

**A Program Based on Empathetic Stories to
Develop EFL Second Cycle of Basic
Education Students' Writing Fluency and
Affective Empathy**

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to design a program based on a series of empathetic stories to enhance preparatory stage students' writing fluency and affective empathy. The study commenced with a review of relevant literature and previous studies related to empathetic stories, writing fluency, and affective empathy. Based on the findings of the literature review, the researcher adopted the quasi-experimental study design and developed a tailored instructional program along with the necessary tools to measure learners' progress. These instruments included a writing fluency rubric, a pre-post writing test, and an empathy questionnaire. The study sample consisted of 20 students whose first language was Arabic. They were enrolled in a pre-intermediate English level and participated in a 12-session program, attending one two-hour session per week. Learners' performance was assessed through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The statistical analysis of the learners' scores on the pre- and post-tests, in addition to the qualitative evaluation of their written work, demonstrated a clear improvement in the learners' writing fluency and affective empathy. The findings underscore the effectiveness of integrating empathetic stories into EFL instruction as a means of fostering both linguistic development and emotional awareness.

Keywords: Empathetic Stories, Writing Fluency, Affective empathy, Egypt.

برنامج فى القصص القائمة على التعاطف لتنمية الطلاقة الكتابية والتعاطف الوجداني باللغة الانجليزية لدى تلاميذ الحلقة الثانية من التعليم الاساسي

الملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تصميم برنامج قائم على مجموعة من القصص التعاطفية لتعزيز الطلاقة الكتابية والتعاطف الوجداني لدى طلاب الحلقة الثانية من التعليم الأساسي. بدأت الدراسة بمراجعة الأدبيات ذات الصلة والدراسات السابقة المرتبطة بالقصص الوجدانية والطلاقة الكتابية والتعاطف الوجداني. وبناءً على نتائج هذه المراجعة، اعتمدت الباحثة المنهج شبه التجريبي، وطوّرت برنامجاً تعليمياً موجهاً إلى جانب الأدوات اللازمة لقياس تقدم المتعلمين. وقد شملت هذه الأدوات قائمة رصد لمهارات الطلاقة الكتابية، واختباراً قبلياً وبعدياً للكتابة، ومقياساً للتعاطف. تكونت عينة الدراسة من (20) طالباً لغتهم الأم هي العربية، وكانوا ملتحقين بمستوى ما قبل المتوسط في اللغة الإنجليزية، وشاركوا في برنامج تدريبي مكون من (12) حصة، بواقع حصة أسبوعياً مدتها ساعتان. تم تقييم أداء المتعلمين باستخدام الأسلوبين الكمي والكيفي. وقد أظهرت النتائج الإحصائية لدرجات الطلاب في الاختبارين القبلي والبعدي، بالإضافة إلى التقييم الكيفي لأعمالهم الكتابية، وجود تحسن واضح في كل من الطلاقة الكتابية والتعاطف الوجداني لدى الطلاب. وتؤكد النتائج فاعلية دمج القصص الوجدانية في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية كوسيلة لتعزيز التطور اللغوي والوعي العاطفي معاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القصص الوجدانية، الطلاقة الكتابية، التعاطف الوجداني، مصر.

Introduction

English has become a vital global language, increasingly used across non-English-speaking countries as a tool for communication, academic achievement, and professional advancement. In today's interconnected world, the ability to use English effectively is no longer optional — it is essential. As a result, English has become a cornerstone of modern communication in diverse areas of life. Among the four core language skills, writing holds particular importance for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it fosters expression, critical thinking, and engagement in academic and professional contexts.

Despite the global emphasis on learning English, many EFL learners continue to face serious challenges in developing their writing abilities. According to William et al. (as cited in Abdalkader, 2023), these difficulties often stem from outdated teaching methods that fail to address learners' real-world needs. Traditional approaches tend to focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary in isolation, with little connection to authentic contexts. This often leads to demotivation and a lack of meaningful progress, particularly in writing, which requires both linguistic and cognitive engagement.

Writing is a fundamental competency that transcends various aspects of life, not only because it is important for effective

communication, both personally and professionally, but it also allows individuals to express their thoughts, convey ideas, and share information in a clear and organized manner. It plays a vital role in academic success, career advancement, and personal growth.

Writing fluency is defined as writing with accuracy and speed (Johnson & Street, 2013, as cited in Ali, 2018). It is also defined as “the act of writing the maximum number of language units in a short period of time while also paying attention to accuracy, the coherent and consistent organization of ideas within the text, and the usage of words and sentences in a complex manner.”

While developing writing fluency is essential for EFL learners, achieving it often requires more than practicing linguistic forms or following structured models. Writing is a deeply personal and expressive act that draws not only on cognitive and linguistic resources but also on emotional engagement (Dörnyei, 2005; Hyland, 2016). This is particularly relevant in foreign language contexts, where learners may struggle with confidence, idea generation, or meaningful self-expression (Harmer, 2007). One way to address these challenges is by fostering affective connections within the learning environment. In this regard, empathy emerges as a powerful catalyst. When learners are emotionally invested—when they can relate to others’ experiences, feelings, and perspectives—they are more likely to

write with authenticity, depth, and fluency (Mercer, 2016; Arnold & Fonseca, 2004). Empathy thus offers an important bridge between emotional awareness and expressive language use, and one of the most effective ways to nurture empathy in the classroom is through the use of stories that invite reflection and emotional resonance (Nikolajeva, 2014; Cooper, 2011).

Empathy is usually experienced when we become aware of others, experiencing difficult situations that in turn have an emotional influence on us (Gill et al., 2018). Empathy is the human characteristic of connecting and responding to another's distress. When we are aware of the challenges of other people, we will be able to connect to their emotions and awareness will occur.

Empathy with others is necessary as the modern society has become materialistic and dominated by stereotyped views and lack of empathy communication. The ability to understand and emotionally connect with others' experiences fosters not only healthier human relationships but also more compassionate societies. Affective empathy involves both recognizing others' emotions and responding to them with appropriate care or concern.

In the field of education, nurturing empathy among students has been associated with enhanced peer interactions, greater emotional intelligence and increased academic motivation. Empathetic learners are more likely to be thoughtful communicators and responsible citizens who consider diverse

perspectives in both their writing and verbal discourse. This capacity often develops through exposure to others' lived experiences—particularly through hearing or narrating personal stories—which can trigger empathetic responses and motivate positive and supportive actions toward others. At its core, empathy involves two essential components; sensitivity to the emotions of others and the ability to visualize and internalize experiences that are not directly one's own.

The main idea behind using empathetic stories in instruction is to present students with narratives that foster empathy and promote human values, encouraging reflection on the feelings and experiences of others. Teachers introduce these stories through various media, such as videos and images, to illustrate key concepts and stimulate engagement. Learners then explore the stories collaboratively, employing peer and cooperative learning strategies to support one another, identify important vocabulary, and deepen their understanding. The teacher facilitates this process by providing necessary vocabulary, guiding brainstorming sessions to help students generate ideas, and encouraging them to select appropriate language for their writing.

While writing fluency and affective empathy may appear distinct, integrating them in the language classroom can produce meaningful learning outcomes. Writing, especially when personal or narrative in nature, offers a powerful medium for students to explore emotions, consider others' experiences, and express

compassionate viewpoints. By engaging in tasks such as empathetic storytelling or reflective writing, learners not only develop fluency but also deepen their emotional awareness. This dual focus fosters both linguistic competence and human connection—key aims in 21st-century education. The current study, therefore, investigates how empathetic storytelling, which combines visual, emotional, and narrative elements, can enhance both writing fluency and affective empathy in preparatory stage students.

Context of the Problem

Despite the importance of writing fluency, it is not given sufficient attention in our Egyptian schools. Learners need to build up their writing fluency in a way that enables them to express themselves and use their imagination and their prior knowledge to generate ideas and produce a well-written composition.

Amer (2003, as cited in Ali, 2018) referred to the Egyptian learners' writing problem, saying: "While I was teaching Egyptian students English as a foreign language, I noticed that almost all the students did not know how to write any subject they were asked to write, they start by saying sentences like "I do not know Where to start?" Besides, "Words do not come when I need them" - I do not know what to write; "I always go for hours without writing a

word” All these expressions were common among middle school students.

This challenge is not only reflected in the literature but also resonates with the researcher’s classroom observations. The researcher observed this issue through her professional experience as an EFL teacher. It was evident that many students struggled to generate original ideas, often relying on memorized fixed expressions to structure their writing. Phrases such as “There’s no doubt that...” or “No one can deny that...” were frequently used to begin written tasks, resulting in formulaic writing with limited variety in language and ideas. This dependency on set expressions hindered students’ ability to write fluently and creatively, and restricted their capacity to develop content in a natural, cohesive manner.

The Pilot Study

Pilot study on fluency

To further investigate and confirm the problem, the researcher administered a writing test to a group of preparatory stage learners (n=10) for the academic year 2022/2023. The students were asked to write about any topic they preferred including:

Their favourite hobby/ Pets/ or The best TV show

The researcher analysed the results according to the following components of writing fluency (the ability to generate ideas, choice

of the appropriate words, and avoidance of repetition and redundancy). The results as follows:

- 80% of the students were unable to write a coherent paragraph with a good sequence of ideas.
- 80% of students lacked basic components of writing fluency such as spontaneity, speed and flow of various ideas.
- 90% of students lacked the ability to plan or organize their thoughts before writing.
- 70% of students repeated their sentences, vocabulary and ideas.
- 75% of students were not able to use much vocabulary, nor choose words appropriate for the topic.
- Most students could not express their thoughts nor their feelings and could not reflect on their personal interests and experiences.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no Egyptian study attempted to address the problem of EFL learners' lack of writing fluency through the use of empathetic stories. Therefore, there is a clear need for the current study.

Pilot study on empathy

To complement the writing fluency results, a diagnostic questionnaire was administered to the same group of students

(n=20) to assess their affective empathy. The four situational items were adapted from Afifi (2022) and presented common social scenarios (e.g., a friend sharing a family problem), each followed by three possible responses. The most empathetic option varied across items to avoid patterned responses. Each choice was classified as indicating high, average, or below-average empathy. Students were asked to select a response and justify their choice in writing. Most answers were vague or action-focused, showing little emotional awareness. For example, one student wrote, *“I would tell them do not think about it”* while another wrote *“I would try to help,”* without acknowledging the other person’s feelings.

The results revealed that:

- 10% of students (n=2) demonstrated high empathy by choosing the most empathetic options and supporting them with emotionally aware explanations.
- 30% (n=6) showed an average level, acknowledging the situations but offering limited support.
- 60% (n=12) showed below-average empathy, often minimizing or overlooking others’ emotions (e.g., *“He is free to do what he wants”* or *“It is just a joke”*).

These findings confirmed that the majority of students struggled not only with writing fluency but also with expressing empathy in English, reinforcing the need for an

instructional program that integrates both language and emotional development through empathetic stories.

Statement of the Problem

Based on the aforementioned evidence and supporting arguments, the problem of the study is identified as the weakness of EFL second cycle of basic education students' in writing, which negatively affects writing fluency. This may be due to the use of conventional teaching methods and the students' lack of affective empathy. Adopting empathetic stories may stimulate students' interest to produce, generate and write ideas effectively through being aware of other people's affective and cognitive states.

Despite the recognized importance of writing as a key skill in English language learning, second preparatory EFL stage students, aged 14, enrolled in a language course at the British Council continue to struggle with producing fluent and coherent written texts. This persistent difficulty highlights a notable weakness in writing fluency, evident in their limited ability to generate, organize, and express ideas in a smooth and meaningful manner. In addition to this linguistic limitation, students also demonstrate a deficiency in affective empathy, which appears to hinder their emotional engagement with writing tasks and their capacity to relate to diverse perspectives

Study Questions

This study attempted to answer the following main question:

“How can a program based on empathetic Stories be used to develop EFL Second Cycle of Basic Education Students’ Writing Fluency and Affective Empathy?”

This study attempted to answer the following main question:

“What is the effect of a program based on empathetic Stories on developing EFL Second Cycle of Basic Education Students’ Writing Fluency and Affective Empathy?”

To answer the above main question, the following sub-questions were also answered:

1. What is the existing level of the students’ writing fluency and affective empathy?
2. What are the necessary and appropriate components of writing fluency for EFL students in the second cycle of basic education?
3. What are the suitable dimensions of affective empathy for EFL students in the second cycle of basic education?
4. What are the characteristics and the principles of a program based on the use of empathetic stories to promote students’ writing fluency and affective empathy?

5. To what extent does the program affect EFL second cycle of basic education students' writing fluency and affective empathy?

Hypotheses of the study

In order to investigate the study problem, the study tested the following hypotheses:

1. There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants in the pre-test and post-test of the overall writing fluency test in favor of the post-test.
2. There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the study participants' pre-post responses of the affective empathy scale in favor of the post-implementation.
3. There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study participants' pre-post responses in each dimension of the affective empathy scale in favor of the post-implementation.
4. This study holds significance for students, teachers, and curriculum developers.

Significance of the Study

For students, it seeks to:

- Enhance writing fluency.
- Foster affective empathy through empathetic stories.
- Increase engagement and motivation by connecting emotionally with story characters.

For teachers, it aims to:

- Support the integration of writing and empathy in instruction.
- Raise awareness of the value of empathetic stories.

For curriculum developers, it aims to:

- highlight the potential of empathetic stories to create holistic, learner-centered EFL programs that combine language learning with social and emotional growth.

Literature review

English language fluency is one of the most important aims of language learning. According to Jones (as cited in Abdalkader, 2022), fluency can, furthermore, be described as being able to string words together, like pearls on a chain, into sentences and make them comprehensible. In other words, it is a meaningful flow of words. Tavakoli et al., (as cited in Abdalkader.2022) explained that there has been an increasing amount of research over the past decades on language fluency due to its significant role in developing communication abilities and its significant contributions to the assessment of learners` proficiency. .

Fluency is the construct that captures the ability to produce language quickly and without substantial hesitations. Most research on fluency has been done on oral language, while the

fluency of text production has historically received less attention. (Dux, 2020)

The term of ‘fluency’ according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary is “the quality of being able to speak or write a language, especially a foreign language, easily and well” and ‘the quality of doing something in a smooth and skilful way.

Writing fluency has always been one of the most difficult writing abilities. It requires learners to write smoothly as the ideas flow through their minds. Even if they are asked to write freely without paying attention to spelling and grammar, they have difficulty putting their thoughts and feelings down because of a lack of vocabulary knowledge, writing practice and reading (Ali, Van Gederen, and Oastda, as cited in Afifi, 2022).

Empathy is not only a vital skill for individual learners but also a cornerstone for nurturing a more just, compassionate, and cooperative society. By enabling individuals to understand and relate to the emotions of others, empathy lays the foundation for peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and collaborative problem-solving. Empathetic individuals are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, such as helping, sharing, and supporting others, which contribute to stronger communities and ethical citizenship (Decety & Cowell, 2014). In a world facing increasing social and cultural divisions, empathy serves as a bridge that connects diverse perspectives and promotes dialogue over

conflict. As Rifkin (2009) argues, expanding empathy beyond the individual and local to the global and collective is essential for humanity's survival and the development of a more inclusive, sustainable future.

Within the rich landscape of educational research in Egypt, a critical concern consistently highlighted by scholars such as Ali (2018), El-Sayed (2019), Ibrahim (2019), Farouk and Atallah (2019), Rafeeq (2020), and Afifi (2022) is the persistent weakness in students' writing fluency within EFL contexts. Their findings consistently point to significant deficiencies in crucial components such as idea generation, textual accuracy, and overall coherence among Egyptian learners. This substantial body of work establishes the foundational problem for the present study, providing robust empirical evidence of writing fluency gaps in the local educational setting. Consequently, these studies underscore the pressing demand for innovative instructional approaches capable of addressing these weaknesses effectively.

While acknowledging this groundwork, the present research—"A Program Based on Empathetic Stories to Develop the Second Cycle of Basic Education EFL Students' Writing Fluency and Affective Empathy"—seeks to extend this line of inquiry through its unique pedagogical focus and integrated objectives. The central distinction lies in its strategic use of empathetic stories. These are not merely general literary narratives but specially selected or crafted texts designed to evoke emotional

connection and foster empathy. By engaging deeply with characters' experiences and emotions, students are encouraged to relate these narratives to their own lives. This emotional and experiential resonance serves as a strong motivator, turning story engagement into a genuine springboard for self-expression and reflective writing, thereby enhancing fluency. Unlike previous interventions that focused primarily on cognitive or linguistic dimensions, this study foregrounds emotional engagement as a direct catalyst for writing fluency.

Students experience a range of emotions such as happiness, anger, anxiety, boredom, and intimidation while they attain new information, take exams, or deal with their peers. Learning about empathy is crucial for students because it helps students to connect emotionally with others. By empathizing with their peers, students can better understand their struggles, offer support, and build stronger relationships. This promotes a positive atmosphere for learning, reduces stress, and enhances overall well-being. Learning about empathy is also essential for teachers at the same time. Teachers are always required to understand their students' emotions, read them, channel them into something useful, and handle difficult situations. For that, raising students' awareness of being empathetic is vital to help learners be less self-centric, and think of and feel for others. It also builds communication and understanding between one another.

Empathy can be defined as ‘The ability and tendency of a person (observer) to understand what another person (target) is thinking or feeling in a given situation.’ (Zoll & Enz, 2010)

Empathy is a subjective responsive human emotion to the telling (or observing) of another’s challenging experience. Empathy is experienced as an “involuntary and unselfconscious merging with another’s feelings” (Hsiao et al., 2013, p. 166).

Humans are social beings; relationships are sought because it is a part of our human nature, our “coding,” and our natural desires. Empathy, I argue, is the core to every affective human relationship. The ability to relate, to feel another’s emotions, or to understand another’s perspective is crucial to successfully navigating social interactions. We as humans thrive on mutual expression, a natural exchange of ideas or emotions, and more specifically, on learning about the significance of our narratives, our stories, and our lives. Learning this is about how stories subtly mold our lives through our “beliefs, behaviors, ethics--how it powerfully modifies culture and history” and how we possess a “set of brain circuits--usually brilliant, sometimes buffoonish--force narrative structure on the chaos of our lives.” By interacting in varied ways with the stories that have filled individuals, books, and humanity to the brim with comedy, romance, and every variety of genre in between, I believe humans experience increased empathetic ability. (Floews, 2014)

Affective empathy relates to the process where emotions in the observer emerge due to the (conscious or unconscious) perception of internal states in a target (either emotions or thoughts and attitudes). Affective empathy thus can be the result of cognitive empathy, but can also grow out of the perception of expressive behaviour that immediately transfers emotional states from one individual to another (emotional contagion). In this case, qualitatively highly similar affective states are evoked in the observer, resulting from a direct link or transfer of emotional states between individuals through verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal cues. This link serves the biological function of fostering social identity and adaptation to the group, e.g. when it is vital for a herd of animals to react quickly to a predator that is only detected by one or few members of the group.

Writing can be challenging for students because it requires organizing thoughts, expressing ideas, and using proper grammar. Sometimes, students may struggle with gathering ideas or finding the right words to convey their thoughts. In addition, students sometimes find writing difficult because they are unable to imagine situations. This usually happens due to various reasons such as their limited exposure to different experiences, lack of confidence or feeling restricted by rules and expectations. To help them overcome this, engaging them in stories that tackle everyday situations and human emotions is likely to spark their creativity and unlock a world of ideas and bring writing to life. As we delve

into the realm of writing fluency, we discover that it does not only enhance individuals' ability to communicate effectively but also fosters a deeper sense of empathy. When fluency is developed in expressing our emotions and thoughts through writing, we gain the power to connect with others on a more profound level. By nurturing both writing fluency and empathy, we unlock the potential to create impactful stories that resonate with readers and promote understanding in an increasingly diverse world.

By analysing and discussing empathetic stories, students learn to put themselves in someone else's shoes, which is crucial for developing strong writing skills. As students go through the emotions and experiences of the characters, they become better equipped to express those emotions and experiences through their writing.

Teaching the students stories that encourage their empathy to fall into place will help them apply empathy in their writing and encourage their flow of ideas. Empathy will evoke the students' feelings and create a connection between them and the characters. Moreover, when empathy is developed, students' writing will be enhanced accordingly because they will get to understand different settings, cultures, time periods, different perspectives and emotions. As a result, they will be able to create relatable and engaging stories. Empathy plays a vital role in fuelling the students' imagination and creativity and will allow them to connect with the characters on a deeper level.

Teachers can also provide writing prompts that prompt empathy, encourage students to share personal experiences and provide constructive feedback that helps students develop their writing skills while nurturing their creativity. By the teacher's guidance and encouragement, students will be inspired to explore their imagination and cultivate empathy in their writing.

Method

The study employed the quasi-experimental one-group pre–posttest design with a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative assessments. This design was selected to identify changes in participants' performance before and after implementing the empathetic stories program. Quantitative analysis involved comparing pre- and post-test results on writing fluency and affective empathy using a writing fluency test and an affective empathy scale. Qualitative analysis included examining writing samples from the pre- and post-tests and reflecting on the researcher's observations of students' comments and interactions during program sessions. The study was conducted at the British Council, Nasr City, Egypt, during the 2022/2023 academic year.

The participants were 20 students ($N = 20$) from the second year of the second cycle of basic education, aged 14 years old. They attended twelve weekly two-hour sessions over three months. The program's objectives were to enhance writing fluency, expand vocabulary, strengthen grammar, improve

emotional expression, encourage creative and confident writing, and foster a supportive environment for peer feedback and collaboration. The first session served as an orientation, while the remaining sessions integrated pictures, videos, questions, and stories selected to match learners' needs and interests, supplemented by home assignments and online work.

The instruments of the Study

The instruments of the current study included:

- The writing fluency skills checklist,
- The pre-post writing fluency test,
- The writing fluency rubric and,
- The affective empathy scales.

Data Analysis

Results of the study

The results of the study were fulfilled through answering the study main question which is “**What is the effect of empathetic Stories on the EFL Second Cycle of Basic Education Students’ Writing Fluency and Affective Empathy?**” In doing so, the study’s hypotheses were investigated.

The first hypothesis

The first hypothesis stated that “There is a statistically significant difference at the significant level of 0.05 between the mean scores of the study participants on the pre and the post-test

with regard to the development of their writing fluency as a whole and to each separate component in favor of the post-test scores.”

These results are clarified in Table 1:

Table 1: Results to detect the significance of the differences between the mean rank scores of the study group in the pre- and post-test of the writing fluency

N=20, and df=19.

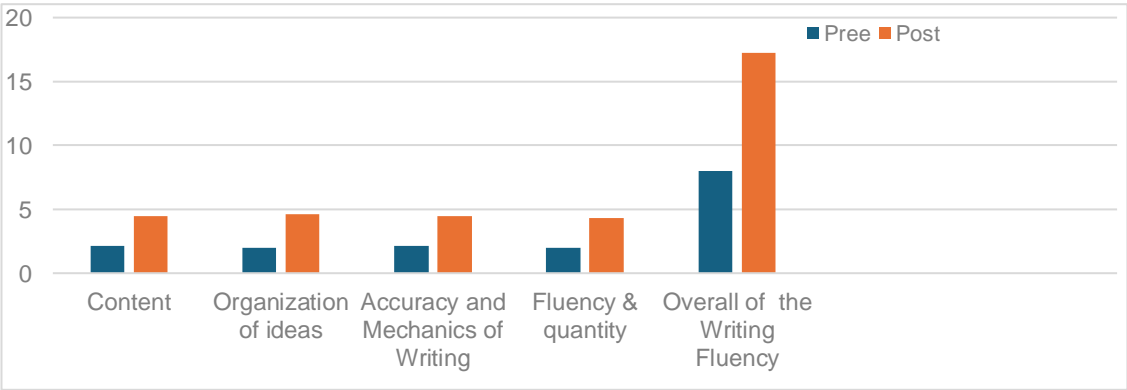
Components	Ranks	Number (N)	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	mean		Std. Deviation		Z - value	Sig.
					PREE	POST	PREE	POST		
I- Content	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	2.15	4.45	0.76	0.6	3.978	0.001
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
II- Organization of ideas	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	2.01	4.60	0.8	0.72	4.022	0.000
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
III- Accuracy and Mechanics of Writing	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	2.10	4.5	0.75	0.73	4.011	0.000
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
V. Fluency & quantity	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	2.00	4.29	0.99	0.79	3.880	0.005
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
Overall of	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	8.00	17.65	1.73	1.23	3.939	0.001

Writing Fluency	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
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The significance level (sig.), for the total writing fluency score and all sub-skills was found to be less than 0.01. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-test (overall and sub-skills) at the 0.01 level of significance.

This figure illustrates the difference between the learners’ mean scores on the pre and post-test of the writing fluency.

Figure 1: The differences between the learners’ mean scores on the pre- and post-test regarding the writing fluency components and the overall writing fluency



The second hypothesis

The second hypothesis stated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean ranks of the research

group's students in the pre and post-test applications of the affective empathy scale as a whole and across its different dimensions in favor of the post-application.

The following table shows the results obtained in this regard:

Table 2: Significance of the differences between the mean ranks of the study group's scores in the pre- and post-applications of the empathy scale.

(n=20, degrees of freedom=19)

Components	Ranks	Number (N)	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	mean		Std. Deviation		Z – value	Sig.
					PREE	POST	PREE	POST		
Suffering	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	16.4	36.80	4.37	1.54	3.924	0.001
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
2. Responsive Crying	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	6.3	13.80	1.78	1.24	3.933	0.001
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
3. Emotional Attention	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	9.45	17.95	2.52	1.24	3.927	0.001
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
4. Feel for Others	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	7.2	17.75	2.42	1.41	3.925	0.001
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
5. Emotional Contagion	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	5.1	8.85	1.86	0.67	3.937	0.001
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						
6. Positive Sharing	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	13.25	23.1	3.61	1.74	3.926	0.001
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						

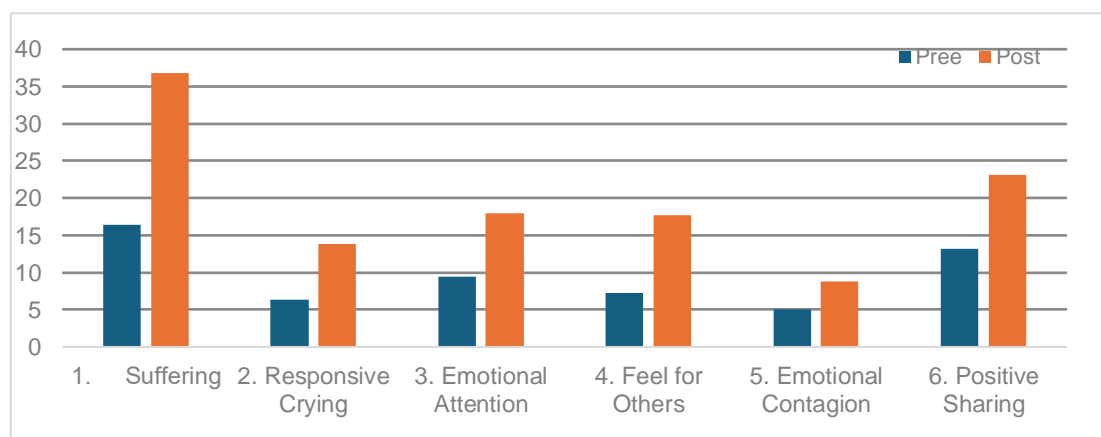
Overall of the Empathy scale	Positive Ranks	20	10.50	210.00	57.7	118.25	9.19	3.6	3.922	0.001
	Negative Ranks	0	0.00	0.00						

The table also shows that the positive ranks are 20, while ties and negative ranks are zero. This means that the scores of all 20 students in the research group increased in the post-application compared to the pre-application, with no student having equal or lower scores.

Moreover, the significance level (sig.) in empathy as an overall score and across each dimension is less than 0.01. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-application of the empathy scale, both overall and in each dimension, at the 0.01 level.

The following chart presents the differences in the mean rank scores of the research group students in the pre and post-applications of the empathy scale.

Figure 2: The differences between the learners' mean scores on the pre- and post-applications of the empathy scale



Measuring the effectiveness of using empathetic stories

To verify the effectiveness of using empathetic stories in enhancing writing fluency and empathy among preparatory stage students, the Corrected Gain Ratio (as defined by Ezzat Abd El-Hamid, 2013, p.28) was used. The relationship is given by the following formula:

$$CEG_{ratio} = \frac{M_2 - M_1}{P - M_1} + \frac{M_2 - M_1}{P} + \frac{M_2 - M_1}{M_2}$$

Where:

- CEG ratio = Corrected Gain Ratio
- M1 = Pre-test mean
- M2 = Post-test mean
- P = Maximum possible score on the test

Interpretation

- If the corrected gain ratio is less than 1.5, the program is considered ineffective.
- If the corrected ratio is greater than 1.5, but less than or equal 1.8, the program has moderate effectiveness.
- If the corrected gain ratio is greater than 1.8, the program is considered effective.

The following table presents the corrected gain ratio values achieved by the research group in each of the writing fluency and the empathy test, according to the corrected gain formula by Ezzat.

Table 3: The mean scores of the group students in the pre- and post-application of both the writing fluency test and the affective empathy scale, and the adjusted gain ratio according to Ezzat

Test	Maximum score	The mean score		Corrected Gain Ratio (Ezzat)	Significance
		Pre-test	Post-test		
Writng Fluency	20	8.00	17.65	1.81	Effective
Empathy	130	57.7	118.25	1.82	Effective

As this table shows, it is evident that the corrected gain ratios calculated using Ezzat’s formula for both writing fluency

and empathy among second-year preparatory students in the research group are greater than 1.8. This indicates that using empathetic stories is highly effective in developing both writing fluency and empathy among second-year preparatory students.

Thus, The answer to the fourth research question, which states: “How effective are the empathetic stories in developing writing fluency and affective empathy among preparatory students?” has been addressed.

The empathetic stories program

The purpose of the program

The proposed program was designed to develop the EFL second cycle of basic education students' writing fluency and enhance their affective empathy through adopting a program based on empathetic stories.

The objectives of the program

This program is expected to:

- Enhance students' writing fluency by engaging them in the process of writing empathetic stories.
- Develop students' vocabulary and language skills through exposure to a variety of words, expressions, and grammar structures in the context of empathetic stories.

- Improve the students' ability to effectively convey emotions and experiences through their written narratives.
- Encourage students to express their thoughts and ideas creatively and confidently in their writing.
- Cultivate a positive and supportive writing environment that encourages students to take risks and explore their own unique writing style.
- Provide students with opportunities for peer feedback and revision to strengthen their writing skills and promote collaborative learning.

Description of the program

The program consisted of twelve sessions. The first session of the program was an orientation session during which the researcher tried to introduce the whole program to the learners. By the end of this session, the learners were expected to have an overall idea about the program and the different roles that they were expected to play. The following sessions integrated different activities that contained pictures, videos, questions and stories, were introduced to urge EFL learners to think, write, empathize and reflect on their writing. The learners' interests and needs were considered while choosing the activities.

Throughout the program, the teacher serves as a guide and facilitator, encouraging thoughtful reflection and discussion. The impact of these activities is expected to be reflected in students'

writing, contributing to the development of writing fluency. This includes improvements in meaning-making, sentence structure and self-expression. In addition, students expand their vocabulary, learn to select appropriate words, construct accurate sentences, integrate diverse ideas, avoid redundancy or exaggeration, and connect their writing to real-life contexts through idea generation and collaborative learning.

In addition to fostering empathy and enhancing writing fluency among students, the impact of using empathetic stories in the classroom extends beyond the learners themselves. Through this process, teachers also gain deeper insights into how their students perceive the world, how they process emotions, and how they express empathy through language. Such understanding allows teachers to tailor their instructional approaches more effectively and to build stronger, more empathetic relationships with their students. Moreover, empathetic stories can be combined with a range of active learning methods and performance-based pedagogies, including drama, collaborative discussions, and future-oriented workshops. These activities not only enrich the learning experience but also provide additional opportunities for both students and teachers to engage with diverse perspectives and deepen their emotional understanding.

Duration of the program

The program contained 12 sessions, two hours a week each. The program lasted for three months. The total of the program's duration also included home assignments and online work.

Content of the program.

The program was designed to enhance students' writing fluency and affective empathy through twelve sessions built around carefully selected empathetic stories. The stories addressed themes such as inclusion, kindness, bullying, resilience, and perspective-taking, and were presented in varied formats, including short videos, narrative texts, and visual prompts. Selection criteria emphasized emotional depth, moral value, cultural relevance, and linguistic appropriateness for pre-intermediate learners, with adaptations made to match students' proficiency levels.

Each story was introduced with lead-in questions and visual aids to activate prior knowledge and foster engagement. Key vocabulary and idiomatic expressions were pre-taught to support comprehension. Activities included predicting events, discussing characters' feelings, and relating experiences to students' own lives. Post-story tasks involved journal writing from a character's perspective, composing alternative endings, and crafting empathetic letters or dialogues. Collaborative techniques such as peer correction, group discussions, and gallery walks were

integrated to promote interaction, critical thinking, and emotionally expressive writing.

Activities, Learning Strategies, and Assessment

The program used interactive writing as its main instructional strategy, with the teacher guiding the process while students contributed ideas, reflections, and suggestions. Collaborative techniques such as peer editing, small-group discussions, and gallery walks promoted engagement and supported a positive learning environment. Writing fluency was developed through free writing, timed writing, thought-provoking prompts, vocabulary expansion, and consistent practice. Activities were linked to empathetic stories, encouraging students to connect emotionally with the content while improving language use and creativity. In addition, assessment combined formative and summative approaches. Formative assessment involved observation, peer and self-assessment, and on-going feedback during tasks, focusing on coherence, vocabulary use, and idea development. Students' empathetic responses were evaluated through their participation in discussions, written reflections, and perspective-taking exercises. Summative assessment included a pre- and post-writing fluency test assessed with a rubric, and an affective empathy scale administered before and after the program to measure growth in both target skills.

Qualitative Analysis and Discussion

The qualitative data were drawn from selected samples of participants' pre- and post-test writings, along with observations of their comments and interactions during the program. The analysis examined how empathetic stories enhanced writing fluency—content, organization, accuracy, and quantity—and fostered affective empathy. The findings showed that exposure to stories centered on emotions, relationships, sharing, and human experiences deepened students' understanding of others' feelings and improved their ability to express their own emotions in writing. This emotional engagement, combined with consistent feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment, led to richer vocabulary use, more coherent structure, and increased output.

One notable example is Learner A's response to the prompt "Write about a sad/happy moment that took place in your life."

- Before the program: *"One day, I lost my cat. I was very sad. I cried. She didn't come back. I searched her but I didn't find her. The cat is brown and white and was play with me all day. I miss her."*
- After the program: *"One day, my cat went missing. She was my best friend. When I couldn't find her, I felt very bad. I cried for many days and didn't want to talk to anyone. My mom said, 'I know you are sad,' and she was*

sad too. She made me happy again. She printed a picture of me with my cat and I put it on my table.”

This progression illustrates how the program not only improved sentence structure, vocabulary, and coherence but also encouraged emotional depth and perspective-taking, reflecting the combined growth of writing fluency and affective empathy.

The researcher’s analysis

This student’s work shows marked improvement across all four writing fluency components. In terms of content, the pre-test offered only a brief account of losing a pet, with minimal elaboration and emotional depth, whereas the post-test expanded on feelings (“felt very bad,” “didn’t want to talk to anyone”), included contextual details (mother’s comfort, printing a photo), and reflected awareness of others’ emotions. Organization improved from a disconnected list of sentences to a cause-and-effect sequence supported by simple connectors (“When,” “and”). Accuracy also advanced, with clearer grammar, verb tenses, and article use, despite minor remaining errors. Fluency and quantity increased substantially, with longer, smoother sentences and more developed ideas. This progression highlights how the program not only enriched narrative content but also strengthened coherence, grammatical accuracy, and expressive fluency.

Conclusion

The program based on empathetic stories proved effective in enhancing both writing fluency and empathy among students. By addressing learners' cognitive and emotional development, it demonstrated that language classrooms can serve as spaces for skill acquisition and personal growth, enabling students to think, feel, and express themselves with greater purpose.

Recommendations

The findings suggest that integrating empathetic stories into EFL writing instruction can make classrooms more engaging, inclusive, and emotionally responsive. To build on this approach, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Curriculum design: Integrate empathetic stories into English curricula, particularly in the second cycle of basic education, and embed empathy education across subjects from early stages.
2. Teacher support: Provide teachers with resources, training, and guidance to implement story-based instruction effectively.
3. Differentiation and accessibility: Select and adapt story materials to match learners' proficiency, ensuring engagement and relevance.
4. Collaborative learning: Promote structured peer interaction and feedback to foster trust and deeper reflection.

5. Holistic pedagogy: Prioritize teacher–student rapport and pedagogies that balance cognitive and emotional development, aligning language learning with student well-being.

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