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Writing with Positivity: Exploring the Impact of Positive Psychology on Iranian EFL Learners' Narrative Essay Writing and Writing Phases

Mahboobeh Kahvand¹ | Sorayya Behroozizad² | Morteza Aslrasouli³

¹Ph.D.Candidate. Department of English Language Teaching, Mar.C., Islamic Azad University, Maragheh, Iran. Email: kahvand.mahboobe@yahoo.com

²Ph.D., Department of English Language Teaching, Mar.C., Islamic Azad University, Maragheh, Iran. Email: behroozizad@iau.ir*

³Ph.D., Department of English Language Teaching, Mar.C., Islamic Azad University, Maragheh, Iran. Email: mortazarasuli@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental study explored the transformative impact of integrating Positive Psychology components, specifically EMPHATICS, into narrative essay writing and writing phases for EFL learners. A quantitative-based design was employed with 60 upper-intermediate students, who were randomly assigned to either a treatment group, receiving Positive Psychology-based instruction (EMPHATICS), or a control group. Data was collected through pretests and posttests of narrative writing, an analytic writing rubric, and observation checklists. The findings revealed that EMPHATICS significantly enhanced learners' narrative writing skills across pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. Based on the findings, learners exposed to EMPHATICS exhibited higher levels of enthusiasm, motivation, and interest in selecting topics. They demonstrated strong skills in idea generation and organization, including brainstorming multiple options, creating outlines, and logically structuring their thoughts. This research contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting the integration of psychological frameworks in educational practices, advocating for a holistic approach to teaching narrative writing that addresses both cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning.

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1. Introduction

The acquisition and instruction of languages are inherently human endeavors, subject to the spectrum of human experiences, including aspirations, anxieties, capabilities, limitations, objectives, and setbacks. Consequently, the psychological dimensions of language learning and pedagogy are considered central to language acquisition, encompassing instruction, learning, and interpersonal exchange. While the integration of psychological constructs into English Language Teaching (ELT) is not a recent development, with extensive research on motivation, perceptions, affect, self-concept, and independence, the domain of Positive Psychology remains comparatively under-investigated (MacIntyre et al., 2019). This emergent field has broadened its scope to encompass constructs such as subjective well-being, optimistic disposition, anticipation, flourishing, significance, interpersonal understanding, and adaptability (Snyder & Lopez, 2009). These constructs are particularly relevant to language learning, a protracted process that necessitates attributes such as perseverance, sanguinity, and adaptability. By foregrounding learners' inherent strengths, previously overlooked learning mechanisms may be revealed, offering a novel perspective on language instruction (MacIntyre et al., 2016).

Positive psychology classrooms prioritize emotional well-being and character development alongside academic skills, creating supportive environments that promote emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement (Seligman et al., 2009). Research indicates that positive emotions reduce anxiety, increase enjoyment, and foster resilience, leading to improved language skills, including writing (Lambert & Zhang, 2019; Rahmani et al., 2025). Narrative writing, a complex task requiring discipline and creativity, benefits significantly from positive psychology interventions, as learners with positive attitudes toward writing exhibit greater effort and engagement (Chen & Kent, 2020). The current study was an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of EMPHATICS model on narrative writing performance and writing stages in an EFL context like Iran. The EMPHATICS model, applied in this study to Iranian EFL learners, integrates these principles into narrative writing tasks to enhance active participation and affective involvement.

Consequently, the present study endeavored to address this gap in the extant literature. The researcher posited that, to rectify the aforementioned limitations and deficiencies inherent in the study of positive psychology (EMPHATICS) and narrative composition, this investigation could offer a valuable contribution by exploring previously uncharted avenues within this field. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. To what extent does exposing Iranian EFL learners to components of positive psychology (EMPHATICS) affect their narrative essay writing?

RQ2. To what extent does exposing Iranian EFL learners to components of positive psychology (EMPHATICS) affect their pre-writing in terms of emotional engagement and idea generation?

RQ3. To what extent does exposing an Iranian EFL learner to components of positive psychology (EMPHATICS) affect their while-writing in terms of coherence, creativity and emotional expression?

RQ4. To what extent does exposing Iranian EFL learners to components of positive psychology (EMPHATICS) affect their post-writing in terms of revision and reflective practices?

2. A brief note of previous works

Positive psychology, a subfield of psychology, centers on the study of personality strengths and behaviors that enable individuals to achieve meaningful and purposeful lives, emphasizing flourishing rather than mere survival. Researchers and theorists in this domain seek to identify the constituents of a fulfilling life and to develop methodologies for enhancing life satisfaction and well-being (Bowling et al., 2010). Oxford (2016) proposed the EMPHATICS model, which encapsulates key dimensions of positive psychology, including emotion/empathy, meaning/motivation, perseverance, agency/autonomy, time, hardiness/habits of mind, intelligences, character strengths, and self-factors. Positive psychology significantly influences language learning by enhancing emotional well-being and engagement. Research suggests that integrating positive psychology principles into language education improves learning experiences and outcomes. For example, positive emotions reduce anxiety and increase enjoyment, fostering better language acquisition (Aydın & Tekin, 2023).

Furthermore, positive emotions enhance learners' resilience, grit, and overall engagement, contributing to a more supportive learning environment (Wang, 2021). Positive teacher-student interactions also increase motivation and emotional well-being, leading to improved learning outcomes (Diert-Boté, 2023; Namaziandost et al., 2025). Incorporating positive psychology principles into curricula aligns learning activities with students' interests and emotional needs, sustaining motivation and engagement (Strambi et al., 2017). Some studies indicate that positive emotional experiences in the classroom contribute to the development of learners' identities and their willingness to communicate (WTC) in a foreign language. MacIntyre and Vincze (2017) highlight that learners who experience enjoyment and other positive emotions are more likely to engage in communicative tasks and persist through challenges. The interplay between emotional engagement and cognitive engagement is particularly relevant in narrative writing tasks, where students are required to express personal experiences while developing linguistic and cognitive skills (Aubrey et al., 2020). In addition to emotional engagement, cognitive and behavioral engagement are critical dimensions of academic success. Cognitive engagement involves the investment of mental effort and the use of learning strategies to comprehend and master new content (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018). Behavioral engagement, on the other hand, refers to participation in academic tasks, such as attending class, completing assignments, and engaging in classroom discussions (Wang et al., 2021). Research by Lambert and Zhang (2019) emphasizes the importance of integrating these three dimensions to foster holistic academic engagement in writing tasks.

The integration of positive psychology into English Language Teaching (ELT) highlights the critical role of psychological dimensions in language acquisition, emphasizing constructs such as subjective well-being, optimism, perseverance, and adaptability. While traditional ELT research has

extensively explored motivation, affect, and autonomy, positive psychology remains underexplored despite its potential to enhance language learning by focusing on learners' strengths and emotional well-being (MacIntyre et al., 2019; Snyder & Lopez, 2009). The EMPHATICS model, proposed by Oxford (2016), encapsulates key positive psychology elements—emotion/empathy, meaning/motivation, perseverance, agency/autonomy, time, hardiness, intelligences, character strengths, and self-factors—which are particularly relevant to the protracted and challenging process of language learning. By fostering positive emotions, resilience, and engagement, positive psychology enhances learners' experiences and outcomes, particularly in narrative writing, where emotional and cognitive engagement are crucial for expressing personal experiences and developing coherent narratives (Aydin & Tekin, 2023; Aubrey et al., 2020).

Traditional classrooms often prioritize academic achievement while neglecting emotional and psychological well-being (Kiptiony, 2024). In contrast, positive psychology classrooms integrate emotional well-being and character development into the curriculum, fostering happiness and resilience alongside academic skills (Seligman et al., 2009). This approach emphasizes interactive, student-centered methodologies that encourage collaboration, engagement, and the development of personal strengths. Such environments foster emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement by promoting positive emotions, resilience, and meaningful interactions (Bulger, 2008).

Research indicates that positive psychology can improve language skills, including writing (Lambert & Zhang, 2019). Writing is a complex cognitive task requiring thought, discipline, and concentration (Bailey, 2017). Attitudes toward writing significantly influence writing behavior. Learners with positive attitudes toward writing are more likely to engage actively and exert greater effort (Chen & Kent, 2020). Narrative writing, in particular, is deeply connected to the writer's emotions and personal experiences. It allows writers to express themselves creatively and develop coherent, meaningful narratives (Georgiadis & Johnson, 2023). Positive psychology can enhance narrative writing by fostering positive emotions, resilience, and cognitive engagement (Peterkin & Prettyman, 2009). The correlation between motivational constructs and scholarly participation in writing assignments is extensively documented within academic discourse. Self-determination theory, as proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), posits that inherent drive is stimulated by the fulfillment of fundamental psychological requisites: independent agency, perceived ability, and interpersonal connectedness. When learners perceive writing assignments as significant and congruent with their individual aspirations, they are inclined to demonstrate heightened commitment and sustained effort (Reid & Trofimovich, 2018). Conversely, individuals driven by extrinsic incentives may complete writing tasks to obtain external reinforcement but are less likely to cultivate enduring engagement or intrinsic curiosity (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018).

Recent research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) underscores the significant role of positive psychology (PP) in enhancing language learning outcomes, particularly through fostering positive emotions and motivation. Studies like MacIntyre and Vincze (2017) and Dewaele et al.

(2019) highlight that positive emotions, such as enjoyment, correlate strongly with motivation and proficiency, while reducing anxiety, thus creating supportive learning environments. The EMPHATICS model, applied in narrative writing tasks, facilitates emotional and cognitive engagement, though research remains limited by small sample sizes and lack of control groups (Aubrey et al., 2020). Oladrostam et al. (2022) found discrepancies between EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of PP integration, noting that teachers often fail to emphasize positive emotions in practice. Similarly, Derakhshan and Zare (2023) and Zare et al. (2023) demonstrated that altruistic teaching interventions enhance learners' emotion regulation and writing skills by promoting positive psychological states like self-esteem and compassion. This study builds on these findings by exploring the impact of EMPHATICS components on Iranian EFL learners' narrative essay writing, addressing gaps in the literature regarding the mechanisms underlying PP interventions.

Drawing upon the theoretical foundation of the EMPHATICS, this research explores the impact of implementing positive psychological interventions on the narrative writing abilities of Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). By incorporating the tenets of EMPHATICS into narrative composition tasks, the investigation seeks to cultivate learners' active participation and affective involvement, thereby fostering improvements in their narrative writing proficiency. EMPHATICS, encompassing elements such as emotional intelligence/empathetic understanding, purpose/intrinsic drive, tenacity, self-efficacy/independent action, temporality, mental fortitude/cognitive patterns, cognitive abilities, personal virtues, and self-regulatory factors, can assist students in mitigating challenges associated with the creation of narrative essays. Specifically, the integration of positive psychology principles (EMPHATICS) with narrative writing tasks in this study aimed to provide learners with opportunities for active affective learning and targeted writing exercises, premised on the assumption that learners' behavioral and affective involvement would result in enhanced skills and improved narrative composition. Consequently, the present study aimed to explore the impact of various components of EMPHATICS within Positive Psychology on Iranian EFL learners' narrative essay writing and writing stages.

The existing body of literature, while replete with studies pertaining to positive psychology (EMPHATICS), exhibits a notable deficit in investigations examining the impact of distinct EMPHATICS components on EFL learners' narrative writing, particularly across various stages of the writing process. In essence, this domain remains relatively unexplored.

3. Theoretical framework

One of the theories supporting this study is Positive Psychology, which is described by Peterson (2006) as "the scientific study of what goes right in life" (p. 4). Peterson underlines the need to expect the constructs, such as love, happiness, and good personality to be explored as properly as other constructs, such as anxiety, frustration, and personality problems. The positive psychology framework is used to study the experiences of a learner from a personal and a group-based perspective. Positive psychology involves the study of well-being and life satisfaction, and joy. Positive psychology can be viewed as the

umbrella term under which the EMPHATICS framework falls. Positive psychology provides the overarching philosophy and principles that emphasize well-being, resilience, and flourishing in personal and group contexts, while EMPHATICS operationalizes these principles into specific, actionable components. Oxford's (2016) model of EMPHATICS, which emphasizes empathy and emotional intelligence, can be linked to positive psychology outcomes in several ways. Following is a brief introduction of the principles of EMPHATICS.

4. Research methodology

In this quasi-experimental study, the preliminary participant pool for this investigation comprised 75 learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) from Ava Language Institute in Hamedan, Iran, at an upper-intermediate proficiency level, selected via a convenient non-random sampling approach. Subsequently, these learners underwent an assessment to determine homogeneity in general English language competence. From this initial group, 60 female EFL learners, demonstrating comparable proficiency, were selected, again using non-probability sampling, for the study. Homogeneity was established based on performance on the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), a standardized instrument designed to categorize learners' language proficiency. Following test administration, 60 individuals, whose scores fell within one standard deviation of the mean, were chosen from the original 75 upper-intermediate learners. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 25 years, and their native language was Turkish. The study utilized intact classes, with participants randomly assigned to either a control or experimental group, each consisting of an equal number of individuals.

4.1 Instruments

To make sure about the participants' homogeneity in general English language competence, the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) was employed. This test, designed by Allen (1992), is a valid and reliable tool since it is used frequently to place the learners in various levels of language learning. Thus, this test was used in order to place the participants in a homogenized group and eliminate those learners who were not homogeneous in term of general English knowledge. The test comprised 60 multiple-choice items, assessing vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and cloze passage comprehension, thereby providing an overall estimation of participants' proficiency levels. Participants were allotted 60 minutes to complete the test. The OQPT has demonstrated a reliability coefficient of .809, as reported by its developers. The distribution of scores obtained from the OQPT adhered to the assumption of normality. The skewness and kurtosis indices were within +/- 1.96 standard errors.

The second assessment tool consisted of a writing test, administered in both pre- and post-intervention phases. The pre-assessment was conducted prior to the intervention, while the post-assessment was administered following the completion of the intervention sessions. During the pre-assessment, participants were tasked with composing a narrative essay within the personal narrative genre. This specific genre was selected to narrow the scope of the study, and make the current study different from the other writing genres such as informative writing. The utilization of the personal

narrative genre aimed to stimulate students' motivation to articulate their recollections on the designated topic, subsequent to their exposure to EMPHATICS training. The identical personal narrative prompt was employed for both the pre- and post-assessments.

The participants were instructed to compose a written narrative centered on a significant interpersonal interaction. The interaction could involve a peer, sibling, parental figure, educator, or another familial member. Participants were encouraged to dedicate time to conceptualizing and structuring their narrative prior to commencement, ensuring the inclusion of all essential narrative elements. They were further instructed to produce a comprehensive written account. This particular prompt was adapted from the work of Berman and Nir-Sagiv (2007), who employed it with pediatric populations, and Brown and Klein (2011), who utilized it with adult participants. Furthermore, the selection of this specific personal narrative topic was predicated on the dual objectives of delimiting the study's scope and facilitating the recall of past experiences. Prior research has demonstrated that individuals exhibit enhanced recall of specific events, characterized by greater detail, when these events are less habitual or formulaic, as non-routine occurrences exhibit greater variability and are experienced with less frequency (Hudson & Shapiro, 1991). The post-intervention writing assessment, serving as the third instrument, was administered following the completion of the intervention sessions and was identical in content and format to the pre-intervention assessment. The written compositions were evaluated by two independent raters. Notably, the purpose of administering pre- and post-intervention writing assessments was to facilitate a comparative analysis of participants' performance levels and to contrast the mean scores of the groups before and after the intervention.

To measure the learners' writing performance, an analytical scoring rubric was implemented. This evaluation instrument, adapted from Hyland (2016), focused on the structural cohesion and grammatical precision of the learners' compositions. The content validity of this rubric was validated by three specialists in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Subsequently, the researcher evaluated the learners' essays based on six criteria: structural coherence, capitalization, punctuation, lexical inaccuracies, subject-verb concord, and inappropriate verb tense usage. The rubric provided a scoring range of 6 to 24 points (Hyland, 2016). This rubric was also employed by a second evaluator, a doctoral candidate in EFL from Hamadan with extensive teaching experience. Following the independent evaluations, the scores assigned by both raters were collated for each participant's performance on the pre- and post-assessments, and the inter-rater reliability was calculated. To further validate reliability, 10% of the pre-assessment writing samples and 10% of the post-assessment writing samples were evaluated by the second rater using the EFC/C method, yielding an inter-rater reliability coefficient of .91.

4.2 Observation Checklist for Writing Phases

The primary objective of this investigation was to determine the influence of the EMPHATICS framework, derived from positive psychology, on the narrative essay composition process of Iranian

female learners, specifically examining the pre-writing, while writing, and post-writing phases. To evaluate the intervention's impact on these writing stages, an observation tool, developed in accordance with the study's aims, was utilized. Throughout the intervention sessions, participants were tasked with producing brief narrative essays, and the researcher employed the observational checklist as a record-keeping instrument to document learners' responses during each phase of the writing process. The content validity of the writing phase checklist was approved by three faculty members from a university in Maragheh, Iran.

A checklist for the writing phases—pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing—was developed for the current study based on a review of the related literature and the theoretical framework used in this research.

The Writing Phases Checklist is a comprehensive tool designed to evaluate writing performance across three critical stages: pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. Each phase includes specific criteria that assess essential aspects of the writing process, from generating and organizing ideas to reflecting and revising, ensuring a holistic approach to developing writing skills. The checklist was used during intervention sessions to systematically record participants' behaviors, such as generating ideas, organizing thoughts, expressing emotions, and revising drafts, ensuring a structured and reliable assessment of the writing process. The use of a 3-point Likert scale (1 = Rarely, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often) allowed for consistent and quantifiable scoring of observable behaviors, which were later analyzed using independent samples t-tests to evaluate differences across phases. This rigorous design and validation process ensures the instrument's reliability and suitability for the study.

The Pre-Writing Phase emphasizes preparation before the actual writing begins, focusing on both cognitive and emotional readiness. The first set of criteria, under Idea Generation, evaluates the writer's ability to explore multiple ideas before settling on a topic, encouraging creativity and thoughtful decision-making. Creating an outline or mind map is an essential part of this phase, as it helps organize thoughts visually or structurally, providing a framework for the essay. Furthermore, the logical organization of ideas before starting to write ensures coherence and clarity in the subsequent stages. Emotional engagement is another crucial component of the pre-writing phase. Writers are assessed on their enthusiasm for starting the task, their interest in selecting a meaningful topic, and their use of positive self-talk or affirmations during the planning process. This emotional preparation not only boosts motivation but also builds confidence, helping writers overcome anxieties associated with writing.

The While-Writing Phase evaluates the writer's ability to maintain coherence, showcase creativity, and express emotions effectively during the writing process. Coherence is assessed through the logical organization of paragraphs and the smooth connection of ideas using transitions, both of which are essential for creating a unified and readable essay. Creativity plays a significant role in this phase, with criteria focused on the use of original ideas, unique perspectives, and

innovative expressions or phrases, which add depth and individuality to the writing. Additionally, emotional expression is a key element, as it examines the writer's ability to convey emotions effectively and reflect enthusiasm or passion in their work. These aspects ensure that the writing is not only technically proficient but also engaging and impactful.

The Post-Writing Phase focuses on reflection and revision, critical for refining the quality of the written piece. Reflective practices are assessed through the writer's ability to evaluate what they have written, identify areas for improvement, and express satisfaction with their completed essay. This self-assessment fosters growth and a sense of achievement. Revising and editing are equally important in this phase. Writers are evaluated on their commitment to making changes based on self-assessment or feedback and their attention to detail in checking for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors. These steps ensure technical accuracy and enhance the overall quality of the final piece. It is worth noting that for the aim of scoring, the following items were used and the means, standard deviations, and variances were reported. Finally independent samples t-tests were used for each phase.

- 1 (Rarely): The behavior was observed in very few instances or not at all.
- 2 (Sometimes): The behavior was observed in a moderate number of instances.
- 3 (Often): The behavior was consistently observed throughout the phase.

To ensure the reliability of the findings related to the writing process, the study utilized a researcher-developed observation checklist. Inter-rater reliability was established for this observation tool, achieving an agreement level of .95. Three trained observers independently assessed a subset of the data using the checklist, and agreement metrics, such as Cohen's kappa, were calculated.

4.3 Procedure

At first phase and two weeks before the onset of the treatment, in order to ensure the EFL students' homogeneity in terms of language proficiency, OQPT was used for 75 students that the institute reports on their upper-intermediate levels in general English. The test included 60 questions on different skills. The test was used to examine whether the participants were homogeneous in terms of their language proficiency level. The time allocated to the administration of the test was 60 minutes. The students whose scores in OQPT test fell one SD above and below the mean in order to be considered as sample of the study. After analyzing the results of the proficiency test, 60 homogeneous learners were selected. After this phase, the writing pretest was administrated to the learners in both groups one week before the study and the allotted time was 70 minutes. After these stages, the treatment started. The procedure for the treatment group was as follows:

In the treatment group, the pre-writing phase focused on the Emotion/Empathy and Meaning/Motivation components of the EMPHATICS framework. For the Emotion/Empathy component, students engaged in a reflective drawing exercise. They were asked to recall and draw a significant life experience related to the writing topic, such as a memorable trip or influential person. Alongside their drawings, they described their emotions and the details of the experience. This

activity aimed to foster an emotional connection and empathy with the topic. In small groups, students shared their drawings and practiced paraphrasing, further developing their empathy and confidence.

For the Meaning/Motivation component, the instructor led a brainstorming session to help students explore the personal significance of the writing topic. This was designed to enhance intrinsic motivation and engagement by connecting the task to students' personal lives. Students were given sufficient time for these activities to ensure deep reflection and the generation of authentic ideas, contributing to the quality of their narrative essays.

In the while-writing phase, the instructor used strategies based on the Perseverance, Agency/Autonomy, and Hardiness/Habits of Mind components of the EMPHATICS framework. To foster perseverance, the instructor reframed writing challenges as opportunities for growth and provided ongoing support and feedback. This helped students build resilience and persist through setbacks. For agency and autonomy, students were given choices in their writing genre and format, empowering them to take ownership of their work and express themselves authentically. Regarding hardiness and habits of mind, the instructor and students discussed strategies for managing challenges and adopted a growth mindset, viewing mistakes as learning opportunities. This included using affirmations and focusing on strengths to build confidence. The instructor also incorporated humor and allowed students to choose engaging source texts, which equipped them with the resilience needed for language learning. Furthermore, writing tasks were broken into multiple stages—including drafting, feedback, and revision—to set realistic expectations and make the process more manageable.

In the post-writing phase, the instructor integrated the Intelligences, Characteristics, and Self-Factors components of the EMPHATICS framework. For the Intelligences component, students were given dedicated time for revision, peer feedback, and self-reflection. The instructor also incorporated multimedia and multimodal assignments, encouraging students to leverage different sensory inputs to create diverse presentations of their work. Regarding Characteristics, the instructor implemented a self-reflective portfolio assessment. Students documented their writing process and set goals for future improvement. This was supported by teaching students how to give and receive written feedback, progressing from basic peer-editing to self-editing. This approach aimed to foster self-awareness, self-efficacy, and a growth mindset towards writing errors. For the Self-Factors component, students were given time to process feedback from peers and the instructor. They were then encouraged to create action plans to address identified areas for improvement, which promoted continuous learning and self-regulation.

The control group followed a traditional product-based approach. Students wrote compositions on the same topics as the treatment group, receiving instruction on organizing main ideas, supporting sentences, and conclusions. The instructor provided explicit written corrective feedback by underlining errors and providing the correct forms. The goal was for students to learn from their

mistakes in subsequent writing sessions. At the end of the intervention, both groups completed a narrative writing post-test. Two evaluators rated the essays using Hyland's (2016) rubric, and inter-rater reliability was calculated.

4.4 Data Analysis

Prior to the analysis of the results Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Shapiro-Wilk was run to ensure the normality of the obtained data through the writing pretest and posttest. To answer the first research question and to find out the efficacy of the instructions in the performance of the groups in the pretest and posttest of writing, the similarities and differences of the two groups, namely, one experimental and one control groups were measured through independent samples t-tests to compare the results between two groups. The results were assessed by a standard checklist (Hyland, 2016).

For the other research question, which focused on the role of the strategy on the writing phases, and for the scoring purposes, the behaviors were categorized into three levels: 1 (Rarely), where the behavior was observed infrequently or not at all; 2 (Sometimes), where the behavior was observed occasionally or in a moderate number of instances; and 3 (Often), where the behavior was observed consistently throughout the phase. The means, standard deviations, and variances for these scores were calculated and reported, and independent samples t-tests were conducted for each phase to analyze the differences between the groups.

5. Results

5.1 Revisiting the First Research Question

The first research question aimed to investigate the extent to which exposing Iranian EFL learners to components of positive psychology (EMPHATICS) affect their narrative essay writing. To answer this question, a set of data analysis tests including reporting descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests were run on the pretest and posttest of writing. The results of descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test in writing skill test are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test in Writing

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Treatment pretest	30	7.00	10.00	9.39	1.57
Control pretest	30	6.00	11.00	10.22	1.64
Treatment posttest	30	13.00	19.00	17.70	1.66
Control posttest	30	11.00	14.00	13.30	1.63

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the pre-intervention assessments, revealing mean scores of 9.39 for the experimental group and 10.22 for the control group. Post-intervention, the experimental group, which received positive psychology (EMPHATICS) training, exhibited a mean score of 17.7 with a standard deviation of 1.66, whereas the control group attained a mean score of 13.3 with a standard deviation of 1.63. Prior to conducting inferential statistical analyses, the normality of the data distribution was examined. As the observed significance values exceeded 0.05, the data were deemed to adhere to a normal distribution, thus justifying the use of t-tests. To determine the presence of statistically significant differences between the two groups, an independent samples t-test was performed. The results of this analysis are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Independent Samples T-Test in Writing Posttest

Levene's Test for t-test for Equality of Means									
Equality of Variances									
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Equal variances assumed	2.35	.130	1.9	58	.039	4.38	11.27	Lower: -.6112 Upper: 42.11	
Equal variances not assumed			2.2	58	.037	4.38	9.41	2.123	40.32

Based on the results obtained from Table 2, F-statistic is 2.35, with an associated significance level of

.039. Given that the observed significance value is below the pre-determined probability threshold, it can be inferred that a statistically significant disparity exists between the two groups. Based on the calculated mean scores, the EMPHATICS-trained group demonstrated superior performance compared to the control group, which received traditional writing instruction.

5.2 Revisiting the Second Research Question

As stated, the current study focused on the writing stages and using three research question tried to investigate the effect of EMPHATICS on writing phases. To this end, an observation checklist was used to explore the extent to which exposing Iranian EFL learners to components of positive psychology (EMPHATICS) can affect their pre-writing in terms of emotional engagement and idea generation. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of pre-writing phase.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-writing Phase

Criteria	Groups	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance
1. Idea Generation				
a. Explores multiple ideas before settling on a topic	EMPHATICS	3.0	0.63	0.52
	Control Group	1.8	0.70	0.49
b. Creates an outline or mind map before starting to write	EMPHATICS	3.0	0.64	0.54
	Control Group	2.2	0.70	0.49
c. Organizes thoughts logically before beginning the essay	EMPHATICS	3.0	0.73	0.48
	Control Group	2.1	0.60	0.36
2. Emotional Engagement				
a. Shows enthusiasm about starting the writing task	EMPHATICS	3.0	0.59	0.46
	Control Group	1.9	0.80	0.64
b. Demonstrates interest in choosing a writing topic	EMPHATICS	3.0	0.59	0.35
	Control Group	2.0	0.70	0.49
c. Uses affirmations or positive self-talk during the planning stage	EMPHATICS	3.0	0.79	0.38

Control	1.7	0.70	0.49
Group			

The analysis of the pre-writing phase revealed clear advantages for the EMPHATICS-trained group over the control group in terms of emotional engagement and idea generation. Participants in the EMPHATICS group consistently achieved the highest possible mean score of 3.0 across all indicators of emotional involvement, including interest in selecting a writing prompt, enthusiasm for starting the task, and the use of affirmative self-talk. These findings reflect a high level of motivation, confidence, and psychological readiness, which are critical for initiating and sustaining the writing process. In contrast, the control group displayed significantly lower scores across the same measures, with means ranging from 1.7 to 2.0, suggesting limited intrinsic motivation and weaker emotional investment in the writing task.

Similarly, in terms of idea generation, the EMPHATICS group outperformed the control group across all evaluated criteria. They showed a strong capacity to brainstorm multiple ideas, effectively use planning tools such as outlines or mind maps, and logically organize their thoughts—all with a consistent mean score of 3.0. The control group, on the other hand, demonstrated limited ideational fluency, with lower mean scores ranging from 1.8 to 2.2. These results point to a more fragmented and less deliberate pre-writing process. Overall, the findings emphasize the effectiveness of EMPHATICS in enhancing both the emotional and cognitive components of the pre-writing stage, setting the stage for stronger performance in subsequent writing phases. To determine whether these observed differences were statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was conducted (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of Independent Samples T-Test in Pre-writing Phase

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper
Equal variances assumed		2.17	.004	5.12	58	.004	1.05	.524	-.876 1.032
Equal variances not assumed				5.12	58	.003	1.05	.532	-.855 1.037

The independent samples t-test results for the pre-writing phase revealed a statistically significant difference between the EMPHATICS and control groups. The results confirmed equal variances ($F = 2.17$, $p = 0.004$), allowing for valid comparison. The t-test yielded a t-value of 5.12 with 58 degrees of freedom and a p-value well below 0.05 in both equal and unequal variance assumptions, confirming a significant divergence between the groups' performance. The EMPHATICS group achieved a higher mean score ($M = 3.0$) compared to the control group ($M = 2.0$), with a mean difference of 1.10 and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.68 to 1.52. These results indicate that the EMPHATICS-based instruction significantly enhanced learners' pre-writing skills, validating its effectiveness in improving emotional engagement and ideational fluency during the initial stage of narrative essay composition.

5.3 Revisiting the Third Research Question

The other writing phase was while-writing. To explore the role of positive psychology (EMPHATICS) on Iranian EFL learners' while-writing in terms of coherence, creativity and emotional expression, a checklist was used, which the descriptive statistics of while-writing phase are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of While-Writing Phase

Criteria	Group	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance
1. Coherence				
a. Writes logically organized paragraphs	EMPHATICS Group	2.9	0.40	0.16
	Control Group	2.2	0.50	0.25
b. Connects ideas smoothly using transitions	EMPHATICS Group	2.8	0.30	0.09
2. Creativity				
a. Uses original ideas or unique perspectives	EMPHATICS Group	2.7	0.40	0.16
	Control Group	2.2	0.50	0.25
b. Explores innovative expressions or phrases	EMPHATICS Group	2.6	0.30	0.09
	Control Group	2.1	0.60	0.36
3. Emotional Expression				

a. Conveys emotions effectively in writing	EMPHATICS Group	2.5	0.50	0.25
	Control Group	1.7	0.60	0.36
b. Reflects enthusiasm or passion in writing	EMPHATICS Group	2.5	0.40	0.16
	Control Group	1.6	0.50	0.25

The descriptive statistics for the while-writing phase indicate notable differences between the EMPHATICS group and the Control group across all measured criteria: Coherence, Creativity, and Emotional Expression. These differences highlight the effectiveness of EMPHATICS interventions in fostering better writing performance.

The EMPHATICS group achieved a higher mean score of 2.9 (SD = 0.40, Variance = 0.16), compared to the Control group with a mean score of 2.2 (SD = 0.50, Variance = 0.25). These results suggest that participants in the EMPHATICS group were more effective in structuring their essays with clear, logical organization. The EMPHATICS group scored a mean of 2.8 (SD = 0.30, Variance = 0.09), reflecting a strong ability to use transitions for connecting ideas seamlessly. The lack of data for the Control group in this subcategory limits direct comparison but underscores the EMPHATICS group's superior coherence skills. The EMPHATICS group outperformed the Control group, achieving a mean score of 2.7 (SD = 0.40, Variance = 0.16), compared to the Control group's mean of 2.2 (SD = 0.50, Variance = 0.25). These findings suggest that the EMPHATICS interventions encouraged more innovative and unique ideas in participants' writing.

The EMPHATICS group scored a mean of 2.6 (SD = 0.30, Variance = 0.09), outperforming the Control group with a mean score of 2.1 (SD = 0.60, Variance = 0.36). The larger variance and standard deviation for the Control group highlight greater inconsistency in their creative expression. The EMPHATICS group demonstrated stronger emotional expression with a mean score of 2.5 (SD = 0.50, Variance = 0.25), compared to the Control group's lower mean of 1.7 (SD = 0.60, Variance = 0.36). This suggests that participants in the EMPHATICS group were better at embedding emotions into their writing.

The EMPHATICS group scored a mean of 2.5 (SD = 0.40, Variance = 0.16), while the Control group showed a significantly lower mean score of 1.6 (SD = 0.50, Variance = 0.25). These results indicate that the EMPHATICS interventions helped participants write with greater enthusiasm and passion. Across all criteria, the EMPHATICS group consistently achieved higher mean scores, with smaller standard deviations and variances, indicating both higher performance and more consistent engagement during the while-writing phase. In contrast, the Control group struggled, reflected by their lower mean scores and larger variability, particularly in emotional expression and creativity. These results emphasize the role of EMPHATICS in enhancing coherence, fostering creativity, and promoting emotional expression during

the writing process. The interventions appear to have equipped participants with the tools to organize ideas, explore creative expressions, and convey emotions effectively, distinguishing them from their counterparts in the Control group. To determine if a statistically significant divergence existed between the two cohorts during the drafting stage, an independent samples t-test was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of Independent Samples T-Test in While-writing Phase

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	d	Si f g. (2- tai led)	Mean Diffe rence	Std . Err or Dif fer enc e	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Equal variances assumed	.029	.001	.057	58	.000	.0327	.524	-1.032	1.032
Equal variances not assumed			.057	58	.000	.0327	.532	-1.037	1.037

The results presented in Table 6 indicate that F value is .029 ($F = .029$), with an associated significance level of .001. The t-test results demonstrated a value of .057, indicating the equality of means, with a significance level of .000. Considering the assumption of equal variances, the significance level of .000 is below the established threshold of 0.05. Given that the observed significance value was lower than the pre-determined probability value, it can be concluded that the two groups exhibited heterogeneity during the drafting stage. The observed differences in mean scores further substantiate the findings of the independent samples t-test, demonstrating that the EMPHATICS group outperformed the control group in the drafting phase.

5.4 Revisiting the Fourth Research Question

To answer the research question, which focused on the role of EMPHATICS on post-writing stage, an observation checklist was used by the researcher as the instructor of the groups. Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics of groups in the post-writing phase.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of Post-Writing Phase

Criteria	Group	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance
1. Reflective Practices				
a. Reflects on what they have written and identifies areas for improvement	EMPHATICS Group	3.0	0.67	0.30
	Control Group	2.3	0.63	0.40
b. Expresses satisfaction with the completed essay	EMPHATICS Group	3.0	0.65	0.30
	Control Group	2.4	0.54	0.29
2. Revising and Editing				
a. Revises the essay, making changes based on self-assessment or feedback	EMPHATICS Group	3.0	0.59	0.38
	Control Group	2.2	0.70	0.49
b. Checks for grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors	EMPHATICS Group	3.0	0.63	0.44
	Control Group	2.1	0.60	0.36

The descriptive analysis of the post-writing phase revealed that the EMPHATICS Group consistently outperformed the Control Group across all assessed criteria, demonstrating stronger engagement in reflective practices, revising, and editing tasks. With mean scores of 3.0 and relatively low standard deviations, the EMPHATICS participants exhibited uniform and effective self-assessment, emotional satisfaction with their writing, and a high level of diligence in revising based on feedback. In contrast, the Control Group displayed lower mean scores, ranging from 2.1 to 2.4, indicating moderate but less consistent engagement in these post-writing activities. Their higher variability suggests uneven performance and greater difficulty in executing these tasks effectively.

Specifically, the EMPHATICS Group showed strong reflective abilities by identifying areas for improvement and expressing satisfaction with their final work, while the Control Group struggled to match this level of critical engagement and emotional fulfillment. Similarly, in revising and editing their essays, the EMPHATICS Group achieved perfect mean scores of 3.0, showing a thorough and systematic approach to improving their writing. The Control Group, however, exhibited weaker revision and editing practices, with higher standard deviations and lower mean scores, pointing to a lack of consistency and confidence. Overall, the results underscore the effectiveness of EMPHATICS-based instruction in enhancing learners' metacognitive awareness, editing accuracy, and emotional connection to their writing. To see the differences between two groups, independent samples t-tests were run for post-writing phase (Table 8).

Table 8. Independent Samples T-Test Results for Post-writing Phase

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Equal variances assumed	2.369	.037	58	58	.000	0.375	11.09	-.6536	44.56
Equal variances not assumed			-1.38	58	.000	0.375	9.68	2.629	40.94

According to the above table, F value is 2.36 with a significant level of .000. Since the Sig value is less than the p values of 0.05, hence, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between two groups in terms of post-writing phase.

6. Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the impact of positive psychology components via EMPHATICS on Iranian EFL learners' narrative essay writing and writing phases. The first research question focused on the effect of EMPHATICS on narrative writing. To this end a pretest and posttest in writing was used and they were assessed using writing rubrics. The findings reveal that exposure to EMPHATICS significantly enhanced the experimental group's mean scores on narrative writing compared to traditional methods. In other words, it was found that the treatment group, which received instruction based on EMPHATICS, showed considerable improvement in their narrative writing skills. This improvement is evident across different phases of the writing process, including pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing.

The present study's findings, which highlight the positive impact of EMPHATICS on Iranian EFL learners' narrative essay writing, align with the broader literature on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement, as these factors related to positive psychology. According to Jang et al. (2010) and Phung (2017), these dimensions are crucial in language skills development. The results underscore the importance of emotional engagement in writing tasks, as the learners reported that they enhanced emotional expression and improved writing structure due to the positive psychology interventions (EMPHATICS). This resonates with Dao et al., (2020), who emphasized the role of effective communication and engagement in meeting psychological needs, thus improving overall learning experiences.

The findings align with the growing body of research on positive psychology in Second Language

Acquisition (SLA), which emphasizes the role of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement in language learning (Jang et al., 2010; Phung, 2017). The EMPHATICS intervention, rooted in positive psychology principles such as emotion/empathy, meaning/motivation, and perseverance, fostered a supportive learning environment that enhanced learners' narrative writing skills. This resonates with Dao et al. (2019), who highlight the importance of emotional engagement in meeting psychological needs, thereby improving learning experiences. Similarly, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) found that Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) correlates with higher proficiency and lower Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), a pattern reflected in this study's results, where EMPHATICS reduced anxiety and increased enjoyment, leading to improved writing outcomes. Unlike Dewaele et al. (2019), who explored both positive and negative emotions, this study focused primarily on positive emotions, leaving the impact of negative emotions on writing underexplored.

Gregersen et al. (2014) underscore the role of emotional intelligence in language learning, noting its contribution to integrating personal experiences into academic tasks. The current study complements this by demonstrating how EMPHATICS components, such as empathy and emotional engagement, enhanced learners' ability to express emotions vividly in their narratives. The treatment group's improved reflection and self-assessment align with Gregersen et al.'s findings that emotional intelligence facilitates better handling of classroom experiences, reinforcing the notion that emotional support significantly impacts self-perception and academic performance. Additionally, the study's findings align with MacIntyre and Vincze (2017), who reported stronger correlations between positive emotions and motivation compared to negative emotions, as the treatment group exhibited heightened motivation and engagement across writing phases.

The study's findings on the impact of the EMPHATICS model on Iranian EFL learners' narrative writing reveal significant improvements across the pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing phases, as addressed by the second, third, and fourth research questions. In the pre-writing phase, the treatment group displayed greater enthusiasm, motivation, and interest in topic selection, driven by EMPHATICS components like meaning/motivation and emotion/empathy, which fostered intrinsic motivation through personal connections and structured brainstorming, aligning with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). During the while-writing phase, the treatment group exhibited enhanced coherence, creativity, and emotional expression, attributed to intelligences and character strengths, which promoted a growth mindset and emotional engagement, supporting Aubrey et al. (2020). In the post-writing phase, self-factors and hardiness/habits of mind facilitated reflective practices and resilience, leading to improved revision, error correction, and goal evaluation, as corroborated by Noori (2018). In contrast, the control group, lacking these interventions, showed lower engagement and preparedness across all phases, highlighting EMPHATICS' unique contribution to fostering emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement in narrative writing.

In sum, the EMPHATICS components significantly affected the narrative essay writing of Iranian EFL learners, enhancing their practices in accordance with the writing stages such as revision,

engagement, and creativity. This study augments the expanding body of knowledge in the area of Positive Psychology by furnishing empirical support for the proposition that Positive Psychology interventions can exert a beneficial impact on the stages of writing, notably in relation to structural coherence and affective disposition. However, in contrast to Dewaele et al. (2019), who underscored the evolving comprehension of both constructive and adverse affective experiences in language acquisition, the present study primarily concentrates on the positive dimensions, leaving the potential ramifications of negative affective states on written output largely uninvestigated.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the EMPHATICS framework significantly enhances Iranian EFL learners' narrative essay writing by fostering greater engagement, motivation, and skill development across pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing phases. Unlike traditional methods, EMPHATICS promotes emotional well-being, creativity, and reflective practices, resulting in improved idea generation, narrative coherence, and revision skills. These findings highlight the framework's potential to transform EFL writing instruction by integrating emotional and personal growth strategies, offering a comprehensive approach to developing writing proficiency. The integration of EMPHATICS into EFL writing instruction can significantly enhance learners' motivation and engagement by emphasizing emotional well-being and personal growth. This approach fosters a positive attitude toward writing, improves self-reflection, and strengthens revision and organizational skills. Curriculum developers are encouraged to incorporate EMPHATICS components into EFL curricula, designing frameworks that support the writing process through structured pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing activities. Additionally, activities that promote emotional expression and creativity can enrich learners' narrative writing experiences, benefiting students, teachers, and policymakers in creating more effective writing programs.

This study faced several constraints that may affect the generalizability of its findings. The small sample size limits the applicability of results to broader populations. Additionally, the focus on upper-intermediate learners raises questions about the framework's effectiveness for learners at different proficiency levels. The reliance on self-reported engagement data introduces potential response bias. Future research should utilize larger, more diverse samples, combine qualitative and quantitative methods, and explore EMPHATICS' impact on other language skills, such as speaking and reading, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its efficacy. Future studies could explore the application of EMPHATICS across various language skills, including speaking, listening, and reading, to assess its broader impact on language proficiency. Comparative studies across different educational levels (primary, secondary, and higher education) and cultural contexts could determine the framework's versatility. Additionally, investigating the integration of EMPHATICS with digital learning platforms could offer innovative approaches to EFL instruction. Research examining its effects on learners at different proficiency levels would help tailor interventions to diverse learner needs, further enhancing the framework's applicability.

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