

Title: ‘Knowing your students is the key to their success.’ - Qualitative analysis of learners’ diary texts carried out as a pedagogical approach to improve their literacy skills in English language.

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Abstract: In the research domain of language learning and teaching, qualitative approach provides better insight into learner’s own world of knowledge which can be pertinent for the language educators while designing their pedagogy-plan. Diary writing as an effective tool in language learning enables the students to transform their thoughts and expressions into English words and sentences. It also serves to be a qualitative tool of inquiry by collecting qualitative information written by the learners about their everyday lives and experiences in a log, diary or journal. In addition, teachers learn from students’ diaries about their limitations in writing. Diary studies can discover what teaching strategies students appreciate most and implement them in their teaching. Using diary studies, in the present study, specifically refers to students' own life experiences in English language. The present research reports the diary analysis on understanding learner’s expressive world and literacy issues observed by detecting the challenging areas to facilitate and develop learners' writing abilities. The purpose of this article is to discuss diary texts of the students as texts of self-expression and as a pedagogical method in improving literacy skills in English language of school students of grade four and five from Queen Global International School, based in Delhi. Diary analysis revealed the researcher while working in the same school as a language teacher that the approach was an effective drill in identifying students' particular areas of difficulty and interest, thus leading her to revise teaching methods. Students actively participated in the diary writing project which led them to practice and improve English writing skills. The use of diaries is a strong recommendation by the researcher to language teachers and students for self-expression and improving writing skills in English language.

Keywords: Diary texts, English as second language, Language learning, Qualitative analysis, Literacy skills, Indian students.

Introduction: Diary writing is a phenomenal tool of self-expression in any language. “I can shake off everything as I write, my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn.” an excerpt from the ‘Diary of a Young Girl’ by Anne Frank which is the most famous book, originally published in 1947 from Anne Frank’s diary, who wrote her personal life amidst

the Holocaust, as diary writing became her own open window to the world. Diary writing provides an insight about the diarist's own world and on proficiency of the language used. Therefore, for second language educators, learners' diaries are one method that helps to understand their literacy needs and limitations while expressing their world of thoughts in a second language like English. The method develops 'one-to-one' relationship between the learner and the educator.

For language researchers, the diaries written over a period of time are effective collection of data to study learners' inner minds, motivations, interests, emotions and feelings that are invisible in the classroom. As qualitative tool, diary studies have had a long history of use in English language teaching (Maneekhao and Watson Todd, 2001; Thornbury, 1991; Lowe, 1984). On diary studies, Kathleen M. Bailey (1990) stated that, "documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analyzed for recurring patterns or salient events" (Bailey K., 1990, p.215). Further affirming on diary studies, as per David Nunan "they have been used in investigations of second language acquisition, teacher-learner interaction, teacher education, and other aspects of language learning and use" (Nunan D., 1992, p.118). Jennifer Jarvis in her exploration on using learner diaries with in-service teachers during a short methodology course to help teachers on the role of diaries as a tool of self-reflection stated that "those who succeeded in reflecting on practice, seem also to reveal a heightened sense of their own responsibility for their learning and for changing their teaching. They seem to have more confidence in their own ability to act" (Jarvis J., ELT Journal 1992, p.142).

Review of research work in Diary studies: In the research domain of second language learning or teaching, 'diary study' can be defined as "account of a second language experience as recorded in a first-person journal" (Bailey and Ochsner, 1983, p. 189). The diarist or the diary writer records daily life, happenings, feelings and reactions to his or her own way in the second language known to the writer becomes a self-identity document for introspection. Therefore, the diary studies in the context of second language learning and teaching provides the teachers and teacher-researchers with significant information on the factors that might be contributing and fundamental to second language learning and teaching in a formal classroom setting. On other hand, it creates a platform to look for significant patterns in second language writing. As educational theorist, John Dewey mentions in his book titled 'Experience and Education' (1938), about the role of the teacher in the classroom to promote 'the act of freely thinking, observing and judging'. He believed that

education is not just means of acquiring information, but it's a way to bring learning into our daily activities and behaviors like successful learners would identify problems by reflecting on what they already know, whereas, the less successful learners would need to develop during their learning process with the help of the teacher. This section contains review of previous studies in conducted in diary studies which led to the discussion of the objective, research questions and subsequently towards the methodology part of the present research article.

There has been many investigations for decades with diary studies highlighting learners' affective aspects by using dairies in language learning classrooms. Allison (1998) conducted study focusing on the use of language course diaries as a means of language exploration by learners during English language course at the National University of Singapore. Diary studies offered insights into learners' attitudes towards their own learning. Fry (1988) evaluated diary studies as a research method in second language acquisition (SLA) field and stated, "It is a powerful tool where learners come to trust it as a form of on-going dialogue with their teacher. It is intended to raise levels of consciousness about learning and to lead to teacher-researcher intervention." (Fry, J. 1988, Pg.166)

Diary studies as one of the effective qualitative method have gained popularity for various purposes in language education. As observed by Howell-Richardson and Parkinson (1988), diary studies could be used for pedagogical purposes, course evaluation and basic research. They suggested that in pedagogy, dairies could be used as effective mode of communication between teachers and learners. Bailey (1983), Jarvis (1992) and Parkinson et al. (2003) conducted studies on dairies written by learners. Woodfield & Lazarus (1998) conducted diary studies written by the teachers as learners of a language. Gray (1998) studied interactive dairies written by teachers and learners to help learners to be aware of their learning and by teachers to reflect on their second language teaching methods. He concluded with positive findings which provided the teachers with feedback on their teaching methods. Krishnan and Lee (2002) conducted diary studies in relevance to language course evaluation and founded that learners expressed more anxiety when they moved from their home country to the host country and their learning affected by the change in the learning environment which affirmed that curriculum developers and teachers need to understand learners' needs for successful learning. Jarvis (1992) and Halbach (1999) used dairies to evaluate teacher training course through their learning experiences. Howell-Richardson & Parkinson (1988) did diary studies to explore language learners' feelings outside the class in terms of learning-related anxiety, and what they remember from their class. Kazuko Matsumoto (1987) conducted

classroom based diary studies for English as foreign language learning and teaching in Japan and recommended diary studies as a qualitative method to second and foreign language classroom centered research, “diary study is that it provides a detailed description of "all" aspects of language learning or teaching experience” (Matsumoto, 1987, pg.24). Emphasizing assertively on the strengths of the language learning diary studies as “a holistic investigation of classroom language learning or teaching” and as an explorative methodology it led to explore affective attributes that were influencing language learning process in natural settings of the classroom. Findings of diary studies by Matsumoto were positive as it benefitted the more shy, less- active Japanese learners of English to express themselves and the same holds true in Indian context where shy learners never communicate verbally in the classroom and their learning progress in English language doesn’t get discernibility.

The first diarist-researchers were Schumann and Schumann (1977) who examined their own second language learning experiences in three different learning situations, first while studying Arabic as beginners in Tunisia with formal instruction. Second on learning Persian as intermediate learners in UCLA and then while studying Persian as intermediate learners in Iran. Introspective analysis of their diaries by both authors identified six personal variables of the diarists, like the nesting patterns, desire to maintain one's own language learning agenda, reactions to dissatisfaction with teaching methods, motivation for choice of materials, eavesdropping vs. speaking as a language learning strategy, and transition anxiety, affected the language learning process. (Schumann, F .M. & Schumann, I.H. (1977). *Diary of a language learner: An introspective study of second language learning*. TESOL, pp. 241-249). In 1980, on further self-studies, Francine M. Schumann identified four more personal aspects which had important effects on her language learning in the target language country which were competition vs. cooperation, the disadvantages of being an English-speaking second language learner, the role of the expatriate community in hindering a newcomer's second language learning, and being a woman language learner in Iran. (Schumann, F .M. 1980. *Diary of a language learner: A further analysis*, pp. 51-57).

Kathleen M. Bailey (1980) conducted introspective diary analysis of her language learning experience in a ten-week French reading course at UCLA. She concluded that language learning environment, teaching style, and feedback from the teacher were influential in her second language learning experiences. The diary analysis revealed the importance of the social environment of her language classroom affected her language learning and her attitude towards learning French improved as the social climate in the class improved. The teacher's openness and willingness to

treat the students as her social equals, positively influenced her language learning and increased her enthusiasm to study French. (Bailey K.M., 1980, An introspective analysis of an individual's language learning experience. (pp. 58-65). Bailey (1983) used her self- introspective diary studies to discuss the relationship between two affective factors of competitiveness and anxiety from her language learning diary of her university French classes. In her paper, she concluded that she was highly competitive and highly anxious in the beginning, as she became more proficient than her classmates her anxiety decreased. She compared and discussed ten similar diary studies in terms of the issues of competitiveness and anxiety and proposed the hypothesis that language classroom anxiety can be caused and/or aggravated by the learner's competitiveness when he/she perceives himself/herself as less proficient than the object of comparison. (Bailey, K.M., 1983, Competitiveness and anxiety in adult second language Learning, pp. 67-102).

In her published work, Kathleen M. Bailey (1991) laid importance on discussing different methodological approaches for language learning diary studies. She stated, "The language learning diary studies can be divided into two groups :(1) those in which the diarist and the analyst are the same person, and (2) those in which the researcher analyzes journals kept by other language learners" (Bailey K.M., 1991, pp.65). She cited Matsumoto (1987) given terminologies to these two groups as "introspective" and "non-introspective" diary studies. The popular examples of Introspective (first-person) analysis were the diary studies of Schumann and Schumann (1977, 1980) and by Kathleen M. Bailey (1980, 1983) which has been discussed above. Matsumoto (1987) described diary studies with non-introspective analysis where researcher analyzes the diaries of other language learners providing learner's views and researcher's analytical interpretation based on previous diary studies and learning theories. Recently published work by Nešić and Spasić-Stojković (2017) on language learning diary studies they conducted in the context of English as foreign language by studying linguistic and non-linguistic factors influencing the language learning process through introspection, as a research procedure, the students were told to write their language learning diaries in Serbian to express their thoughts freely. They collected diary entries from 39 students of Business English course in Blace, Serbia. The study used content analysis of the diary texts and was interpreted quantitatively. They concluded that non-linguistic factors influenced the process of learning a language these factors impacted students' willingness to learn the language. Their findings showed that "Students" prior experiences also have an influence on students" future attitudes towards foreign language learning." (Nešić L. & Spasić-Stojković M., 2017). The diary studies provided insight into

learners' difficulties they were facing while learning English and mentioned that, "Students' diaries reflected their preferences as to how they would like to be taught and this is very useful for the teacher who can then design their courses and plan the language classes to fit their students' needs." (Nešić L. & Spasić-Stojković M., 2017, JTESAP, Vol. 5, pp. 529-544).

Methodology

The approach and objective of the present diary study: The present qualitative textual study is based on the non-introspective approach (Matsumoto, 1987) of diary studies of the diary texts written by the young English learners of grades four and five of Delhi based school with objective for the researcher being the English teacher of the same students to read and analyze the expressive-minds of her students through content analysis of individual diary and to evaluate students' writing skills in English language. To encourage free thinking of the young minds and to frame their thoughts into texts, the researcher for the study chose the concept of free diary writing to for her students to practice their writing skills in an open-ended form.

Research questions: The study aims to answer the following two 'questions' from the analysis of students' English language learning diaries: Based on the writing style and content of the students' diaries, (1) How student's identities are getting shaped during diary-writing? (2) What literacy issues were observed that influence student's English language learning process?

Data collection and analysis: The students of grades four and five were provided with fresh new dairies by the researcher-teacher to write their feelings, thoughts, and daily activities in English for eight weeks on everyday basis considering the diary as their best friend in order to facilitate writing skills. They were free to write in any colour, no word limit, and they could decorate their dairies too. The students were instructed about the basic outline of diary writing from their English grammar books. As the purpose of textual analysis is to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in the written texts, twenty students' diaries were collected at the end of eight weeks and the collected diary texts were analyzed qualitatively for their self-expressions that dominantly portrayed their identities, their ways of using English language, grammar and vocabulary. Diary texts paved path for the teacher-researcher to enter her students' world through their written texts. Students participated in the study at their own will and their names being kept private. The images in the subsequent table of analysis and interpretation are selected-excerpts from the data collected of all student-diarists which are original-texts of the students revealing about the diarists' identities by itself.

Analysis and Interpretation of the excerpts from students' diaries:			
	<p>The student diarist expresses to the Diary how the day went and feelings in neat and precise hand writing. Lerner is confused verbs usage in Past tense.</p>		<p>The last narrative line 'love you diary' by the student shows the affective bonding with the diary. The tense are used appropriately in the sentences, except in one line '...i have to decide that to go...'.</p>
	<p>The student diarist likes to write and express happy feelings to the diary with time and date, using appropriate tense forms. Repeated use of 'then'</p>		<p>Creativity in literacy shows learners' interest and connectivity to the learning tasks in & outside the classroom. This colorful image shows freedom of expression.</p>
	<p>The student have used pencils and decorated the Diary. The Diarist expresses feelings and attachment to the diary in cursive writing with day-activities Tense structure perfectly used.</p>		<p>The student diarist used creativity with color pencils to write feelings and day activities in casual writing with 'Yeahhhh.'</p>
	<p>The student portrayed creative identity, symbolized with pride and happiness to the diary with colours. Confidence of expressive writing is visible as student writes, 'India is our life and we have to love it.'</p>		

Findings of Diary studies: Affective explorations: All the students showed close attachment to their diaries and the emotional connectivity was visible from the diarists' texts. The diary texts were in narrative form, like the diarist was talking to the diary everyday. Normal daily routine was

expressed by every student-diarist. The subsequent action in most of the sentence structures was found repeatedly expressed by the word 'then', which showed familiarity with their mother tongue. One student diarist liked reading newspapers, news channels and sharing opinions and future plans with the diary. The notions being lazy and competitiveness with school mates. In spite of the student-diarist confessing to the diary being a slow writer, an optimistic identity was persistent from the diary texts.

Literacy issues observed and remedial measures recommended (1) For most, the written expression had spelling errors with homophones, for example, diarists used 'weekend' for 'weekend'; 'exited' for 'excited'; 'shooping' for 'shopping' (2) The sentence structure showed strong influence of spoken Hindi by the student-diarists. The diary texts portrayed 'Indian English' on similar pattern of Hindi usage in their personal lives. (3) Few examples like, 'saturday' written as 'saterday', 'goen' for 'gone', used 'mendir' for 'mandir', 'mach' for the word 'match'. 'gaste' for 'guest'. 'Yesterday, I get holiday homework"; "I play in phone"; I ready to go in school"; "We went in EDM mall" similar to the way in spoken Hindi. (4) The students had the tendency of translating their home spoken language, Hindi into their English scripts. Their minds maintained duality of Hindi and English. For example, 'diner' was used for 'dinner' as they sound the same for the diarist. Vocabulary enrichment was highly recommended. (5) Clear understanding of regular and irregular verbs was missing, therefore, for few, tense usage was limited to simple present and using past participle in simple past tense, for example, using 'I gone' for 'I went'. Classroom activities with past tense regular and irregular verbs were recommended for the students. (6) For habitual actions of the recent past, the student-diarists have used the words like, I go, I wake up, I sleep repeatedly in simple present form, which were noticed in most of the texts, and therefore, oral and written activities based session using Educomp smart class tool was recommended.

Delimitations of the study: The present study was pedagogical explorative survey which was delimited to qualitative textual analysis to address literacy issues that wouldn't be visible in regular English class. Another objective to explore the minds of young learners through diary studies and to explore by providing the student-diarists to write their own way for seven weeks. The study was confined to the twenty students of grade four and five of Delhi based Queen Global International School.

Conclusion: Conclusively, like diary writing did proved to provide students to practice their writing skills in an open way as it encouraged free thinking of the shy students of the class. It is a

recommended technique to consider by English teachers for their students. The findings of the study agrees well with the strength discussed by Bailey, "...that it sheds light on otherwise unobservable aspects of second language learning or teaching experience, particularly on hidden psychological variables in SLA such as affective factors (e.g., motivation), cognitive style, language learning strategies, decision making, self-esteem, and sources of enthusiasm." (Bailey K., 1983, pp. 72-73). Pedagogical objective of teaching and learning of English as second or foreign language entirely depends on how to connect the learner of any age group with the language.

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