writing of the students; however, his/her job is to motivate students to write more, to guide them, and to give them productive feedback (Taggart & Wilson, 2005). DJW is very beneficial for students since they get involved in real written dialogues and they develop a close relationship with teachers. By using DJW, students are motivated to express their feelings and interests and they are encouraged to use vocabulary, grammar and spelling accurately (Kose, 2005; Larrotta, 2008; Peng, 2007). Students use journal writing without being of afraid of correction or evaluation (Barjesteh, Vaseghi, & Gholami, 2011).

Benefits of using DJW

Several benefits of DJW were identified either for the learners or teachers. For example, many suggested that DJW enhances student’s confidence and motivates them to write more which could decrease students’ anxiety level studies (Peyton, 2000; Uduma, 2011; Erkan, 2011; Naba’h, 2013; Rodliyah, 2016; and David, Azman and Ming, 2018). Thus, students feel free to express themselves and to write more about their lives and concerns which eventually will make them better writers. Similar results were found by Holmes, and Moulton’s (1997) study which concluded that students taught using DJW felt more comfortable in writing and they were capable of expressing themselves better in English. Other studies found that DJW is an excellent solution for learners’ anxiety of writing which in turn improves students’ writing abilities in terms of content, grammar, and lexical usage (Peng, 2007; Bacha, 2002; Altimnakas and Bayyurt, 2019). Lingley (2005) argues that dialogue journal writing is significantly effective for integrating the skills of returnee students into the EFL classroom.

Other linguistics identified the positive impacts of DJW on learning writing skills. For example, many studies found that DJW improves spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation (Koch, 2005; Hemmati & Soltanpar, 2012; Safitri, 2013-2016).
Rosadi, 2014; Kobra & Hossein, 2018; Novan and Kocaoglu, 2019). Khairunnisa (2018) found out that DJW enhanced students’ motivation and their writing skills on content, organization, and vocabulary. Studies like Yulianawati et al. (2019), Tahseldar (2018), and Hapsari et al. (2018) found out that participants gain positive attitudes towards writing. Moreover, Jones (1991) found out that students who participate in authentic and real dialogue journal writing were motivated to look for the correct usage of vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. Similar results were found by Peng (2007) who suggested that DJW can be beneficial in improving learners’ abilities in transferring their lexical and grammatical knowledge into purposeful and real language use. In addition, DJW increases the writing fluency of learners because they learn a foreign language in a healthy and friendly environment and they do not have to worry about the grammaticality of their sentences (Orem, 2001; Denne-Bolton, 2013; Peyton & Reed, 1990; Larrotta, 2008; Liao and Wong, 2010; Lestari, 2018). Madkour (2016) found out that DJW improved writing skills especially vocabulary and style.

Linnell (2010) suggested that DJW is the best tool to handle large classes. So every student will have the chance to learn and practice a foreign or a second language. Miller (2007) argued that dialogue journals are a means for teachers to serve their learners’ needs. Students can progress in their academic and social lives when there are mutual trust and a good relationship between students and teachers. Brown & Abeywickrama (2010) and Hansen-Thomas (2003) suggested that if teachers used journal writing, they will know their students better which will help them to meet students’ needs. Similarly, Yoshihara (2008) found out that DJW is one of the best methods to build trust between teachers and their students, so students can learn the foreign language in a friendly environment. Rana (2018) found out that DJW enhanced the writing fluency of students and their overall performance in writing.

Purpose of the study

The present study aims to explore the influence of DJW on the writing skills and its sub-components: vocabulary, organization, and grammar of Jordanian EFL learners. It also aims to figure out whether the DJW method is better than the conventional writing instruction in learning writing skills by Jordanian EFL learners. The study also explores the effect of DJW on the attitudes of students towards writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A great body of research has been conducted to figure out the impact of DJW on learning writing. For example, Datzman (2010) investigated the influence of DJW on the writing performance of fourth-grade English language learners at an elementary school in Northwest Arkansas. The sample of the study consisted of 8 participants divided equally into control and experimental group. The study used pre-test and post-test in the form of writing prompts from the Arkansas Benchmark writing assessment to judge the improvement of both groups. After 12 weeks, the results of the study found out that the writing skills of English language learners who took part in DJW were significantly improved.

Another study by Haynes-Mays et al. (2011) shed light on the effect of DJW on the development of writing skills of 49 African Americans. The participants enrolled in two classes were assigned to an experimental and control group. The results of the study revealed that the writing skills of students taught using DJW were improved.

In another study, Rokni & Seifi (2013) identified the impact of DJW on the improvement of the grammar of Iranian learners of English. Participants consisted of 68 students enrolled in two classes at Golestan University, Iran. They were selected randomly and divided into control and experimental group. While the control group received traditional writing instruction, the experimental group asked to write 12 journals over 12 weeks. The researchers adopted a pretest and a posttest to evaluate students’ grammatical knowledge before and after the experiment. The findings of the study indicated that DJW enhanced positively participants’ grammar.

In research conducted by Foroutan et al. (2013), forty intermediate English students at a Malaysian university participate in the study. Twenty students were divided into the control group and the other twenty students to the experimental group. The results of the study revealed those EFL learners’ writing skills and their components: vocabulary, content, language use, and organization were significantly improved after using DJW.

Hashemi & Amerian (2011) investigated the effect of journal writing on learning English grammar by Iranian EFL students. The sample of the study consisted of 40 undergraduate students studying English at the Valie-Asr University of Rafsanjan, Iran. Twenty students received traditional writing instruction and twenty students using DJW. The findings of the study revealed that the subjects who participated in DJW learned English Grammar better than the control group.

In another study, Dabbagh (2017) studied the impact of DJW on writing skills and its subcomponents: vocabulary, organization, content, language use, and mechanics. Eighty-four EFL learners were divided randomly into control and experimental groups. The control group received conventional writing instruction and they sat for pretest and post to evaluate their improvement. On the other hand, the experimental group wrote three journals a week for about six months between the pre- and post-tests. After analyzing the data, the study found a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental group concerning the overall writing performance, and its sub-skills: content, vocabulary organization, in the post-test.
In another study, Tuan (2010) investigated whether learners will overcome writing difficulties by participating in journal writing. Participants were 85 second-year students from two writing classes at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City. Students were assigned to control and experimental group. Results showed that writing scores of subjects who participated in DJW increased by 24.67% and the writing scores of the control group increased by only 7.32%. The study concluded that DJW improved learners’ writing skills and created a good relationship between teachers and students.

Yürekli & Afacan (2020) investigated the influence of dialogue journal writing on the students’ writing proficiency. The study found out that DJW improved the writings of students especially the level of organization. Moreover, the experimental group showed self-confidence after getting involved in DJW.

As it is clear from the previous literature, the impact of DJW undergraduate students’ writing skills was not investigated in the Arabic and Jordanian context. Therefore, the study aims to fill this gap. Moreover, the literature review makes it clear that DJW is very beneficial in improving the writing of EFL learners. Thus, this study aims at investigating how DJW can improve Jordanian EFL students’ proficiency in English vocabulary and grammar.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

**Participants**

The sample of the study consists of 50 undergraduate students who enrolled in an Advanced Writing Class in the first semester of 2019/2020. These students were second and third-year students studying English language and literature at Al Balqa’ Applied University/ Ajloun University College. The study used a control group consisted of 25 students and the experimental group consisted of 25 students. Both groups were given lessons on grammar, vocabulary, and writing techniques of English. The experimental group was further taught using DJW.

**Procedure**

Before the treatment phase, the control and experimental groups sat for a pretest which came in the form of an essay. Both groups were asked to write an essay on any topic they want. The essays were graded for the use of vocabulary, organization, and grammar from 1 to 4 following the writing rubric (See Appendix A).

To ensure the homogeneity of all subjects of the study in terms of writing skills, an independent sample t-test was used before conducting the study. It is used to find out whether there are differences between the control and experimental group regarding the overall writing performance, as well as the sub-components of grammar, vocabulary, and organization in the pre-test. The results showed that there were no significant differences between the two groups in pretest since the P-value for grammar, vocabulary, and organization was larger than .05, as shown from table 1 below:

|                | Group          | N  | Mean | Std. D | t     | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|----------------|----------------|----|------|--------|-------|-----------------|
| grammar        | Control group  | 25 | 2.20 | 1.93465 | .000  | 1.000           |
|                | Experimental group | 25 | 2.20 | 1.56753 |       |                 |
| vocabulary     | Control group  | 25 | 2.40 | 1.99284 | .519  | .608            |
|                | Experimental group | 25 | 2.07 | 1.48645 |       |                 |
| organization   | Control group  | 25 | 2.33 | 1.67616 | .723  | .476            |
|                | Experimental group | 25 | 1.93 | 1.33452 |       |                 |
| pretest        | Control group  | 25 | 6.93 | 3.86313 | .648  | .523            |
|                | Experimental group | 25 | 6.20 | 2.07709 |       |                 |

**Source:** Prepared by authors

Over four months the control group was given conventional writing instruction while the experimental group was taught using DJW. The experimental group was asked to write 32 journals at two journals per week on any topic they want. They were encouraged to write about their emotions, experiences, thoughts, or any topic they find interesting. The researchers collected and commented on the journals. They commented on the grammar, organization, and vocabulary and encouraged the students to write more. Moreover, the researchers discussed any writing problem students faced while writing their journals and gave them guidelines and feedback to overcome these problems. After four months, both groups sat for the post-test. They were asked to write a second essay on any topic they want. The essays were graded for the use of the vocabulary, organization, and grammar from 1-4 according to the writing rubric (see appendix A).

To investigate the attitudes of students towards writing, a questionnaire was prepared (see appendix B). To ensure the homogeneity of all subjects in terms of attitudes to writing, the experimental and control group asked to answer the questionnaire before the experiment. T-test was used to find out whether there were statistical differences between the two groups, as shown in the following table:
Table 2: Results of pre-questionnaire

| GROUP            | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | t    | P-value |
|------------------|----|------|----------------|------|---------|
| Pre-questionnaire| 25 | 2.58 | .64            | .960 | .342    |
| Experimental     | 25 | 2.77 | .75            |      |         |

Source: Prepared by authors

The table reveals that there were no significant differences between the experimental and control group in the pre-questionnaire since the P-value is larger than 0.05. These results that both groups showed somehow the same attitudes to writing. At the end of the experiment, the control and experimental groups asked to answer the questionnaire (see Appendix B). The results of the questionnaire were collected and analyzed to find out whether there is an influence of DJW on the attitudes of control and experimental groups toward writing.

Statistical analysis

The present study is a quantitative study. It aims to figure out whether there was an improvement in the writing skills of Jordanian EFL learners and their attitudes towards writing after taking part in DJW. Thus, an independence sample test was used to find whether there were statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups in the post-test and the post-questionnaire. If the significance value less than .05, the differences were statistically significant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into two parts. The first one addresses the influence of DJW on learning writing skills, while the second part addresses the impact of DJW on improving the attitudes of students towards writing.

The impact of DJW on writing skills

The results of the study showed that the students who participate in DJW showed improvement in overall skills better than the control group since the mean of the experimental group (15.80) is larger than the control group (9.67) (see table 3). The results revealed significant differences between the experimental and control group in the posttest in favor of the experimental group at P-value .000.

Table 3: Results of posttest of the experimental and control group

| GROUP            | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | t    | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|------------------|----|------|----------------|------|----------------|
| grammar          |    |      |                |      |                |
| Control group    | 20 | 3.40 | 1.76473        | 3.374| .002           |
| Experimental     | 20 | 5.33 | 1.34519        |      |                |
| vocabulary       |    |      |                |      |                |
| Control group    | 20 | 3.20 | 1.82052        | 3.451| .002           |
| Experimental     | 20 | 5.20 | 1.43759        |      |                |
| organization     |    |      |                |      |                |
| Control group    | 20 | 3.07 | 1.83095        | 3.885| .001           |
| Experimental     | 20 | 5.20 | 1.08233        |      |                |
| Post-test        |    |      |                |      |                |
| Control group    | 20 | 9.67 | 3.47782        | 5.58 | .000           |
| Experimental     | 20 | 15.80| 2.45531        |      |                |

Source: Prepared by authors

Table (3) above also revealed that the experimental group improved in using grammar better than the control group since the mean of the experimental group (5.33) is larger than the control group (3.40). Significant differences between the experimental and control group in the posttest were found in favor of the experimental group at P-value .002.

As indicated in the table (3), the experimental group learned vocabulary better than the control group since the mean of the experimental group (5.20) is larger than the control group (3.20). Significant differences between the experimental and control group in the posttest were traced in favor of the experimental group at P-value .002. The data also revealed that the experimental group was doing better than the control group in learning “organization” and the differences were significant at P value .001.

The overall analysis of the data demonstrated that the Jordanian EFL learners who took part in DJW showed improvement in writing skills and its components: grammar, vocabulary, and organization better than those who were taught using conventional writing instruction. The findings are directly in line with the findings of all previous studies in the literature review. These results are consistent with the findings of Lagan (2000), Datzman (2010), Tuan (2010), Larrotta (2008), Alexander (2001), Tin (2004) and Haynes-Mays et al. (2011) who indicated that students’ writing skills were improved in general after taking part in DJW. The findings also are in line with the studies of Dabbagh (2017), Foroutan et al. (2013), Wafa et al. (2010), Rokni and Seifi (2013), Hashemi & Amerian (2011) and Koch (2005) which found out that students who used DJW learned grammar, organization, and vocabulary of English better than those who were taught using conventional writing instruction. These results prove that DJW is a very beneficial method in teaching writing skills.
The impact of DJW on the attitudes of students toward writing

The results of the study showed that the attitudes of the experimental group taught using DJW towards writing were improved positively better than the control group, as shown in the following table.

| GROUP       | N  | Mean | Std. D | Mean | Std. D | t       | Sig.  |
|-------------|----|------|--------|------|--------|---------|-------|
| Control     | 25 | 2.58 | .64    | 2.95 | 8.6    | 5.882   | .000  |
| Experiential| 25 | 2.77 | .75    | 3.83 | 2.3    |         |       |

Source: Prepared by authors

Table 4 showed statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups (the P-value was .000) in favor of the experimental group since the mean of the experimental group is larger than the mean of the control group, 3.83 and 2.95, respectively. These results suggested that students taught using DJW developed positive attitudes towards writing better than students taught using traditional teaching methods. After taking part in DJW, many students feel confident when they write in the exam. They are not afraid of writing because they may commit mistakes. They learn through DJW that mistakes are part of the learning process. Besides, students were not afraid of evaluating their writings by their teachers and colleague. They also believe that they will be good writers and they can learn writing like professionals. Students also developed a belief that learning writing will help in their academic success. These positive attitudes toward writing motivate students to work hard to improve their writings.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to identify the impact of the DJW method on students' learning vocabulary, organization, and grammar of English. The study came up with interesting findings. It proves that DJW is one of the efficient strategies that improve students' writing skills and its subcomponents: vocabulary, organization, and grammar. Additionally, the study found out that the grammar, organization, and vocabulary of students who participate in DJW improved better than those who took part in conventional writing instruction and the differences were statistically significant. The findings of the study suggested that students developed positive attitudes towards writing after getting exposed to DJW. Based on these results, the study recommends the instructors to adopt DJW in teaching writing.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The study has some limitations. First, the data were collected from undergraduate students at Al-Balqa Applied University. Second, the influence of gender in learning writing skills was not considered in the study. Further research should be conducted to explore the impact of DJW on the development of different writing skills like mechanisms and styles. The impact of gender and age on writing skills should be considered in future research.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Murad Al Kayed wrote the literature review and designed the writing rubric. He also collected the journals from the experimental group, graded them, and gave them feedback on their writings. He also did the results section and analysed these results. Majd Alkayid wrote the introduction and helped the first author in designing the rubric and grading the pretests and post-tests for the students. She also helped the first author in commenting on the journals of the experimental group. Mohareb AlSmadi designed the questionnaire of students' attitudes towards writing and collected the responses of the students. He also did the statistical analysis. All authors commented on the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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| Topic             | Rubric                                      | 1                                      | 2                                      | 3                                      | 4                                      |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Grammar           | The text contains numerous errors           | The text contains frequent errors      | The text contains minor errors         | The writing is error-free             |                                        |
| Vocabulary and word usage | Using word choice                         | Using ordinary vocabulary              | Good vocabulary                        | Using vocabulary                       | exceptional                            |
| organization      | The organization is confusing and missing transition. | Paragraphs are written alone without evident or strong transitions. | The competent organization, but it lacks effective and smooth transitions. | Paragraphs are well developed; the organization is appropriate; ideas linked with effective transitions. |                                        |

Appendix A: Writing rubric
Appendix B

A questionnaire of students’ attitudes towards writing

| No | Items                                                                 | Strongly agree | agree | neutral | disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 1  | I avoid writing as much as I can                                    |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 2  | I am not afraid of evaluating my writings                           |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 3  | I look forward to writing down my ideas                              |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 4  | I am afraid of writing essays if they will be read by others        |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 5  | I feel nervous when I have to write in the exam                     |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 6  | Writing is a waste of time                                           |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 7  | I do not believe that I can learn writing                            |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 8  | I enjoy writing classes                                              |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 9  | I believe that Writing is essential for my academic success         |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 10 | I will be a good writer                                              |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 11 | I feel ok to discuss my writings with others and I find it very interesting | |       |         |          |                   |
| 12 | I think that Writing is fun                                          |                |       |         |          |                   |
| 13 | I am afraid of writing because I may commit mistakes.                |                |       |         |          |                   |