



Karya Journal of Emerging Technologies in Human Services

Journal homepage:
<https://karyailham.com.my/index.php/kjeths/index>
ISSN: 3093-6551



Exploring the Use of Dialog Journal Writing to Improve Writing Proficiency among Students at A Community College - A Preliminary Study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 October 2025

Received in revised 12 November 2025

Accepted 18 November 2025

Available online 23 November 2025

Keywords:

Dialogue journal writing; descriptive writing; ESL students; writing fluency; writing proficiency; community college; writing anxiety; personalized feedback; educational intervention; Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of Dialogue Journal Writing (DJW) on improving descriptive writing proficiency among community college students in Malaysia. Writing remains a challenging skill for English as a Second Language (ESL) students, often exacerbated by limited exposure and traditional exam-oriented instruction. DJW offers an interactive and low-stress platform for students to engage in writing while receiving personalized feedback from instructors. This quasi-experimental study involved 15 female community college students, aged 18 and above, enrolled in English language courses. Through a pre-test and post-test design, the study assessed students' descriptive writing fluency before and after four weeks of DJW intervention. Results indicated significant improvements in students' writing performance, as evidenced by higher post-test scores and an increase in writing fluency, measured through word count progression in journal entries. Participants' descriptive writing skills improved across various dimensions, including idea development, organization, and vocabulary. The study highlights the effectiveness of DJW in fostering confidence, reducing writing anxiety, and enhancing writing proficiency. The findings suggest that DJW is a valuable tool for improving descriptive writing in ESL classrooms, with potential implications for broader application in writing instruction at the community college level.

1. Introduction

Writing is a critical skill in language learning, essential for both academic and professional success. However, for students learning English as a second language (ESL), writing poses a significant challenge [1]. Many community college students struggle with sentence structure, vocabulary, and content organization, which affects their ability to express ideas effectively [2]. Teachers aim to

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support students in developing strong writing skills, but traditional methods often emphasize grammatical accuracy and format rather than creativity and critical thinking [3].

In Malaysian educational settings, English is a compulsory subject, yet students often lack confidence and proficiency due to limited practice beyond the classroom [4]. The focus on exam-oriented writing instruction leads to mechanical memorization rather than meaningful composition [5]. As a result, students may struggle with writing tasks that require critical thinking and descriptive expression [6].

Dialogue journal writing (DJW) offers an alternative approach that encourages students to engage in written conversations with their teachers, fostering language development in an interactive and low-stress environment [7]. Research suggests that this technique can enhance writing fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and overall composition skills [8,9]. This study investigates whether implementing DJW in community college classrooms can improve students' proficiency in descriptive writing.

1.2 Background of the Study

Community college students often struggle with writing due to limited English exposure outside the classroom [10]. Traditional ESL instruction prioritizes grammar and structure over meaningful expression [11], with teachers focusing on error correction rather than content development [12]. Many ESL learners, especially those from non-English-speaking or underserved backgrounds, face challenges in vocabulary, organization, and coherence [4,13].

Dialogue journal writing (DJW) offers a student-teacher written exchange, fostering expression without judgment [7]. Through feedback, teachers guide students in writing conventions, improving grammatical accuracy and organization [9,14]. This study examines DJW's effectiveness in enhancing community college students' descriptive writing fluency, promoting confidence and academic performance.

1.3 Problem Statement

Despite writing's importance in ESL curricula, many community college students struggle due to low confidence, motivation, and proficiency [15]. Traditional methods emphasize structure and correctness over creativity [11], limiting students' ability to express ideas clearly [6].

DJW provides a pressure-free platform for regular writing, encouraging fluency and idea development [7,8]. Teachers' responses serve as writing models, improving sentence structure and vocabulary [12]. This study explores whether DJW can enhance descriptive writing skills by fostering a supportive and interactive writing environment, helping students gain confidence and proficiency.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Explore how dialogue journal writing impacts community college students' fluency in descriptive writing.
2. Understand community college students' perceptions of using dialogue journal writing in their writing practice.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How does dialogue journal writing influence community college students' fluency in descriptive writing?
2. What are community college students' perceptions of using dialogue journal writing in their descriptive writing courses?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Dialogue journal writing plays a crucial role in enhancing community college students' ability to write descriptive essays while also providing an opportunity for them to communicate with their instructors through writing. This study is significant as it aims to improve students' ability to elaborate ideas in descriptive writing using dialogue journal writing.

Writing is a key component of English language courses in Malaysian community colleges. Although this study will be conducted on a small scale within a single class, any improvements or positive changes observed can contribute to expanding knowledge and diversifying teaching approaches for writing instruction. Implementing dialogue journal writing as an intervention to address students' writing challenges may lead to meaningful improvements in their overall writing performance. Additionally, this approach can help instructors gain better insights into students' writing abilities, ultimately enhancing the teaching and learning process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Improved Writing Performance

Research shows that DJW *enhances* descriptive writing, especially among EFL learners. Rassaei and Khoshsiman [16] found that DJW improves writing proficiency and confidence, particularly in descriptive tasks. Similarly, Jafarpour and Zare [17] reported significant improvements in content development, organization, vocabulary, and overall writing quality among DJW participants.

2.2 Increased Motivation and Confidence

DJW creates a stress-free space for self-expression, boosting students' motivation and fluency. Chen and Zhang [18] found that students viewed DJW positively, as it provided constructive feedback and a non-threatening environment, increasing their willingness to write.

2.3 Reduced Writing Anxiety

DJW helps students overcome writing apprehension and engage more deeply in writing. Foroutan *et al.*, [19] observed that students saw DJW as a supportive tool that eased anxiety and fostered a stronger student-instructor connection, improving writing performance.

2.4 Personalized Feedback and Interaction

The interactive nature of DJW allows for tailored feedback, enhancing writing skills. Teachers' questions and responses guide students in refining their writing, encouraging critical thinking and improvement.

2.5 Student Perceptions and Community College Implications

Students generally find DJW supportive, reducing anxiety and strengthening their connection with instructors [19]. DJW provides structured practice and individualized feedback for community college learners, benefiting students at various proficiency levels [18].

Integrating DJW into writing instruction can significantly enhance descriptive writing skills and foster a more positive attitude toward writing in community colleges.

3. Methodology

Selecting an appropriate research design is essential and should align with the research questions [20]. This study investigates how dialogue journal writing enhances community college students' fluency in descriptive writing. A quasi-experimental design was chosen as it effectively evaluates educational interventions [21] and examines specific groups through targeted approaches [22]. Quasi-experimental designs are useful when randomized controlled trials are impractical or unethical [23]. They allow research in real-world settings without full experimental control [24,25]. This study used a quasi-experimental design without a control group, selecting one class due to the limited writing abilities of other students.

A pretest was conducted, followed by the intervention—dialogue journal writing—and a post-test to measure its effects [26]. To ensure validity and reliability, data collection included pretests, post-tests, and analyses of students' dialogue journals [27]. Quasi-experimental designs remain valuable in educational research, providing insights into effective interventions like dialogue journal writing [28]. Their practical and ethical approach makes them suitable for studying writing fluency in community colleges.

The study was conducted at a community college located in the northern region. A total of fifteen female students participated in this study. These students, aged 18 and above, were enrolled in English language courses as part of their academic program. They were selected as participants because they needed to develop effective descriptive writing skills for their coursework. The intervention, which involved dialogue journal writing, aimed to enhance their ability to write descriptive essays more effectively and confidently.

Two methods were used for data collection in this study. As the primary objective was to assess the students' writing fluency in descriptive essays, these methods provided multiple sources of evidence to support the validity and reliability of the findings [27]. The two selected techniques were the pre-test and post-test, as well as the participants' dialogue journals.

The pre-test and post-test were assessed using the SPM examination scoring rubric to evaluate students' descriptive writing. The rubric consists of five categories in the grading system: Excellent (A) [30–26 marks], Good (B) [25–21 marks], Satisfactory (C) [20–16 marks], Weak (D) [15–11 marks], and Very Weak (E) [10–0 marks]. This grading system, based on the guidelines provided by Lembaga Peperiksaan (Appendix B), was used to measure and compare students' writing performance before and after the intervention.

3.1 Participants' Dialogue Journals

Data were collected through students' dialogue journals. Four topics (Appendix D) were selected after a discussion with the students to ensure relevance. Each student was given 10 to 15 minutes to complete each entry using an exercise book provided as their personal journal. Coloured pens and pencils were used to help differentiate between student entries and responses. Dialogue journal

writing was introduced during an English language class, along with clear guidelines: write a minimum of 10 sentences, maintain respectful language, and freely express thoughts, feelings, or past experiences. Before the main sessions, students practiced by pairing up and exchanging short written dialogues using different coloured pens. They had the freedom to choose topics and were encouraged to share their ideas verbally afterward. During the actual sessions, students wrote entries based on the agreed-upon topics. Feedback was given using a different coloured pen and placed directly after each entry. Journals were collected every Tuesday over four weeks. This method aimed to track students' writing progress and explore how dialogue journals could enhance their fluency in descriptive writing while also sparking interest in writing.

3.2 Data Analysis: Pre-Test, Post-Test, and Dialogue Journals

The pre-test and post-test results were analysed using the scoring rubric (Appendix B). A paired sample t-test was applied to compare the scores and assess if dialogue journal writing improved participants' writing fluency in descriptive essays. This test helped identify any significant differences in their writing abilities before and after the intervention.

Additionally, improvements in writing fluency were observed through the participants' dialogue journal entries. Writing fluency, defined as the natural flow and organization of writing, was measured by the number of words in each entry. An increase in word count indicated greater confidence and fluency in describing situations. The analysis also provided insights into the participants' preferred topics for their journal writing [29].

4. Findings and Data Analysis

4.1 Pre-Test and Post-Test

As previously mentioned, the pre-test and post-test were conducted to address the first research question (RQ1), which aimed to investigate whether dialogue journal writing had an impact on the descriptive writing skills of beauty therapy students. These assessments were carried out before and after the intervention to evaluate student writing performance changes.

Table 1
Results of pre-test and post-test

Participants	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Difference
S1	7	13	6
S2	11	16	5
S3	8	13	5
S4	11	17	6
S5	9	14	5
S6	10	16	6
S7	9	14	5
S8	8	13	5
S9	12	19	7
S10	14	19	5
S11	6	11	5
S12	7	11	4
S13	10	15	5
S14	9	14	5
S15	11	17	6

This method allowed the researcher to collect data on students' understanding prior to the intervention and compare it with their performance after engaging with dialogue journal writing. By analysing the results of both tests, the effectiveness of the intervention could be determined. In this study, the pre- and post-test results were presented using tables and graphs to illustrate the findings clearly, and descriptive statistics were used to interpret the data. Findings from Table 1 show a clear improvement in the post-test scores of the beauty therapy students when compared to their pre-test results.

Table 2

Results of pre-test and post-test

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 Pre-Test	9.40	15	2.20	0.568
Post-Test	14.67	15	2.21	0.571

Table 2 presents the mean scores for the pre-test and post-test among the 15 beauty therapy students. The mean score for the pre-test was 9.40 (SD = 2.20), while the mean score for the post-test increased to 14.67 (SD = 2.21). This improvement in the mean score suggests that the dialogue journal writing intervention positively impacted students' descriptive writing performance. The standard error of the mean for both tests was relatively low (0.568 for the pre-test and 0.571 for the post-test), indicating that the sample mean is a reliable estimate of the population mean. The consistent increase in scores across all participants further supports the effectiveness of the intervention used in this study.

Table 3

Results of pre-test and post-test

Paired Differences	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post-Test – Pre-Test	5.27	0.80	0.207	25.42	14	0.000

Table 3 displays the results of the paired samples t-test conducted to determine whether the difference in students' scores before and after the intervention was statistically significant. The analysis shows a mean difference of 5.27 between pre-test and post-test scores, with a **t-value of 25.42** and a **p-value of 0.000** ($p < 0.05$). This indicates a statistically significant improvement in the participants' descriptive writing performance following the dialogue journal writing intervention. The findings strongly support the effectiveness of the strategy in enhancing writing skills among beauty therapy students at the community college level.

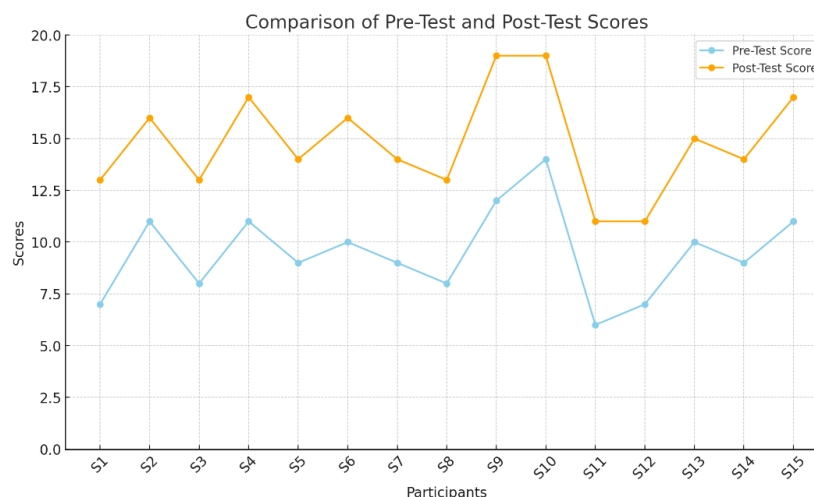


Fig. 1. Results of pre-test and post-test

Figure 1 shows the individual scores of 15 beauty therapy students from both the pre-test and post-test. As seen, each student achieved a higher score on the post-test compared to the pre-test, suggesting a clear improvement in their descriptive writing abilities. The upward trend in the post-test scores highlights the positive influence of the dialogue journal writing intervention. This visual evidence aligns with the statistical data presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3, which collectively reinforce the effectiveness of the intervention in boosting students' writing skills.

Table 4

The paired samples correlations of pre-test and post-test

Paired Samples Correlations	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 PRE-TEST & POST-TEST	15	0.983	0.000

From Table 4, the paired samples correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores by implementing dialogue journal writing to improve descriptive essay writing skills is **0.983**. The pre-test and post-test scores have statistical significance at **p = .000**.

Table 5

The comparative table of pre-test and post-test

Paired Samples Test	Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference (Lower, Upper)
Pair 1 PRE-TEST - POST-TEST	-5.333	0.976	0.252	(-5.875, -4.792)

From Table 5, the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is **5.333**, with a standard deviation of **0.976**. The t-value is **-21.144** with **14 degrees of freedom**. The pre-test and post-test scores by implementing dialogue journal writing to improve descriptive essay writing skills have statistical significance at **p = .000**.

Based on Table 8, the result of the paired samples t-test is significant ($t(14) = 21.144$, $p < .05$). This shows that there is a **significant effect** on participants' descriptive essay writing skills after the implementation of dialogue journal writing. The mean score of the post-test (14.6) after the intervention is higher than the mean score of the pre-test (9.3)

Table 6

Band distribution of participants in pre-test and post-test

Band	Score Range	Grade	Pre-Test (n)	Post-Test (n)
Excellent	30–25	A	0	0
Good	24–19	B	0	2
Satisfactory	18–13	C	1	10
Weak	12–7	D	13	3
Very Weak	0–6	E	1	0

Table 6 shows the distribution of participants based on their band scores before and after the intervention. In the pre-test, the majority of participants (13 participants) were in the **Weak** band, and 1 participant was in the **Very Weak** band. After the implementation of dialogue journal writing, most participants (10 participants) improved to the **Satisfactory** band, while 2 participants achieved the **Good** band. Only 3 participants remained in the **Weak** band. None of the participants remained in the **Very Weak** band after the intervention. This result further supports that dialogue journal writing had a positive effect on participants' descriptive essay writing skills

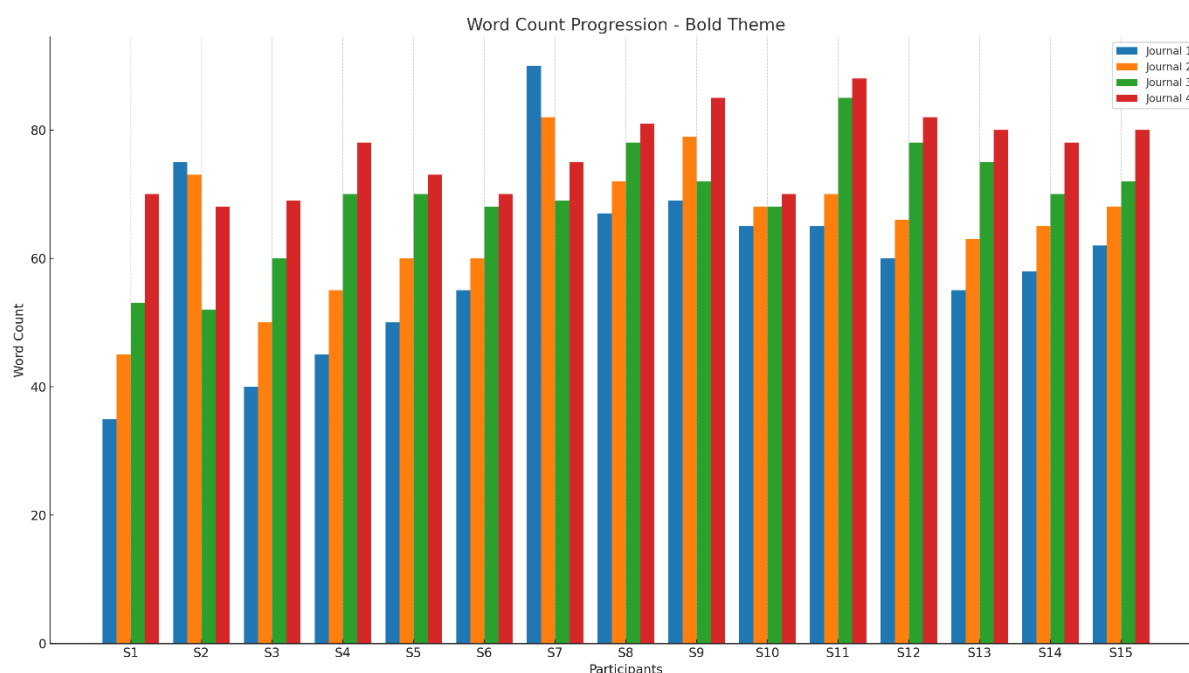


Fig. 2. Dialogue journal entries

Figure 2 illustrates the word count progression for all 15 participants across four dialogue journal entries. Overall, the majority of the participants showed a steady increase in the number of words written from the first to the fourth journal entry. Participants such as S1, S3, S8, and S11 demonstrated a consistent improvement in their word count with each successive journal, indicating enhanced writing fluency and confidence. Some participants like S2 and S7 exhibited higher word counts at the beginning, maintaining a strong performance throughout the sessions. A few participants, including S5 and S12, showed slight fluctuations but ultimately ended with higher word counts in their final journal compared to the initial one. The steady upward trend among most participants suggests that the dialogue journal writing sessions provided meaningful practice, enabling students to develop their ideas more fully and write with greater ease. This finding supports

the observation that consistent writing practice through dialogue journals contributes positively to improving students' writing fluency over time

5. Conclusions and Implications

The findings from this study demonstrate that the implementation of dialogue journal writing had a significant and positive effect on improving students' descriptive essay writing skills. The results from the paired samples correlation showed a strong positive relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores, while the paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the scores before and after the intervention. Participants' post-test scores were considerably higher, and many of them improved their performance, moving from lower bands (Weak and Very Weak) to higher bands (Satisfactory and Good) based on the grading system. The improvements observed indicate that dialogue journal writing provides an effective platform for learners to practice writing fluently in a low-anxiety environment. Regular writing practice through dialogue journals encouraged participants to express ideas more clearly, organize their thoughts better, and develop confidence in descriptive writing tasks.

The implications of this study suggest that educators should consider incorporating dialogue journal writing as a part of regular classroom activities, particularly for improving writing fluency and descriptive writing skills. Dialogue journal writing not only helps to enhance students' technical writing abilities but also fosters better communication between teachers and learners, allowing for more personalized feedback and encouragement.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of using meaningful, student-centered approaches in writing instruction. Future research may explore the long-term impact of dialogue journal writing across different genres and proficiency levels to broaden the understanding of its effectiveness in English language classrooms

Table 7

The schedule of the study on the dialogue journal writing implementation

Week	Date	Activity
Week 1	27th January	Pre-Test
Week 2	3rd February	1st Dialogue Journal Entry
Week 3	10th February	2nd Dialogue Journal Entry
Week 4	24th February	3rd Dialogue Journal Entry
Week 5	17th March	4th Dialogue Journal Entry
	20th March	Post-Test
	21st March	Collection of Final Journals

Appendix B (Scoring rubric for pre and post-test)

Criteria	5 (Excellent)	4 (Good)	3 (Satisfactory)	2 (Weak)	1 (Very Weak)
Content & Ideas	Clear, vivid, and well-developed ideas; highly engaging and detailed description of the subject.	Clear and relevant ideas; good level of detail with some engagement.	Ideas are somewhat clear; limited description and details.	Ideas are unclear; weak development of the topic.	Ideas are very unclear or completely irrelevant.
Organization	Well-organized with clear introduction, body, and conclusion;	Organized with a clear structure, though some transitions may be weak.	Basic structure; organization is present but awkward or inconsistent.	Lacks clear structure; ideas are poorly organized.	No clear structure; disorganized and hard to follow.

	smooth flow of ideas.				
Language Use & Vocabulary	Rich, varied vocabulary; precise language; strong command of grammar.	Appropriate vocabulary; minor errors in language or grammar.	Adequate vocabulary; frequent errors, but meaning is clear.	Limited vocabulary; many language and grammar errors affect meaning.	Very limited vocabulary; many errors make meaning unclear.
Sentence Structure	Sentences are varied and complex, enhancing the writing.	Sentences are mostly varied, with occasional repetition or awkward structure.	Simple sentence structures; some repetition and lack of variety.	Basic sentences with limited variety; frequent repetition.	Very simple, unclear sentences; major issues with sentence structure.
Mechanics (Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar)	Almost no errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar.	Few errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar that do not affect readability.	Some errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar that slightly affect readability.	Many errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar, affecting readability.	Frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar, making the writing hard to read.

Appendix D: Dialogue Journal Topics

A Place That Makes Me Feel at Peace

Describe a place that brings you comfort or peace. It could be a real place you've been to or one you imagine. Focus on the sights, sounds, and feelings you experience there.

A Memorable Experience at College

Describe an event or moment in college that you will never forget. What happened? How did it make you feel? Why was it significant to you?

Someone Who Inspires Me

Write about a person who has had a positive impact on your life. Describe what they are like, what they do, and how they have influenced or inspired you.

My Dream Career

Describe your dream job in the future. What kind of work would you be doing? What would your workplace look like? How would you feel doing this job every day?

Acknowledgement

Any grant did not fund this research.

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