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Yaroslava FEDORIV,

orcid.org/0000-0001-5915-9428

*Candidate of Philology,
Associate Professor at the English Department,
National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy"
(Kyiv, Ukraine) yaroslava.fedoriv@ukma.edu.ua*

Iryna PIROZHENKO,

orcid.org/0000-0001-5061-1625

*Senior Lecturer at the English Department
National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy"
(Kyiv, Ukraine) i.pirozhenko@ukma.edu.ua*

Mariya FEDORIV,

orcid.org/0009-0000-8460-970X

*Senior Specialist
Publishing House "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy"
(Kyiv, Ukraine) fedorivml@ukma.edu.ua*

NARRATIVE WRITING FOR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: A CASE STUDY INTO ENHANCING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS AND RESILIENCE

In the current global world, marked by unprecedented crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, the educational landscape has undergone significant changes, necessitating innovative approaches to support teaching and learning.

This article aims to examine the dual benefits of narrative writing for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in crisis conditions, focusing on their linguistic development alongside psychological stability.

Backed up by contemporary studies on the healing potential of narrative writing, the research hypothesis holds that narrative writing as a pedagogical tool not only facilitates EFL skills development by enhancing vocabulary, grammar, and overall language proficiency but also plays a crucial role in fostering resilience among students facing adversities.

The article draws on the case study methodology to examine how narrative writing aids in building coping mechanisms, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being, thus reinforcing the students' ability to overcome hardships.

The findings suggest that through crafting and sharing personal narratives, students are provided with beneficial conditions for emotional expression, which is particularly vital in terms of stress relief during times of crisis.

Given its therapeutic potential, the study advocates for reinforcing narrative writing in the ELF curricula and embedding resilience-building narratives in EFL classrooms to both support the students' language acquisition and nurture their emotional health.

Accounting for possible challenges and limitations, the paper underscores the importance of holistic educational practices, including intellectual, psychological, social, and ethical dimensions while addressing both cognitive and emotional needs of the students and ultimately contributing to creating a balanced and inclusive educational environment that assures not just academic achievements but also personal growth, well-being, and overall life skills.

Key words: EFL, emotional well-being, narrative writing, resilience.

Ярослава ФЕДОРІВ,

orcid.org/0000-0001-5915-9428

*кандидат філологічних наук,
доцент кафедри англійської мови
Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія»
(Київ, Україна) yaroslava.fedoriv@ukma.edu.ua*

Ірина ПІРОЖЕНКО,

orcid.org/0000-0001-5061-1625

*старший викладач кафедри англійської мови
Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія»
(Київ, Україна) i.pirozhenko@ukma.edu.ua*

Марія ФЕДОРІВ,
orcid.org/0009-0000-8460-970X
старший спеціаліст
Видавничого дому «Києво-Могилянська академія»
(Київ, Україна) fedorivml@ukma.edu.ua

НАРАТИВНЕ ПИСЬМО ЗАДЛЯ ЕМОЦІЙНОГО БЛАГОПОЛУЧЧЯ: ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ РОЗВИТКУ МОВНИХ НАВИЧОК ТА СТІЙКОСТІ СТУДЕНТІВ

У сучасному глобалізованому світі, позначеному безпрецедентними кризами, такими як пандемія COVID-19 та геополітичні конфлікти, освітній простір зазнав значних змін, які зумовили потребу в інноваційних підходах задля підтримки викладання та навчання.

Ця стаття має на меті дослідити подвійні переваги наративного письма для студентів, які вивчають англійську мову як іноземну в кризових умовах, з особливим акцентом як на їхньому мовному розвитку, так і на психологічній стабільності.

Гіпотеза дослідження, підкріплена сучасними дослідженнями в галузі наративної терапії, полягає в тому, що оповідне письмо як педагогічний інструмент не лише сприяє розвитку англійськомовних навичок шляхом збагачення словникового запасу, покращення граматики та підвищення загального рівня володіння мовою, але також відіграє ключову роль у формуванні психологічної стійкості у здобувачів освіти, які живуть у складних обставинах.

Стаття спирається на методологію кейс-дослідження, щоб визначити, як наративне письмо допомагає створювати механізми подолання стресу, підвищення самооцінки та досягнення емоційного балансу, тим самим зміцнюючи здатність студентів долати труднощі.

Отримані результати свідчать про те, що створюючи та ділячись особистими наративами, студенти отримують сприятливі умови для вираження емоцій, що особливо важливо з погляду подолання стресу в кризових умовах.

Беручи до уваги благотворний потенціал наративного письма, автори стверджують про необхідність посилення його значення у програмах навчання іноземних мов і ширшого впровадження наративів незламності під час занять з метою розвивати іншомовні навички й водночас плекати емоційне здоров'я студентів.

Враховуючи можливі виклики та обмеження, стаття підкреслює важливість цілісних освітніх практик, які охоплюють інтелектуальний, психологічний, соціальний та етичний виміри, водночас відповідаючи як на когнітивні, так і на емоційні потреби здобувачів освіти й укінцевому рахунку сприяючи створенню збалансованого та інклюзивного освітнього середовища, яке забезпечує не лише їхні академічні досягнення, але й гармонійний особистісний розвиток та загальні життєві навички.

Ключові слова: англійська мова як іноземна, емоційне благополуччя, наративне письмо, стійкість.

1. Introduction

The development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) skills has become increasingly important not only for academic success but also for personal and professional growth. However, in the current global climate, marked by unprecedented crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, educational systems have faced unprecedented challenges, highlighting the need for innovative approaches that address both academic and emotional well-being of the students. One of these innovations is the development of narrative writing in the EFL classroom, which serves as a tool to enhance both language skills and emotional resilience among students.

In this context, the **research problem** focuses on understanding how narrative writing contributes to the psychological well-being and resilience of students, particularly in times of crisis. To address this problem, the research undertakes the following **tasks**: (1) examining the specific ways in which narrative writing enhances students' emotional expression and coping mechanisms; (2) exploring how narrative

writing fosters a supportive and inclusive learning environment for EFL students; (3) using a case study approach to demonstrate the broader applicability of narrative writing for emotional well-being and language development in diverse educational contexts. The **research hypothesis** suggests that narrative writing not only offers significant benefits for EFL skills development but also plays a crucial role in building resilience among students.

By investigating these aspects, the **study aims** to demonstrate the dual benefits of narrative writing by promoting its resilience-focused use in EFL classrooms and thus supporting both students' language acquisition and emotional well-being.

2. Literature Review

Extensive literature on narrative writing in EFL contexts offers various approaches to defining narrative writing. Proceeding from the classification by M. L. Colin (1990) and our focused research (Fedoriv et al., 2023b: 10–11), we define narrative writing as rendering a story or recounting a series of events in a structured and engaging manner. It typically includes elements such as characters, a plot,

setting, conflict, and resolution. The primary purpose of narrative writing is to entertain, inform, or convey an experience, allowing the writer to share personal or imaginative stories. This type of writing often incorporates descriptive language and dialogue to create vivid imagery and emotional connections with the reader. In educational contexts, narrative writing can serve as a tool for developing language skills, fostering creativity, and providing an opportunity for self-expression.

Narrative writing, with its capacity for emotional expression and personal storytelling, becomes an important tool in not only enhancing EFL skills but also in fostering resilience among students, particularly in challenging times. The paper by Ya. Fedoriv et al. (2023a: 207–216) addresses enhancing learner motivation during wartime in Ukraine. By analysing student survey responses, the study identifies strategies to create a collaborative and dynamic learning environment that fosters intrinsic motivation and engagement and concludes that learner motivation is crucial for academic success. Our further exploration of linguistic constructs of resilience in educational contexts (Fedoriv et al., 2023c: 66–77) builds upon a review of scholarly literature on the role of language of motivation and demonstrates how it shapes students' resilience.

Expanding the area of our investigation, we have examined contemporary studies that address the psychological benefits and therapeutic potential of narrative writing, showcasing its capacity to enhance emotional well-being and resilience. In this context, R. Charon asserts that techniques like close reading and reflective writing enhance empathy, reflection, and trust, helping people to connect and “understand their own journeys” (Charon 2001: 1897–1902). Charon argues that this approach requires narrative competence – the ability to acknowledge, interpret, and act on others' stories. By bridging gaps between physicians, patients, colleagues, and society, narrative medicine fosters more humane and effective care. Reflecting on her discussion with Dr. Miriam Divinsky, Charon (2007: 1265–1267) notes that the concept of narrative medicine was introduced by Divinsky's work, and her essay, “Stories for Life” (Divinsky, 2007: 203–211), emphasises the value of shared stories in building human connections. Additionally, C. Fioretti et al. (2016), proceeding from a systematic review of studies on the narrative medicine, demonstrate that it can be used both as an intervention and as an assessment tool. The paper emphasises the need for more research to better understand the impact of narrative medicine on patient outcomes. Furthermore, a systematic review by

M. Milota et al. (2019: 802–810) of studies in medical education reveals that using writing and storytelling as educational tools demonstrates significant benefits in enhancing students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills. This approach offers a structured and replicable framework that fosters reflection and personal growth, leading to improved empathy and communication skills among students.

Holistically, the examined studies highlight the growing recognition of narrative medicine as a beneficial tool, underscoring its role in fostering more empathetic and effective communication. Extrapolating these findings to the context of EFL classes for students studying under crisis conditions, the principles of narrative medicine can be adapted to enhance both language learning and psychological resilience, which includes the capacity to manage stress, adversity, and trauma, covering both cognitive and emotional aspects of mental strength.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a case study approach to examine the impact of narrative writing on students' EFL skills and emotional resilience during crises. By focusing on specific instances of narrative writing within language classrooms, the study aims to understand the benefits and challenges associated with this strategy.

For this purpose, participants were selected from first-year EFL students at the National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy” (NaUKMA) currently studying under war conditions. They ranged in age from 17 to 20 and had intermediate to upper-intermediate proficiency in English, possessing the necessary skills for engaging in narrative writing activities.

Data collection focused on qualitative aspects of students' experiences portrayed in their writing samples on the topic “The Warmest Memory of Your Childhood” (see Appendices) and analysed for vocabulary, overall writing style, and attitudes. Teacher feedback was provided on students' writing proficiency and emotional responses. Students' understanding of resilience was examined using thematic analysis to explore the participants' emotional states and coping strategies.

By employing this methodology, the study aimed to evaluate how narrative writing can reflect both language proficiency and psychological well-being of EFL students under challenging conditions.

4. Research Findings

The participants of the case study demonstrated their ability of emotional expression through their narrative samples, reflecting on deeply personal and cherished memories. For example, one student wrote about the warmest memory of her childhood, when

she spent a day in the mountains with her parents (Appendices, Sample 1). The vivid descriptions of the beauty of nature and the joy of being with loved ones highlight the student's ability to articulate emotions and find comfort in positive memories.

Narrative writing also helped students to build confidence, as seen in their reflections on overcoming fears and embracing unknown experiences. For instance, a student recounted her first visit to a horse club, where she found the courage to interact with a horse, despite initial apprehension (Appendices, Sample 2). This experience of success and personal growth through narrative writing illustrates the development of self-assurance and a sense of accomplishment.

Expressing gratitude in another narrative piece, a student recalls a cherished childhood memory of participating in the choir «Svitanok» (Appendices, Sample 3). This memory reflects the abundance of art in the student's life, the joy of rehearsals and concerts, and the busy yet carefree nature of that time. The student mentions the opportunity to travel to foreign countries with the choir, emphasising the positive impact of this experience and her intention to provide a similar opportunity for her future children.

These sample narratives highlight the resilience-building potential of writing in supporting students' emotional state and self-esteem. Through guided classroom activities, students not only enhance their language skills but also exhibit coping mechanisms crucial during times of crisis. In writing, they can focus on positive experiences and develop a stronger sense of self, which contributes to their overall well-being.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation of findings

The findings of this study align with the research hypothesis that narrative writing fosters both language skills development and psychological resilience. The reflections on cherished memories demonstrate how teacher-guided narrative writing, directed by the provided topic, allows students to articulate emotions and find satisfaction in positive recollections. The opportunity to express oneself through storytelling supports the notion that narrative writing is not merely a linguistic exercise but also a therapeutic practice that can help to regain emotional balance, develop self-confidence, and support personal growth. The experience of success, elicited through narrative writing, underscores the role of storytelling in fostering resilience and a sense of accomplishment. The description of the transformative power of art emphasises cultural values and shapes future aspirations, showing

how narration can help students to reflect on and appreciate formative experiences.

To convey their experiences and emotions, the students used various stylistic devices including descriptive and emotive language like «warmest,» «delightful,» and «happy.» Vivid scenes were recalled with admiration, joy, and a sense of honour. Adjectives such as «striking» and «gorgeous» enhanced visual appeal, while metaphors and personifications added depth. For example, a student personified her heart as «filled with love and respect» during a family outing. Alliteration and rhetorical questions emphasised key moments, evoking nostalgia and gratitude. Enumerations and contrasts displayed the range of emotions from «carefree» happiness to «embarrassment.» The vivid imagery and expressive language made the narratives evocative and impactful, underscoring the positive emotions and appreciation in their experiences.

5.2. Implications for EFL Teaching Practices

As evidenced by the students' storytelling, integrating resilience-building narrative writing into EFL courses can both benefit language development and provide emotional support.

The therapeutic potential of narrative writing can be especially beneficial for students studying under challenging conditions, as it offers a means to process their experiences and find strength in putting their reflections to paper. Crafting narratives helps students to process difficult situations and express their feelings in a conscious way, which can lead to clearer emotional understanding and greater stability. Encouraging students to share their stories can help them to make sense of their experiences, reflect on their emotions, and develop coping mechanisms, which fosters a supportive community where students feel heard and understood.

Thus, the analysis proves that narrative writing can serve as a therapeutic tool that not only develops students' linguistic skills but also strengthens their psychological resilience, equipping them with endurance needed to face life's challenges.

5.3. Challenges and limitations of implementing narrative writing in EFL classrooms

Guided by the hypothesis that narrative writing both benefits EFL skills development and builds resilience among students, we should note that its implementation in EFL classrooms poses challenges such as varying levels of student proficiency, potential reluctance to share personal stories, and the need for instructors to provide adequate feedback and support.

In particular, while narrative writing allows students to articulate and rethink traumatic experiences, facilitating emotional release and potential healing,

this practice should be guided by the «do no harm» principle, i.e. writing assignments should implicitly embed positive and optimistic themes like «my warmest memories» or «how to rebuild Ukraine.» Namely, when encouraging students to engage in reflective and expressive writing, EFL instructors should consciously formulate tasks that create a safe psychological atmosphere in the classroom. Assignments that prompt students to write about positive personal experiences or challenges they have overcome can create a sense of validation and connection that can enhance students' resilience, enabling them to better navigate and overcome adversities.

Such an approach proves to be feasible in enhancing students' language skills while promoting emotional resilience and well-being, ensuring a supportive and constructive learning environment.

6. Practical Applications

For effective incorporation of the principles of healing through narrative writing in EFL classrooms, in this section we offer practical applications and tips to foster a supportive learning environment that conduces to resilience-building communication practices.

Namely, instructors can create a dynamic and empathetic classroom by designing contextual learning assignments that relate to current global or local crises and prompt students to write narratives about their experiences or observations, cultivating a classroom atmosphere that values sharing and listening, fostering a safe and supportive learning environment, and enhancing students' language skills through meaningful practice.

However, it should be emphasised that, without special professional training in psychological counselling, an English language instructor must be careful and avoid requiring students to describe their traumatic experiences, as this can pose serious emotional risks. Notably, if a student's writing shares a distressing event and suggests a tendency toward destructive behaviour, the instructor should engage in a private discussion with the student and advise seeking professional assistance from the psychological support centre.

To tackle this problem, language writing assignments should motivate the description of pleasant moments and the expression of positive emotions, allowing students to engage in self-discovery and reflect on their personal growth and coping strategies during challenging times.

Sample assignments designed to help EFL students to find positivity when expressing themselves may include uplifting topics oriented towards positive

reflection, such as the following: «*My Warmest Memories,*» «*A Day I Felt Truly Happy,*» «*My Ideal Future,*» «*Acts of Kindness I've Experienced/Observed,*» «*A Place That Brings Me Peace,*» «*How I Overcame a Challenge,*» «*My Dream Vacation,*» «*A Person Who Inspires Me,*» «*How to Rebuild and Improve Our Community/Country,*» «*A Time I Helped Someone,*» «*My Favourite Family/Community Tradition,*» «*The Best Compliment I've Ever Received,*» «*A Hobby That Brings Me Joy,*» «*The Importance of Friendship,*» «*A Book or Movie That Changed My Perspective,*» «*My Role Model,*» «*The Beauty of Nature I've Witnessed,*» «*What I'm Grateful For,*» «*My Vision for a Better Future,*» and «*How to Spread Positivity in Our School/Community.*»

This approach will encourage students to focus on positive memories and to build a community where they feel safe to express their thoughts and support one another, which is crucial during periods of crisis.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, the article discusses the dual benefits of narrative writing for EFL students, focusing on both linguistic development and psychological stability. Proceeding from contemporary literature and based on a case study approach, the paper demonstrates that narrative writing can be effectively integrated into EFL curricula to support both language acquisition and resilience.

The research findings underscore the importance of holistic educational practices that address intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions, ultimately contributing to a balanced and inclusive educational experience that promotes not just academic achievement but also personal growth, well-being, and overall life skills.

In response to the research hypothesis, the study asserts that narrative writing helps students to articulate their emotions, overcome fears, find relief in positive recollections, build confidence, acknowledge personal growth, and gain a sense of accomplishment. Through guided classroom activities, students not only improve their language skills but also develop coping mechanisms, as well as focus on positive experiences, which strengthens their sense of self and overall well-being.

The core idea of this research is not only to emphasise the healing role of narrative writing in the English classroom but also to transform the EFL curriculum in a way that communicative tasks inherently foster a positive classroom atmosphere. By intentionally designing assignments that encourage students to reflect on and write about uplifting experiences, such as their warmest memories, moments of kindness, or visions for a better future,

educators will cultivate an environment that nurtures emotional stability and optimism. This approach ensures that embedding resilience-building narratives into the EFL curriculum will enhance students' language skills while simultaneously sustaining their emotional health and ensuring a supportive and inclusive classroom experience.

Future studies should continue to explore the innovative approach of employing narrative writing for healing, in addition to using it as a traditional pedagogical tool for building EFL skills through vocabulary, grammar, and development of the overall writing proficiency. Beyond its linguistic benefits, narrative writing holds promise for fostering psychological resilience in the language classroom and beyond the educational institutions, especially during humanitarian crises.

8. Appendices. Student writing samples

ASSIGNMENT: Talk about the warmest memory of your childhood.

Sample 1. *The warmest memory of my childhood was the first day I spent in the mountains. The weather was delightful and it was the time and the place to enjoy myself. Moreover, how happy I was standing among the beauty of shady woods, rolling hills and soaring mountains with my beloved mum and dad. The heart of a small child was filled with love and respect to the whole world, to everyone and everything. Furthermore, that day I understood that the life is an unbelievable miracle, given to take delight in the world around. My parents and I were talking about all sorts of things. It had become dark enough before we noticed that the sun set and the sky became full of stars. In addition to this, we saw someone's shadow close to us. What an amazement it was when we found out that it was just a little squirrel with a nut in its mouse. I'll never forget that feeling of embarrassment. It was the first time I've been in the mountains and it will remain the best day forever.*

Sample 2. *One of the things that enriches my life each moment and that I always keep in my thoughts is the warmest memory of my childhood – a visit to the horse club "Troia", where I found one of my best friends. I gasped in admiration just from the moment I entered the stable. Although striking interior amazed me a lot, my whole attention was captured by gorgeous statures of the horses standing right near the window and I decided to come closer. A stableman, who was pottering about nearby, noticed my affection and offered me to treat one of the horses to an apple. My heart began throbbing faster and faster, as I realized that it was*

my first experience of any contact with that kind of animal. I took the biggest and the most tasty-looking ripe red apple and awkwardly treated it to the horse. A pair of big black eyes slowly met mine, and I caught a slight note of thankfulness in that glance. But more thrilling emotions I felt a few minutes later when I heard an unexpected question of the stableman, who asked me whether I wanted to saddle the animal. It had not even entered my head, since such a graceful, noble and at the same time independent and free creature just could not be brought under. Nevertheless, the temptation was too strong and I yielded to the overwhelming desire to saddle that horse. With those thoughts spinning in my head, I looked without confidence in its eyes and calmed down. Trying to be as careful as I could, I slowly took Choco's (that was his name) saddle, put it on its back and mounted the horse. That was one of the most striking episodes of my whole childhood that I will never forget for sure: a magnificent and inexpressible feeling of great honor, home warmth and breathtaking excitement entered my mind and settled in my soul forever. It was like waking from a lovely dream, when my mother came in to say that it was time for us to go. I took a last parting look, reluctant to leave that cute animal that already became my close friend. Although I have never seen Choco again, I can say with confidence and without any doubt that it was the best memory of my childhood that keeps me warm for years.

Sample 3. *The warmest memory of my childhood regards to the time when I was a member of a choir named "Svitanok". There are several reasons why I associate particularly this memory with the warmest and dearest one. First, I can't bethink of a time when I had so much art surrounding me. For instance, my schedule at that time was full of different classes, such as piano lesson, then choir and then choreography. Another thing that makes nostalgia stronger is that carefree life I used to have, and at the same time I wasn't playing the fool, I was always busy. All of these rehearsals and concerts, my complaints about having no time to spend with my classmates- that was actually the best time of my life. The last thing which I will always be grateful to "Svitanok" for is the chance and opportunity to visit foreign countries. Only thanks to this organization I opened Turkey, Germany, Poland and Bulgaria to myself. To sum up, I think that I will definitely take my child to an organization like "Svitanok", because it is a wonderful experience and I would like my future child to have it.*

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