

The Effect of Using Personal Experience Journals on Writing Fluency and Writing Anxiety of Al-Aqsa University EFL Students

Enas A. R. Hammad¹

¹ Associate Professor, Curriculum & Instruction Department, Al-Aqsa University, Gaza- Palestine

Correspondence: Dr. Enas A. R. Hammad, Associate Professor, Curriculum & Instruction Department, Al-Aqsa University, Gaza- Palestine.

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Abstract

Journal writing strategy is useful for improving students' English as a foreign language writing. However, a few researchers have investigated the use of journal writing in Palestinian English as a foreign language instructional settings. The current study examined the effect of one of the journal writing types i.e., personal experience journals on writing fluency and writing anxiety of a sample of students majoring in English language at Al-Aqsa University. The researcher administered a writing test and a closed-questionnaire to 30 students, and conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 students selected from the 30 ones. The study concluded that using personal experience journals could develop the participants' writing fluency and reduce their writing anxiety. Additionally, the interviews data analysis revealed that the participants had positive views on personal experience journals. Based on the study results, the researcher offered relevant implications.

Keywords: anxiety, fluency, personal experience journals, students

1. Introduction

Effective learning of a foreign language requires focusing on writing skills. According to Grauberg (1997), writing in foreign languages is a tool for communication, correspondence of all kinds, reports, messages, essays, summaries, and forms. Berry (2018) also views that writing is one of the fundamentally important skills since it can prepare university students for future careers.

Among the strategies practitioners and researchers focused on for developing EFL (English as a foreign language) students' writing is journal writing. Journal writing can provide learners with a chance to practice writing as an expressive activity without getting anxious of their mistakes (Yurekli & Afacan, 2020). Various studies showed the significance of employing journal writing in EFL classrooms. For example, Al Kayed, Alkayid, and Alsmadi (2020) concluded that journal writing had positive effects on 50 Jordanian EFL students' writing skills. Likewise, David, Azman, and Ming (2018) reported that journal writing had a positive role in reducing the writing anxiety levels of 26 low proficiency ESL (English as a Second Language) undergraduates at a Malaysian public university. Hapsari, Susilohadi, and Elyono (2018) also revealed that the implementation of dialogue journal writing could improve the writing proficiency of 20 EFL high school students in Surakarta. Furthermore, Liao and Wong (2010) showed that dialogue journal writing improved 41 Taiwanese EFL tenth graders' writing fluency and writing performance, and it increased writing motivation. Rokni and Seifi (2013) found that dialogue journal writing improved grammatical competence of 68 Iranian EFL universities. Additionally, Tuan (2010) showed the benefits of journal writing in enhancing writing skills of 85 second-year students at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities.

In the Palestinian EFL context, Hammad (2016) and Mourtaga (2010) reported that writing performance of Palestinian EFL university students was flawed. Additionally, Abu Shawish and Abdelraheem (2010) referred to a high level of writing apprehension among Palestinian EFL university students. The researcher of the present study also noticed that Al-Aqsa University EFL students' writing performance was poor, and their writing anxiety levels were high. Therefore, the present study attempted to examine the effectiveness of using one of the journal writing types (i.e., personal experience journals) in developing Al-Aqsa University EFL students' writing fluency and reducing their writing anxiety. Thus, the study addressed the following research questions and hypotheses:

1. To what extent do personal experience journals improve EFL writing fluency of Al-Aqsa University female students?
2. To what extent do personal experience journals reduce Al-Aqsa University EFL female students' writing anxiety?
3. How do Al-Aqsa University EFL female students perceive personal experience journals?

Research Hypotheses

1. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in Al-Aqsa University female students' writing fluency between the pre-measurement and the post-measurement.
2. There are no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in Al-Aqsa University female students' writing anxiety between the pre-measurement and the post-measurement.

2. Literature Review

The literature review consists of a theoretical framework and previous studies related to the use of journal writing in L2/FL (Second Language, Foreign Language) classes.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study briefly introduces the definition of 'journal writing', the significance of using journal writing in FL/L2 classes, and the types of journal writing. It also focuses on definitions of 'writing fluency', 'anxiety', and 'writing anxiety'.

Definition of 'Journal Writing'

Rokni and Seifi (2013) view that 'journal writing' is a systematic way of recording things on specific topics or events without any feeling of pressure. Moon (2004) also provides that 'journal writing' is free writing, and it is based on reflection.

According to the present study, 'journal writing' is a strategy used by EFL teachers and students to write paragraphs and essays on related topics without any feeling of pressure.

Personal Experience Journals

Casanave (2011) states that 'Personal experience journals' are based on students' lives. They can be written by students with all levels of proficiency (description of friends, family members, and plans for future), and can be private and unshared by other students. Furthermore, Hadiyanti and Wibowo (2019) provide that 'personal experience journals' imply that students should write compositions about their life experiences or any topics relevant to their interests.

The current study adopts the definition of Casanave (2011) since it is more comprehensive than the definition of Hadiyanti and Wibowo (2019).

The Importance of Using Journal Writing in FL/L2 Classrooms

Journal writing has a central role in improving FL students' overall proficiency (Saad & Ahmed, 2015). It is very useful for enhancing students' writing in that it can help learners communicate fluently with their experience (Thompson & Adams, 2011). Indeed, journal writing can provide learners with the chance to experience writing as an expressive activity without getting anxious about their mistakes (Yurekli & Afacan, 2020). It has also various functions, such as centering on language learning process, responses to literature, thoughts on intercultural experiences (Verlag, 2018), stimulating critical thinking, and reflecting on past situations (Hashemi & Mirzaei, 2015).

The Use of Journal Writing in EFL Classrooms

Verlag (2018) asserts that prior to employing journal writing; teachers should introduce the concept of journal writing and its objectives to the students. Moreover, Casanave (2011) states that students should express their feelings and views to a teacher or a peer reader. Teachers should expand students' thinking through responding to their ideas and thoughts. In addition, Tuan (2010) provides that journal writing is one way of practicing writing at home. Rodliyah (2019) also views that journal writing can be implemented as an out-of-class assignment.

It is worth mentioning that both Casanave (2011) and Verlag (2018) provide that in assessing the students' journals, the teacher should give more emphasis to cohesion, coherence, fluency, and communication appropriateness and less emphasis to grammatical accuracy.

The Types of Journal Writing

According to Casanave (2011), journal writing is of different types:

1. Dialogue journal is a journal that is regularly written back and forth between two persons for the purpose of communication. The main feature of dialogue journals is that they are balanced exchanges of personally meaningful ideas between learners and teachers or between peers.
2. Journal letter is a balanced discussion between a teacher and a student. It functions like a letter.
3. Peer journals allow journal writers to engage in real communication with partners with the same interests and age. The topics should be relevant to students' interests.
4. Secret friend journals are exchanges prepared by teachers between the learners who do not know each other, and who remain anonymous.
5. Personal experience journals are based on learners' lives. They can be written by students with all levels of proficiency (description of family members, friends' visions, and plans for future), and can be completely private and unshared by anyone.
6. Response journal is written by individuals in response to something they experienced, heard, or seen, and there are many types including reading response journal (i.e., commenting on class reading or new readings) and film response journal ensures (using films as content for journal writing and comments).
7. Teacher development journals document the journal writers' intellectual, linguistic, and practical growth in education programs. Such journals include the following:
 - a. E-journals which are exchanged between learners and a teacher or among students in a class through online discussion groups or email exchanges. Their purpose is to help students interact with content in content-based language class or in teacher-preparation courses.
 - b. Journals for research which help learners think about issues in research projects.
 - c. Field journals that record learners' observations made during a field work.
 - d. Language learning diaries that are kept by language learners to record their experiences.

It is noteworthy that the present study focused on one of the journal writing types i.e., personal experience journals which are based on students' lives. The students were asked to write about topics relevant to their interests i.e., hobbies, friends, family members, plans, and favorite university courses.

Writing in a Foreign Language

Hyland (2003) views that 'writing' in a foreign language is a process that requires using linguistic knowledge, vocabulary choices, syntactic patterns, and cohesive devices that comprise the essential building blocks of texts. For Byrne (1996), 'writing' involves encoding of a message written through a sequence of sentences ordered together in certain ways, and it requires some conscious mental effort including making notes, drafting, and revising. Additionally, Hammad (2016) provides that 'writing' is a thinking process which involves generating ideas, composing these ideas in sentences and paragraphs, and finally revising the ideas and paragraphs composed. Good writing also requires knowledge of grammatical rules, lexical devices, and logical ties.

The present study defines 'writing' as a process involving generating ideas and expressing such ideas in correct sentences and well-organized paragraphs.

Definition of 'Writing Fluency'

'Writing fluency' refers to amount of production, and it can be measured either by the number of words per minute or by the number of words per unit (Barkaoui & Knouzi, 2012). In other words, 'writing fluency' is the length of composition. The longer an essay the better score it will get. Long essay usually introduces rich information, and it refers to the development within paragraphs and structural completeness (Llach, 2011). Many relevant studies (e.g., Pham, 2021; Raish, 2017) measured writing fluency by number of words per minute.

The researcher views that 'writing fluency' is the easiness of producing written texts, and it is measured by number of words per minute.

Definition of 'Anxiety' and 'Writing Anxiety'

According to Leaver, Ehrman, and Shekhtman (2005), 'anxiety' is a sort of nervous-system arousal that happens when doing a task like learning a language. Additionally, Hammad and Abu Ghali (2015) define 'anxiety' as a

negative feeling accompanied by a low thinking ability, physical changes, and negative behaviors. Terry (2016) views that 'anxiety' can be described through various symptoms such as physical reactions including heart rate, rapid breathing, and sweating; emotional feeling of distress; and a cognitive state of distraction. Harris and Lampe (2015) also state that the somatic symptoms of anxiety may be experienced from head to toe, such as run of strong heartbeats, feeling of shortness of the breath, tightness of the chest, stomach pain, and tingling in hands and feet. Additionally, Armario and Nadal (2013) and Terry (2016) mention that there are two types of anxiety: state anxiety and trait anxiety. State anxiety is a temporary arousal of anxiety provoked by certain situations, such as having exams whereas trait anxiety is one personality trait, and it is stable.

Based on the above, the researcher defines 'anxiety' in this study as a temporarily arousal of negative feelings accompanied by certain physical changes, a low thinking ability, and negative behaviors.

As for 'writing anxiety' in L2/FL field, Hassan (2001) provides that there is a negative correlation between writing anxiety and EFL students' self-esteem and writing competence.

Considering the above, the researcher refers to 'writing anxiety' as a temporarily arousal of negative feelings experienced by students when writing English compositions, and it is accompanied by certain physical changes, a low thinking ability, and negative behaviors.

Previous Studies

Several studies have been recently conducted on employing journal writing strategy in EFL/ESL settings. Most previous studies focused on one type of journal writing i.e., dialogue journal writing. Al Kayed, Alkayid, and Alsmadi (2020) investigated the impact of dialogue journal writing on English writing of 50 Jordanian EFL students and their attitudes towards writing. The study used a test and a questionnaire. Results showed that journal writing had positive effects on the participants' writing skills, and it could develop positive attitudes towards writing. Likewise, Hapsari, Susilohadi, and Elyono (2018) explored the effectiveness of using dialogue journals in improving writing proficiency of 20 EFL high school students in Surakarta. The study collected its data through qualitative and quantitative instruments, including observations, interviews, and tests. Results revealed that the implementation of dialogue journal writing could improve the students' writing proficiencies. Furthermore, Liao and Wong (2010) examined the effect of English dialogue journal writing on 41 Taiwanese EFL tenth graders' writing fluency, reflections, anxiety, and intrinsic motivation. The data were collected through interviews, questionnaires and a test. Findings concluded that dialogue journal writing improved the students' writing fluency and writing performance, and it increased writing motivation. Rokni and Seifi (2013) also centered on the impact of dialogue journal writing on 68 Iranian EFL university students' achievement levels in grammar. Results of a test indicated that dialogue journal writing had a significant positive effect on the students' achievement in grammar. Moreover, Salem (2007) investigated the effect of journal writing on written performance and writing apprehension of 50 third-year English department male students in Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Instruments included a writing test, a writing apprehension questionnaire, interviews, and the participants' written comments. The findings showed significant differences between the experimental group and the control group in writing performance in favor of the experimental group.

Other studies centered on electronic journals. For example, David, Azman, and Ming (2018) explored the effect of online dialogue journal writing on writing anxiety of 26 low proficiency ESL undergraduates at a Malaysian public university. The project was conducted as a supplementary writing activity outside the regular contact hours of an English course. A writing anxiety inventory was utilized to measure the participants' writing anxiety, and results showed that journal writing could reduce the students' writing anxiety levels. Yang (2017) also explored the effect of Moodle English Journal writing on 40 Taiwanese non-English-majored college students' writing performance levels. The study concluded that journal writing had positively affected the participants' writing abilities.

A study of Yurekli and Afacan (2020) was concerned with the effectiveness of using journal writing both with and without an audience on 76 Turkish EFL university student's academic writing performance. The study collected its data through a test, focused-group meetings, and an interview with the instructor. The study found that journal writing with an audience increased the proficiency level of students, especially in terms of organizational skills.

Rodliyah (2019) employed the descriptive method to explore the views of Indonesian EFL university students on a one-semester long journaling activity. The students experienced it as out-of-class assignments. The findings derived from students' written reflections and interviews showed that students perceived journaling as a useful activity, and it could help them improve their writing skills.

In the Palestinian EFL context, Abu Hussein, Al Jamal, and Sadi (2020) and Farrah (2012) were the only Palestinian

studies that focused on this research area. Abu Hussein, Al Jamal, and Sadi (2020) investigated the effectiveness of online reflective journals on 60 Birzeit University students' creative writing. To carry out the study, the researcher established a closed-group on Messenger for the students to write their online reflective journals, and share them on the group frequently each time on a different topic. The data about the students' creative writing skills were collected through a pre/post-test. The study concluded that employing reflective journals was effective in improving the students' creative writing. Likewise, Farrah (2012) evaluated the benefits of reflective journal writing for improving English writing skills, motivation, creativity, and critical thinking among university students. The sample consisted of 120 male and female students. A test and a questionnaire were employed in the study. The results showed the positive role of using reflective journal writing in enhancing motivation and writing skills.

None of the previous studies conducted in the Palestinian EFL context focused on the effectiveness of using personal writing journals in developing the students' writing fluency and reducing their writing anxiety.

The previous studies were useful for designing the present study instruments.

3. Method

Research Design

The study utilized one of the quasi-experimental designs (i.e., one-group pre-test/post-test) to explore the effect of using personal writing journals on writing fluency and writing anxiety of EFL students at Al- Aqsa University. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) provide that one-group pre-test/post-test measure whether there are any changes from before to after intervention. Mertens and McLaughlin (2004) also note that one-group pre-test/post-test is often employed to test effects of curriculum interventions, and it includes administering a pre-test, implementing the treatment, then administering a post-test

Participants

The participants were 30 Palestinian female students selected purposively from English department students at Al-Aqsa University. Participants were third-year students joining the department of English at Al-Aqsa University in the academic year 2021-2022. All participants passed *Writing one* and *Writing two*. They were between 20-21 years old. The Participants had studied English as a foreign language for 15 years.

Research Instruments

The study employed three instruments i.e., a writing test, a closed-questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview. The researcher checked the face validity and content validity of all instruments.

A Writing Test

The researcher employed an essay test to assess the participants' writing fluency (Appendix B). The researcher checked the content validity of the test through introducing it to a jury of experts. Based on a pilot experiment, the researcher determined the test time by adding minutes taken by the student who finished the test first to minutes spent by the student who finished the test last, then dividing the total number of minutes by two. The 30 students in this study were given 50 minutes to write 30 essays on a topic familiar to them. The researcher selected a familiar topic to help the participants complete their essays.

A Closed-question Questionnaire

The researcher prepared a closed-question questionnaire for measuring the participants' writing anxiety levels. Based on literature review (e.g., Armario & Nadal, 2013; Hammad & Abu Ghali, 2015; Harris & Lampe, 2015; Leaver, Ehrman & Shekhtman, 2005; Terry, 2016) related to anxiety and writing anxiety, the researcher developed a closed-question questionnaire consisting of four categories 'Physical Changes', 'Negative Feelings', 'Low Thinking Ability', and 'Negative Behaviors'. The questionnaire items required multiple choice answers with a five-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Disagree, and 5=Strongly Disagree. The researcher checked the content validity of the questionnaire through validating the items by a jury of experts. Its internal consistency was also determined through Cronbach Alpha. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), Alpha is utilized for measuring reliability of an instrument. The Alpha coefficient for the overall questionnaire (17 items) was at 0.93. Table 1 shows Alpha coefficients for the questionnaire categories.

Table 1. Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of the Questionnaire Categories

No.	Categories	Items Numbers	Alpha Cronbach coefficients
1	Physical Changes	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	0.87
2	Negative Feelings	6, 7, 8, 9	0.80
3	Low Thinking ability	10, 11, 12	0.82
4	Negative Behaviors	13, 14, 15, 16, 17	0.79
	Total	17	0.93

A Semi-structured Interview

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) view that semi-structured interviews lead conversations to unexpected data. The researcher conducted group semi-structured interviews with 12 participants. After reviewing some relevant references and studies (e.g., Armario & Nadal, 2013; Hammad & Abu Ghali, 2015; Harris & Lampe, 2015; Leaver, Ehrman & Shekhtman, 2005; Terry, 2016), the researcher developed the interview questions (Appendix C). The researcher also checked its content validity through introducing it to a jury of experts. Each interview was audio-taped for transcription.

4. Research Procedures

First, the researcher administered a writing test and a writing anxiety questionnaire to 30 students. Then, she gave them an awareness-raising session about the basics of journal writing. The researcher also asked the participants to write on topics that interested them. Each student provided the researcher with two journal entries a week. Based on some previous studies (e.g., Rodliyah, 2019; Tuan, 2010), the participants practiced journal writing as out-of-class assignments. The experiment lasted nine weeks (September, October and November, 2021). At the end, the researcher administered a writing test and a writing anxiety questionnaire to the participants. During the experiment, the students were given corrective feedback on content and meaning rather than grammar. Additionally, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 students selected from the participants to identify their views on the strategy. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and participating in the research might improve their writing fluency and reduce their writing anxiety. All participants were willing to take part in the research.

Based on some studies (e.g., Barkaoui & Knouzi, 2012; Pham, 2021; Raish, 2017), the researcher measured the participants' writing fluency. The students' written papers were tallied for word counts. Furthermore, the researcher used paired t-test, employing SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Studies) to identify the differences in writing fluency and writing anxiety between the pre-measurement and post-measurement. Moreover, the researcher used Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to determine the distributional differences between the two measurements. The results of the test in Table 2 and Table 3 show that p-values are higher than 0.05, and this indicates that the data are normally distributed.

Table 2. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test result (The Writing Anxiety Questionnaire)

Writing Anxiety Questionnaire	Z-Value	Probability Value
	1.12	0.15

Table 3. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test result (The Writing Test)

Writing Test	Z-Value	Probability Value
	0.72	0.67

Second, in analyzing the interviews data, the researcher used the qualitative data analysis steps given by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006). The researcher transcribed, coded, and organized the interviews into three main categories, including "Advantages of using personal experience journals" (i.e., developing students' abilities to generate relevant ideas, improving students' organizational skills in writing, developing students' writing fluency, enhancing students' vocabulary knowledge, and students' experiences of positive emotions during the treatment), "Factors contributing to the effectiveness of personal experience journals in improving EFL students writing" (i.e., the effectiveness of homework writing assignments and relevance of writing topics to students' personal issues), and "Disadvantages of using personal experience journals" (i.e., lacking focus on grammatical accuracy). To establish the interviews data credibility, another researcher reviewed and coded the material, and the two researchers agreed on 90% of the coded data.

5. Results

Results of First Research Question

The first research question was "To what extent do personal experience journals improve EFL writing fluency of

Al-Aqsa University female students?' This research question aimed at measuring the effects of journal writing on the students' writing fluency in terms of number of words produced in their essays.

Table 4. Means, Standard deviations, and t-test values of pre-measurement and post-measurement (The Writing Test)

Measurement	Mean	STD	T-Test	P-value
Pre-measurement	3.58	1.42	4.305	0.000
Post-measurement	3.91	1.66		

As shown in Table 4, there are statistically significant differences between the mean score of the pre-measurement and the mean score of the post-measurement (i.e., pre-measurement, 3.58; post-measurement, 3.91) in favor of the post-measurement.

Results of Second Research Question

The second research question was "To what extent do personal experience journals reduce Al-Aqsa University EFL female students' writing anxiety?" Table 5 shows the differences between the pre-measurement and the post-measurement.

Table 5. Means, Standard deviations, and t-test values of pre-measurement and post-measurement (The Writing Anxiety Questionnaire)

Measurement	Mean	STD	T-Test	P-value
post-measurement	2.59	0.47	12.769	0.000
Pre-measurement	3.99	0.61		

Table 5 indicates that while the mean score of the post-measurement is 2.59, the mean score of the pre-measurement is 3.99. This means that personal experience journals had a positive role in reducing the participants' writing anxiety.

Results of Third Research Question

The third question was "How do Al-Aqsa University EFL female students perceive personal experiences journals?" To examine the participants' views on personal experiences journals, the researcher conducted group semi-structured interviews with 12 participants. The interviews analysis showed that the participants in this study had positive views on personal experience journals. From their perspectives, personal experience journals had many advantages, such as developing students' performance in idea generation, students' organization skills in writing, students' writing fluency and students' lexical abilities.

One main advantage of using personal experience journals in this study was improving students' abilities to generate valuable ideas.

Participant 7 (a student with an intermediate achievement level): *This course enhanced my ability of storming appropriate ideas. Now, the ideas come to my mind easily and quickly.*

Participant 2 (a student with a low achievement level): *I received a lot of red comments on the thoughts of my first three or four compositions, and gradually the feedback given by my teacher become more positive.*

A second advantage was improving students' organization skills in writing. According to some participants, the course could assist them to write a coherent text.

Participant 4 (a student with an intermediate achievement level): *In the past, I was unable to organize ideas of a composition well. I used to write on an idea, move to another, then return to the first one. Now I can logically order connected ideas, moving smoothly and reasonably from an idea to another.*

Participant 1 (a student with a low achievement level): *One of the benefits of this experiment is that it enhanced my ability to write well-organized essays. At the start of the course, I practiced writing many ideas within a single paragraph. The feedbacks provided by my instructor taught me how to write a paragraph focusing on one main idea and how to make a logical connection between all ideas or paragraphs.*

Furthermore, most interviewees reported that the treatment had improved their writing fluency.

Participant 6 (a student with a high achievement level): *I noticed that I became faster in writing. Unlike my beginnings, I do not spend much time on thinking how to begin and what to write.*

Participant 11 (a student with an intermediate achievement level): *The time spent on writing English compositions since the start of the course till its end has gradually been decreased. While I took more than an hour for accomplishing my first composition, I could write my last essay in this course within 30 minutes.*

Another benefit was enhancing the students' vocabulary. Many students viewed that out-of-class assignments could give them enough time to search dictionaries and use English words in its real contexts.

Participant 12 (a student with a high achievement level): *Writing compositions at home helped me to take my time in consulting dictionaries, and using words appropriately.*

Participant 5 (a student with an intermediate achievement level): *Home assignments enhanced my lexical ability. While writing I used to translate sentences from Arabic to English, and therefore I needed to use internet sources to find suitable English vocabulary. Indeed, we do not have adequate time in writing classes for such tasks.*

Another type of gains associated with personal experience journals was affective (i.e., psychological). The majority of students reported that they experienced positive emotions during the treatment, such as feelings of easiness, enjoyment, comfort, and excitement.

Participant 3 (a student with an intermediate achievement level): *I enjoyed this experiment so much because I wrote about topics related to my daily life. I also practice writing without that kind of pressure associated with traditional writing courses. I found it easy to write about my everyday life, and this made me feel relaxed and confident.*

Participant 12 (a student with a high achievement level): *During this experiment, I could express feelings and emotions that I could not write in other ways, and this comforted me.*

Participant 11 (a student with an intermediate achievement level): *I always feel stressed due to my responsibilities as a mother, a wife, and a student. When I wrote about such strain and anxiety I really felt comfortable. I felt as if I removed a burden from my chest.*

Participant 5 (a student with an intermediate achievement level): *The tasks were very interesting. I found it easy and exciting to write about my family, best friend, future plans, and wishes. I do not need to review references to have adequate knowledge about the topics I am going to write on. It was a new experience for me, and I was eager to receive my instructor's feedbacks on my compositions.*

Despite most students viewed personal experience journals as very useful and interesting tasks, they complained that they did not receive adequate feedback on errors related to grammar and mechanics of writing. According to them, the treatment could not improve their grammatical accuracy.

6. Discussion

The present study concluded that personal journal writing improved the participants' EFL writing fluency and reduced their writing anxiety level. Congruent with this result, many relevant studies reported the effectiveness of using journal writing in developing EFL students' writing. For example, Abu Hussein, Al Jamal, and Sadi (2020) concluded that employing reflective journals was effective in improving Palestinian university students' creative writing. Farrah (2012) also showed the positive effects of using reflective journal writing in enhancing motivation and writing skills of Palestinian EFL male and female students. Likewise, David, Azman, and Ming (2018) revealed that online dialogue journal writing could effectively reduce the writing anxiety of low proficiency ESL undergraduates at a Malaysian public university. Moreover, Liao and Wong (2010) reported the positive effect of English dialogue journal writing on Taiwanese EFL tenth graders' writing fluency and writing anxiety. Additionally, Yang (2017) indicated that journal writing had positively affected the writing performance of Taiwanese non-English-majored college students' writing performance levels.

It may be argued that two main factors contributed to the effectiveness of using personal experience journals in improving the participants' writing fluency and reducing their writing anxiety. One important factor might be that the tasks were out-of-class assignments, the thing which gave the students enough time to reflect ideas, consult dictionaries, and write without being stressed. In this context, Adamson and Coulson (2015) refer to the importance of homework assignment for developing FL writing. Thus, for helping Gaza EFL students reflect their thoughts and write effective papers, the instructors should give them various writing homework assignments.

Another factor was related to the topics the students were asked to write on. Such topics were connected with their daily life and personal affairs. A large number of the interviewees reported that they experienced feelings of easiness, enjoyment, comfort, and excitement during the experiment due to the relevance of the topics to their personal issues and everyday life. According to Freeman (2014), writing about personal information can enhance writing skills. So, the present study strongly recommends Gaza EFL instructors to assign writing asks focusing on the students' personal life i.e., things they know, things they can do, people they may know, and places they have been.

Despite that the participants viewed personal experience journals as a useful strategy, they complained that the instructor did not give attention to grammatical accuracy during the course. According to the interviewees, providing

feedbacks related to their grammatical errors could improve their writing accuracy. Ur (2009) states that grammar is central to language production. Therefore, the researcher recommends Gaza EFL teachers to provide other types of writing courses emphasizing grammatical correctness.

7. Recommendations

In light of the above, the study recommendations can be summarized as following:

1. It is advisable for Gaza EFL instructors to employ journal writing strategies (i.e., personal experience journals) in writing classes.
2. For helping Gaza EFL students reflect their thoughts and write effective papers, the instructors should give them various writing homework assignments.
3. The present study strongly recommends Gaza EFL instructors to assign writing asks focusing on the students' personal life i.e., things they know, things they can do, people they may know, and places they have been.
4. The researcher recommends Gaza EFL teachers to provide other types of writing courses emphasizing grammatical correctness.

8. Conclusion

The study concluded the effectiveness of personal experience journals in improving writing fluency and reducing writing anxiety of Al-Aqsa University EFL students. Additionally, the interviews data analysis revealed that the participants had positive views on personal experience journals, and the course could help them experience positive emotions and feelings, such as feelings of easiness, enjoyment, comfort, and excitement.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: The English Writing Anxiety Questionnaire

NO.	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Certain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Certain parts of my body (e.g., stomach, hands, legs, etc.) feel tense when writing in English					
2.	I feel my heart pounding when I write compositions specifically in English writing classes					
3	I tremble when I write compositions in English writing tests					
4	I sweat when I write in English					
5	I freeze up when I unexpectedly asked to write English compositions					
6	I do not enjoy the experience of writing in English					
7	I feel anxious when writing in English					
8	I feel anxious when writing English compositions in writing classes					
9	I feel afraid when having English writing tests					
10	My thoughts are confused when writing in English					
11	My mind goes blank when I start writing compositions in English writing classes					
12	I forget things I know when writing compositions in English writing tests					
13	I usually do my best to avoid writing English compositions					
14	I often choose to write down my thoughts in English					
15	I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside the classroom					
16	I avoid academic challenges related to English writing					
17	I do not participate in English writing classes.					

Appendix (B): The Essay Test

Write an English essay within fifty minutes about your favourite university subjects. Your essay should include an introductory paragraph, at least two supporting paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

Appendix (C): The Semi-structured Interview

- 1- What do you think about personal experience Journals? Did it improve your English writing fluency? Could it help in reducing your English writing anxiety?
- 2- How did you feel toward personal experience Journals? Did you enjoy them? Why? Why not?
- 3- From your perspectives, what are the advantages and disadvantages of personal experience Journals?
- 4- Would you practice personal experience Journals in the future? Why? Why not?

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