

DEVELOPING NARRATIVE WRITING THROUGH SUSTAINED INSTRUCTION: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF GRADE 4-6 EFL STUDENTS' TEXTS

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Abstract:

Narrative writing is a key genre in upper primary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, supporting learners' development of extended text construction, genre awareness, and linguistic control. However, many EFL primary students struggle to organize ideas coherently and use appropriate narrative language features, particularly in exam-oriented contexts. This qualitative classroom-based study investigates the narrative structure and linguistic features of texts produced during a semester-long writing project in an Indonesian EMI primary school. The focus on Grades 4–6 reflects a critical developmental stage in which learners transition from sentence-level production to extended texts while managing increasing academic demands in English as the medium of instruction. Guided by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the study analyzes schematic structure (orientation, complication, and resolution), grammatical patterns, vocabulary use, and cohesive devices across grade levels. Findings indicate that sustained, explicit instruction, particularly the teaching of narrative stages, staged scaffolding of linguistic resources, and iterative drafting over time, supported students' ability to construct more coherent and linguistically controlled narratives. The study contributes qualitative linguistic insights into narrative development across upper primary grades and highlights how explicit genre instruction combined with sustained scaffolding enhances writing development in primary EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Narrative writing; Systemic Functional Linguistics, Upper Primaty EFL; Genre-based instruction; Writing Development*

INTRODUCTION

Narrative writing plays a central role in the development of literacy and early academic writing skills among upper primary school learners, particularly those in Grades 4 to 6. At this stage of schooling, students are expected to move beyond sentence-level production and short responses toward the construction of extended written texts that demonstrate coherence, logical sequencing of events, and meaningful language use. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, narrative writing functions not only as a means of personal expression but also as a foundational genre through which learners develop control over text organization, grammatical patterns, and discourse-level meaning. As such, narrative writing serves as a critical bridge between early literacy practices and more formal academic writing demanded in later stages of education.

Despite its pedagogical importance, narrative essay writing remains a challenging skill for many primary EFL learners. Writing in a foreign language requires learners to simultaneously generate ideas, organize content, apply genre conventions, and manage linguistic accuracy, including grammar and vocabulary selection (Barkaoui and Hadidi 2020; Manchón 2018). Many primary students are more accustomed to oral expression or short written tasks, which limits their ability to sustain ideas and maintain coherence in extended writing. In addition, limited exposure to written English narratives often results in underdeveloped awareness of narrative structure and language features, leading to texts that are fragmented, repetitive, or difficult to follow (Aziz and Yamat 2021; Teng 2020).

These challenges become particularly salient in instructional contexts where writing is assessed through essay-based examinations. In many Asian EFL settings, including Indonesia, assessment practices increasingly require students to produce complete narrative essays independently and within limited time constraints. In the present research context, the school is a private EMI institution that benchmarks its English curriculum against regional standards and adapts selected assessment materials from Singaporean primary examination papers. This practice reflects a broader trend among Indonesian private “international-oriented” schools that reference Singapore’s English curriculum for its structured emphasis on genre stages, paragraph organization, and linguistic accuracy. Such assessment demands have exposed the limitations of instructional approaches that treat writing as an occasional classroom activity and instead underscore the need for systematic, sustained instruction that explicitly develops narrative coherence, genre awareness, and linguistic control.

In response to these demands, writing instruction in the present study was reconceptualized as a semester-long narrative writing project rather than a series of isolated tasks. This pedagogical decision was grounded in the understanding that writing is a process-oriented skill that develops over time through planning, drafting, feedback, and revision (Graham 2019). A sustained writing project allows learners to engage more deeply with narrative construction while gradually developing their linguistic resources. From a research perspective, such an approach also enables closer observation of students’ writing development across time and grade levels, rather than relying solely on final test scores.

Prior to the implementation of the writing project, several recurring problems were identified in students’ narrative writing. Many texts lacked essential narrative elements, such as clear orientation, well-developed complications, and coherent resolutions. Paragraphing was often weak, with paragraphs containing either unrelated ideas or only single sentences. Linguistically, students demonstrated frequent difficulties with tense consistency, subject–verb agreement, and limited lexical variety, often relying on repetitive vocabulary and simple sentence structures. These issues indicate challenges not only at the surface level of language accuracy but also at deeper levels of textual organization and meaning-making.

From a theoretical perspective, narrative writing development is closely linked to genre-based pedagogy, particularly approaches informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Within this framework, narratives are understood as socially situated texts organized through predictable stages - typically orientation, complication, and resolution - each serving specific communicative purposes (Martin and Rose 2020; Rose and Martin 2012). Research over the past decade has shown that explicit instruction in genre structure supports learners’ ability to

organize ideas, sequence events, and use language meaningfully across a text (Derewianka and Jones 2016; Nagao 2019). For primary EFL learners, such explicit guidance is particularly valuable because it reduces uncertainty about writing expectations and makes abstract textual conventions more visible (Hyland 2007).

In addition to text organization, linguistic features such as grammatical patterns, vocabulary use, and cohesion are key indicators of narrative writing development. Studies on young EFL learners' writing show gradual progression from simple, sentence-based texts toward more complex clause structures and greater lexical variety as learners advance through primary grades (Myhill and Newman 2016; Webb and Nation 2017). More recent research has also highlighted the developmental relationship between syntactic complexity and writing quality in young learners (Bulté and Housen 2018) and the role of lexical diversity and phraseological development in L2 writing growth (Kyle and Crossley 2018). Cohesive devices, especially temporal connectors and reference items, play a crucial role in narrative clarity and reader comprehension (Crossley et al., 2016). However, empirical research that examines these linguistic features qualitatively, particularly across multiple primary grade levels within the same instructional context, remains limited, especially in Indonesian EFL settings.

Existing research in Indonesia has predominantly focused on secondary or tertiary EFL learners, leaving primary-level narrative writing underexplored (Emilia and Hamied 2015; Nurhayati. 2019). Moreover, while studies have examined genre-based pedagogy and explicit writing instruction, few have integrated these perspectives within a sustained classroom-based project that spans Grades 4 to 6. As a result, there is limited understanding of how primary EFL learners' narrative writing develops linguistically over time and how sustained instruction supports their ability to meet exam-oriented writing demands.

Responding to this gap, the present study investigates the narrative writing development of Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6 EFL students through a semester-long writing project in an Indonesian primary school. Rather than focusing on test scores alone, the study conducts a qualitative linguistic analysis of students' written products to examine how narrative structure and language use evolve across grade levels. By analyzing authentic classroom writing produced under sustained instructional conditions, this study contributes empirical insights into narrative writing as a developmental and institutional literacy practice in primary EFL education.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are narrative schematic structure and linguistic features realized in the narrative writing of Grade 4–6 students within a semester-long instructional context?
2. What cross-sectional differences in narrative organization, linguistic complexity, and cohesion can be identified across Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6?
3. How do patterns observed in students' narrative texts reflect the role of sustained, scaffolded writing instruction within the classroom context?

This paper is organized as follows. Following this introduction, the literature review synthesizes recent research on narrative writing in primary EFL contexts, genre-based

pedagogy, linguistic features of young learners' writing, and exam-oriented literacy practices. The methodology section describes the research design, context, participants, data collection procedures, and analytical framework. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics, the analytical procedures focus on how students construct meaning through the ideational, textual, and interpersonal metafunctions. Specifically, the analysis examines process types and clause expansion within the transitivity system (ideational meaning), conjunctions and reference chains as cohesive resources (textual meaning), and evaluative language as a marker of interpersonal positioning. The findings section presents a qualitative analysis of students' narrative texts across grade levels, highlighting developmental shifts in schematic structure, process selection, clause complexity, and cohesive control. The discussion situates these findings within existing scholarship on genre-based writing development and socio-cognitive perspectives of literacy learning. The paper concludes by outlining pedagogical implications for explicit instruction in transitivity, cohesion, and narrative staging in primary EFL classrooms, and by suggesting directions for future longitudinal research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative classroom-based research design to investigate how primary EFL learners develop narrative writing within a sustained instructional context. The purpose of the study was not to measure improvement statistically or establish causal relationships, but to examine how narrative structure and linguistic features were realized in students' written texts across grade levels. A qualitative approach was selected because narrative development is a complex, process-oriented phenomenon shaped by instructional practices, genre awareness, and learners' evolving linguistic resources. Close analysis of authentic classroom writing allows for detailed insight into patterns of organization, grammar, vocabulary, and cohesion that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone.

The study was conducted in an upper primary cohort of a private Indonesian school where English serves as the primary medium of instruction. Students regularly use English for classroom interaction, academic tasks, and written assignments. The upper primary population during the 2022/2023 academic year consisted of 26 students, including 16 students in Grade 4, 7 students in Grade 5, and 3 students in Grade 6. All students within these grades were included in the study; thus, total population sampling was employed. The focus on Grades 4 to 6 reflects a critical transitional stage in primary education, during which students move from basic literacy practices toward extended, genre-based writing and increasing academic language demands.

Narrative writing instruction was implemented systematically over the course of one semester through a structured genre-based teaching cycle embedded within the existing curriculum. Instruction began with modeling exemplar narratives and guiding students to identify schematic stages, including orientation, complication, and resolution. Classroom discussions emphasized chronological sequencing, the creation of narrative tension, and the role of complications in driving the storyline. Attention was also given to key linguistic features such as simple past tense verbs, temporal and causal connectors, clause expansion, paragraph organization, and general writing conventions. Following the modeling phase, students participated in joint construction activities in which the teacher scaffolded paragraph

development, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. Students subsequently completed independent narrative tasks and received feedback targeting structural completeness, clarity of events, tense consistency, and cohesion. This instructional cycle was repeated across multiple writing tasks to ensure sustained engagement rather than isolated practice.

Over the semester, each student produced four narrative writing tasks as part of regular classroom instruction, resulting in a corpus of 104 narrative texts across the three grade levels. All texts were collected. For systematic cross-grade comparison, the final narrative produced by each student was selected as the primary unit of analysis, as it reflected cumulative exposure to modeling, scaffolding, feedback, and revision. Earlier texts were reviewed to inform interpretation of developmental tendencies but were not subjected to full structural and linguistic coding. This corpus design allowed the study to capture both instructional influence and grade-level differences while maintaining analytic consistency.

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics. Each selected narrative text was examined for schematic structure, process types and tense use, clause complexity, lexical variety, and cohesive devices such as temporal connectors and reference items. Coding categories were predetermined based on the analytic framework, and recurring patterns were identified and compared across grade levels to explore developmental progression in narrative organization and linguistic control. Because the researcher also served as the classroom teacher, reflexive awareness and data triangulation were employed to reduce potential bias. Students' written texts were analyzed alongside lesson documentation and field notes to support interpretive validity. Given the relatively small cohort size, particularly in Grade 6, the findings are presented as contextual and interpretive rather than statistically generalizable conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the qualitative linguistic analysis of students' narrative writing produced during a semester-long writing project. The findings are organized according to the three study objectives: (1) analysis of narrative structure and linguistic features, (2) comparison of narrative writing development across Grade 4, 5, and 6, and (3) examination of how sustained writing instruction supported students' responses to essay-based assessment tasks.

1. Narrative Structure and Linguistic Features of Students' Writing

Addressing study objective 1, analysis of students' narrative texts revealed emerging control of narrative genre conventions across all grade levels, particularly in relation to the core stages of orientation, complication, and resolution. Although the level of sophistication varied, most students demonstrated an awareness that narratives require an opening to situate the reader, a problem or event to drive the storyline, and a closing to signal completion. This pattern reflects early genre awareness, consistent with recent genre-based research emphasizing the role of schematic narrative stages as cognitive and linguistic scaffolds for young writers (Humphrey et al., 2020; Nagao, 2022).

Orientation was the most consistently realized narrative stage across the dataset. Students typically introduced characters, settings, and time using familiar and formulaic expressions

such as *One day*, *Last holiday*, or *Yesterday*. These conventional openings functioned as genre signals, indicating students' understanding that narratives conventionally begin by establishing contextual background before events unfold (Humphrey et al., 2020).

One day I go to my grandmother house and I play with my cousin. [G4-S1]

Last week, I visit my uncle house and we watch movie together. [G4-S2]

Yesterday, I was sick but I still went to school because have test. [G4-S3]

While these openings successfully set the narrative context, they also revealed recurring linguistic challenges. Tense inconsistency was common, with students shifting between present and past forms within the same sentence. Orientation stages were also frequently brief and minimally elaborated, offering limited descriptive detail about characters or settings. These patterns suggest that students prioritized narrative organization and meaning construction over grammatical precision. Recent research on developing writers similarly notes that learners often allocate cognitive resources to managing content and genre structure before attending to linguistic accuracy, particularly in second language contexts (Kim & Crossley, 2022)

The complication stage was commonly realized through the introduction of an unexpected or disruptive event, frequently marked by temporal adverbials such as *suddenly*, *then*, or *after that*. These markers played a crucial role in signaling narrative tension and transitions from background information to action, supporting coherence at the discourse level (Crossley et al., 2016).

Suddenly, I fell from the bike and my leg was hurt. [G4-S4]

Then, I bump into my friend and my shoulder was pain [G4-S5]

After that, I fell into the water and my clothes was wet. [G4-S5]

Although explicit temporal markers helped readers follow the sequence of events, complications were often brief and underdeveloped. Students tended to focus on reporting a single event rather than elaborating on its causes, consequences, or emotional impact. This suggests that while learners recognized the functional importance of complication in narrative structure, their ability to expand this stage into a more complex and layered episode was still emerging. Such patterns are consistent with recent findings that young EFL writers often demonstrate structural awareness before developing narrative depth and elaboration (Nagao 2022).

Resolution stages typically appeared as short closing statements that expressed emotional outcomes or signaled narrative closure, often introduced by discourse markers such as *finally*.

Finally, I was happy and I go home. [G4-S3]

Then, I slip and my clothes was dirty. [G4-S6]

Then, I crash my bike and my leg was bleeding. [G4-S7]

These resolutions functioned primarily as closure rather than reflective evaluation. Students rarely commented on the significance of the experience or articulated personal insights drawn from the events. This indicates an early stage of narrative development, as evaluative and

reflective dimensions of narrative writing tend to emerge later and require more advanced discourse control and metalinguistic awareness (Humphrey et al., 2020).

From a linguistic perspective, students' narratives were dominated by simple clause structures and action verbs, reflecting an event-focused approach to storytelling. Vocabulary use was largely repetitive, with limited lexical variation, and descriptive language was mainly realized through basic emotional adjectives such as *happy* or *sad*. Cohesion was achieved primarily through chronological sequencing using temporal connectors such as *then*, *after that*, and *finally*. While these devices supported basic coherence, their repetitive use suggests developing discourse-level control, as students relied on a narrow range of cohesive strategies rather than a more diversified linguistic repertoire (Crossley et al., 2016).

Overall, the findings indicate that students, many of Grade 4 students in particular, were operating at an early yet meaningful stage of narrative writing development. They demonstrated emerging genre awareness and basic coherence while continuing to develop grammatical accuracy, lexical richness, and narrative elaboration. These patterns highlight the pedagogical importance of instructional approaches that build on students' existing genre knowledge while gradually expanding their linguistic and discourse resources through guided practice and feedback (Kim and Crossley 2022; Nagao 2022).

2. Differences in Narrative Writing Development Across Grade Levels

Addressing study objective 2, cross-grade analysis revealed clear developmental differences in narrative organization, linguistic complexity, and genre awareness across Grade 4, 5, and 6. These differences indicate a qualitative progression in narrative writing rather than a simple increase in text length. As students advanced through grade levels, their narratives showed increasing control over narrative staging, cohesion, and linguistic resources. This developmental trajectory aligns with recent research suggesting that narrative writing development involves gradual shifts in how learners organize meaning at the text level, not merely improvements in sentence accuracy or vocabulary range (Kim and Crossley 2022; Nagao 2022).

Grade 4 narratives were predominantly linear and event-driven, often presented as a single paragraph or a sequence of loosely connected sentences. Narrative stages such as orientation, complication, and resolution were frequently merged, with little differentiation between background information and main events. Cohesion relied heavily on repetitive temporal connectors, particularly *then* and *after that*, which functioned as the primary means of linking actions.

Then I swim. After that I eat. Then I go home [G4-S7]

Then I wake up. After that I brush my teeth. Then I go to school [G4-S8]

This pattern reflects sentence-based writing, where students focused on listing actions in chronological order without developing text-level meaning or paragraph structure. The reliance on simple temporal sequencing suggests that Grade 4 students were still operating at an early stage of narrative development, prioritizing event recall over narrative shaping. Similar findings have been reported in recent studies of young EFL writers, which note that early narratives often resemble oral recounts transposed into writing, with limited elaboration or reflection (Crossley et al., 2016).

Grade 5 narratives demonstrated noticeable development in narrative organization and linguistic control. Students showed clearer separation of narrative stages, with more explicit orientations and complications, often organized into multiple paragraphs. Tense usage became more consistent, and students began to employ causal connectors such as *because*, *so*, and *when*, allowing them to express relationships between events rather than merely sequencing them.

We were very excited because it was our first trip. When we arrived, something bad happened. My bag was lost.[G5-S1]

I felt very nervous because it was my first competition. When my name was called, I forgot my speech. [G4-S2]

The inclusion of causal relationships indicates growing awareness of how meaning unfolds across narrative stages and how events are interconnected. Complications became more clearly defined, moving beyond simple mishaps toward events that created tension or disruption within the story. These features suggest that Grade 5 students were transitioning from sentence-level to discourse-level writing, consistent with research showing that middle primary learners begin to integrate coherence, causality, and paragraphing as part of genre development (Humphrey et al., 2020).

However, it is important to note that developmental patterns were not strictly linear. A small number of Grade 4 students were also able to construct similar causal and temporally organized structures, as illustrated in the excerpt above [G4-S2]. These instances demonstrate that while such discourse-level features were more consistently observed in Grade 5, some younger learners had already begun to demonstrate emerging control over causal sequencing and narrative tension. This variation suggests individual differences in linguistic readiness and highlights that developmental progression in EFL narrative writing may overlap across grade levels rather than follow rigid boundaries.

Grade 6 narratives exhibited the highest level of narrative and linguistic control across the dataset. Paragraphs were more consistently aligned with narrative stages, with orientations setting context clearly, complications elaborated through multiple events or emotional responses, and resolutions providing closure and reflection. Students demonstrated greater lexical variety, including abstract and evaluative vocabulary, as well as increased syntactic complexity through the use of subordinate clauses and complex sentences.

I did not tell my parents at first because I was afraid. After a few hours, the problem was solved and I learned to be more careful.[G6-S1]

I hesitated to join the competition because I doubted myself. After receiving encouragement from my teacher, I decided to try. [G6-S2]

These texts reflected more mature narrative construction, particularly in the use of reflective resolutions that extended beyond simple closure. Students began to articulate lessons learned or emotional growth, signaling an emerging evaluative dimension of narrative writing. This shift aligns with recent findings that older primary and lower secondary learners are more capable of integrating reflection and stance into narrative texts, especially when they have internalized genre expectations (Nagao 2022).

Overall, the cross-grade comparison reveals a gradual shift from event listing toward coherent, staged narrative construction as students progressed through upper primary grades. Linguistic development was closely tied to genre awareness, with improvements in cohesion, complexity, and evaluation emerging alongside clearer control of narrative structure. These findings underscore the importance of developmentally responsive writing instruction that supports students' movement from sentence-based recounts toward fully realized narrative texts, particularly in EFL contexts where exposure to extended written discourse may be limited (Crossley et al., 2016; Kim & Crossley, 2022).

3. Sustained Writing Instruction and Responses to Essay-Based Assessment Tasks

Addressing study objective 3, the findings indicate that sustained and explicit writing instruction implemented through a semester-long writing project played a significant role in supporting students' ability to respond more effectively to essay-based assessment tasks. Rather than treating assessment writing as an isolated or test-driven activity, instruction emphasized genre awareness, narrative structure, and gradual text development. As a result, students' final narratives demonstrated clearer staging, more consistent paragraph organization, improved linguistic accuracy, and closer alignment with assessment expectations. These findings align with recent research emphasizing the importance of sustained instructional cycles in developing writing competence in EFL contexts (Hyland, 2007; Lee, 2020).

This instructional impact is illustrated in the following Grade 5 narrative excerpt:

Last holiday, my family and I went to Bali. We stayed there for three days and visited many places. On the second day, an accident happened when I was playing near the beach. I slipped on the rocks and hurt my leg, so my parents took me to the clinic.[G5-S7]
Last month, I decided to join the basketball team. In the first practice, I struggled to follow the drills. After several weeks of training, I improved and felt proud of my progress.[G6-S3]

This final version demonstrates a controlled orientation, clear temporal framing, and more developed paragraph-level organization. The student introduces characters, setting, and time before moving logically into the complication, indicating increased awareness of narrative staging. The expansion of events beyond short clauses suggests that explicit instruction in genre structure enabled students to elaborate ideas while maintaining coherence. Such developments reflect findings that genre-based pedagogy supports students in producing texts that meet institutional and assessment-oriented expectations (Martin and Rose 2020; Nagao 2022).

Repeated cycles of drafting, teacher feedback, and revision appeared to be particularly influential in improving students' writing quality. Feedback practices in this study prioritized idea development, narrative completeness, and organization rather than focusing exclusively on surface-level grammatical correction. Over time, students demonstrated greater control over tense consistency, clearer connections between events, and more complete narrative resolutions. This approach aligns with contemporary feedback research, which highlights that formative, meaning-focused feedback supports deeper writing development and learner autonomy (Bitchener and Storch 2021).

The effects of sustained instruction were most evident among Grade 6 students, who showed increased ability to produce exam-style narratives independently and within time constraints. Their texts demonstrated not only improved linguistic accuracy but also more reflective and evaluative narrative endings, as illustrated below:

Although I was scared at first, I tried to stay calm and think carefully. I told my parents what happened, and after a few hours the problem was solved. From that experience, I learned to be more careful and responsible. [G6-S1]

The use of concessive clauses, emotional reflection, and evaluative statements indicates higher levels of syntactic and discourse-level control. Rather than simply reporting events, the student constructs meaning through reflection, suggesting a shift toward more mature narrative competence. This progression supports research showing that sustained exposure to writing instruction allows learners to internalize genre expectations and linguistic resources necessary for assessment contexts (Hyland 2007; Nagao 2019)

Taken together, these findings suggest that exam-oriented writing tasks, when embedded within sustained and explicit instructional practices, functioned as productive learning opportunities rather than merely as test preparation. Narrative writing emerged as an institutional literacy practice through which students gradually internalized the valued forms of organization, language use, and meaning-making expected in school-based assessments. At the same time, students developed the capacity to express personal experiences in coherent and meaningful ways, demonstrating that instructional continuity plays a crucial role in shaping narrative writing development in upper primary EFL classrooms (Bitchener and Storch 2021; Martin and Rose 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine primary EFL learners' narrative writing by addressing three objectives: identifying the narrative structures present in students' texts, examining the linguistic features used to construct narratives, and exploring developmental differences across grade levels within a sustained instructional context. The findings indicate that narrative writing competence among young EFL learners develops gradually and is shaped not only by age or general proficiency, but also by consistent exposure to structured writing tasks, feedback, and opportunities for revision within a sustained instructional cycle. In this respect, the study supports socio-cognitive and genre-based perspectives of writing development, which view writing as a socially mediated and instructionally scaffolded process rather than a purely maturational progression.

In relation to narrative structure, students across all grade levels demonstrated awareness of basic narrative stages, particularly orientation. However, complications and resolutions were often underdeveloped in lower-grade writing, suggesting partial schematic knowledge without full control over narrative elaboration. As students progressed to higher grades, their narratives became more structurally complete, with clearer problem-solution patterns and more explicit closure.

Analysis of linguistic features revealed that students relied heavily on material processes and simple past tense verbs, reflecting an action-oriented approach to storytelling characteristic of early narrative development. While grammatical inaccuracies were common, particularly in lower grades, they rarely impeded meaning-making. Over time, students demonstrated

increased clause combining, more varied temporal and causal conjunctions, and greater use of evaluative language, indicating expanding linguistic resources and stronger interpersonal control. From an SFL perspective, this gradual diversification beyond predominantly material processes is significant, as academic writing requires greater use of relational and mental processes to construct definitions, explanations, and evaluations. Thus, the observed linguistic development suggests an emerging capacity to move from event-based narration toward more abstract and analytically oriented forms of academic discourse..

Developmental differences across grade levels therefore reflect the cumulative effect of sustained, scaffolded writing instruction. The findings confirm theories that conceptualize writing development as gradual, recursive, and socially supported, while also suggesting that explicit genre-focused pedagogy can accelerate students' control over narrative coherence and linguistic complexity in exam-oriented EFL contexts.

Overall, this study contributes to understanding narrative writing development in primary EFL contexts by demonstrating how students' control of schematic structure, tense consistency, causal sequencing, and lexical variety develops through sustained instructional support. The findings suggest that teachers should move beyond short, product-oriented writing tasks and instead implement structured writing cycles that explicitly teach narrative stages (orientation, complication, resolution), model effective texts, and provide guided joint construction before independent writing. Regular feedback on paragraph organization, cohesive devices, and verb tense control appears particularly important. Curriculum designers may consider allocating extended instructional time for recursive drafting and revision to support measurable improvement in assessment performance.

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