AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Incorporating Electronic Dialogue Journal Writing in an Armenian EFL classroom: Action

Research

A thesis submitted in

partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By

Mariam Anatolyan

Irena Galikyan, Adviser

Yerevan, Armenia

May 4, 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Abstract

Dialogue journal writing (DJW) has gained popularity and has proven its effectiveness in EFL classrooms worldwide. Dozens of research studies have been carried out to study the functionality of this writing tool in teaching foreign languages throughout the world. However, there is little evidence of DJW implementation in the Armenian educational setting. The current study adopted an action research approach to investigate the potential and limitations of DJW implementation in a high school in the Lori region and find out the attitudes of key stakeholders towards it. The study addresses such facets as improving students' writing and creating an authentic platform for genuine written communication by integrating DJW. The participants of the research were 10th-grade students and their EFL teacher.

Within the action research framework, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data. The qualitative data were collected through teacher interviews, dialogue journals, and field notes, while the quantitative data were gathered through pre-and post-study essays and student surveys. The results of the study provided insights into the potential of DJW implementation and supported the use of dialogue journal writing in developing students' writing. DJW appeared to be a practical writing tool for improving grammar in an authentic context and offered a flexible opportunity for the teacher to engage students in a process-oriented interactive writing practice. The results also revealed the participants' positive attitudes towards the method.

Keywords: electronic dialogue journal writing, EFL Armenian classroom, student attitude, teacher attitude, improving grammar range, action research.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Writing is an inseparable part of foreign language acquisition. However, it is considered the most challenging skill for learning and teaching because it is a continuous process of thinking, creating, and reflecting (Armstrong 2010). Writing as a uniquely human capacity enables the transfer of thoughts and knowledge and dramatically impacts academic and professional development (Brown, 1973). According to Manchon et al. (2007), this productive skill is useful for students' pushed output and self-monitoring processes, since it can be done without the pressure of oral production. Vygotsky (1987) emphasizes that writing should contain authentic context and be relevant to life. Thus, when teaching writing, teachers are expected to use authentic materials and provide opportunities for students to engage in a meaningful interaction. Teachers can encourage students to produce opinions on various authentic topics in a written discourse (Lindemann & Anderson, 2001).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Teaching writing is a challenging task given its cognitive and linguistic demands on the one hand and the school curriculum and time constraints on the other. In the Armenian public schools, the teaching of writing in a foreign language is often narrowed down to grammar instruction or production of short paragraphs that are used only for assessment purposes. The textbooks restrain idea generation and authentic interaction. This approach can result in students' negative attitude toward writing and reluctance to produce written output. Teachers face challenges in making their writing assignments more authentic and are unaware of ways to encourage idea generation, creativity, and meaningful communication (Barseghyan, 2020). This study attempts to address this problem by integrating electronic dialogue journal writing in an EFL classroom in one of the regional public schools of Armenia.

1.2. Statement of the Purpose

The present study aims to evaluate the potential of electronic dialogue journal writing for creating an authentic platform for meaningful written interaction between students and their teacher. It explores how DJW may develop students' writing and investigates how practical DJW is as a writing tool in the high school setting. The study aims to equip an English EFL teacher with a non-threatening means of assessing students' writing performance and providing feedback.

Research Questions

The current research project seeks to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the potential and limitations of DJW implementation in a public school in a regional area of Armenia in developing students' writing?

2) What are public school students and their teacher's attitudes toward the role of DJW in developing students' writing?

As the research questions suggest, this action research attempts to explore the potential and limitations of DJW implementation in the Armenian regional high school for creating more student-centered and authenticity-driven lessons. Another central concept of the research questions is to analyze whether DJW is a valuable tool to improve grammatical accuracy.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Nature of Writing: Expressive Writing

Writing as a productive skill is considered the most challenging in language acquisition since it is an ever-going combination of thinking, creating, and composing processes (Armstrong 2010; Sundana, 2017). According to Byrne (1988), it is much more than the production of symbols as the symbols have to be arranged according to particular rules to form words, while words have to be arranged to form sentences. Different types of writing enhance different writing skills. For instance, expressive writing is a type of writing that aims to link the learning process to one's own experiences (Bean, 2011). From a pedagogical perspective, expressive writing improves writing performance and confidence and promotes engagement in learning. The critical factor is doing the writing as authentic as possible, activating vocabulary, and practicing the language (Fulwiler, 1987). Another benefit of expressive writing is the opportunity for collaborative assignments. Vygotsky (1987) highlights the importance of the collaborative process in second language acquisition and the authentic context of communication. Expressive writing provides a practical platform where the writer is expected to express personal thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences. In other words, it is directly related to the writer's state of mind and socioemotional state. Different types of expressive writing are widely used in education, such as dialogue journals, blogs, and reflections.

2.2. Challenges of Writing

Byrne (1988) highlights three main reasons that could make writing challenging. These challenges are categorized into psychological, linguistic, and cognitive problems (as cited in Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016). The first category of the issues is related to psychological problems. When we communicate with someone orally, their presence and ongoing feedback (answer-question) help to create context. However, there is no immediate feedback in the case of written discourse. Thus, the writing should be attentively done not to hinder comprehension or

cause confusion. The second category is related to linguistic problems. A case study by Phothongsunan (2016) with Thai University students demonstrated that the students were challenged by discursive challenges, such as language and context, and non-discursive challenges, such as motivation and psychological issues. Some students were demotivated to start or continue the writing process, and the writing of the others contained many errors in terms of organization and context. Thus, writers have to organize their thoughts and pick specific words so as not to hinder the reader's comprehension. The third category is related to cognition. People unconsciously learn to speak their L1 without making any special effort. However, writing is learned through continuous instructions and feedback. People learn strategies for constructing and organizing their thoughts and ideas to sound clear while communicating.

2.3. Dialogue Journal as a Writing Tool

Dialogue journals are written conversations between teachers and students. The central goal of DJW is to create a stress-free and natural environment where students can share their thoughts and opinions and ask questions. Dialogue journal writing (DJW) has been used in diverse EFL settings to relate the classroom to the real world. There is no pressure regarding topic choice, word limit, and error correction. Dialogue journals are permanent records of a student's learning experiences, which teachers can always refer to and see a student's linguistic gaps and progress in an authentic context (Genesee & Upshur, 1996). Peyton (1993) highlights that the focus of DJW is the content, not the form. Here students have equal opportunities with the teacher. They can choose a particular style to write and initiate discussions. This venue enables a teacher to provide interactionally altered input, which, as various studies suggest, is expected to result in better comprehension, idea generation, and language acquisition (Loschky, 1994; Pica et al., 1987, cited in Ellis, 2015). Long (1996) views DJW as a meaningful written interaction between a student and a teacher aiming to enhance second language acquisition and overcome the aforementioned psychological challenges. Keeping a dialogue journal is an additional activity done by a teacher and a learner outside of the classroom, usually over a

course, to improve linguistic patterns. (Yoshihara, 2008). According to the Interaction Hypotheses, a learner needs different opportunities to practice language skills with a more proficient person. Both sides can have a meaningful interaction, a continuous input, and output (Long, 1996). DJW enables the practice of authentic writing considering these factors.

Another aim of DJW is related to Schmidt's (1995) Noticing Hypothesis: when learners notice and consciously accept the input. The question under JW is whether students will see and register the input and implicit feedback they get or ignore it. As feedback, a teacher can use paraphrasing, highlighting, or circling the errors to bring a student's attention to specific linguistic units (Ellis, 2015). In her study on dialogue journals and literary logs, Reyes (1991) found out that the students noticed the input only when presented explicitly; that is, the errors were highlighted and explained. In this case, the students mostly did not make the same errors again throughout the study. Shook (1999) exposed L2 Spanish students to three kinds of input while DJW: enhanced textual input, unenhanced textual input, and enhanced textual input with metalinguistic description. According to the results, the participants were focused chiefly on textually enhanced input and neglected the other two types of input (Ellis, 2015; Shook, 1999).

Next, according to Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985, cited in Ellis, 2015), learners should be provided with various opportunities to produce their knowledge; otherwise, it would be impossible to assess abilities and find particular gaps. In this vein, DJW promotes written production and helps students notice their errors. It gives a stimulus to students to find alternative ways to make their written discourse understandable and clear, enhancing metalinguistic cognition (Swain, 1985, cited in Ellis, 2015). Thus, carrying out a stress-free writing activity in a classroom, such as dialogue journal writing, can help develop learners' writing.

2.4. Benefits of Using Dialogue Journals

Different scholars and researchers highlight various benefits of using dialogue journals in EFL classrooms. One of the benefits is engagement, which enables all the students to participate

in dialogue journaling regardless of their language proficiency (Peyton & Staton, 1992). Another significant benefit is the personal reflection that students can have since the writing process consists of continuous drafting and revising (Graham, 1994). This opinion was supported by Fulwiler (1978, as cited in Eastman, 1997), who noted that dialogue journals help students reflect on their language and personal lives, draw parallels between these, and link their lives with their learning process. One of the significant benefits of DJW for Sebranek, Meyer, and Kemper (1995, as cited in Eastman, 1997) is that it provides a valuable record of a writer's thoughts, memories, and experiences. DJW suggests a pleasant and straightforward way to practice writing. With no explicit feedback, a student can learn to feel more confident (Genesee & Upshur, 2011; Young, 1997). Ellis (2015) indicates that by using proper tools, such as DJs, teachers can provoke students' intrinsic motivation and engage them naturally in the learning process.

Teachers also benefit from dialogue journals. The collaborative process of dialogue journaling enables both students and teachers to learn more from each other. Both sides exchange information and share opinions (Bode, 1989). Dialogue journals are valuable, informative sources that can be used for further course planning and can become a resource for new ideas when designing a curriculum, allowing teachers to consider students' interests. Reed (1988) claims that dialogue journals can positively affect the socio-emotional relationship between students and teachers. The researcher explains that teachers should be aware of their student's needs and problems. This information can significantly help teachers in the teaching process. To be more precise, teachers can create better and safer learning conditions for learners to grow academically and emotionally (Downey et al., 2008; Hiemstra, 2001; Miller, 2007; Yoshihara, 2008). Moreover, teachers can detect introverted learners' strong and weak features and help them with their challenges (Konishi & Park, 2017; Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002). Thus, the benefits mentioned above make journal writing a valuable writing tool.

2.5. Electronic Dialogue Journaling

Technology is an inseparable part of our lives and is essential for surviving in this quick-phased world. Education is one of the main areas where technology has a significant role, and many educators utilize it in teaching writing. Saulsberry et al. (2015) claim that digital writing tools help to promote the writing process, enhance writing apprehension, and motivate reluctant students to write. A study on electronic journaling and traditional pen and paper journaling in improving writing skills revealed that 74% of the students expressed their thoughts more freely in electronic journals than in pen and paper journals (Ramaswami, 2009). Another researcher, Siemens (2009), conducted a case study with 16 intermediate-level students who participated in two different electronic journaling: a community one and a personal one. The results showed that the word limit was significantly higher than traditional writing in both cases. Moreover, the students believed that there was less stress in the case of electronic journaling, and they had enough time to revise their writings. Goldberg et al. (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies from 1992 to 2002 to determine the difference between electronic journaling and pen and paper options. The results showed that the technology positively affected the learning process. The students wrote more and made fewer errors. In addition, electronic journaling can cause less anxiety and stress than the traditional one, resulting in better writing performance (Foroutan & Noordin, 2011).

2.6. Challenges of Dialogue Journal Writing

Although DJW has many benefits, there are also several possible challenges that both students and teachers may face. One of the main challenges for teachers is the lack of time. A considerable amount of time is required to read and respond to each student since they need an individual approach (Peyton, 2000). However, a solution suggested to teachers who struggle with time management is to write once or twice a week in order not to put too much pressure on both slides (Peyton & Staton, 1992). Although in the beginning, teachers may find it difficult to provide a timely response to each student, they get used to this over time, and learn to genuinely enjoy the process (Staton, 1988). At the same time, some researchers believe that responding to

students' entries can be comparatively shorter since teachers do not check, grade, or give explicit feedback (Bolton, 2013; Larotta, 2008).

Another challenge for students can be an unwillingness to interact with the teacher in this format. Teachers should be prepared psychologically and be as patient as possible in such cases. In this regard, Liao and Wong (2010) studied the attitudes towards writing DJ and met a student unwilling to join DJW. Thus, such cases should be considered before or during DJW incorporation. Next, some learners might need explicit feedback. Many learners are eager to get corrective feedback and focus-on-form instruction; however, learners need to focus on both form and meaning for successful language acquisition (Schiltz, 1996 stated in Renko, 2012). Though DJW is not for corrective feedback and focuses on form, Linnell (2010) offers that teachers can use explicit but insensitive ways without hindering natural interaction in addition to discrete strategies. Thus, like all writing tools and assignments, journal writing has its pros and cons.

2.7. Dialogue Journals and Corrective Feedback

According to Gee (1972), good writing skills require hard and long-lasting work, as they cannot happen by chance. Teachers should supply instances of good writing, give feedback and time to digest the information and provide opportunities to practice writing. Written feedback enhances writing and helps students maximize accuracy and clarity (Ferris, 2002). Kepner (1991) defines feedback as a process when a teacher responds to a student's work and informs them about errors improving students' written performance. Although DJW traditionally is not employed for providing explicit feedback, according to Linnel (2010), incorporating direct feedback in DJW can enhance its educational benefits without affecting the natural conversation. Feedback in dialogue journals can serve as helpful information and reflection about one's success in a learning process (Schmidt, 2010; Chandler, 2003).

2.8. Implementation of DJW in EFL classrooms

DJW has been used in various EFL settings to connect the classroom to the real world. Many studies have revealed the effectiveness of DJW in teaching and learning contexts

regarding writing fluency and accuracy, reducing anxiety and motivating writing. For instance, a study on DJW implementation was conducted at a Japanese University with nineteen students. The study aimed to make purposeful and meaningful written interactions between teachers and students and make students confident writers. During DJW, the teacher focused on the meaning and context more than on the forms and structures. The teacher encouraged students to write more by suggesting different topics, asking questions, and sharing opinions. The DJW lasted for two semesters, after which, according to the questionnaire results, the students significantly increased their motivation to write and were less anxious. Interestingly the ungraded assignment had a controversial influence. Some students were motivated by this, while others dropped out of the research. They thought it was an extra assignment that would overload them. Overall, the sample size was a significant limitation since only nineteen students remained from thirty-six. Another limitation was the level of proficiency of the students. The response in DJW had the least word limit, which was challenging for the students who lacked vocabulary. Eventually, it resulted in a reluctant attitude toward participation in the study (Yoshihara 2008).

Foroutan et al. (2013) compared the effect of dialogue journal writing and topic-based writing (TBW) on students' writing performance. There were two groups of participants: the TBW group and the DJW group. The TBW group was assigned several topics to write compositions and got explicit feedback on linguistic errors. The DJW group was given freedom of topic choice, and the feedback was implicit. The experiment lasted for ten weeks, and according to pre-and post-test results, the DJW group developed vocabulary and content, while TBW improved the language use and organization. The findings also revealed that indirect feedback in the DJW group was not helpful in language use and organization. The students were mainly focused on the content and vocabulary, trying to express their thoughts clearly, and did not worry about grammatical mistakes.

Another case study was conducted by the researcher El Koumy (1988) in an Egyptian university with 136 students from the history program to improve speaking and writing skills

with DJW. The study had a control group and an experimental group. The experimental group received DJW training in addition to classroom instructions, while the control group received only instructions. According to post-study writing results, the experimental group scored significantly higher. The researcher explains the results with a student-teacher rapport that motivated students to learn about communication more and openly express themselves. DJW helped students reduce anxiety while speaking, which made their speech more confident with fewer errors.

Reyes (1991) compared DJW and diary logs for developing writing. The results showed that dialogue journal writing developed the students' creative thinking and idea generation. Additionally, DJW improved students' writing fluency due to its free, relaxed, and friendly format. In contrast, the logs made no significant difference. The study's primary limitation was that students ignored the teacher's implicit feedback in both cases, no matter how she tried to bring the students' attention to it. Eventually, the teacher used an explicit error correction method to help students notice them. Thus, the study proves that implicit feedback is not recommendable for all the cases and mainly depends on the participants.

2.9. The Potential of DJW in Armenia

In the Armenian EFL classroom, a limited number of audio/video and theme-based authentic materials are used. Students learn vocabulary and grammar tenses by memorizing them as isolated word lists and fixed structures. Students only practice them in controlled grammar exercises that are used only for the assessment purposes (Goroyan, 2015). Except for some published dissertations (Barseghyan, 2020; Movsisyan, 2021), there are no studies on the use of DJW in the Armenian EFL context. In the research project carried out by Barsegyan (2020), the participants enhanced their grammar accuracy and fluency, became motivated to write, and shaped a positive attitude towards DJW. Movsisiyan's (2021) study revealed that in the Armenian context, males and females display different characteristics typical to their gender during DJW. Generally, DJW helped students to improve writing skills and critical thinking.

Even though males were less active and responsive during DJW, the results showed that all the participants liked the method and agreed to continue it after the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The study is designed within the framework of action research. It aims to improve the writing practice in a specific EFL classroom by implementing Dialogue Journal Writing. It evaluates the potential and limitations of DJW in improving writing practice and examines the participants' attitudes towards dialogue journals as a writing tool. This chapter presents the study setting, participants, instruments, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

The main purpose of this action research is to bring positive change in participants' social situation (to get them acquainted with DJW), enhance collaboration and involvement of participants who are actors in the situation, and finally, establish an attitudinal stance of continual use of DJW in the curriculum (Burns, 2010, as cited in Cornwell, 1999). The study was carried out through cycles consisting of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and improving. It employed non-probability, purposive sampling. The particular school and students were chosen for the study and aimed to examine the phenomenon and improve their teaching and learning practice. The study used a mixed-methods approach (QUAL>quan) to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

The following research questions direct the study.

1. What are the potential and limitations of DJW implementation in a public school in a regional area of Armenia in developing students' writing?

2. What are public school students' and their teacher's attitudes towards the role of DJW in developing students' writing?

3.1. Context

The research was conducted in a high school located in the Lori region of Armenia. Students' regular English classes take place once a week for 70 minutes. The teacher uses the

English 10 textbook (Gasparyan et al., 2017) designed for low intermediate level. Once in two or three weeks the students write compositions, the topics of which are chosen by the teacher from different sources. The twelve-week exposure was the students' first experience of DJW.

3.2. Participants

There were fifteen participants in the study: twelve female and four male and their EFL teacher. The students' age ranged from 15 to 17 years, and they were all native Armenians. The level of students' language proficiency was between high elementary and pre-intermediate. All of them had been exposed to English from the 3rd grade as a foreign language. Seven of them (females) attended private English classes outside the school. The teacher was a 33-year-old female with a B2 level of language proficiency. She had been teaching for more than 10 years in that public school. The EFL teacher was not familiar with DJW before and got acquainted with it throughout this research.

3.3. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations guided the whole process of the study. The researcher had an IRB (Institutional Review Board) Certificate that ensured the protection of human participants. First, the oral permission was asked from the school's headmaster to conduct a study. Next, before the study, the parents were contacted by the researcher to ask permission for their children's participation in the study. Afterward, the teacher, the students, and the researcher met face to face, and the researcher informed about the goal and procedures of the study. The students were told that the inquiry is on a volunteer basis and were assured of confidentiality in handling their information. Both teacher interviews and post and pre-tests were conducted in the school. Throughout the study, a high level of constant objectivity was carried out.

3.4. Data collection

The data collection process lasted for about twelve weeks and was done in three stages. In the first stage, before the implementation of DJW, a pre-study interview with the teacher was conducted, and pre-study essays by the students were written. The rationale behind the interview and essays were to collect baseline information about how writing was practiced and students' writing performance. The topic choice for DJW was discussed with the teacher beforehand, and was based on students' interests and attitudes. However during the study some topics were also added as suggested by the students. The teacher started DJW with each student in a shared google document, and the researcher had the role of a teacher assistant. The students were assigned to write two journal entries each week. During the second stage, the researcher and the teacher reflected on the process in order to evaluate it and make necessary changes. In the final third stage, a post-study interview with the teacher was conducted, post-study essays were written by the students and a post-study survey for the students was administered. Throughout all the data collection stages, the researcher kept a notebook for essential and insightful inquiry details.**3.5. Instruments**

Both qualitative and quantitative data were elicited for the study.

For quantitative data the following instruments were used:

- Pre-study essays
- Post-study essays
- Post-study survey with the students

For qualitative data the following instruments were used:

- Pre-study interview with the teacher
- Post-study interview with the teacher
- Textbook analysis
- DJs
- Field notes

3.5.1. Pre-study and post-study essays

The students were asked to write a pre-study and post-study essay (250 words each) to address the first research question. The topics were chosen with the help of their teacher, who considered it appropriate for the students' age and interests. The writings were analyzed quantitatively. The analysis consisted of identifying all obligatory contexts for the use of certain grammatical structures (Plural -S, Possessives, Articles, 1st Conditionals and Passive Voice) and counting the number of times in which these were correctly supplied. For reliability three writing samples, that were randomly chosen, were analyzed by the researcher and the teacher together. Later, the researcher continued checking all the essays.

3.5.2. Post-study survey

During the post-study survey the students completed a survey with Likert-scale type items and three open ended questions about how efficient and practical they find DJW, its challenges and whether they want to have DJs as permanent writing (See appendix A).

3.5.3. Pre-study and Post-study interviews

Two semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were arranged to elicit information on the teachers' understanding and attitudes of DJW before and after the study. Additionally, an attempt was made to find out her and the students' attitudes towards traditional writing assignments. The pre-study interview encompassed eleven questions concerning modern teaching techniques and methods, students' writing challenges and attitudes towards writing compositions. The background knowledge helped to guide the study successfully. The interview was carried out face to face on January 15 in Vanadzor. The duration was one hour. The teacher was against being recorded, as she said it puts a pressure on her (See Appendix B). The post-study interview included ten questions that helped the researcher to accumulate ample evidence

on the instructor's attitude and beliefs after administering DJW in her classroom, the challenges and benefits of DJW in general and for the students in particular (See Appendix C).

3.5.4. Textbook Analysis

The textbook was analyzed in terms of the nature of writing exercise and assignments. The main focus was to find out if the textbook provides any opportunities for idea generation and creativity in terms of writing assignments (See Appendix D).

3.5.5. Field notes

Field notes are used in action research to record fresh data on the participants' behaviors and events in action (Burns, 2009, as cited in Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015). The tool provided valuable insights from the processes and put them into service to gain more accurate data. The specific form of the field notes was used throughout the whole inquiry, incorporating both factual and reflective commentaries (See Appendix E).

3.5.6. Dialogue journal writing

An individual google document was created by the teacher for each student, and twice a week, the teacher asked questions or asked to respond to a prompt. Students responded to the questions and could ask questions to the teacher within that week. The first message was, "What do you like and dislike about writing?" The students were asked to respond to start the dialogue. The journaling topics were based on the students' interests. Here are some of the writing topics: "My hometown," "My favorite food," "Watching TV," "Clothes," and several more ones.

During DJW implementation in addition to having reflection sessions with the teacher, the researcher also had a reflection session with the students to identify potential ways of improving the implementation process.

3.6. Data analyses

The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed inductively, while pre and post-study writing samples were analyzed quantitatively. Besides promoting writing, this study also aimed to gather more evidence on the order of acquisition of the following grammatical morphemes/structures: Plural -s, Third-person -s, Possessives, Articles, Conditionals, and Passive voice. These linguistic units were potentially interesting features to analyze since they could shed light on the grammatical accuracy/range. According to The IELTS descriptors, Plural -s, Third-person -s, Possessives, and Articles are considered "basic", while Passives are classified as "complex" structures (Diessel, 2004). The method for analyzing the grammatical morphemes was obligatory context analysis because this method was used in the bulk of the morpheme order studies (Goldschneider and Dekeyser, 2005). Brown (1973) was the first to suggest Obligatory context analysis for a specific grammatical functor and count the number of times this functor was correctly used. Accuracy rates will be calculated by dividing the number of correctly supplied morphemes by the total number of obligatory contexts. For example, if the writer had four uses of a specific morpheme/structure, out of which one is correctly supplied, it will give us an accuracy score of 1/4 or 25%. The quantitative data from the post-study survey was subjected to descriptive analysis, such as percentages via Excel.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations guided the whole process of the study. The researcher had an IRB (Institutional Review Board) Certificate that ensured the protection of human participants. First, the oral permission was asked from the school's headmaster to conduct a study. Next, before the study, the parents were contacted by the researcher to ask permission for their children's participation in the study. Afterward, the teacher, the students, and the researcher met face to face, and the researcher informed about the goal and procedures of the study. The students were told that the inquiry is on a volunteer basis and were assured of confidentiality in handling their information. Both teacher interviews and post and pre-tests were conducted in the school. Throughout the study, a high level of constant objectivity was carried out.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the outcomes of the current study by addressing each research question presented earlier. The qualitative data (DJs, interviews, and researcher's notes) and the quantitative data (students' questionnaires and pre-and post-study writing samples) were analyzed to provide answers to the research questions. The main findings are presented for each research question.

RQ1: What are the potential and limitations of DJW implementation in a public school in a regional area of Armenia in developing students' writing?

First, the pre-study and post-study essays were analyzed in order to evaluate the degree of accuracy of a number of grammatical morphemes in each of the samples. The results of the analysis revealed changes in the degree of accuracy of some grammatical morphemes/structures. For instance, in the pre-study essays, Plural -*s* was correctly used 81.7% of the time, 67 times out of 82. while in post-study, the correct use increased to 85.2%. The results further demonstrated an increase in the number of correctly used articles. In pre-study this linguistic pattern was correctly used in 67.5 % of cases (160 times out of 237), while in the post-study it was correct in 72.6% (202 out of 303). The results of Passive Voice revealed pleasant results since in the pre-study sample it was correctly used 73.6% times and in the post-study writing, it was 90%. This little shift was also obvious in DJW, where most students started to use Passive Voice more and did it correctly. The last morpheme was Conditionals. Fortunately, in this case, the results were again satisfying. In pre-study essays the correct usage was 61.5%, whereas in post-study the accuracy rate became 90%.

4.1. DJW Potential

The results of the analysis of the DJs and the post-study interview with the teacher highlight the potential of DJW. Firstly, students' DJW responses at the beginning differed significantly from those written at the end. Gradually, the students' entries became lengthy, and

students seemed to focus more on the content. The students started to ask questions and share their opinion, and the interaction evolved genuinely. The teacher also noticed that the students struggling with the content organization had begun to produce their thoughts more clearly. Interestingly, the error rate of articles and passive voice decreased over time. This satisfied and amazed the teacher at the same time. It helped the teacher notice the effectiveness of implicit feedback. She used it for the first time during the study and liked it. Here are presented examples of students' responses from entries, which shows the gradual increase in word limit.

Example 1: Student A First Entry

When I say village, I mean animals, milk, yogurt, cheese and other similar things. I am afraid of all animals, I do not like such food and I am sure I can not live in the village.
In fact, I have a very complicated orientation both in terms of food and clothes. I have a rather complicated character.

Example 2: Student A Second Entry

To be honest, there are many foods that I do not eat. And there are very few things I like. I like to eat cookies the most. I have loved french fries since I was a child. In my opinion, it is the most popular food by everyone. I do not like dairy products the most. I have not loved since I was a child! In Vanadzor, in my opinion, most people like to eat pizza. I love it too. I personally prepare. I love to bake cakes. And I love entertaining my friends and relatives; I hear real opinions about what I make. I baked Eskimo today. And everyone liked it very much. What do you like to eat or cook? As a mother, I think you will prepare more delicious dishes.

Example 3: Student B First Entry

We do not have pets, but I would love to keep a monkey. I do not like animals because I am afraid of even a simple butterfly. Many people in Armenia keep a dog, which is strange to me. I think it is difficult to keep a dog even in a private house.We did not have pets and I think we will not keep them, because my sister is afraid of animals like me, and my mother can give allergies to even the cleanest cat.

Example 4: Student B Second Entry

ard. Everyone is always surprised by the balanced state of my diet and health. At a young age everything was better than now. I can not say that it is not good now, but at a young age life was more interesting.

At a young age there were questions to think less and to do hard and light, you can say life was wonderful 🙂 I have remembered almost everything from my childhood with the help of my parents, the stories they tell are so carefree, everything is so beautiful.

I remember only one thing from my childhood very well, I was quite quarrelsome and I only communicated with boys. My parents tell me that every time I went down to the yard, the mother of one of the children in the yard would always go up to my mother and say that I was very quarrelsome and had hurt their child.I can not say where it is good for children to grow up because I do not like the village at all. But I think maybe I lived in the village and today I am not afraid of all the animals - dogs, cows, horses and other animals.

Another significant potential was related to language proficiency differences as DJW allowed students with a relatively lower level of language proficiency to participate. This was also true for introverted students. The students were encouraged to share their thoughts, and as the interaction was steadily private, they were triggered to feel free and share their ideas. The teacher highlighted that DJW was especially helpful in exploring students as individuals, and establishing better socio-emotional relationships with them. The teacher noted that the content focused nature of DJW motivated students to write more. She considered DJW a good source for vocabulary and idea generation. Moreover, the field notes and the survey findings supplement the teacher's feedback on the instrument's usefulness.

4.2. DJW limitations

As claimed by the teacher in the post-study interview, the central challenge of DJW implementation was its time-consuming nature. DJW revealed that the teacher needed more practice to work independently, without the help of the researcher and keep consistency in responding to the students. Additionally, three students dropped from the study claiming that they did not have extra time especially when the assignment was not graded. Along with the listed constraints, the post-study students' survey implied that the students faced internet issues

from time to time. Anyway, in the case of keeping diaries instead of online journals, this issue can be eliminated.

To sum up, as reported above, according to the post-study interview and survey, the students mostly showed enthusiasm and readiness to participate in the project. The teacher interview and field notes revealed the gradual growth of students' answers in DJW demonstrated engagement. Expressly, it was noted that the content-driven nature of the DJW seized students' attention and motivated them to write more.

The second research question elicited the instructor's and students' initial and final thoughts about DJW.

RQ2: What are public school students' and their teacher's attitudes towards the role of DJW in developing students' writing?

4.3. Student's attitudes towards DJW

To investigate the student' attitudes towards DJW, a post-study survey (100% response rate) was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

The responses to Question 1 which asked whether or not the students enjoyed dialogue journal writing demonstrated the overall positive attitude of the participants toward the new method, as all the students appeared to enjoy the process with 83.3% (10 out of 12 students) choosing "strongly agree," and 2 (16.6%) of them selected "agree."

Regarding the second Question, students' opinions about whether DJW improved their level of English proficiency, seven (58.3%) students believed that DJW enhanced their English proficiency and four (33.3%) students perceived DJW to have improved it to some extent. And one participant (8.3%) selected the 'no' option.

Question 3 aimed to uncover students' beliefs on DJW topics' nature. According to the results, the opinions were positive. All the students chose two following options together:

'interesting' and 'resourceful'(100%). The next question revealed students' opinions about the language skills that DJW enhanced (Figure 1). Overall, nine (75%) students selected both 'vocabulary' and 'spelling', while two (16.7%) chose 'accuracy'.

Figure 1

*To what extent do each of the following language skills developed after DJW?*
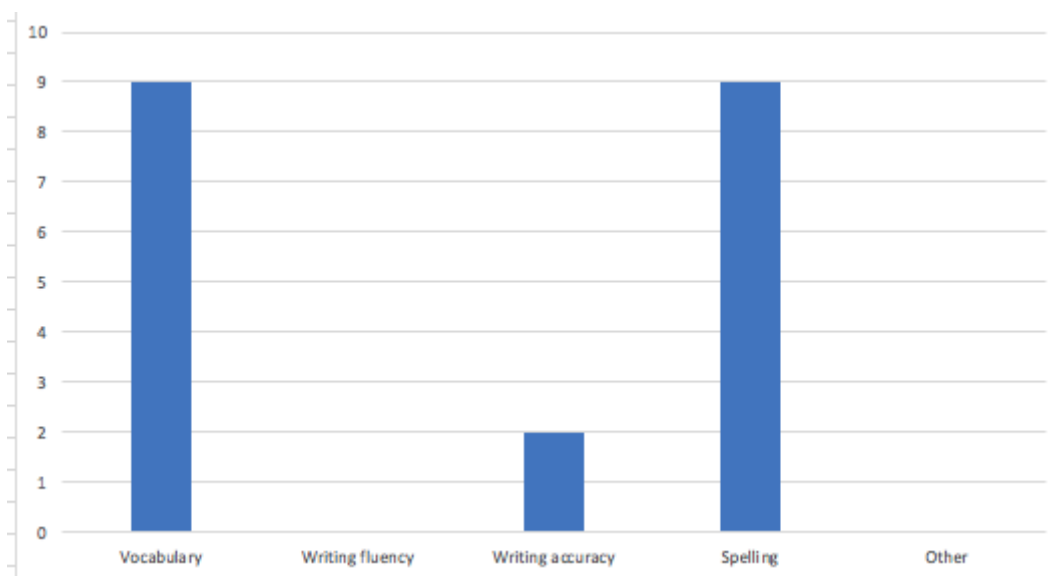
It is inferred from the provided evidence that the student-participants were pleased with DJW, and they believed DJW enhanced their overall English competency. Similarly, the teacher's reports from the post-study interview revealed improvements such as an increased number of words in essays with better accuracy and enriched vocabulary.

The analysis of the responses to Question 5 aimed to disclose the students' beliefs about anything else than the English they learned. Of the given three choices, the highest was 66.4% (8) answered 'yes,' and 25% (3) answered 'no,' and only 8.33% (1) answered 'somewhat'.

Through the five measurement scales (from always to never) in Question 6, the students revealed the amount of external help they used while journaling (Figure 2). High percentages were given to the 'never' option 83% (10) and 16% (2) answered 'often'. So, we can conclude that students mainly avoided external help.

Figure 2

How often did you use external help during dialogue journal writing?
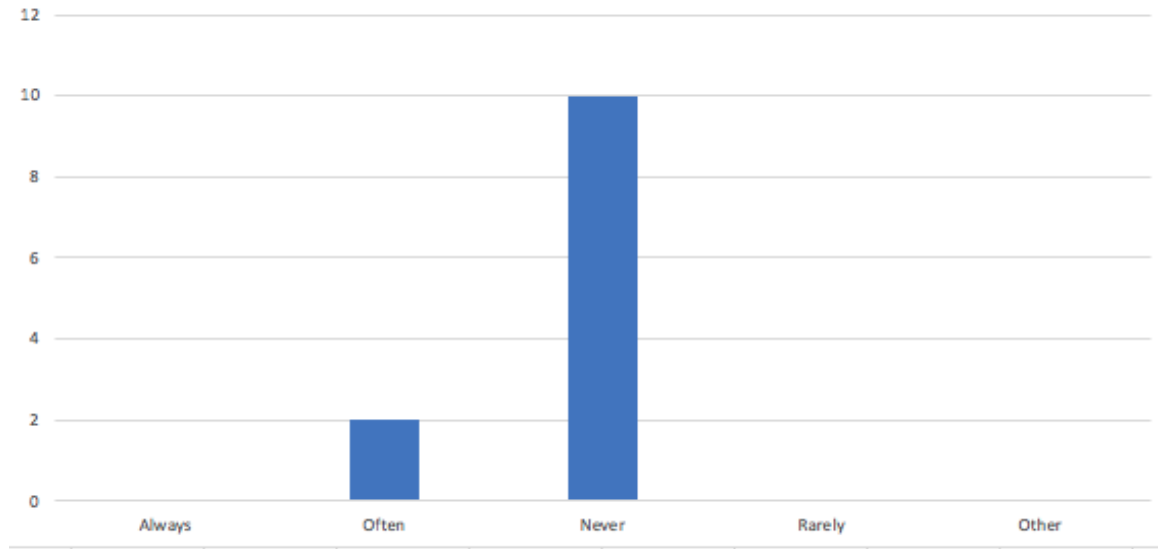
The analyses of Question 10 (Figure 10) aimed to determine the students' attitudes to having DJW as a permanent assignment from the given five choices where the highest was 'strongly agree' and the lowest was 'strongly disagree', 58% students (7) selected the 'agree', 25% of them (3) responded 'disagree', and the one participant (12%) answered 'neither agree nor disagree.' According to the teacher's responses in the post-study interview, DJW had the advantage of fostering students' work individually and trusting their vocabulary.

Figure 3

Would you like to have DJW as a permanent writing assignment?
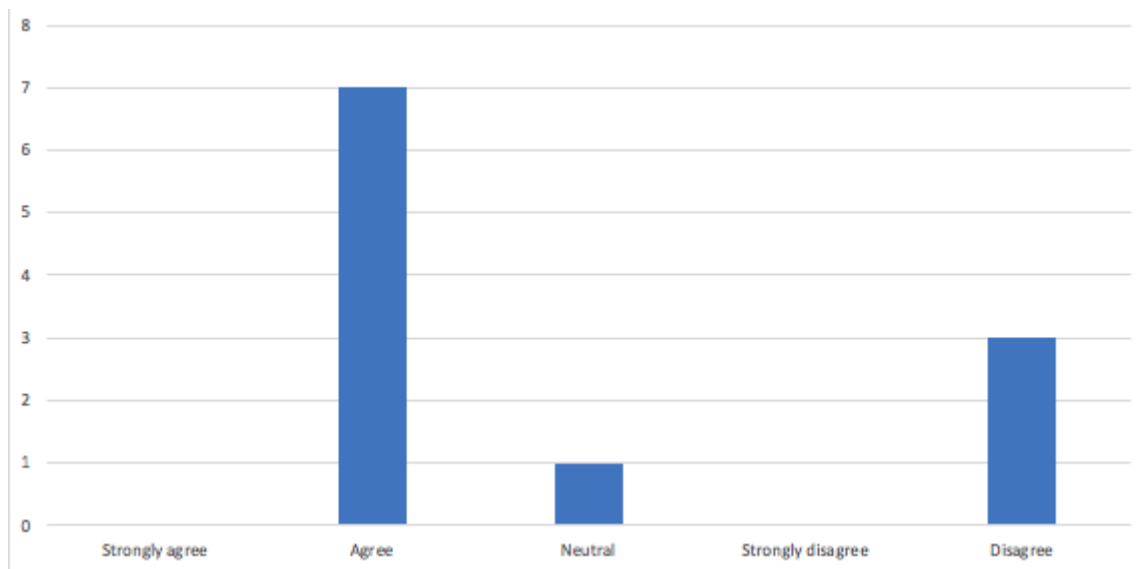
The investigation of Questions 7, 8, and 9 concerning their preferences and challenges of DJW provided more in-depth evidence of the students' perceptions. The students' difficulties were 'lack of vocabulary' (12%), and four students (33.3%) responded 'internet issues'. The majority, 58.3% (7), answered there were no challenges. The 8th question sought to find out the advantages of DJW. A significant number of students, 75% (9), mentioned benefits, such as privacy and not graded format. The last question enabled us to find the answers to what students learned after DJW. One participant (12%) stated the ability to express thoughts more clearly. In comparison, 83.3% (10) students mentioned that now they are not afraid or shy to be incorrect. Another participant, 12% (1), noted the opportunity to know their teacher from a different perspective.

4.4. Teacher's attitude towards DJW

The post-study interview with the teacher and the field notes documented the teacher's positive outlook on the process. The teacher stated that she had never heard about this method before, yet, she showed enthusiasm to experience it to enhance her students' language competency and motivate students to write compositions by practicing a new interactive tool. According to her, her students were inspired and enthusiastic about the topics. The students regularly discussed who was writing more, shared their opinions on specific issues, and

discussed what topics to write about. Additionally, the teacher noted that DJW allowed her to lead her students to learn English authentically, and she could assess the lesson content in a different way. She learned many new things about her students and had already established better socio-emotional relationships with some. Another witnessed benefit to her was the positive impact of implicit feedback. The teacher also realized this method was a great tool to promote writing, and she was eager to start DJW with another class. The teacher claimed that DJW had a positive impact on the learning process for its potential to enhance spelling, enrich the vocabulary and practice the forms in an authentic context. As for the disadvantages, the teacher mentioned the time-consuming process of responding to students; however, she thought she would manage to do DJW once a week. The teacher also stated that DJW was very practical for high school students. Her students had enough linguistic knowledge to participate equally in the process at this level.

To summarize, the cross-checked data of all the study instruments disclosed DJW's overall potential in this instructional setting. The participants asserted that DJW had a relatively positive impact on the teaching and learning process. The findings revealed that both the teacher and her students were optimistically inclined towards DJW. The teacher commented that this method had the potential to enhance her students' L2 abilities and viewed it as a reasonable alternative to the school's regular assignments. The overall analysis of the survey results demonstrated that the participants enjoyed this new format. Despite some limitations, the results were satisfying; the primary goal to equip the teacher with a new method and familiarize with its effect was reached.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussion

The current research aims to explore the potential and limitations of DJW implementation in the Armenian high school EFL classroom and the perceptions of the stakeholders (the EFL teacher and her 10th -grade students) towards it. The research findings are discussed in this chapter regarding the posed rationale of the study and previous research presented in the literature review.

In response to the first research question about the potential and limitations of DJW implementation, the results indicated development in several grammatical aspects, such as Articles, Plural -s, Passive Voice, and First conditional. According to the studies, this positive change can be the stress-free atmosphere that allows students to express their thoughts independently, focusing on the content without fear of critical feedback. These results are in line with the findings of Holmes and Moulton (1997); however, unlike Holmes and Moulton's study, which was based merely on the learners' perceptions, the current research also includes statistical evidence in the interpretations of the results. Throughout the journaling process, the teacher continued to give implicit feedback; however, primarily, the students ignored it. Few students noticed the teacher's input and target-like modeling of the problematic language samples (Schmidt, 1995). Accordingly, the teacher sometimes used explicit feedback. It can be explained by the fact that the students had never been exposed to indirect feedback, and maybe even automatically, they ignored it.

Another significant aspect of DJW implementation concerned students' motivation to write. The findings of the analysis of DJs and post-study essays indicated a highly positive impact of DJW in terms of the increased length of students' responses. Gradually, the students became more open and willing to share and elaborate on their opinions. The topics for discussions were appropriate to the students' age and interests and awakened their curiosity by

increasing their intrinsic motivation. The reason for inspiration and development of writing habits could be the ungraded nature of DJW and writing samples. The findings are in line with previous studies indicating the positive impact of dialogue journal writing (Liao & Wong, 2010; Ramaswami, 2009; Yoshihara, 2008).

The results of the second research question about discovering the participants' perceptions of DJW revealed that the instrument can be perceived positively both by the teacher and students. There may be some challenges for teachers, especially at the initial stage of the writing process, such as reluctant students (Holmes & Moulton, 1995); however, within the process of writing, DJW promotes engagement and involvement. The teacher indeed faced reluctant writers, and three participants dropped the study.

5.2. Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study come to support the use of dialogue journal writing in developing writing skills. Based on the findings of the study, it can be suggested that integrating DJW into the EFL classroom can provide teachers with a flexible and practical opportunity for engaging students in an interactive writing practice. Several recommendations can be proposed to make the process of DJW incorporation more valuable. The first suggestion is to organize a tutorial about the difference between explicit and implicit feedback and find out which one is better for the students. Next, before implementing online DJW, it is recommended to make sure all students have access to the internet and technological devices, provide guidance on how google documents work, and discuss privacy and confidentiality issues with students. Finally, teachers should try to keep consistency in responding to students on time in dialogue journaling.

5.3. Limitations and delimitations

The research experienced the following delimitations: the city and the educational setting in which the study was conducted, the age group and the grade, which defined the scope of the

study. Limitations were related to time constraints since it restricted the duration of the study, and the sample size which limited the research to have more extensive data.

5.4. Recommendations for further research

The following directions for further research are suggested: to conduct research for a more extended period, at least a whole term, with different language proficiency students. It would also be interesting for the researcher to be just the observer, not the assistant. Dialogue journal writing can be used to explore its impact on speaking skills and the acquiring of incidental vocabulary.

5.5. Conclusion

The findings of the current study suggest that despite some limitations, DJW implementation in the Armenian EFL context was beneficial for authentic communication, improving some grammatical patterns, and creating positive attitudes toward writing among students. These promising results motivated the teacher to show her readiness to start her dialogue journaling with another class after the study. The current research was a small-scale experiment seeking to present this authenticity-driven approach to the Armenian public-school stakeholders and evaluate its potential in this setting. Hopefully, the findings of this research can provide a valuable reference for future implementations.

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Appendix A

The aim of the survey is to learn about your opinion and attitude towards DJW in order to make improvements. The survey is anonymous; no one can see who is the responder. Please give honest answers to each of the questions. Your opinion matters. Thank you in advance.

1. Did you enjoy dialogue journal writing?

● Strongly agree

● Agree

● Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Strongly disagree

2. In your opinion, did the new format improve your level of English proficiency?

● Yes

● Somewhat

● No

3. The topics were….

You can click on more than one option.

- Interesting

- Enjoyable

- Boring

- Neutral

- Resourceful

4. To what extent do each of the following language skills developed after DJW? You can click on more than one option.

- Vocabulary

- Writing fluently

- Writing accurately

- Spelling

- Other

_____

_____

5. *Did you learn about anything else other than English?*

● Yes

● Somewhat

● No

6. *How often did you use external help (somebody's help) during dialogue journal writing?*

● Always

● Often

● Rarely

● Never

● Other

7. *What was the most challenging part of dialogue journal writing?*

_____

_____

8. *What did you like the most about DJW?*

_____

_____

9. *What did you learn other than English?*

_____

_____

10. *Would you like to have DJW as a permanent writing assignment?*

● Strongly agree

● Agree

● Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Strongly disagree

Appendix B

Pre-study Interview questions

1. What are the attitudes towards writing skills in X public school?

2. What writing activities do you often use in your classroom?

3. Does the textbook enable idea generation and creative thinking in terms of writing?

4. Do you use any additional sources besides the textbook? If yes, what sources?

5. How often do you write essays in your English class?

6. Do you use any modern teaching techniques?

7. How much time is devoted to writing practices during class hours?

8. What are your students' main writing challenges?

9. Do your students enjoy writing?

10. Have you ever heard about DJs?

11. Do you agree that intense writing practice can improve writing skills?

Appendix C

Post-study interview questions

1. Did you like dialogue journal writing?

2. What was your students' reaction towards the new method? How did you understand it?

3. What language skills or areas was DJW able to improve among your students?

4. In your opinion, what are the advantages of DJW?

5. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of DJW?

6. To what extent has the new method changed your teaching?

7. What was the difference between checking compositions (traditional) and online journals? Which one required more effort?

8. If you were to use DJW again in your classroom, what would you change? What would you do differently?

9. What kind of teaching and learning issues did the DJW implementation solve?

10. Do you think DJW is an efficient writing tool in high schools? Why?

Appendix D

The textbook English 10 consisted of 12 units, from which only 9 units contained writing assignments for idea generation.

Unit 1: Write a passage about your favorite corner in your native city.

Unit 3: Write a passage about your plans for next summer.

Unit 5: Write a passage about your favorite painter

Unit 6: Write a short review based on the text you have read.

Unit 7: Write a small passage about why water is so important for men. Use signposts such as firstly, secondly, thirdly, sum up.

Unit 8: Write a few words about your friend. Does his or her star sign describe him or her well?

Unit 9: Write about your childhood.

Unit 10: Write a passage about somebody your classmates know too. Read it out and let your friends guess who it is about.

Unit 11: Write a paragraph about your attitude to high-tech.

Appendix E

Field notes' form

Things that worked well	
Things that did not work well	