**O R I G I N A L   A R T I C L E**

# The Effect of Dialogue Journal Writing on Iranian English Language Learners' Writing Performance in both Virtual and Traditional Education

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**A B S T R A C T**

This study explores the impact of dialogue journal writing on the writing performance of English Translation students in both virtual and traditional education at Payame Noor University, Iran. A sample of 150 undergraduate students was selected using convenience sampling. After administering the Oxford Placement Test to ensure homogeneity, 120 students who scored one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen for the study. These students were divided into two experimental groups and two control groups. The study employed a pre-test/post-test design using writing tests to measure changes in performance. Peyton's guidelines were followed to ensure consistent dialogue journal writing entries. Analysis showed a significant increase in the writing performance among students who engaged in dialogue journal writing in both virtual and traditional education. The findings confirm that dialogue journal writing effectively enhances writing skills among virtual students more than traditional students. Language teachers can use this method to boost student engagement and improve writing skills, especially in virtual learning contexts. Future research should investigate the effects of dialogue journal writing on different demographics and other language skills. These insights highlight the potential of dialogue journal writing as a valuable tool for language teachers to improve educational outcomes in language classrooms.

## Extended Abstract
### Introduction
Dialogue Journals Writing (DJW) are useful instruments for fostering meaningful written interactions by allowing instructors and students to converse naturally (Taheri & Eidi, 2021; Peyton, 1993). They promote communication, enhance writing abilities, and strengthen the bonds between students and teachers (Al Kayed et al., 2020). Empirical studies demonstrate the beneficial effects of DJW on students' writing proficiency and motivation. These studies include Gholami Mehrdad's (2008) research, as well as the work of Chiesa et al. (2013) and Peyton et al. (1990). DJW use has also been demonstrated to boost ESL students' enthusiasm for writing assignments (Trites, 2001; Chow, 2004; Holmes & Moulton, 2017). Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), Reeve (2013), and Ucar and Goksel (2020) highlight how EFL learners' motivation is adaptable and can be influenced by outside factors like virtual learning.

Virtual learning has received more attention as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic forcing the widespread adoption of online education, particularly English Language Teaching (ELT) (Walabe & Lubicini, 2020). Virtual learning programs use the internet and technology to provide educational materials (Mundir et al., 2022; Joseph, 2018). Research has indicated that virtual learning improves language learning results (Walabe & Lubicini, 2020). The importance of ESL learners' motivation for language learning and achievement is highlighted by the fact that highly motivated learners actively participate in learning activities because they are curious, interested, and driven to succeed (Brown, 1994; Kılıç et al., 2020; Williams & Burden, 1997).

Additionally, research has shown how virtual learning improves language learning outcomes and how effective it is at improving students' linguistic proficiency and general academic performance (Peredo Alarcon, 2023).

While there is existing research on the effectiveness of dialogue journal writing, this study investigates the effect of DJW on writing in both virtual and traditional education. Examining how dialogue journal writing impacts writing performance among Iranian EFL learners in both virtual and traditional education settings represents a unique contribution to the literature. In light of the gap in the literature, the study raises the following research questions:

1. Does DJW improve the writing performance of English Translation students at Payame Noor University in a virtual educational setting?

2. Does DJW improve the writing performance of English Translation students at Payame Noor University in a traditional educational setting?

3. Is there a significant difference in the writing performance improvement of students who use DJW in virtual education compared to those in traditional education?

To address these questions, the study develops the following null hypotheses:

H01: DJW does not improve the writing performance of English Translation students at Payame Noor University in a virtual educational setting.

H02: DJW does not improve the writing performance of English Translation students at Payame Noor University in a traditional educational setting.

H03: There is no significant difference in the writing performance improvement of students who use DJW in virtual education compared to those in traditional education.

### Literature Review
The growth of virtual education, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has introduced new challenges and opportunities for language instruction. Studies comparing virtual and traditional educational settings suggest each has its own strengths and weaknesses. Al-Mansour and Al-Shorman (2020) found that while traditional classrooms offer direct interaction and immediate feedback, virtual environments provide flexibility and promote independent learning. In terms of dialogue journal writing, Kessler (2018) highlighted that online platforms can facilitate continuous dialogue beyond classroom walls, enabling more consistent practice and feedback.

Dialogue journal writing is increasingly recognized as a valuable teaching strategy in language education. Back in 1993, Peyton and

Staton identified its potential to enhance communication skills by creating a space for genuine written exchanges between students and teachers. This method has gained traction over the years, with recent studies continuing to validate its effectiveness.

Dialogue journal writing has five basic features. Firstly, it is considered as an interactive writing activity. It is because the focus of the interaction is on real communication, not on form. Secondly, topics are typically not assigned, leaving students free to discuss whatever they wish or to write on any topics that interest them. Thirdly, dialogue journals are not corrected, nor are they graded or evaluated. The quality of the dialogue journal would be assessed based on students' presentation of idea. Fourthly, teachers keep the writings private, promising not to show the journal to any third party without the student's consent. Finally, dialogue journal writing is also seen as "… a vehicle of a mind's progress towards understanding a subject…" (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1983). This means that journal writing enables students to monitor their own performances and progress whereas the teacher or their partner initiates them to improve by giving feedback to their written product.

Ho (2003) investigated the effectiveness of audio-taped dialogue journals in a university context in Taiwan. He collected data from 26 intermediate level students who attended English class, focusing on personal communication rather than completing assignments. The study found that audio-tapped journals allowed students to express their thoughts and feelings, improve their performance, enjoy one-to-one tutoring, and provide opportunities for learning by doing. Teachers could better understand their students' learning goals, language proficiency levels, learning styles, motivation, interests, and learning problems.

Collentine (2004) conducted research on identification as a language learner, use of targeted language structure and functions, and consolidation of course content. He collected data from eight third-semester intermediate students enrolled in Spanish learning. The students were asked to write journals using past tense verbs and subjunctive mood, with tasks related to narration, question formation, and stating opinions using embedded clauses. The findings showed that learners were able to identify themselves as learners and increased their use of targeted forms and contents. High-frequency classroom participants and low-proficiency participants used targeted forms and contents more than those who participated less. Learners used their journals as a forum to express accomplishments, challenges, and questions about the Spanish language.

Dialogue journal writing provides learners with a low-pressure environment to practice, boosting their confidence and willingness to experiment with language. Holmes and Moulton (2017) observed that students involved in dialogue journal writing showed significant improvements in the coherence and organization of their writing. They also noted an increase in students' motivation to write. Razali et al. (2018) found that dialogue journals offer ESL learners regular practice and personalized feedback, which helps them engage more deeply with the language. This engagement leads to notable improvements in writing fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

Recent studies have started to explore the differing impacts of dialogue journal writing in virtual versus traditional educational settings. Shintani and Aubrey (2016) noted that in virtual settings, dialogue journals can enhance learner autonomy and digital literacy skills, giving learners opportunities to engage with language in varied ways. Similarly, Ismail et al. (2020) pointed out that the reflective nature of dialogue journals encourages critical thinking and self-assessment, which are essential for developing effective writing skills. Conversely, Adams and Newton (2021) found that the structured environment of traditional classrooms can better support learners who might struggle with self-directed learning in virtual spaces.

Overall, the literature suggests that dialogue journal writing is a powerful tool for improving writing performance among language learners. While both virtual and traditional education settings offer distinct benefits for implementing dialogue journals, the choice of setting can influence the effectiveness of these benefits. Further research is necessary to explore how different demographics and language skills are

impacted by dialogue journal writing across various educational contexts. This continued exploration will help educators adapt the technique to maximize its potential for different learners.

## Methodology

This design compared the effects of dialogue journal writing on two groups (virtual and traditional education) with the inclusion of control groups. The lack of random assignment makes it quasi-experimental, but this design is robust for educational settings. The study's dependent variable was the learners' writing performance, while the independent variable was DJW facilitated through virtual and traditional education.

A total of 150 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Language Translation field of study at Payame Noor University, Alborz province, were initially selected using convenience sampling. These students were participating in an English Writing course. To ensure homogeneity among participants, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered. Based on their OPT scores, 120 students were identified as having an intermediate level of proficiency, as their scores were within one standard deviation above and below the mean. These students were then divided into two experimental groups and two control groups, each consisting of 30 learners, using a non-random technique. The test consists of 60 multiple-choice questions covering various areas such as cloze tests, grammar, and vocabulary. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82 confirmed the test's reliability.

To assess participants' writing skills, a pre-test was administered at the beginning of the study to establish a baseline for each student's writing abilities. Participants were required to write an essay of 150 to 200 words within 45 minutes on one of two topics: "Compare and contrast governmental and non-governmental universities" or "Discuss the impact of aging on behavior." After the intervention, the same test was administered as a post-test to measure changes in writing performance. Two raters evaluated the essays using the ESL Composition Profile, achieving an inter-rater reliability coefficient of 0.87 to ensure consistent and objective assessment.

The ESL Composition Profile, developed by Jacobs et al. (1981), was employed to evaluate students' essays. This profile assesses writing based on criteria such as vocabulary, topic coherence, language competency, mechanics, and organization. It categorizes writing into four levels: Very Poor, Fair to Poor, Good to Average, and Excellent to Very Good, each with specific score ranges.

The 120 intermediate-level students were divided into four groups, each consisting of 30 students. This division was done using a non-random technique, ensuring that each group had an equal number of participants.

o Virtual Experimental Group (VEG): Consisted of 30 students who participated in dialogue journal writing activities conducted in a virtual learning environment. These students were provided with instructions and materials to engage in online journal writing with their instructors.

o Virtual Control Group (VCG): Comprised 30 students who participated in traditional writing activities conducted in a virtual setting, without the use of dialogue journals. This group continued with standard course assignments without the additional journal writing intervention.

o Traditional Experimental Group (TEG): Included 30 students who participated in dialogue journal writing activities conducted in a traditional classroom environment. These students engaged in face-to-face interactions with instructors while maintaining dialogue journals as part of their coursework.

o Traditional Control Group (TCG): Made up of 30 students who engaged in traditional writing activities conducted in a physical classroom setting, without dialogue journal intervention. This group followed the conventional curriculum without the inclusion of dialogue journal activities.

Each group was balanced in terms of student numbers to ensure comparable group sizes, allowing for more accurate comparisons of writing performance across different instructional methods and settings. By organizing the participants in this manner, the study aimed to assess the impact of dialogue journal writing on writing performance in both virtual and traditional educational contexts.

During the intervention, students in the

experimental groups were introduced to Dialogue Journal Writing (DJW) following Peyton's guidelines, which provided a structured approach to writing journal entries. In both virtual and traditional learning environments, participants engaged in written dialogues with the instructor through Learning Management Systems (LMS) for virtual education and through handwritten journals for traditional education. Students wrote journal entries on various topics, and teachers provided feedback, posed questions, and guided discussions to enhance student engagement and writing performance.

The experiment lasted for 8 sessions, each session being 90 minutes long. During these sessions, participants in the experimental groups practiced dialogue journal writing, while the control groups followed the traditional writing curriculum, they engaged in standard writing activities such as essays or reports without the dialogue component. All groups were administered the writing pre-test and post-test to assess performance changes. The student DJW sample and the instructor response are followed:

*Dear Dr. Takallou,*

*I recently read an article about the importance of cultural context in translation. It made me think about how translators must consider not only the words but also the cultural nuances. For instance, when translating idioms, direct translations often don't work because they can lose meaning. I'm curious about strategies to handle such challenges effectively. Could you share your insights on how to improve in this area?*

*Best regards,*
*Maryam*

*Dear Maryam,*

*Thank you for your thoughtful entry. You're absolutely right about the importance of cultural context in translation. One effective strategy is to familiarize yourself with the cultural background of both the source and target languages. This can be done by reading literature, watching films, or even speaking with native speakers. When dealing with idioms, try to find an equivalent expression in the target language that conveys the same meaning or feeling. Practice is*

*key, so keep engaging with diverse texts.*
*Looking forward to seeing your progress!*
*Best,*
*Takallou*

**Findings**
Data from the participants' pre-test and post-test writing scores were collected and analyzed using SPSS software (version 26). Paired t-tests within groups were conducted to assess pre- and post-test differences, determining the significance of the changes in writing performance due to the DJW intervention. ANCOVA (Analysis of Covariance) was used to control for initial differences and compare post-test scores across the four groups.

Paired t-tests were conducted within each group to examine changes in writing performance from pre-test to post-test. The results are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Paired t-test Results

| Group | Mean Difference | t | df | Sig. |
|-------|-----------------|-------|----|------|
| VEG | 2.07 | -12.28 | 29 | < 0.001 |
| VCG | -1.40 | -3.24 | 29 | 0.003 |
| TEG | 3.20 | -10.85 | 29 | < 0.001 |
| TCG | 2.10 | -7.42 | 29 | < 0.001 |

The paired t-test results demonstrate significant improvements in writing performance for all groups. The Virtual Education Experimental Group (VEG) showed a substantial increase in writing scores from pre-test to post-test ($t(29) = -12.28$, $p < 0.001$ $t(29) = -12.28$, $p < 0.001$ $t(29) = -12.28$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, the Traditional Education Experimental Group (TEG) exhibited significant improvement ($t(29) = -10.85$, $p < 0.001$ $t(29) = -10.85$, $p < 0.001$ $t(29) = -10.85$, $p < 0.001$). The Control Groups (VCG and TCG) also showed significant improvements, although to a lesser extent compared to the experimental groups ($t(29)=-3.24, p=0.003$ $t(29) = -3.24$, $p = 0.003$ $t(29) = -3.24$, $p = 0.003$ for VCG, and $t(29) = -7.42$, $p < 0.001$ $t(29) = -7.42$, $p < 0.001$ $t(29)= -7.42$, $p < 0.001$ for TCG).

**According to table 1, first and second hypotheses were rejected, i.e.** DJW significantly improves the writing performance

of English Translation students in a virtual educational setting; and DJW significantly improves the writing performance of English Translation students in a traditional educational setting.

The analyses confirm that dialogue journal writing significantly enhances writing performance among Iranian English language learners. The effect is more noticeable in the experimental groups engaged in dialogue journal writing, particularly in the virtual education setting. These findings suggest that dialogue journal writing can be an effective pedagogical tool to improve writing skills, especially in virtual learning environments. The method holds promise for enhancing student engagement and educational outcomes in language classrooms.

To assess the differences in post-test writing performance among the four groups (Virtual Education Experimental Group, Virtual Education Control Group, Traditional Education Experimental Group, and Traditional Education Control Group) while controlling for pre-test scores, ANCOVA was conducted. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** ANCOVA Results

| Source | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | 132.93 | 3 | 44.31 | 30.69 | <0.001 |
| Pretest | 380.78 | 1 | 380.78 | 263.71 | <0.001 |
| Residual | 166.05 | 115 | 1.44 | | |

The ANCOVA results reveal a significant effect of the group on post-test writing performance $(F(3,115)=30.69, p<0.001)$, indicating differences in writing performance across the groups after controlling for pre-test scores. Additionally, pre-test scores significantly predicted post-test scores $(F(1,115)=263.71, p<0.001)$.

**According to table 2, third hypothesis was rejected, i.e.** there is a significant difference in the writing performance improvement of students using DJW in virtual education compared to those in traditional education, with virtual education potentially showing greater improvement.

The analyses confirm that dialogue journal writing significantly enhances writing performance among Iranian English language learners. The effect is more significant in the experimental groups engaged in dialogue journal writing, particularly in the virtual education setting. These findings suggest that dialogue journal writing can be an effective pedagogical tool to improve writing skills, especially in virtual learning environments. The method holds promise for enhancing student engagement and educational outcomes in language classrooms.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of dialogue journal writing on the writing performance of English Language Translation students at Payame Noor University, focusing on both virtual and traditional educational settings. The results of the study indicated that students who participated in dialogue journal writing (both virtual and traditional settings) demonstrated a meaningful improvement in their writing performance compared to those in the control groups. This finding is consistent with previous research by Peyton and Staton (1993), who emphasized the value of dialogue journals in fostering authentic written communication and enhancing language skills. The finding is in line with Trites, 2001, Chow, 2004, Holmes & Moulton, 2017 who concluded that DJW may boost ESL students' enthusiasm for writing assignments.

The benefits observed can be attributed to several factors inherent in dialogue journal writing. First, the low-stakes environment provided by journals reduces the pressure on students, allowing them to take risks with their language use and experiment with new vocabulary and structures. Second, the interactive nature of dialogue journals encourages continuous feedback and reflection, promoting self-assessment and critical thinking. This iterative process is crucial in developing writing skills, as it helps students recognize and address their weaknesses over time.

The study also explored the differential impact of dialogue journal writing in virtual and traditional settings. Interestingly, students in the Virtual Experimental Group (VEG) showed greater improvement in writing performance compared to those in the Traditional Experimental Group (TEG). This suggests that the virtual environment may offer unique

advantages for implementing dialogue journals. The finding is consistent with Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), Reeve (2013), and Ucar and Goksel (2020) who pointed how EFL learners' motivation is adaptable and can be influenced by outside factors like virtual learning. The regular practice and feedback inherent in dialogue journal writing appear to encourage students to engage more deeply with the writing process, leading to improvements in fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

One possible explanation for this finding is that virtual settings provide more flexibility and opportunities for personalized feedback, as noted by Kessler (2018). The asynchronous nature of virtual dialogue journals allows students to reflect on feedback at their own pace, potentially leading to more thoughtful and deliberate revisions. Additionally, virtual environments may encourage more frequent interactions between students and instructors, fostering a sense of continuous support and engagement.

In contrast, while the Traditional Experimental Group also benefited from dialogue journal writing, the structured nature of traditional classrooms may limit the flexibility and frequency of feedback. However, the face-to-face interactions inherent in traditional settings can offer immediate clarification and support, which some learners may find beneficial, particularly those who struggle with self-directed learning, as highlighted by Adams and Newton (2021).

The findings of this study have several practical implications for language educators. First, incorporating dialogue journal writing into the curriculum can be an effective strategy for enhancing writing skills across different educational contexts. Teachers should consider leveraging the strengths of both virtual and traditional environments to maximize the benefits of dialogue journal writing.

In virtual settings, educators can utilize online platforms to facilitate continuous dialogue and provide timely feedback, which can enhance learner autonomy and engagement. In traditional classrooms, teachers can integrate dialogue journals as a supplement to face-to-face instruction, using them as a tool for reflection and personalized feedback.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of adapting teaching methods to the specific needs and preferences of learners. Educators should be mindful of individual differences in learning styles and preferences, providing tailored support to help students navigate the challenges of both virtual and traditional learning environments.

## Conclusion

The positive outcomes observed in both experimental groups suggest that dialogue journals offer a valuable platform for learners to practice and enhance their writing skills. By creating a low-pressure environment, dialogue journals allow students to explore language use freely and receive consistent, personalized feedback. This iterative process not only builds confidence but also fosters critical thinking and self-reflection, leading to improvements in writing fluency, accuracy, and complexity.

One of the key insights from this study is the adaptability of dialogue journal writing across virtual and traditional learning environments. In virtual settings, the flexibility of online platforms can enhance learner autonomy and provide more opportunities for interaction and feedback. This approach allows students to engage with the material at their own pace, which can be particularly beneficial for those who thrive in self-directed learning environments.

Conversely, traditional classroom settings offer the advantage of face-to-face interaction, which can provide immediate support and clarification for students who benefit from structured learning environments. Teachers can effectively integrate dialogue journals as a supplement to in-person instruction, helping students to bridge the gap between practice and real-time application.

While dialogue journal writing is a powerful tool, it is essential to recognize and address potential challenges that learners may face. For example, some students might struggle with maintaining regular entries or may find it difficult to engage in reflective writing. Educators should be proactive in providing guidance and encouragement, helping students to overcome these hurdles and make the most of the journal writing experience.

Moreover, it is crucial to tailor the use of dialogue journals to meet the diverse needs of students. By understanding individual learning styles and preferences, teachers can offer customized support, ensuring that all students benefit from this pedagogical approach.

The findings of this study open up several avenues for future research. Investigating the long-term effects of dialogue journal writing on overall language proficiency and academic performance could provide deeper insights into its benefits. Additionally, exploring how dialogue journals impact other language skills, such as speaking and listening, would further enrich our understanding of their role in language education.

In conclusion, dialogue journal writing holds great promise as a tool for enhancing writing performance and supporting language learners across different educational contexts. By leveraging its adaptability and addressing potential challenges, educators can help students harness the full potential of this method, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes and greater language proficiency.

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