



## ENHANCING COLLEGE STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE THROUGH DEVELOPING NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.33329/joell.62.100>

### ABSTRACT



The current research aims at developing college students' writing performance in the light of using narrative inquiry. This study employed the one group experimental design along with mixed research approach incorporating quantitative and qualitative analyses.

The current research is delimited to the participants group of 3rd level female English majors (n=115) at Al-Azhar university in the gaza strip. Also, some online and face to face activities relevant to the targeted writing performance components were used for the study participants.

The researcher adopted the narrative inquiry which included searching and exploring based on inquiry techniques of narration. According to the findings of writing performance rubric, the highest average was in effective storyboard usage after conducting the posttest in compared to the others components. As a result, there was a significant development in students' writing performance in narration due to using storyboard. Moreover, most of them became able to generate ideas by using narrative inquiry before they started writing. Besides, the choice of the topic had a positive impact on the participants' writing performance. However, a few number of participants showed lacked the appropriate use of vocabulary that matched well with the context.

The following recommendations were stated;

- Using pre-writing storyboard for developing students' writing performance.
- Choosing topics that appeal to students' interest and background knowledge.
- Presenting materials based on internet search to the students to simulate their inquiry abilities.
- Enhancing self-expression ability as a prerequisite for language learners.
- Participating in oral and written activities as highly appreciated practices of learners.

**Keywords:** *Narrative Inquiry & Writing Performance*



## INTRODUCTION

In the EFL teaching and learning context, the concept of performance encompasses a range of responses either in an oral or a written form. Many studies emphasized the importance of integration both both oral and written activities such as arguments, questioning, group dynamic activities through the students' preparation of providing evidences, comparing cases and discovering contradictions and criticizing (Harpaz, 2013; Rivard and Straw, 2000; Abbott & Wren, 2016; Newby, 2011).

When discussing the importance of writing performance, Torrance, Galbraith and Waes (2007) further conclude that understanding the processes of writing involved in producing and evaluating thoughts rather than translating them into the language. Thus, students should be given the opportunities that would develop their writing performance.

## CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

Besides the importance of writing performance for students, it is crucial for teachers, especial student- teachers who are one step far from real teaching. However, most EFL majors and students teachers in Palestine lack a clear understanding of writing performance due to the lack of applying strategies and techniques in an authentic context focusing on this type of writing performance. Within the previous frame, several studies support this conclusion giving reasons behind such situation: In some cases, teachers are not clearly aware of the current writing strategies. Most of them focus on a traditional approach that concentrates on the language structure knowledge (Kakandee, 2017).

In addition, the interference of the mother tongue might be one of the reasons as mentioned by Nik et al. (2010) and Derakhshan & Karimi (2015) who found out that those students who do not read or write well in their first language need to work harder in their second language.

Another reason for inefficient writing performance is the deficiency of writing texts which is evidenced by Ibrahim (2015) who stated that most English majors lacked the ability to write a comprehensive, well-organized and logically text which negatively affected their writing performance. The researcher recommended the importance of implementing approaches that may enhance students' writing performance.

The difficulty of writing is extended to extracting ideas which is concluded by Chin (2016); the difficulty of writing is resulted from reformulating

and integrating new ideas. The researcher, therefore, asserted the need for more training courses on how to rearrange and reorganize ideas. In general, writing is a complex task which requires a higher level of thinking. Therefore, prospective teachers should waste no effort to have students achieve that well (Alfaki, 2015; Schoonen et al., 2003).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### WRITING PERFORMANCE

The function of writing is to help students construct and evaluate their knowledge. Woolfolk (2013, p. 357) ensured the importance of developing writing in order to help students express and perform their knowledge. Although writing and performance are different concepts, they are related to each other since writing is considered as an act of performance (Harris & Jones, 2016).

A corpus of studies on teaching and learning writing performance was reviewed. A study by Fahim and Seifodin (2015) adopted a self-regulated strategy to improve writing performance. The results revealed that self-regulatory strategy development instructional model resulted in improved writing performance of EFL learners.

Other studies examined the effectiveness of different of teaching writing such learning styles in Bahgat's study (2014), feedback in Lackey's study (1997), blog in Eldesouky's study (2018), instruction in Mirlohi et al. (2012) and higher-order thinking in Abed study (2014), linguistics activities based on rhymes in Elsoud 's study (2016).

### WRITING PERFORMANCE AND EFL

Writing, by nature, integrates with other components and activities. It cannot take place in isolation, however, it comes out as an integration process through which students can interact orally, raise questions, discussions and take notes, or write some stories. Prewriting technique is related to several issues; storyboard, brainstorming and mind mapping. Varvel and Lindeman (2005) stated the importance to maintain organization. It is important to use a graphic organizer to record important information such as character, plot, setting. This allows students to put down their ideas in the final work without missing any important detail.

### STORYBOARD

Thinking and writing process are both related to each other. So, it is impossible for one to write without thinking. Therefore, Rohman(1965) defined storyboard as a prewriting process which combines drawing with storytelling. As a study by Norris et al. (1998) stated that drawing ideas before writing makes students more effective in producing



more words, more sentences and more ideas. Thus, their overall writing performance was higher than those students who wrote without drawing. The storyboard narration has its positive effects on problem-solving. A case study conducted by Annerstedt et al. (2010) applied problem based storyboard to improve the learning experiences of university students through the use of innovative collaboration technologies to make students more motivated. Varvel and Lindeman (2005) stated that after reading, the first thing to do is to organize both abstract and concrete materials then all the information and resources to be used during the development of the storyboard in advance.

#### **NARRATION**

Integrating writing with narration, the process of narrative writing is defined by Baldick (2008). It provides fictitious event or connected sequence of events. It is a set of events in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order. Narrative writing is the most interesting type of essay writing among EFL learners because students write stories of their own interests more than other types of writing where learners express their emotions and feelings.

Turning to the narrative inquiry which is considered to be an effective way of telling the story of students' life, the study of Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p.13) ensured the importance of reciting students' stories using variety of ways. For that, they define narrative inquiry as a process of entering into lives of each inquirer. In terms of using elements of writing stories, a study conducted by Saricoban (2011) stated that a short story includes setting, characters and plot which improves students and enhances cultural and higher order thinking. Therefore, story is connected with telling one where progress of listening comprehension either during or after story reading is achieved. The elements that are focused are setting (i.e., time and place where the story happened), characters, problem or plot, resolution, and theme. Accordingly, writing stories is something organized as previously mentioned. Students should be familiar with different components of writing story: setting, characters and events in order to enhance their performance in writing stories.

#### **NARRATIVE INQUIRY & WRITING PERFORMANCE**

Inquiry is essential to students' narration. This is emphasized in a study conducted by Silva et al. (2014) where 30 children answered questions about the story and then produced a narrative using the book. Thirty children completed the tasks in reverse

order. Elements of coherence were assessed in both tasks, namely problem, resolution, and mental states. The findings indicate that questions scaffold the production of more coherent narratives. Narratives elicited after questions were judged to be more coherent than those produced before the question-answering task. In contrast, there were no differences between scores for the question answers in the different order conditions. The results are discussed regarding the interactional role of questions and the facilitative effect they have on focusing attention to the narrative task.

It is elicited that asking question has a positive impact in writing stories. Therefore, the current research tries to use the narrative inquiry to investigate the further events and generate more ideas to enhance students' writing stories.

#### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

This study employed the one group pretest/posttest design along with a mixed research approach incorporating quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

The participants of this study were third year English majors (n=115) enrolled in the English Department, Faculty of Education, Al-Azhar University, Palestine.

#### **INSTRUMENTS**

The following instruments were used in the study:

- The Pre/post-test,
- The Writing Performance Rubric.

#### **DURATION OF EXPERIMENT**

The program was conducted in the academic year 2017-2018. It took eight sessions of narration over 4 weeks. Each session was 60 minutes.

#### **QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' WRITING PERFORMANCE**

T. test for dependent groups was used for the statistical analysis to compare the students' mean scores in the pre and the post administrations of the writing performance. This was done to determine the significant differences between the students' mean scores in the overall writing performance and in each single writing performance component as well. The t-test for dependent groups was also used to determine the significant differences between the students' mean scores in the pretest and the posttest with regard to developing narration. Results of the study will be reported in the terms of study hypotheses.

#### **VERIFYING THE HYPOTHESIS**

The hypothesis states that there is no difference between the mean scores of the pretest



and of the post-test of the experimental group in terms of narration in favor of the posttest.

In order to verify the hypothesis, the researcher compared the mean scores of the study

group in the pre and post measurements of the test.

These results are clarified in table (1)

**Table 1**

**T-Test Results of the Pre & Post administrations of Narration Concerning Each Element**

Skill	Mean		Std. Deviation		tc	sig	Effect size( $\eta^2$ )
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post			
<b>Narration</b>							
Storybaord	1.29	3.96	0.68	0.85	30.652	0.000	0.859
Setting	1.79	3.73	0.91	0.81	23.817	0.000	
Character	1.79	3.62	0.89	0.79	25.303	0.000	
Plot & Conflict	1.75	3.72	0.87	0.81	25.179	0.000	
Sequence of Time	1.60	3.48	0.82	0.77	23.928	0.000	
Time markers	1.67	3.62	0.83	0.89	24.379	0.000	
<b>Setting</b>	1.94	3.29	0.91	0.82	3.102	0.000	0.79
Character	1.78	3.34	0.79	0.90	4.56	0.000	
Plot& Conflict	1.71	3.21	0.87	0.81	4.38	0.000	
Conclusion	1.60	3.63	0.66	0.88	5.243	0.000	
<b>Total</b>	7.03	14.28	3.09	3.12	10.35	0.000	

Table (1) shows that there is difference at the significance level of 0.01 between the mean scores of the pretest and of the post-test of the study group in terms of narration (the sub elements and the whole one) in favor of the posttest. So, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pretest and of the post-test of the study group in terms of developing narration in favor of the posttest". Thus, it can be concluded that the students' ability to narrate developed due to the narrative inquiry.

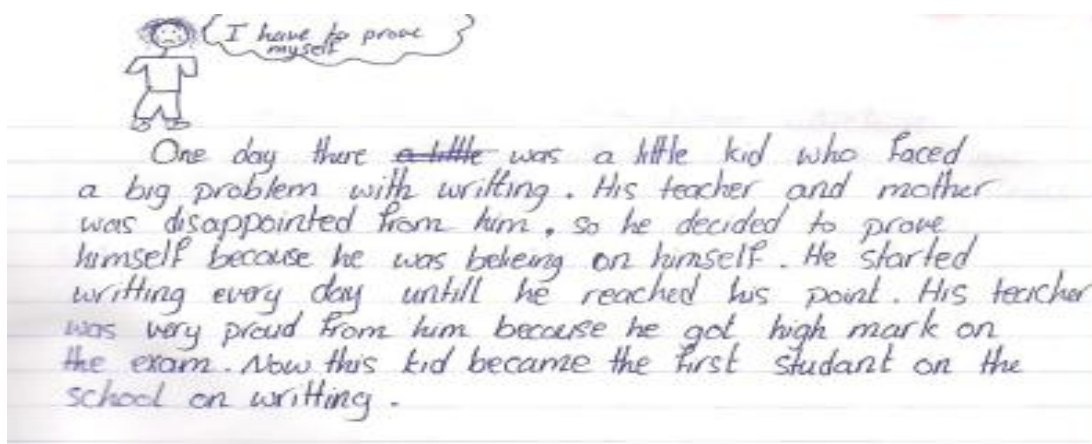
Also, table (1) shows that the experimentation's effect size for narration. The effect size value of the test's total scores is (0.79), which is a large effect size indicating the effectiveness of the study's program in developing the students' narration.

**Qualitative Analysis of Students' Writing Performance**

The following examples of participants A, participant B, participant C before applying for the program on narrating some topics as below:

Answers of prettest: (Pre treatment)

**Participant A narrated**





Participant B narrated:

The diagram shows a central oval labeled "Backwash effects of technology". Six arrows point outwards from this oval to the following terms: "loneliness", "depression", "be unsociable", "lazy", "bad websites", and "bad behaviours". Below the oval, the text "ignore bad morals" is written with an arrow pointing down towards it.

No doubt that the technology has made our world smaller, but the technology has two sides: good side and bad side.

Technology has a good side. It makes doing many things much easier and without any tiredness, but it also has a bad side. It makes the youth lazy and unsociable by overdose using of social media especially Facebook. The person can open a bad website and then the parents notice bad behaviours, bad morals. Also, they are suffering of loneliness and depression. Youth also are wasting their times.

So, technology has two sides, you should use it carefully and in useful way.



Participant C narrated:

Two years <sup>ago</sup> ~~before~~, I met one of my lovely friends and we sat just to talk about her experiences in Canada. She told me ~~about~~ about how she acquired a new language there and ~~about~~ how she knew a new culture different from the culture in her home land & and how that affected in her life and her way of thinking, I finally analysed that personal experience is ~~much~~ <sup>very</sup> exciting and usefull, ~~and~~ better.

Participant A narrated a topic about Backwash effects of technology



One day there was a little girl Lara who fail in school. She was on grad 5. Lara came to her mother Ola with her bad marks; her mother was so disappointment from her because on the last night her mother worked hard with her daughter, Lara started belanning herself because her mother always told her you can be the first student if you wanted to



Lara started working on herself; she went to the security of the library Mohammed to borrow a benefit book to read it on her free time; she also asked her teacher Morther to help her on her studies; she put extra hours for studying she was completely different she became strong not only on her studies and on her ~~character~~ social life also, she used the internet also to ~~space~~ expand her thinking. Finally Lara finished her exams and she was so scared from the result, but her mother was believe on her. The last day come after a hard days of thinking. The result was really great. Lara can't forget that day when Mr. Morther said to Lara standed up please and asked the rest students to clap their hands for her; she was so happy because she was the first student on the class, she can't imagine that. She went to her mother and ~~told her~~ she told her that she was so proud of her. Thus she tasted the success and she never fail again.

Participant B narrated about the Backwash effects of technology



Once upon a time, a boy whose name was Sami. He was very obsessed to social media of all types such as Messenger, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and WhatsApp. He was very addicted to these apps. One time, his friend Amir called him to play football but he refused. The Internet had made him to be

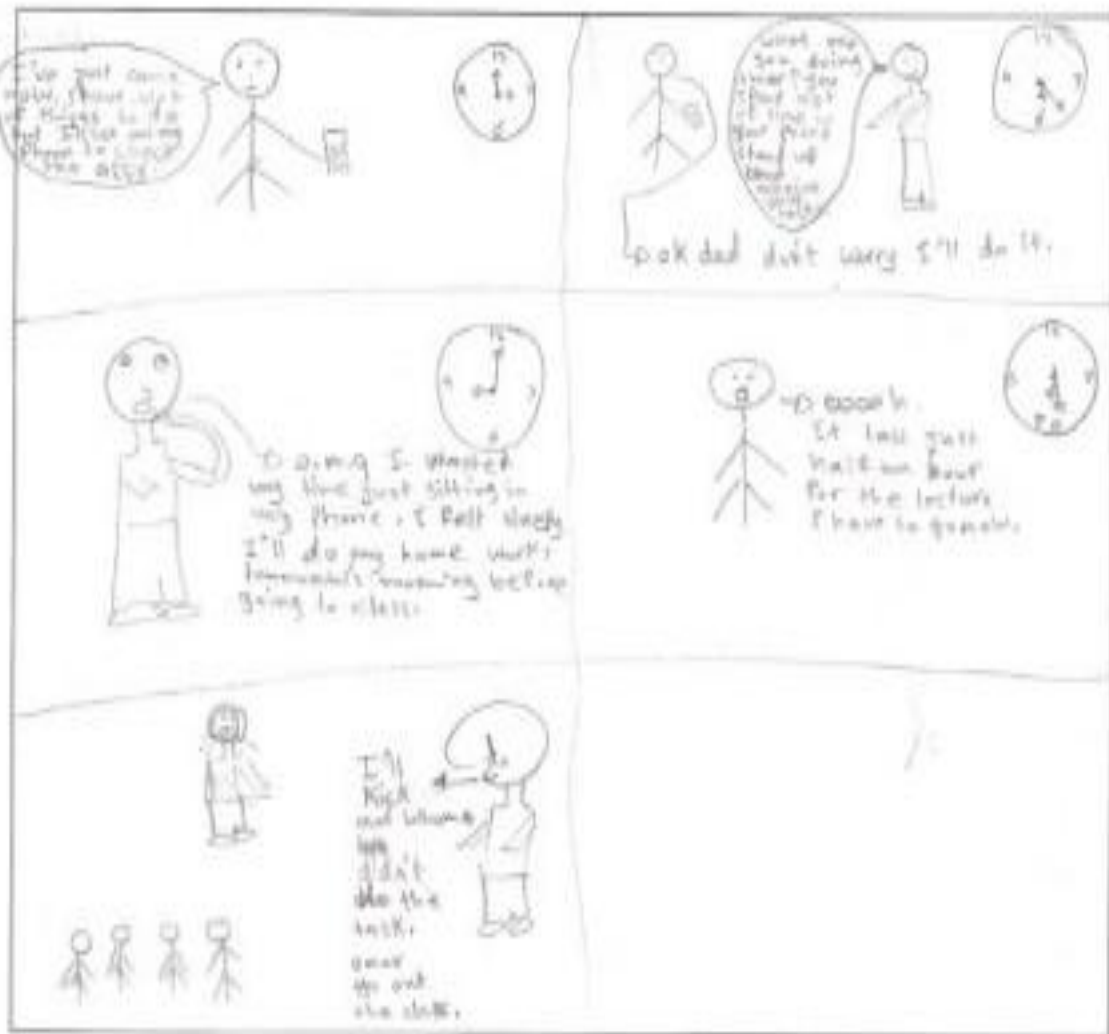


coupled up in the house. He was very indulgent in Internet. He was keeping isolated in the house which led him to become anti-social. After that, his mum knocked on his door but without vain. He refused to respond even to his mother's call. So, each day passed on him without moving or doing anything. Afterwards, He passed in front of his mirror. He was shocked and surprised to know that he gained weight and became much fatter. In the meantime, he was crying and weeping <sup>all day</sup> then his parents came and saw his miserable state. He was listening to his parents when they started to encourage him about going to the gym and eat healthy food also to have a diet. After he had gone to the gym, he started to lose weight gradually. He was very happy for that and also satisfied about his awareness of being healthy and having a healthy body. He started to move and do exercises. Also, he started to play with his friend and go out to stroll around his house. When his parents saw him like that, they were very proud of him and were over the moon because his son became much better. He said, "Thank you my parents for all your efforts. You taught me to use technology and Internet in useful way. Also, he learned to get benefits of Internet and to use it in a good way. He also learned to control himself when he used Internet and not the vice-versa."





Participant C wrote about Human ability topic.



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.... One day, I came back from my university at 3 p.m. I had a lot of things to do, but I preferred to sit on my phone to check Facebook, Instagram and the other application before starting studying. Time took me and I didn't feel. I spent many hours in it. At 6:30 p.m., my.....



..father..came..and..blamed..me..for..my..careless..I..told..him...  
 that...I...still...have...time...and...I'll...be...able...to...do...my...homeworks,  
 ..suddenly,..I..looked..at..the..clock..and..I..found..it..9:20PM  
 but..unfortunately,..~~the~~ I..felt..sleep..and..tired..and..I..delay....  
 ..my..homeworks..to..the..next..day..I..decided..to..do..them....  
 ..before..going..to..class..In..the..next..day,..I..walked..up  
 ..at..7:30..before..the..lecture..but..I..didn't..have...  
 ..enough..time..to..do..them..I..just..dressed..and..went..to....  
 the..university,..our..teacher..dismissed..them..didn't...  
 do..the..tasks..he..insulted..me..and..fired..me..out....  
 of...the..class..I..from.....

## COMMENTARY

It can be inferred from the previous examples of the posttest that a big number of participants were able to narrate the story using the different features, such as setting, character, plot, and conclusion. In the beginning, they could not understand the real meaning of narrating a story; they only wrote about the topic in general but then they started creating characters. This shows the importance of using characterization in showing the story events through rising to reach the plot then falling to end the events.

Regarding using storyboard, most participants had presented a sketch before they started writing and that was an important step in the prewriting stage. Based on students' opinions; one student said "storyboard gave me a space to organize my thought before writing". However, in the beginning we found it was difficult for us to draw". While others said, "we didn't accept the idea of drawing first" then we realized the importance of using storyboard". Another student said, "I feel excited when I draw the ideas", "Sometime I couldn't find the exact meaning to express my idea but when I draw I've found it is easy now". Therefore, storyboard was highly appreciated by most students and this was obvious in their opinions towards it.

However, a few number of participants showed less experience of narration due to their low awareness of topics. This is evidenced in the study of McCrudden et al. (2016) who suggested some solutions to such problems in writing stories as the students have to show critical reflection towards different topics they are living with. Therefore, the problem which students are familiar with is more influenced in their writing.

The statistical analysis of the pre/post test results has also shown a high average of effective storyboard usage after conducting the posttest as compared with the pretest in the following components; setting, plot, characterization, and conclusion.

Moreover, the choice of the topic had a positive impact on the participants' writing performance. Therefore, participants chose topics that matched their interests. Lacross, (2015) explored the effect of selecting short stories based on students' interest on enhancing their cognitive engagement with texts. He clarified how students' cognitive engagement with short stories was positively affected by selecting texts that connected



with learners' preferences, personal interests and culture.

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