

The impact of diary writing on EFL learners' narrative writing skills

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Abstract:

Considering that the use of diaries as a writing medium in English language learning has gained in popularity, there is a need for more research that investigates its impact on different aspects of writing. The current action research particularly aimed to examine the impact of diary writing on Omani grade nine students' narrative writing. The purpose of the study was to investigate how incorporating diary writing can enhance students' ability to narrate stories. The research involved 16 grade nine student from Asma school, a public school in Barka. The participants were ultimately divided equally into control and experimental groups. The experimental group participated in a one-month diary writing intervention. The data collection method involved a pre- and post-narrative writing tests and questionnaire. The quantitative data collected from the pre- and post- tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data collected from students' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis. The finding revealed that the intervention of diary writing improved students' performance in narrative writing tests mainly in three areas: spelling, punctuation and ideas. It further showed that students had a positive attitude toward recording their diary entries, the study suggested incorporating narrative writing activities into the classroom, as well as providing seminars that successfully teach the skill of diary writing to both educators and students.

Key words: *narrative writing, diary writing, diary entries, journals,*

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1. Introduction

Narrative writing is an important skill for English as a EFL students because it enables them to express themselves creatively while simultaneously improving their language competence. Diary writing has been shown to be an excellent tool for developing EFL students' writing skills and enabling them to create tales that engage readers. Due to its multiple benefits, the usage of diaries as a writing medium has grown in popularity in language learning (Kao & Lin, 2020).

According to research, narrative writing may be challenging for EFL learners, especially when it comes to creating cohesive and captivating narratives (Kern & Clemens, 2020). Furthermore, students often fail to build a rich and vivid vocabulary that helps them to construct complex characters and locations. In contrast, diary writing could assist students create a more natural and genuine voice in their writing and enable them to explore with various writing styles (Kao & Lin, 2020). Students could grow more comfortable expressing themselves in English and gain a better comprehension of narrative components such as plot, character development, and conflict resolution via frequent journal writing practice. As a result, using diary writing as a method to improve narrative writing abilities in EFL learners is a worthy topic for further investigation.

There is a substantial amount of research on the influence of diary writing on the writing skills of EFL learners in general. Huang and Chen (2020), for example, performed a study to examine the influence of diary writing on Taiwanese high school

students' English writing skill. The researchers discovered that diary writing helped students improve their writing abilities, such as vocabulary usage, sentence organization, and overall writing quality. Similarly, Li and Wang (2021) evaluated the impact of diary writing on Chinese EFL learners' writing competence and found that it was beneficial in boosting both high-achieving and low-achieving students' writing abilities.

While the aforementioned research found that diary writing improved EFL learners' writing abilities, few of them particularly looked at the influence of diary writing on narrative writing skills. To fill this need, the current research will investigate the influence of diary writing on the narrative writing skills of nine grade nine EFL students. It follows an action methodology where the intervention will be the utilization of dairy writing as tool to improve the students' narrative writing skills.

1.1. Research Problem

It has been noticed that grade nine students struggle with producing ideas and structuring their thoughts into meaningful stories. Furthermore, they tend to utilize basic and repetitive vocabulary, which results in less engaging and intriguing narratives. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate how impactful the adaptation of diary writing in improving students' narrative writing skills, especially due to its increasing popularity in EFL settings.

1.2. Research Questions

- To what extent does diary writing enhance the narrative writing skills of grade



nine EFL students? With has the following sub questions:

- How does the intervention of dairy writing impact the narrative writing skills of the grade nine students?
- Which areas of narrative writing will most likely be affected by the intervention of dairy writing?
- How do grade nine students perceive the impact of dairy writing on their overall narrative skills?

1.3 Research Hypothesis

The purpose of this research is to look at the effect of diary writing on the narrative writing skills of grade nine EFL students. The research will look at the extent to which diary writing improves students' narrative writing skills. The study hypothesis is that diary writing will improve grade nine EFL students' narrative writing abilities, particularly leading to improvements in vocabulary use and sentence structure . Furthermore, the research will investigate the views of grade nine EFL students toward diary writing as a technique of improving narrative writing abilities. The students are expected to have positive attitudes about diary writing and regard it as a beneficial tool for strengthening their narrative writing skills.

1.4 Research Goals and Objectives

The primary purpose of this research is to look at the effect of diary writing on grade nine EFL students' narrative writing abilities. The research intends to accomplish the following goals:

- To investigate how much diary writing improves the narrative writing abilities of grade nine EFL students.
- To investigate the narrative writing areas that can be improved the most with the intervention of diary writing.
- To investigate the views of grade nine EFL students toward diary writing as a means of improving narrative writing abilities.

By fulfilling these goals, the research seeks to provide light on the potential benefits of diary writing as a technique for boosting EFL students' narrative writing skills and general writing competency. By investigating students' views about diary writing, the research hopes to get a better understanding of how students perceive and benefit from this writing tool. Finally, the results of this research could be utilized to enrich pedagogical practices and build effective writing teaching techniques that can improve EFL students' language learning experiences.

1.5 Study Importance

This research is significant for a number of reasons. First, it intends to address a study gap by investigating the influence of diary writing on the narrative writing skills of grade nine EFL students, a largely unexplored issue in the literature. Second, the study's results may help EFL instructors and curriculum designers understand the effectiveness of diary writing as a pedagogical tool for enhancing students' writing

abilities. This research could further inform educators on how to incorporate diary writing in their teaching practices.

1.6 Research terms

Narrative writing: it is a form of writing that tells a story or depicts a sequence of events. It often includes characters, setting, plot, and theme.

Diary writing: a kind of personal writing in which people regularly record their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. It is often used for self-reflection and self-expression.

Journaling: a writing habit that entails frequently documenting personal ideas and experiences in a notebook or electronic format. It may be utilized for a number of reasons, including personal development, artistic expression, and academic reflection.

Diary entries: written accounts of personal thoughts, experiences, and reflections recorded in a diary or journal.

1. Literature Review

2.1 Narrative writing for EFL learners

Narrative writing is a valuable skill that can help EFL learners to enhance their language proficiency and express themselves creatively. It involves creating stories that captivate readers and require students to use proper grammar, expand their vocabulary, and construct sentences that evoke emotions and imagination (Hedge, 2021). For secondary students, narrative writing can be a pathway to personal and

academic development, inspiring them to develop critical thinking skills that are essential for success in all areas of life (Florez & Bimbela-Penas, 2022).

EFL teachers can include creativity and enjoyment in their courses to fully harness the power of narrative writing. They might urge young learners to share their stories with peers, who can offer criticism and comments, using prompts to spark their imagination. Additionally, they can inspire students to collaborate on group writing assignments, which promote cooperation and improve language acquisition in a welcoming and enjoyable setting (Kuiper & de Haan, 2022). Teachers can assist students in developing their writing skills by encouraging a feeling of community and offering a secure environment for language exploration.

The National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) for narrative writing is one assessment tool that could be used to evaluate the narrative writing skills of students (Caldwell & White, 2020). The criterion consists of 10 dimensions: audience, text structure, ideas, character and setting, vocabulary, cohesion, paragraphs, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. The current study used the NAPLAN criterion to offer a comprehensive evaluation of grade nine students' narrative writing skills.

2.2 Dairy writing for EFL learners

Diary writing is a form of personal writing that involves keeping a record of daily activities, thoughts, and feelings. It is a simple yet powerful tool that can help EFL learners to improve their language proficiency, enhance their writing skills, and reflect

on their experiences (Li, 2020). Diary writing allows students to practice their grammar, expand their vocabulary, and improve their spelling and punctuation, while also providing a safe space for them to express themselves and develop their voice.

Diary writing can be particularly helpful for EFL students who are unconfident in their language skills or have trouble expressing themselves vocally. Giving pupils a private writing place allows them to concentrate on their writing without being concerned about making mistakes or receiving negative feedback from others. This can aid in increasing their sense of self-worth and of ownership over their language learning process (Chang & Ku, 2020).

For secondary students, diary writing can also be a powerful tool for personal and academic development. By reflecting on their experiences and emotions, students can gain insights into themselves and the world around them, and develop critical thinking skills that are essential for success in all areas of life (Lopez-Serrano, 2020). Additionally, diary writing can help students to develop their writing skills in a way that is both meaningful and enjoyable, leading to improved academic performance and a lifelong love of writing (Erdogan & Al-Mekhlafi, 2022).

To fully leverage the power of diary writing, EFL educators can incorporate it into their lessons in a variety of ways. They can encourage students to write daily entries in a notebook or on a digital platform and provide feedback and guidance on their writing. They can also incorporate prompts or topics for students to write about, such as current events, personal experiences, or reflections on their language learning



journey. By incorporating diary writing into their curriculum, educators can help their students to become more confident, reflective, and proficient writers.

2.3 Dairy writing on EFL learners' narrative learning

Narrative writing is an essential skill for EFL learners, which not only enhances their language proficiency but also allows them to express themselves creatively. Diary writing has been found to be an effective method to develop EFL students' writing abilities and enable them to construct stories that captivate readers. The use of diaries as a writing tool has become increasingly popular in language learning due to its numerous advantages (Kao & Lin, 2020). However, the impact of diary writing on EFL learners' narrative writing skills is still a relatively underexplored area in the literature.

Research has shown that narrative writing can be a challenging task for EFL learners, particularly when it comes to constructing coherent and engaging stories (Kern & Clemens, 2020). Moreover, students often struggle with developing a rich and vivid vocabulary that allows them to create complex characters and settings. Diary writing, on the other hand, can help students to develop a more natural and authentic voice in their writing and encourage them to experiment with different writing styles (Kao & Lin, 2020). Through regular diary writing practice, students may become more comfortable with expressing themselves in English and develop a better understanding of narrative elements such as plot, character development, and conflict resolution. One study by Al-Hazmi, M. M. (2020) revealed that the effects of diary

writing on the writing proficiency of Saudi EFL learners and found that it was effective in improving the narrative writing skills of and low-achieving students.

While many studies have reported the significant improvements in EFL learners' narrative writing skills through diary writing, few studies from the Arab world have focused on the impact of diary writing on the narrative writing skills of EFL students, even fewer explored its influence on secondary student. To address this gap, the present study aims to explore the impact of diary writing on the narrative writing skills of secondary school EFL learners. The intervention in this study will be the use of diary writing as a tool for improving the narrative writing skills of EFL learners.

2. *Methodology*

3.1. Context and Participants

The study was conducted at Asma school, a public school located in Barka, Muscat. It involved 16 high-achieving Omani students from two grade 9 classes. From each class, 8 high-achieving students were selected to participate in the study. The students from the first class form the control group. Therefore, they did not receive any intervention. On the other hand, those from the second class formed the experiment group; as a result, they received instructions on how to write diaries and untimely they were given notebooks to write their own diaries on a daily basis.

3.2. Data Collection Tool

The current study aimed to explore the effectiveness of dairy writing on grade nine students' narrative writing skills.

3.2.1 pre- and post- tests:

The pre- and post-tests that were given to the students are attended to evaluate their overall narrative skills. Both of the narrative writing tests were in the form sequential pictures that students had to use to narrate stories (see appendix 1). This form of narrative writing was used since it is already part of the regular assessment set by the ministry of education for students in grade nine. Their tests were scored using the NAPLAN criterion for narrative writing (see appendix 2) (ACARA, 2022). The criterion consists of 10 dimensions: audience, text structure, ideas, character and setting, vocabulary, cohesion, paragraphs, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. Each dimension would be scored out of 5, with a total score of 50.

3.2.2. Questionnaire

A questionnaire which was posted on Google Form was sent to the experimental group to explore their perception of writing their diary entries (see appendix 3). The questionnaire had three questions that covered three themes: their attitudes toward dairy writing before and after the experiment and the challenges they faced during the experiment.

3.3. Data collection procedures

The data collecting procedures for the study will include giving both the control and experimental groups pre- and post-tests to assess their narrative writing skills. The

pre-test was given at the start of the study, and the post-test was given at the completion of the research. The experimental group was provided with a notebook to record their daily journal entries for one month (see appendix 4). The diary entries were used to monitor the students' improvement in narrative writing throughout the course of the study. Furthermore, the questionnaire was sent to the experiment group by the end of the experiment to investigate their views on the experiment with its various aspects.

Informed consent was acquired from the students prior to participating in the study. Furthermore, participants were told that some of their diary entries would be shared publicly, and they were given the choice to opt out if they did not wish to participate in this aspect of the study. Throughout the study, all personal information about the students is kept secret, and their identities are preserved.

3.4. Data analysis

In order to collect students' data for this study, the NAPLAN criterion for narrative writing (ACARA, 2022) was used to quantitatively evaluate both of the groups' narrative writing before and after the experiment. Then, the data was tabulated using Microsoft Excel to find its central tendencies and prominent attributes. The qualitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed through thematic analysis.

4. Results

This study attended to investigate the impact of dairy writing on grade nine students' narrative writing. The following section will first explore the student' background information. Then, it will answer the research questions mentioned earlier.

Table 1 shows the participants' background information including their class section and gender. All the participant who chose to participate

Table 1. Participants' background information

	N	Class section	gender
Control group	8	9/1	female
Experimental group	8	9/2	female

4.1 The effectiveness of dairy writing on narrative writing

To answer the first question in the research:

- How does the intervention of dairy writing impact the narrative writing skills of the grade nine students?

The data in Table 2 shows the two groups' performance in both of the tests. It is clear from the table that the highest grade scored among both of the groups in the pre-test was 38.

However, by the end of the experiment, the highest scores from the two groups varied. The

highest score from the control group 40, while the that from the experimental one reached up to 43.

Table 2. Students' overall scores in the pre- and post-test

Control	Pre- test	Post- test	Experimental	Pre- test	Post- test
student 1	38	40	student 1	34	37
student 2	35	38	student 2	35	40
student 3	33	33	student 3	33	36
student 4	34	36	student 4	38	39
student 5	32	33	student 5	32	36
student 6	33	33	student 6	33	42
student 7	34	37	student 7	35	43
student 8	34	31	student 8	35	40

The data in Table 3 reveals that both of the control and experimental groups did relatively similarly in the pre-test. They scored a mean of 34.13 and 35.13 respectively. However, by the end of the experiment, it is evident that performance of the control group remained fairly the same (M=31.5). On the other hand, the experimental group's performance improved by a mean of 4.87.

Table 3. Students' mean scores in the pre- and post-tests

Group	Group	Mean	Mean difference	
Control	Pre-test	34.13	1	
	Post-test	35.13		
Experimental	Pre-test	34.38	4.87	4.2 The impact
	Post-test	39.35		of dairy writing on different

areas of narrative writing

To answer the second question in the research:

- Which areas of narrative writing will most likely be affected by the intervention of dairy writing?

The data in Table 4 revealed that the writing areas that had the most significant growth after the intervention of dairy writing are spelling, punctuation and ideas. The three improved by a mean of 1.75, 1.39 and 0.62 respectively. Alternatively, the area that witnessed the least improvement are character and setting as the scores only increased by a mean of 0.13.

Table 4. Descriptive statistic of the narrative writing measures from the experimental group

	Mean	Mean
--	------	------

			difference
Writing Skills	Pre-test	Post -test	
Audience	3	3.33	0.33
Spelling	2.25	4	1.75
Paragraphs	3	3.25	0.25
Punctuation	2.25	3.64	1.39
Character and Setting	3.25	3.38	0.13
Sentence structure	3.25	3.5	0.25
Ideas	3.25	4	0.75
Vocabulary	3.88	4.5	0.62
Cohesion	3.25	3.8	0.55
Text structure	3.14	3.5	0.36

4.3 Students' perception of dairy writing

To answer the second question in the research:

- How do grade nine students perceive the impact of dairy writing on their overall narrative skills?

The responses of the experiential group are documented in Table 5. The responses of the experimental group are documented in Table 4. From the table, it is clear that most students before the experiment had reservation about writing their own dairies. They reported that they had some sort of anxiety about writing their dairies. One student even shared that dairy writing could be a waste of time. After the experiment, however, most of their attitudes on journaling had a significant shift. The majority of them stated that writing dairies gave them a safe space to convey their emotions. Furthermore, some students maintained that the act of documenting diaries allowed them to improve their writing. As to the challenges of dairy writing, Students had different views on what hindered them from writing. Many stated that that they had difficulty thinking about what to write or expressing personal matters. Others reported that they did not feel motivated to write. One student additionally answered that she had a hard time keeping an eye on her spelling and grammar while writing.

Table 4. Students' attitude towards diary writing



Student	Before Writing Diaries	After Writing Diaries	Challenges of Diary Writing
1	It seemed boring. I did think I [would] like it.	It made me feel relaxed. I think I will start writing my diaries [from now on].	I struggled with thinking about [what I should] write about
2	I was so excited to try it. My friends were also excited.	I enjoyed drawing things more than writing my ideas.	Sometimes I had trouble finding the time to write every day.
3	I was a bit nervous about writing my thoughts and feelings.	I felt more confident. It gave me a chance to express my feelings. I will start writing more in the future.	I struggled with organizing my thoughts and making my writing clear.
4	I thought it would be a waste of time. I never wrote dairies.	I felt happy and relaxed when I wrote my diaries.	I found it difficult to write about personal things.
5	I never wrote my diaries before. I didn't know about it a lot but I was ready.	It made me improve my writing. Now it takes me [less] time to write my ideas.	I struggled with grammar and spelling, [which made] it annoying to write sometimes.

5.	6	I didn't know how to do it.	I learned to [reflect on] my daily activities.	I sometimes felt like I didn't have anything important to write about.
	7	I thought it would be beneficial for my writing skills.	I was happy that it helped me [preserve] some nice memories. I feel safe when I write things there.	Sometimes I didn't feel like I [was] in the mood to write my diaries.
	8	I didn't have strong feelings about it.	I enjoyed it a lot. I feel confident about my writing.	I didn't know what I should write and what I shouldn't write.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the impact of keeping dairies on grade nine students' narrative writing. It found that writing dairies had a positive influence on different aspects of students' narrative writing. Furthermore, students had a positive attitude with regards to writing dairies after the experiment.

The first theme revealed that the intervention of writing dairies improved student's performance in narrative writing tests as their scores witnessed a considerable shift after the experiment. This finding is in line with another study that confirmed that journaling improved the scores its participants received in recount texts, including narrating stories (Hermawan, Sada, & Rezeki, 2020).

The second theme illustrated that the invention of diary writing particularly helped students advance their spelling, punctuation and ideas. This finding is consistent with several studies. For instance, Ji and Tang (2020) found that The regular engagement in diary writing activities assisted their participants students improving their spelling accuracy over time. Another study showed that diary writing significantly contributed to improving students' punctuation skills (Wu, 2020). The regular practice of documenting thoughts and emotions helped his participant be more aware of different punctuations rules and ultimately apply them in their writing (Wu, 2020). Puspasari, Kurniawati, and Rahayu (2020) further asserted that frequent diary writing helped students increase their creativity and produce more varied and cohesive thoughts when writing recount narratives.

The third theme explored students' perception of diary writing. Most students reported that they felt hesitant to start writing diaries. This finding is similar to that of Ghaith, G. (2020) who explained that students might be hesitant to share private occurrences or thoughts in their journals as they might be concerned about their privacy being infringed or feel uneasy about disclosing personal information. After the experiment, the participants shared that writing their diaries helped them feel at ease and more confident about their writing. This finding aligns with another study that found that the act of recording diaries can boost their writing skills and provide a less stressful medium through which students can practice their writing in an authentic manner (Kao & Lin, 2020). The current study also showed that some students felt



unmotivated to get in the writing zone. Ahmed (2020) explained that some students might be hesitant to write their diaries because they have high expectations for their writing. They may strive for perfection and be afraid that their writing will fall short of those expectations, causing them to be hesitant to begin or continue their diary entries (Ahmed, 2022)

6. Recommendations and limitations

The findings of this study draw a couple of recommendations with regard to using diary writing to improve students' narrative writing. According to the findings, introducing diary assignments into the classroom could be an effective pedagogical technique for improving students' narrative writing abilities. Educators should consider including diary writing as a regular practice within the writing curriculum to provide students opportunities for self-reflection, creative expression, and narrative writing skill development. Furthermore, the current study suggests that schools and educational institutions might provide teacher training programs and professional development workshops aimed at successfully introducing diary writing into the curriculum. These workshops may give educators with the methods, tools, and resources they need to execute diary writing exercises that help students improve their narrative writing abilities. Sharing best practices and having collaborative conversations may help instructors tailor diary writing to match the requirements of their students.



It is worth noting that the study comes with some limitations. One limitation of this study is the small number of participants involved. With a less sample size, the generalizability of the results could be limited. It is significant to acknowledge that a larger and more varied sample would provide a broader range of perceptions and potentially improve the validity and applicability of the results. Future studies could consider growing the participant pool in order to increase the representativeness of the findings. Another limitation is the diary writing intervention's short duration. Because writing skills develop over time, a longer intervention period may be required to see more noticeable improvements in students' narrative writing abilities.

7. Conclusion

This study intended to investigate the effectiveness of diary writing on students' narrative skills. It concluded that the intervention of diary writing improved student narrative skills, particularly in three areas which are spelling, punctuation and ideas. Furthermore, it revealed that students had a positive attitude toward journaling and diary writing. The study recommended introducing narrating writing activities into the classroom as well as giving workshops that effectively teach the art of diary writing to both educators and students.



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Appendix 1: The pre- and post-tests



Name:.....

Grade:.....

Write at least 75 words based on the following picture. Make your story lively and interesting.

①



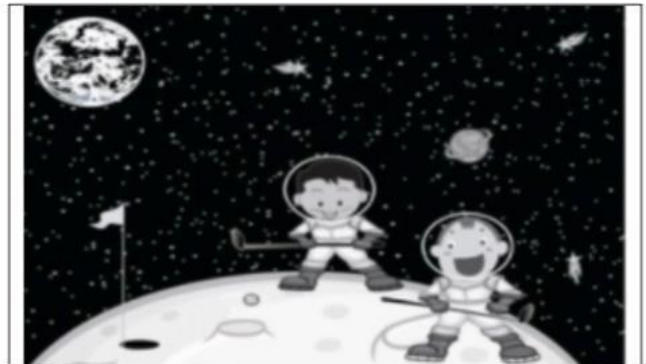
②



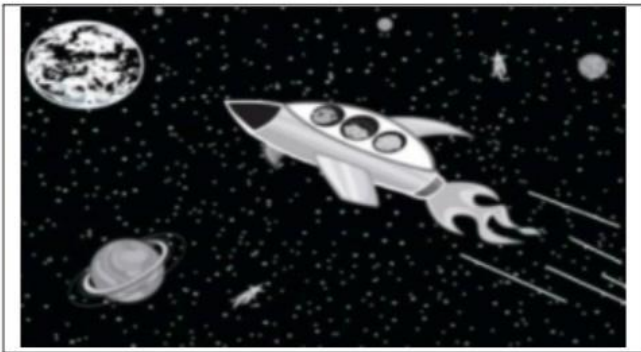
③



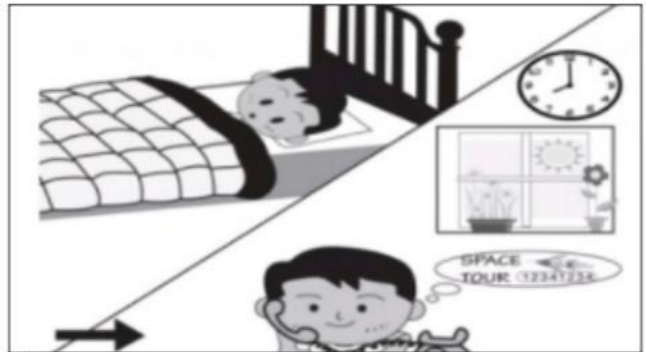
④



⑤



⑥



(EASIJ.COM)

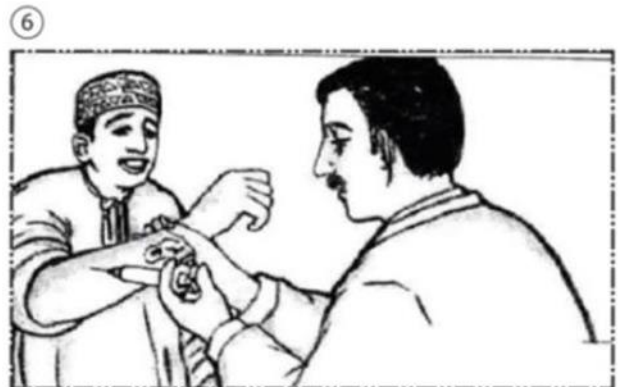
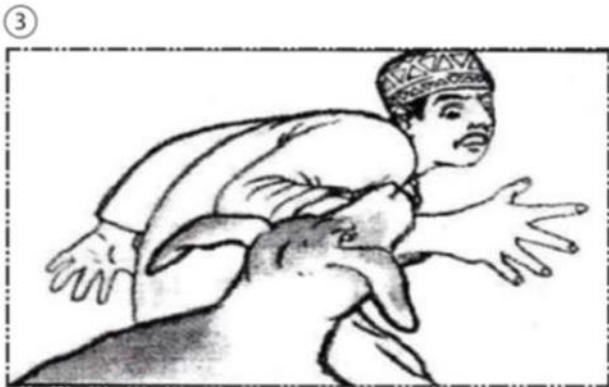
Email: editor.easij@gmail.com editor@easij.com Website: easij.com



Name:.....

Grade:.....

Write at least 75 words based on the following picture. Make your story lively and interesting.



Appendix 2: NAPLAN criterion for narrative writing

1	Audience	The writer's capacity to orient, engage and affect the reader
2	Text structure	The organisation of narrative features including orientation, complication and resolution into an appropriate and effective text structure
3	Ideas	The creation, selection and crafting of ideas for a narrative
4	Character and setting	Character: the portrayal and development of character Setting: the development of a sense of place, time and atmosphere
5	Vocabulary	The range and precision of language choices
6	Cohesion	The control of multiple threads and relationships over the whole text, achieved through the use of referring words, substitutions, word associations and text connectives
7	Paragraphs	The segmenting of text into paragraphs that assists the reader to negotiate the narrative
8	Sentence structure	The production of grammatically correct, structurally sound and meaningful sentences
9	Punctuation	The use of correct and appropriate punctuation to aid reading of the text
10	Spelling	The accuracy of spelling and the difficulty of the words used

Appendix 3: Some of the students' entries

For Appendix 3, you may be contacted with respective Researcher - Anfal Ali Al Farsi via

Email: anfal12345678@gmail.com

Appendix 4: The questionnaire

You are invited to participate in a research study about the impact of diary writing on grade nine students' performance. In this study, you will be asked to respond in writing to a questionnaire. The questionnaire will take a maximum of 5 minutes. To participate, please click on the following link:

<https://forms.gle/CffGbbCK1wezaGYNA>

Your participation is important because this study will give you an excellent opportunity to freely express your views about the matter. Your participation will help improve the teaching and learning experiences of students. All the information you supply will be kept confidential. Privacy will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions about the questionnaire, please contact me at s126969@student.squ.edu.om. Feel free to write to me in either Arabic or English.

Yours sincerely,

Anfal Ali Saud Al Farsi

- 1- What did you think about diary writing before the experiment?
- 2- What did you think about diary writing after the experiment?
- 3- What challenges did you have while writing your diary?

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