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RECONCEPTUALIZING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE PHILIPPINES: INTERPLAY OF JOURNALING AND EMOTIONS

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Abstract
While language teaching focuses on structural aspects, intricacies of any language come along with schema and emotion. Journaling, recognized as reflective-effective language teaching strategy, augmenting lifelong skills, remains underexplored in its interplay with language and emotions in second language teaching and learning. This phenomenological qualitative research determined the impact of journaling on ESL learners' writing and emotional aspects. Responses of 61 Grade 8 ESL learners from provincial laboratory Science high school in Central Luzon, Philippines, during the Academic Year 2023-2024, were chosen through non-probability sampling method. After a series of in-depth face-to-face interviews guided by a set of 10 validated self-developed guide questions, responses were systematically arranged, coded, analyzed, characterized, and thematically interpreted. Findings reveal that through journaling, ESL learners showed engaging and positive language learning experience. While approaching journal writing tasks, the ESL learners involved a piece of themselves, transcending writing at a personal-academic level rather than structural-technical alone. As ESL learners improved language and emotional skills through journaling, they were still cognizant of being judged by peers and teachers. This research contributes to comprehensive understanding of reflective writing practices in language education, providing evidence-based insights for educators and policymakers to enhance both academic and emotional aspects of ESL learners' experiences.

Keywords: emotions, journaling, language teaching, second language

Introduction
Language learning is realized through an array of reflective practices involving the discovery of linguistic strengths and limitations, thereby transcending the borders of academic and personal learning arenas. With the continuous language learning processes, doors towards improving linguistic capacity and personal confidence on the use of language to communicate are opened to navigate other

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meaningful means to improve (Farrell & Avejic, 2020). Reflective methodologies (Van Velzen, 2016), in this sense, widened both academic and personal tunnels for language learners to find ways where they could flourish while developing a stronger linguistic foundation.

One of the fascinating platforms for learners to nourish their language proficiency is through literature, which fosters the reciprocity of language, emotion, realities, and depth on human experiences. With the intricacies of literary works presented through carefully choosing the language to use, the plot to highlight, and other equally important devices, language learning becomes more meaningful at a certain level. Embedded in the language of literature are wealth of emotions that concatenate second language learners and the literary work, which registers the relevance of language and emotion in the process. With the interrelation of emotion in language learning through literature consumption, there builds the requisite to traverse the relevance of emotion in language education and the pivotal role of English as a second language (ESL) teachers in this respect.

The learners are given the opportunity to learn the language with the supervision of their ESL teachers in the classroom. One compelling yet candid writing technique to build authenticity, language proficiency, metacognition, and self-awareness among learners is through the utilization of journaling, which is suitable to the current demands in the educational system (Villarama et al., 2025; Villarama et al., 2023). In this regard, journaling capitalizes its functionality and purpose to attain a meaningful learning process for ESL learners while acknowledging the presence of barriers towards effectuating educational and personal progress (Alt et al., 2022; Denton, 2018; Griggs et al., 2018). Seeing through its advantageous core, journaling meliorates learners' academic performance and self-awareness through its reflective nature that allows them to assess their individual learning progress while cultivating emotional maturity and stability since they open their hearts and stories along the journaling process while expanding their minds (Barbagallo, 2021; Farrell 2025; Huang et al., 2020; Karnieli-Miller et al., 2021; Szenes & Tilakaratna, 2021). Although others encountered challenges in utilizing "journaling" in academic contexts such as emotional focus and vulnerability of learners, ESL teachers' competence and preparedness, and alignment and appropriateness of lessons and assessment forms (Soodmand Afshar & Farahani, 2018).

Albeit the pertinence of journaling and its thoughtful procedures, there is perennial dearth on scrutinizing the interplay of second language learning and emotions, particularly in countries like the Philippines where English is regarded as a second language. Hence, this research focuses on ESL learners' experiences with journal writing and their emotional responses. The present study examines the influence of journaling on ESL learners' emotions and writing skills, with the objective of contributing to language education through the framework of a critical academic writing routine. In doing so, it draws upon perspectives from reflective practices, language education, and emotional development. The research questions addressed are as follows:

1. What is the impact of journaling on ESL learners' writing skills?
2. What is the effect of journaling on ESL learners' emotional well-being?

Role of journaling in ESL writing sphere

In the advent of innovative ESL teaching strategies, journaling displayed functional linguistic benefits as the undertaking empowered ESL learners to learn the language while stirring their emotional facet (Majchrzak & Ostrogska, 2022). Through constant journaling, ESL learners were exposed to their writing entries that led them to revamp their grammar mistakes; thus, deriving at producing quality write-up and heightening their capacity to self-monitor their language learning (Alharti, 2021).

Hammad (2022) showed that using personal experience journals in language learning not only boosted writing fluency but also reduced learners' anxiety on writing. Avramenko et al. (2018) found that de-emphasis on stringent academic writing rules created an environment that encouraged students to think independently and creatively, which facilitated their personal growth. Indeed, when language learning lacked strict regulations, it fostered creativity, innovation, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Because journaling is reflective, it allowed students to think about their ideas and turn them into clear and organized writing. Research indicated that journaling helped improve overall language proficiency and critical thinking skills in ESL classes (Rana, 2018).

Journaling through emotional spectrum

There had been studies on the use of journal writing to improve writing skills among ESL and EFL learners (Al-Wasy, 2020; Bai & Wang, 2023; Dewi, 2021); however, there remained lack of studies on exploring how journaling could help students express their emotions, relieve stress, and address academic and personal challenges; hence, the present study explored the emotional effects of journaling among high school ESL learners in the Philippines. The study conducted by Skar et al. (2022) during pandemic, explored the impact of journaling on learners' writing skills and mental health where findings revealed journaling served as valuable tool for enhancing writing abilities, while also providing a means to clarify thoughts and express emotions. Improving students' mental well-being through writing exercises like journaling could lead to positive change in emotional state, as mental and emotional aspects of individuals were closely linked (Kim-Godwin et al., 2020; Maclsaac et al., 2022; Ruini & Mortara, 2022).

As early as it is possible to date the stance taken by contemporary researchers on the issues of the contribution of emotions to both emotional well-being and academic performance, it has often been shown that emotions truly make a difference in many ways along the way in any learning process (Doqarini & Heydarnejad, 2023; Jajarmi, 2019; Zhang, 2021). These terms point out quite clearly that emotion is an integral part of education, given that such research brings forth findings of generalizations that pay little attention to how such emotions are handled inside classrooms or pedagogical mechanisms. In this case, the essay writing is really a practicable yet underused technique. In this view, it becomes very important for ESL educators, not only to introduce students to journaling assignments, but also to support students on the way to recognizing, expressing and regulating both felt and hidden emotions during reflective writing (Reed, 2022; Sun et al., 2021). However, such issues need to be taken under closer scrutiny: journaling indeed induces emotional awareness, yet it could completely depend on teacher mediation and the learners' meaningful engagement in the process whether

or not it redirects negative thoughts into optimism and resilience as far as language learning is concerned (Coore, 2022).

The synthesis of prior research highlights journaling as a pedagogical process that promotes language competency and mediates emotional development. However, the literature reveals a gap in investigating the contextual and subtle experiences of ESL learners who reflectively write, especially in areas where cognitive and affective processes are intertwined. This gap emphasizes the need for an approach that embraces observable linguistic advancements, as well as the subjective and often tacit aspects of emotional involvement on the part of the learners. Paying attention to what is written in learners' journals can help to foreground how journaling develops language skills and creates an emotional experience, which affirms a richer understanding of journaling's role in the ESL classroom.

Method

Research design

This research employed phenomenological qualitative research design to explore and analyze the effects of journaling on ESL learners in greater depth. This approach delved into the lived experiences, reflections, and meaning-making processes of high school ESL learners from the Philippines. Through detailed and vivid narratives, it revealed the impact of journaling on language acquisition, self-expression, and learner autonomy within genuine contexts (Creswell et al., 2007).

Participants and context

A non-probability sampling method was utilized for the selection of participants. A provincial laboratory Science high school in Central Luzon, Philippines, implemented journaling as pedagogical approach for all 61 eighth-Grade second language learners, who were coded and identified as R(n), where R stood for respondent and (n) represented the number of respondents in the study. For the Academic Year (AY) 2023-2024, these 61 ESL students were purposely chosen on the merit of their official enrollment in an English composition course.

During the series of face-to-face interviews, the researchers utilized a set of 10 self-developed interview guide questions. These questions focused on two main areas, namely journaling on writing skills and journaling on the emotional aspect. The instrument underwent a thorough review and validation process by a panel of five professionals, including ESL professors, social sciences researchers, and curriculum experts. The respondents were well-informed and willingly agreed to have their face-to-face interviews documented using written and audio recordings.

Data collection and analysis

There was a total of 20 weeks dedicated to ESL writing class interactions during a semester. The journal writing occurred in the second semester of the Academic Year (AY) 2023-2024, with two sections consisting of 61 Grade 8 ESL students who were enrolled in an English writing class. Every week, ESL learners dedicated two hours to language development. During this time, they engaged in journal writing for one hour and participated in voluntary interview sessions for another hour. The implementation balanced the use of guiding questions and free writing. Guiding questions were utilized to scaffold learners' reflections,

particularly for those who experienced difficulty generating ideas in English. Meanwhile, free writing was encouraged to promote creativity, authenticity, and emotional expression. This dual approach was informed by studies such as Hammad (2022), which identified journaling as an effective strategy to reduce anxiety and enhance fluency, and Rana (2018), which highlighted its contribution to the development of critical thinking. Overall, the reviewed literature guided the implementation by emphasizing reflection, flexibility, and emotional regulation as essential principles of effective journaling.

Prior to these activities, approval from the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) Ethics Research Committee (ERC) was obtained with protocol code 2024-070 on January 29, 2024. Necessary forms for parental and guardian consent, child assent, and respondent consent were secured. A series of face-to-face interviews were scheduled, taking into account the availability, willingness, and readiness of ESL learners.

The study focused on identifying noteworthy statements that reflected the journaling experiences of ESL learners. Guided by Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method, to undertake the data with objectivity and impartiality, the researchers bracketed, abrogating any bias and prior apprehension on journaling and on the participants. In four closed-door roundtable sessions led by each researcher, interview-transcripts were read and reviewed carefully to corroborate consistent, credible, and reliable thematic interpretations. Significant statements of the participants that revealed their journaling experiences were extracted and formulated into meanings, which were then clustered into themes exhibiting relevant evidences that shape their authentic experiences. Data cross-checking and triangulation among the researchers and select participants were implemented to guarantee the precision, dependability, and authenticity of information and findings. Following the rigorous procedures, a comprehensive description of the essence of ESL learners' journaling experiences was synthesized, representing the shared meaning of the phenomenon as revealed through participants' narratives. This research did not address other factors such as variations in age, gender, year level, socio-economic status, comparisons among different types of educational institutions (public, private, elementary, secondary, and higher education), or the experiences of ESL teachers who incorporated journaling in their ESL or non-ESL classes.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The study analyzed thematically the influence of journaling on English as a second language (ESL) learners' writing and emotional aspects. Figure 1 shows three (3) major themes with nine (9) sub-themes in total, as the summary of research exploration on the interplay of journaling in language and emotions of ESL learners.

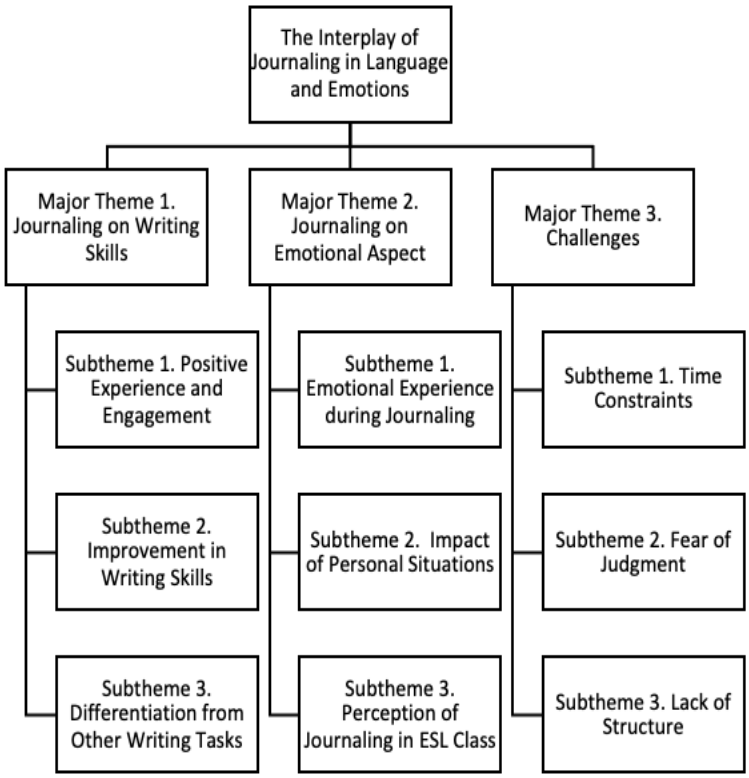


Figure 1. The interplay of journaling in language and emotions

Major theme 1. Journaling on writing skills

With the utilization of journal writing in English as a second language (ESL) classroom, the learners experienced more engaging classroom activities that foster positivity in a language class since they were given the opportunity to express themselves freely through their journal entries. Through the given tasks involving journaling, the respondents admitted that they became more responsible in monitoring their writing progress, which helped in improving their responsible writing skills and independence with consistent writing entries. Further, student-respondents perceived journaling as a refreshing avenue for them to anchor their writing prowess; hence, they considered journaling as far different from other usual writing tasks in ESL class.

> *Journaling expands my vocabulary, which helps me write or speak in English better; likewise, it gives me freedom to write about anything or even in given themes or topics that are simple yet fun activities that I have gotten used to and look forward to doing.* (R8, Interview, Week 2)

While students learned the language structurally and systematically through governing rules and standards, journaling in ESL classroom teaching and learning offers a promising way to engage students into productive discourse (Nückles et al., 2020). Similar to the study of Jarvis and Baloyi (2020), journaling promoted positive avenues to improve language and communication skills, and language confidence among ESL students, which in return lessened their language anxiety and uncomfortability (Jin et al., 2020).

Subtheme 1.1. Positive experience and engagement

Participants consistently highlighted journaling as more than just a writing task, but as a positive and engaging activity. They described it as both enjoyable and straightforward, providing a space to freely express themselves without fear of judgment. This sense of liberation fostered enthusiasm and creativity in their writing, allowing them to break free from the usual constraints of formal writing tasks. Further, ESL students eagerly anticipated their journaling sessions, demonstrating a growing comfort and enthusiasm for the activity. These insights underlined the positive experience and high level of engagement that journaling elicits, suggesting it transcended mere writing practice to become a more meaningful and enjoyable activity in the ESL classroom.

> *I had fun writing in our ESL class because of journaling that is so relaxing in mind and soul. I believe that the tasks given to us are engaging and sincere because the journaling makes us reflect while learning the language and enjoying the process, too.* (R47, Reflective Journal, Week 6)

Journaling is a "rediscovering-self" activity as it served as a self-reflection that led the writers to understand themselves better and a creative expression that gave learners a fulfilling language learning and self-discovery experience (Mardiningrum & Adriyanthi, 2023; Suhardi et al., 2023).

Subtheme 1.2. Improvement in writing skills

The ESL learners credited journaling for improving their writing skills, specifically on spelling and grammar, and organization, noting that it helped them express themselves more fluently in English and expanded their vocabulary. They highlighted increased confidence in articulating thoughts and emotions, along with valuable feedback from teachers that aided in correcting grammar mistakes. These insights highlighted how journaling fostered interactive language acquisition and skill development in the ESL classroom.

> *Through journaling, I found a creative and safe space to improve my writing and speaking skills because I never thought of it as a graded activity but rather a more relaxed and personal undertaking to express freely while expanding my vocabulary.* (R36, Interview, Week 12)

Journaling catered to the needs of ESL learners not only in improving their syntactic knowledge but also in safeguarding their emotional wellbeing (Li & Pei, 2024; Tulomana et al., 2023). The writing tasks provided to students helped them to increase their vocabulary and addressed their emotional concerns, which strengthened the link between a person's language and emotions (Derakhshan & Zare, 2023).

Subtheme 1.3. Differentiation from other writing tasks

The student-respondents appreciated the unique aspects of journaling compared to other writing tasks, as evidenced by excerpts such as freedom to write about anything and no wrong or right answers. They valued the personalized nature

of journaling, where they could express their feelings and thoughts without the pressure of producing correct answers. However, they also acknowledged the potential challenges associated with the lack of structure and guidance, particularly in a formal educational setting. These responses showed the importance of balancing freedom of expression with the need for clear objectives and instructional support to maximize the effectiveness of journaling as a learning tool in the ESL classroom.

> *I manage to enjoy the ESL class with so much freedom to write about anything with no wrong or right answers because I feel that this is far different from our regular writing assignments where grading criteria is set by our teacher.* (R17, Reflective Journal, Week 8)

Rubrics to grade students' writing outputs guided both the ESL and EFL teachers to provide corrective feedback while learners were guided to correct their mistakes; however, through journaling, ESL learners experienced liberating writing tasks that targeted both their language improvement and affective domain (Kessler, 2023; Shafiee Rad & Jafarpour, 2023).

Major theme 2. Journaling on emotional aspect

While journaling improved the writing skills of the ESL learners, they also revealed that through thematic journaling activities, they approached the ESL class as an avenue to release their untold narratives and emotions, which signaled a significant impact on their varied personal undertakings in school and most especially at home. Through journaling, a previous anxiety they felt in ESL class turned to a positive impression since the student-respondents maximized the relevant function of journaling in their language learning.

> *In our ESL class before, I felt tired and pressured when writing, but because of journaling, I felt the fulfillment and sense of achievement because journaling is a very good way to vent out my feelings, which helped me to be awake and motivated, and nervous and excited at the same time.* (R22, Interview, Week 15)

On top of challenging language tasks, without proper guidance and irrelevant writing activities in ESL and EFL classrooms, students developed anxiety and poor writing skills that turned them away from expressing themselves emotionally and intellectually (De los Ríos, 2020). Journaling assisted learners to produce diverse and creative writing outputs as products of their emotional and intellectual commitment to the writing tasks (Nadeem et al., 2024). In consonance with Baharuddin et al. (2022), ESL and EFL students produced enriching and creative writing outputs through journaling that constantly allowed them to draft, edit, rewrite, polish, and finalize their write-up.

Subtheme 2.1. Emotional experience during journaling

Participants described a wide range of emotions experienced during journaling, from happiness and excitement to calmness and nervousness. This emotional engagement reflected the intimate nature of journaling, as participants

explored their inner thoughts and feelings. The excerpts suggested that journaling could also evoke positive emotions, contributing to a sense of accomplishment. Journaling served as a therapeutic outlet for expressing emotions, promoting self-awareness, and enhancing emotional regulation. Participants recognized the profound impact of journaling on their attitudes, emotions, and motivation, highlighting its therapeutic and motivational benefits; however, managing these emotions, particularly negative ones like anxiety or frustration, could present challenges that may affect the quality of writing. Participants may struggle to effectively navigate these emotions, resulting in fluctuations in their writing experiences.

> *I did not feel that I was in a grammar-focused classroom but I felt rather relieved from my emotional baggage by expressing my thoughts and emotions through the use of powerful language tasks like journaling.* (R50, Reflective Journal, Week 10)

Journaling provided a safe space for students' emotions and self-assessment. It was important that ESL teachers provided a safe and comfortable learning environment for their learners to process information and skills. Journaling was additionally considered a coping mechanism for those going through emotional turmoil (Coore, 2022).

Subtheme 2.2. Impact on personal situations

While journaling was often associated with positive emotions such as happiness and enthusiasm, it also evoked negative emotions such as fatigue or emotional intensity. Balancing these emotions is essential for maintaining engagement and ensuring that journaling remained a fulfilling and sustainable practice. Participants' ability to navigate these emotional fluctuations significantly impacted their overall writing experience and their motivation to continue journaling over time.

> *There were episodes when I felt nervous because of my writing tasks; however, I was excited to accomplish them because I knew that my ESL teacher would guide me in expressing my ideas and reflecting on my emotions. At some point as well, I felt tired writing.* (R14, Interview, Week 18)

Learners had various ways to process their emotions like through journaling; however, exhaustion may also appear as a barrier for them to reflectively express and improve their writing skills, especially when ESL learners were confined with numerous academic tasks, which made them feel burdened at some point (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Van Niekerk et al., 2021).

Subtheme 2.3. Perception on journaling in ESL class

The participants' responses revealed a generally positive perception of journaling in ESL classes. They valued its authenticity in written expression and appreciated the personalized feedback from teachers that improved their grammar and language skills. Journaling provided teachers with insights into students'

difficulties, making it academically beneficial and purposeful. However, some participants also found it stressful due to time constraints or a lack of topics to write about. While journaling was seen as a valuable tool for language learning, its implementation should consider students' time and topic availability to minimize stress.

> *I perceive journaling as an authentic written expression that helps me write or speak in English better because whenever I make a grammar mistake, my teacher reads and corrects it that's why for me journaling is also academically and personally purposeful and beneficial but it can be stressful sometimes due to lack of time or topic to write about.* (R61, Reflective Journal, Week 20).

Similarly, Nückles et al. (2020) revealed that journal writing offered an authentic way to assess the writing progress and emotional state of learners. Aside from the language corrective feedback that the ESL teachers provided to their learners, they could also extend their mentoring to the learners who experienced emotional problems as they may had written or shared in their journal entries (Lee, 2020).

Major theme 3. Challenges

Writing is a literacy skill and a complex form of self-expression. It is a form of exhibition of cognitive, visual, conceptual and motor potential (Baharudin et al., 2023). In this connection, ESL learners were expected to encounter various challenges. In fact, journaling revealed positive feedback from the ESL learners; however, as a way to improve the journaling mechanics in ESL classrooms, the learner-respondents shared and identified some challenges and concerns that covered time constraints, fear of judgment, and lack of structured feedback.

> *Writing a journal means sharing some reflections and personal experiences; thus, I am afraid of judgment not only on my language capabilities but also on the things I share about my life. I fear that others may have access to reading my journal entries.* (R52, Interview, Week 7).

Whenever ESL learners engage with writing activities such as journaling, they expected themselves to be critiqued by their ESL teachers to help them improve their writing capabilities but this disappointed learners when structured feedback was not provided to them (Yu et al., 2021). Given the limited time in ESL class, the repetitive and continuous journal writing process stressed ESL learners to accomplish the task and at the same time reflect on (Khezrlou, 2020; Kim et al., 2022).

Subtheme 3.1. Time constraints

Participants' expressions of difficulty due to time constraints resonated with the reality faced by many ESL students. Writing early in the morning or within limited class periods led to fatigue and impacted the quality of writing entries, as indicated by ESL responses. The pressure to produce content within a short time

frame also hindered their reflective and expressive aspects of journaling, restricting the depth and breadth of their writing.

> *There were some journaling episodes in our ESL writing class, when I felt very tired because of having to write very early in the morning and within one hour only.* (R2, Reflective Journal, Week 1).

Students had various learning styles and techniques that involved time management such as using mnemonics for easy memorizing, reading loudly for the retention when reviewing, writing while listening to music or journaling early in the morning. Time restrictions had a substantial impact on ESL students' effectiveness when writing argumentative essays, as highlighted by Fitria et al. (2014), that students who were given an extended period to write would feel more fulfilled since they had more opportunity to proofread and edit their work, which resulted in fewer mistakes.

Subtheme 3.2. Fear of judgment

The fear of judgment, whether from peers or teachers, emerged as a significant barrier to effective journaling. The ESL participants' concerns on making grammatical errors or revealing personal thoughts and emotions reflected the vulnerability inherent in journaling. Phrases such as fearing judgment and worrying about others reading it highlighted the psychological burden participants experienced, which hindered creativity and authenticity in their writing.

> *During our journaling tasks, I was very afraid of judgment from my fellow students who might have read my journal entries. Likewise, I feared that my teacher would feel upset about my grammar mistakes.* (R32, Interview, Week 18).

Fear of judgment and rejection was paralyzing and it could hinder people's growth, stifle their creativity, and deter pursuing their dreams (Matias et al., 2024; Torres et al., 2024). Therefore, ESL teachers should cultivate a more encouraging language learning environment so that their learners would feel safer and more encouraged to share their ideas and feelings while improving their language skills.

Subtheme 3.3. Lack of structured feedback

While the ESL participants valued feedback from teachers, the absence of structured feedback on grammar and written structure was noted as a hindrance. Excerpts below show the importance of clear guidance in facilitating skill development. Without actionable feedback, ESL students struggled to identify and address areas of improvement, leading to frustration and demotivation. Further, without clear objectives or guidance on the purpose of journaling activities, students found it challenging to understand the relevance of the tasks and may feel uncertain about how to approach them. These responses also highlighted the ambiguity students face, which led to disengagement and undermine the effectiveness of journaling as a learning tool. Thus, setting clear expectations and objectives was crucial to guiding ESL students' efforts effectively.

> *Maybe my ESL teacher was very busy at that time because of the work traffic she handled that's why absence of structured feedback was experienced. Additionally, there's no specific guidance on answers such as grammar and structure, which slowed down the overall progress of honing my linguistic abilities.* (R28, Reflective Journal, Week 10).

The role of ESL teachers in the interplay of language and emotions through journaling is important, especially the need to guide the ESL learners in the step-by-step writing processes and the time spent to process their reflection, too. Language ambiguities significantly affected the opportunities for ESL learners to flourish in the ESL classroom (Bensalem & Thompson, 2022; Botes et al., 2020); more so, if there is lack of proper guidance and constant feedback from ESL experts or teachers (Zarei et al., 2020).

Discussion

As positioned in this research, journaling empowered the academic experiences of ESL learners by augmenting their writing capacities, vocabulary development, confidence in using the target language, and emotional facility. These outcomes are evident in the first major theme, where learners reported that journaling created positive and engaging experiences (Subtheme 1.1), improved their writing skills in grammar, spelling, and organization (Subtheme 1.2), and distinguished itself from other writing tasks by offering freedom of expression and reduced anxiety (Subtheme 1.3). Likewise, the reflective nature of journal writing revealed the learners' authentic and vulnerable side, as captured in the second major theme on emotions. Here, participants highlighted journaling as a therapeutic outlet that fostered emotional engagement (Subtheme 2.1), influenced their personal situations both positively and negatively (Subtheme 2.2), and shaped their overall perception of journaling as purposeful yet sometimes stressful (Subtheme 2.3). Finally, the third major theme illuminated the challenges of journaling, where learners emphasized time constraints (Subtheme 3.1), fear of judgment (Subtheme 3.2), and the lack of structured feedback (Subtheme 3.3). These findings point to the dual function of journaling in ESL classrooms: while it enhances language proficiency and emotional expression, its success depends on the presence of teacher guidance, adequate time, and constructive feedback. Comparably, Li and Pei (2024) and Tulomana et al. (2023) revealed that through journaling, ESL learners increased their ability to manage their emotional curb and to discover more about themselves towards the process, which superintended extensive language use in learning and emotional regulation.

In spite of that, journaling in language classrooms does not guarantee openly the advancement of language competencies as far as the writing process is concerned. In this regard, the present findings impugned previous studies that claimed journaling as reflective and self-regulated writing rather than academic, showing that the integration of journal writing exercises in ESL classroom focused more on providing laxed writing class among non-native writers instead of putting forward its strength to foster rich language learning experiences with proper feedback from ESL teachers (Fitria et al., 2014). Without clear and proper scaffolding and guidance from the language teachers, the journaling as a writing

practice may replicate rather than ameliorate anxiety among ESL learners since it was covered by time structure and was challenged by privacy assurance in academic setting as the learners share their authentic and vulnerable sides through the writing process. The difference was linked to situational aspects like teacher scaffolding, learner motivation, and cultural orientations to expressive writing and Filipino ESL learners' group-oriented culture made them sensitive to judgment, which explained their voiced concerns on vulnerability in sharing personal entries in journals.

Moreover, the present findings on the scarcity of time and limited feedback corroborate the observations of Kim et al. (2022) and Yu et al. (2021), who identified excessive workload and ancillary responsibilities as major constraints to the consistent provision of feedback. In the Philippine context, this concern is particularly resonant, as it reflects a prevailing reality among ESL teachers who, despite these challenges, continue to perform their instructional roles with diligence. The results revealed that ESL learners remained deeming for structured rubric to position the learners' entries on standards prescribed by their course, which highly signified that ESL teachers' role prevailed relevant amid the independent nature of journaling. The teachers' presence for their learners in ESL classroom prompted balance on the language learning process and thoughtful characteristic of journaling, which championed authentic, comprehensive, and functional language learning.

To this extent, the current study contributed with its fine-grained representation of journaling as an ambidextrous act, enhancing writing ability while providing an authentic and therapeutic channel for emotion regulation among ESL students. Understanding this interplay helped to explain why the same platform could be empowering for some ESL learners, yet daunting for others. With its drive on interplaying language and emotion through journaling, this research serves as benchmark-guide for language educators, curriculum experts, and policy-makers towards an informed decision to further explore the theoretical and academic potential of journaling as positioned in ESL education.

Conclusion

This study investigated journaling as used by ESL teachers for ESL learners in the Philippines, which emphasized the balanced and positive effects of journaling on writing ability and emotional well-being of learners. While the ESL learners gained improvement on their writing skills, significant development was likewise observed in terms of the contents they produced. Equally, emotional benefits and challenges during journaling sessions transpired while journaling was realized as an interactive and innovative way for ESL teachers to increase the creativity, self-expression, and language learning experience of their learners. Other difficulties were experienced, which ranged from a lack of time, to worrying on potential judgment from others, and the need for concrete and timely feedback from ESL teachers.

While the study was based on self-reported reflections and interviews, to maximize the benefits of journaling, this research recommends integrating journal writing as regular component in the ESL curriculum rather than an exercise that appears in class randomly. In addition, the results were not readily generalizable because of the small sample size and the single-institution nature of the present study; thus, future studies should employ mixed-methods, with a wider pool of ESL

populace, and explore long-term impact of journaling, which investigates digital journaling platforms, including teacher-moderated feedback mechanisms to further understand the impact of the journaling experience on the academic and emotional well-being of the learners.

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