

A Creative Writing Intervention for Second Language Acquisition Development in Multilingual Students

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Received: September 10, 2023

Accepted: October 14, 2023

Online Published: October 24, 2023

doi:10.11114/jets.v12i1.6375

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v12i1.6375>

Abstract

The primary goal of this research is to examine how creative writing-based methods impact the development of narrative skill in students who are learning Greek as a second language at the A1-A2 proficiency levels. More specifically, this study aims to evaluate the extent to which the writing abilities of A1-A2 level Second Language Learners (SLL) can progress from basic, structured stories to more complex narratives at higher proficiency levels. In this study, a total of fifty-four A1-A2 level SLL were divided into two groups: the Experimental Group (E.G.) and the Control Group (C.G.). Both groups underwent a pretest and a posttest assessment. An intervention, consisting of six class hours per week over a three-month period, was exclusively administered to the E.G. When designing the creative writing activities, the research considered the A1-A2 level writing criteria and writing competencies outlined in the Common Application Text for European Languages. The results of the study reveal that, following the intervention, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The C.G. displayed only a marginal improvement across all measurement scales, while the E.G. performance reached the levels of B1-B2 in terms of written narrative skill. These findings confirm previous research indicating that creative writing, as an engaging teaching approach, empowers A1-A2 level SLL to employ specific narrative techniques, thus elevating their narrative writing skill to B1-B2 proficiency levels. As a result, the discussion underscores the importance of enriching teaching practices with effective tools such as creative writing to enhance the narrative skill of multilingual students, ultimately facilitating their acquisition of a second language.

Keywords: multilingual education, SLL, second language acquisition, narrative skill, creative writing-based intervention

1. Introduction

Multilingualism is a natural and increasingly common aspect of today's globalized world (Lasagabaster, 2017). Many students around the world grow up speaking more than one language, and as they navigate their educational journey, they often encounter the need to acquire additional languages. Developing second language acquisition skills in multilingual students is a complex and dynamic process that involves a combination of linguistic, cognitive, social, and cultural factors (Duff, 2019).

Multilingual students often possess a distinct advantage when learning their two languages due to their simultaneous language exposure and cognitive flexibility (Markova, 2017). However, they also face unique challenges. Multilingual students may experience language interference, where elements of their native language influence their pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary in the target language (Turnbull, 2018). Using multiple languages can be mentally taxing, and some students may struggle to maintain proficiency in all their languages (Duff, 2019).

Previous studies (e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2018) suggest several strategies to overcome these challenges and successfully acquire a second language, however, there is a dearth of research regarding the role of creative writing as a technique to enhance second language acquisition. Creative writing is of significant importance for various reasons, transcending its role as a mere academic exercise (Herawati, 2021). It holds a special place in education, personal development, and the world of literature and art while it plays a vital role in developing second language acquisition in multilingual students (Almelhi, 2021). It offers a unique and effective approach to language learning by combining linguistic skill development with creative expression (Tu, 2021). Specifically, creative writing contributes to the development of language skills in multilingual students by enhancing their vocabulary, improving grammar and syntax, boosting cultural exploration, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and imagination (O'G'Li, 2021; Akhter & Nordin, 2022). Incorporating

creative writing into language instruction for multilingual students can be a powerful tool for language acquisition. It not only hones linguistic skills but also nurtures creativity, cultural awareness, and emotional intelligence, providing a holistic approach to language learning. Creative writing encourages students to actively engage with the language, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective. This article explores the challenges and strategies for fostering effective second language acquisition in multilingual students by using a creative writing-based intervention.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*

The Common Application, often referred to as the Common App, is a standardized college application used by many colleges and universities in the United States. The Common App includes a section where applicants can report their proficiency in various languages, including European languages. Specifically, the notation "A1-A2" refers to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is a widely recognized system for assessing language proficiency. The CEFR divides language proficiency into several levels, with "A1" and "A2" being the lowest levels on the scale. At A1 (Beginner) level, students have very basic language skills. They can understand and use simple phrases and expressions related to familiar, everyday situations. This level indicates a very basic ability to communicate in the language. At A2 (Elementary) level students can handle simple, routine tasks and interactions. They can understand and use common phrases, express basic needs, and engage in simple conversations on familiar topics (Council of Europe, n.d.). In terms of narrative skill, A1 and A2 levels indicate the use of basic narrative framing phrases (e.g., "Once upon a time", "and they lived happily ever after") and only signs of narrative basic structure (the three layers of structure are not adequately used) (Kalaitzi & Panos, 2023).

"B1" and "B2" are higher levels of language proficiency compared to "A1" and "A2". At B1 (Intermediate) level, students have a more substantial command of the language. They can understand and participate in conversations on a wide range of topics, including those that are not entirely familiar. They can also produce coherent and detailed text on various subjects, express opinions, and provide reasons for their views. At B2 (Upper-Intermediate) students can understand complex texts and engage in discussions on a wide range of topics. They can express themselves fluently and spontaneously, use the language effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes, and provide detailed explanations and justifications for their ideas (Council of Europe, n.d.). In terms of narrative skill, B1 and B2 levels indicate the use of complex narrative framings and only adequate three-layer narrative basic structures. They can also use advanced narrative techniques which presuppose abilities of deconstruction, subversion, coding, and de-coding (Kalaitzi & Panos, 2023).

2.2 *Evidence on the Effectiveness of Creative Writing as a Teaching Approach*

Embarking on the findings on second language acquisition through the teaching approach of creating writing, it's highly noted that in teaching a language as a second language, creative writing as a process-based writing approach, outweighs traditional methods in improving the written expression skillset of learners in terms of text structure, word choices and organization (Turkben, 2019). The main difference between the old-fashioned process regarding the acquisition of writing skill and the contemporary one which highlights creative processes, is that creative writing serves as a tool that helps students enjoy writing and regard it as a need (Göçen, 2019). It could be said that writing becomes a fascinating process, that flows effortlessly in any level of language competency. In support of the previous assumption, another recent research not only enhanced the argument that creative writing-based intervention functions adequately/successfully as a research approach, but also confirmed that the combined use of narrative elements by children between the age of 5 and 6 years old is possible and leads to the development of their narrative speech by producing distinctive literary types (Kalaitzi & Panos, 2023).

2.3 *Evidence on the Use of Creative Writing Assignments in a Second Language Course*

Creative writing assignments are found by students to be engaging and helpful in boosting their writing fluency and self-assurance. This is because these assignments are not evaluated with a focus on grammar, spelling, or structural errors (Arshavskaya, 2015). Generally, the use of creative writing assignments in a second language course can be a highly effective and engaging approach to language learning (Wang et al., 2019; Almelhi, 2021). Particularly, creative writing tasks encourage students to actively use the target language to express their thoughts and ideas (Herawati, 2021). This application of language helps reinforce vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure, leading to improved language proficiency. Additionally, creative writing assignments require students to communicate authentically, often in contexts that mirror real-life situations (Akhter & Nordin, 2022). This type of practice helps bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use. Sharing and discussing creative writing assignments with peers, fosters a sense of community in the language class (Turnbull, 2019). Peer feedback provides valuable insights and encourages collaborative learning. Creative writing can incorporate cultural elements, allowing students to explore and understand the cultural nuances and context of the language they are learning (Abdisheribov, YoLdosheva, & Jumayeva, 2022). This fosters a

deeper appreciation of the culture associated with the language. Moreover, creative writing taps into students' creativity and imagination, making language learning more enjoyable and motivating. When students have the freedom to express themselves creatively, they are more likely to be engaged and committed to the learning process. Finally, creative writing assignments can serve as a platform for students from different linguistic backgrounds to share their cultural experiences and perspectives through their writing (Göçen, 2019). This creates a rich environment for cultural exchange and understanding. Instructors can use creative writing assignments to assess students' language proficiency, creativity, and comprehension of cultural themes (Turkben, 2019). It offers a versatile way to evaluate students' language skills and progress. Summarizing, incorporating creative writing assignments into a second language course can be a dynamic and effective way to facilitate language acquisition, cultural understanding, and personal growth. It enriches the learning experience by promoting creativity, critical thinking, and authentic communication, making it a valuable pedagogical approach in language education.

2.4 Evidence on How Creative Writing Practices Affect the Written Expression Skills of B2 Level Second Language Learners

Creative writing practices can significantly enhance the written expression skills of B2 level second language learners (Chamcharatsri & Iida, 2022). These exercises encourage learners to expand their vocabulary, improve grammar and syntax, vary sentence structures, and adapt language use to different contexts (Kim, 2018). Learners also develop organizational skills, honing their abilities to coherently present ideas (Jameel & Mohamood, 2017). The editing and revision process inherent in creative writing fosters precision and clarity. Additionally, creative writing assignments promote creativity, emotional engagement, and cultural understanding. Constructive feedback from peers and instructors further refines writing skills and boosts learners' confidence, making them more motivated to engage with the language (Ten Peze et al., 2021). Ultimately, the skills gained through creative writing extend to real-world applications, enhancing written communication in various contexts beyond creative expression.

2.4.1 Rationale, Conceptual Model, Aim and Objectives

It is well-documented that among students learning a language, whether as their native tongue or as a second language, writing skills present the greatest difficulty. However, there appears to be an existing knowledge gap regarding the influence of creative writing on the narrative techniques employed by second language learners, hereafter referred to as SLL. A teaching intervention, designed and used in previous research, which sets a series of creative writing activities to develop specific narrative techniques (Kalaitzi & Panos, 2023), functioned as the framework of the present research.

The aim of the current study is to identify the effects of creative writing-based practices on the development of narrative skill (both oral and written) of A1-A2 level students learning Greek as a second language.

Specifically, this research would assess the following research questions:

Research Question 1: *To what extent SLL simple structured stories of A1-A2 level can be developed to complex narratives of more advanced levels?*

Research Question 2: *To what level it is feasible for a creative writing-based teaching intervention to produce statistically significant changes to SLL level of language acquisition?*

Consequently, the first research question has to do with whether there is a development to SLL level of second language acquisition in terms of using narrative techniques in their written expression and the second research question explores the level to which it is feasible for a creative writing-based teaching intervention to produce statistically significant changes, which could subsequently be used for comparisons between groups of SLL in regard to their level of second language acquisition.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection Tool

The present research consists of an empirical observation of narrative performance of A1-A2 level students learning Greek as a second language. For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire -based on the Gambrell & Dromsky (2000) framework - was used, aiming at the evaluation of use of specific narrative elements in narrative speech. The readjustment and weighting of the questionnaire was made by a random sample of SLL students, which were excluded from the Experimental and the Control Group. The questionnaire distributed was composed of four assessing criteria defined as indicators with nine items in total. More specifically, the first indicator [I1] was the narrative framing (2 items), the second indicator [I2] was the narrative basic structure (3 items), the third indicator [I3] was the intertextual character (2 items) and the fourth indicator [I4] was the plot subversion (2 items) (Kalaitzi, 2019). All items were measured with a 12-point evaluation scale according to the 6-level system of language proficiency (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 & C2). Moreover, all scales were tested for their reliability and validity and the findings suggest high levels of internal validity and reliability (all

scales present a Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.8). The questionnaire was administered as pretest and posttest to both an experimental and a control group, before and after a teaching intervention -which was conducted only in the experimental group- to reveal any significant deviations in performance (Scott et al., 1995; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

3.2 Sample

In total 54 A1-A2 level SLL students were selected for sampling. They were randomly differentiated to form the Experimental and the Control Group (Kalaitzi, 2019; Karasar, 2017; Nasir et al., 2013). Both groups included foreign (non-Greek) students of typical development, while students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia and dysgraphia were excluded. Age was not an exclusion criterion. Writing ability in the second language was an inclusion criterion. As far as the SLL writing ability is concerned, it must be clarified that spelling, grammar and syntax deficiencies (whenever there were any) were not taken into consideration, since it is shown that grammar and syntax does not affect the production of narrative skill in creative writing-based activities (Arshavskaya, 2015). Students were selected based on their second language acquisition level in accordance with CERF (Council of Europe, n.d.).

3.3 Intervention

The intervention was informed by prior action research endeavors (Kalaitzi, 2019; Fountas & Pinnell, 2010; Gambrell & Dromsky, 2000). It entailed a pedagogical strategy featuring custom-designed activities, which had already been proven effective in earlier research, with the goal of enhancing the application of the four narrative elements specified in the questionnaire. When devising the creative writing activities, the researchers took into account the writing outcomes and competencies at the A1-A2 level, as outlined in the Common Application Text for European Languages (Council of Europe, n.d.).

The intervention, which took place within a period of 3 months with an average of 6 class hours per week (3 days/week, 2 hours/day) delivered by the researcher, was conducted only in the E.G., for the independent variables (Kalaitzi, 2019). The intervention's efficiency & students' engagement on it were weighted through a pilot approach. The procedural practices were divided into 4 phases, each phase including 4 activities aiming at the use of a different narrative technique. A variety of material was used to create an environment where students can express themselves comfortably while developing creative writing activities (e.g., relaxing music, intriguing images). Sufficient time was provided for students to write their texts. The following Table 1 outlines the content of all 4 intervention phases.

Table 1. Intervention phases activities

Activities			
1 st phase	2 nd phase	3 rd phase	4 th phase
Narrative framing technique	Narrative basic structure technique	Intertextual character technique	Plot subversion technique
Identifying the narrative framing of beginnings and endings	Identifying character exposition, complication & climax, resolution	Discerning different roles of folktale characters	Discerning of archetypal patterns
Narrating already known folktales and myths' beginnings and endings	Discerning linguistic markers of narrative basic structure	Identifying intertextual characters in folktales and myths	Identifying reversals of the hero and the villain
Specify the folktales and myths' beginnings	Placing plot cards in linear sequence	Introducing folktale or mythical characters into different plots	Subverting the archetypal patterns
Changing the folktales and myths' endings	Using linguistic markers to retell parts of already known plots	Retelling of folktales and myths including intertextual characters	Reversing both the heroes' action and the chronological sequence of events

4. Results

4.1 Pre-Intervention Outcomes of Groups Performance on Narrative

Results show that A1-A2 level SLL narrative skill lacks structural and morphological narrative patterns. In fact, during

pre-intervention, both groups have similar performance regarding narrative techniques. The students hardly use beginning and ending framings, their stories lack three-layered basic structure, and there is no sign of intertextual characters, or any effort for reversing the chronological sequence of events. The differences between the two groups were not statistically significant as was expected ($p > .05$) (Figure 1).

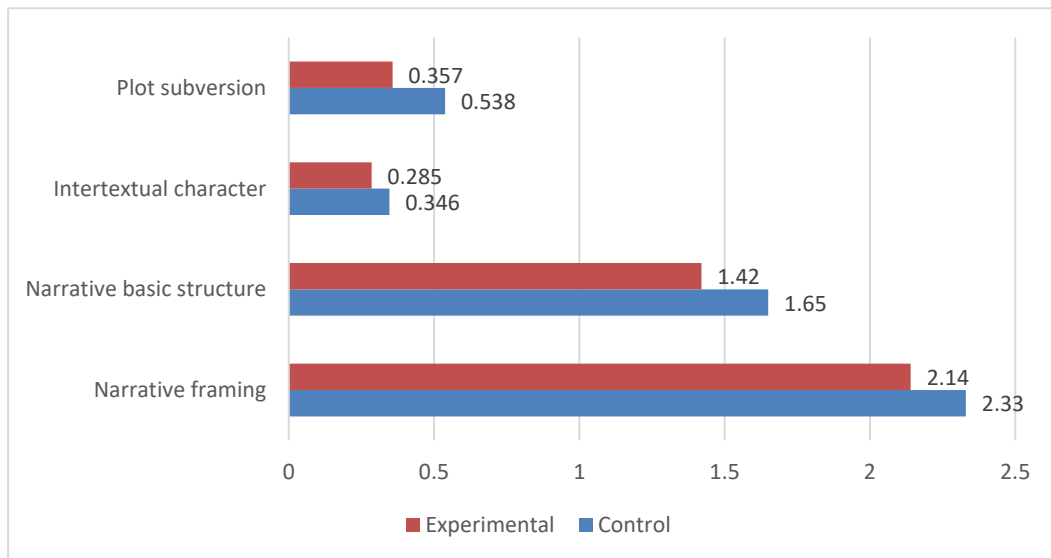


Figure 1. Groups’ performance on narrative teachings in pre-intervention stage

4.2 Post-Intervention Outcomes of Groups Performance on Narrative

After intervention, the differences between groups were found to be statistically significant ($p < .01$). CG shows only a small increase on narrative framing and narrative basic structure scales, while there is no change on intertextual character and plot subversion scales. On the contrary, EG measures can be classified at B1-B2 levels, showing a large difference from pre-intervention measures (Figure 2).

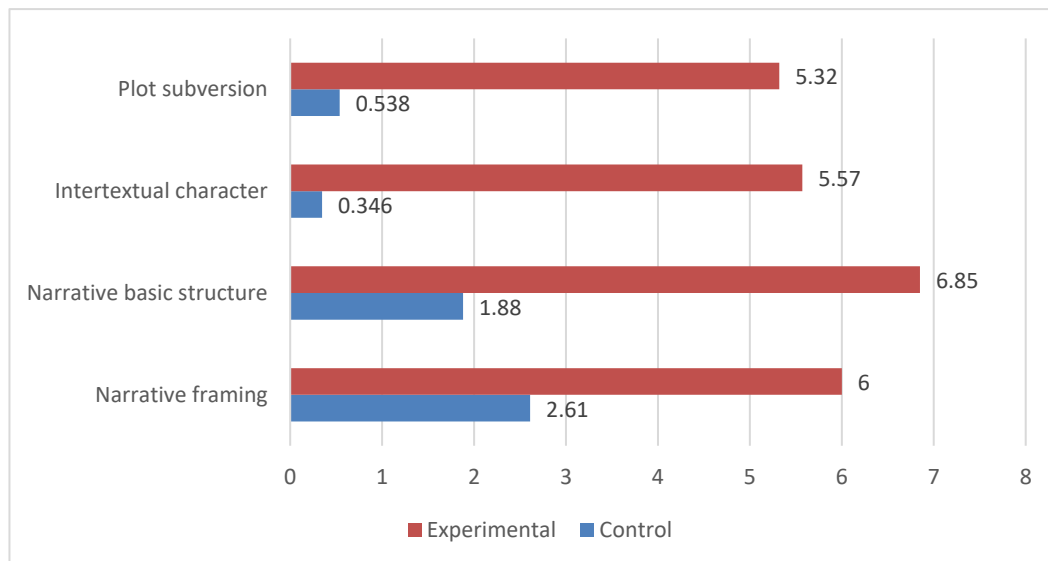


Figure 2. Groups’ performance on narrative teachings in post-intervention stage

More specifically, while the C.G. performance remains close to the pre-intervention levels, E.G students are able to frame their stories with adequate beginnings and endings, and to include a hero, a problem and a solution – which consists of a fully structured narrative. What is impressive is that they now include intertextual characters from other folktales and myths in their stories whose introduction leads to the subversion of the archetypal plot. It is quite clear by the findings

that after the intervention E.G. students' narrative written speech embeds all four narrative techniques under research.

4.3 Pre and Post-Intervention Outcomes Comparison

As far as the second RQ is concerned, both groups provided measurable results and notable deviations of their performance, enabling a between groups comparison and leading to safe assumptions. As shown in Figure 3, there is a similar performance level of both groups before the implementation of the intervention. CG's measures remain at similar levels, while there is a significant prominent performance differentiation of the E.G. after the intervention ($p < .01$).

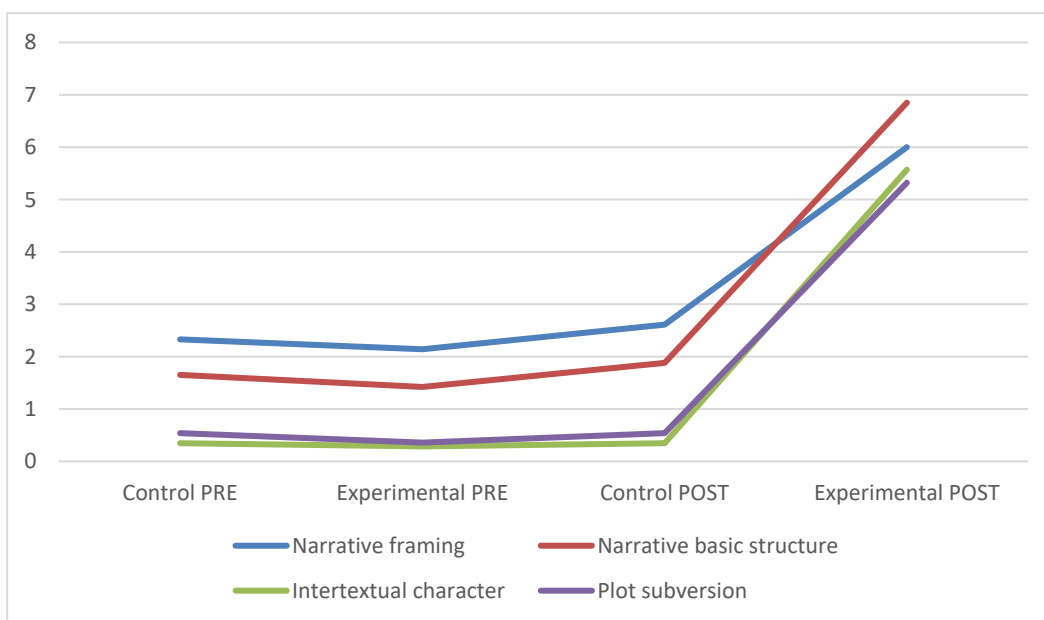


Figure 3. Groups' comparison during pre and post-intervention stages

5. Discussion

Current findings validate previous research showing that as Göçen (2019) and Arshavskaya (2015), pointed out, creative writing, as an engaging teaching approach, enhanced the participation of the E.G. in the intervention. Furthermore, in accordance with Turkbek (2019) and Arshavskaya (2015), SLL do embed narrative techniques in their speech thus improving their written expression skillset and increasing a fluency in text structure. Last, but not least, E.G. students' challenged imagination produced intertextual characters and plot subversion on classic folktales and traditional myths, elevating their creativity levels. All of the aforementioned led to the answer of the first research question, that if A1-A2 Level SLL combine the use of specific narrative techniques, their written narrative skill increases to B1-B2 level of second language acquisition.

Regarding the second research question, both groups yielded quantifiable outcomes with noteworthy differences in their performance, allowing for a comparison between the two groups and leading to reliable conclusions. As depicted in the graph, it is evident that both groups had a similar level of performance prior to the intervention. Notably, the graphic also highlights a substantial and statistically significant divergence in the performance of the Experimental Group (E.G.) following the intervention, with a p-value less than 0.01, as supported by previous research (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010; Chan et al., 1998; Sanders, 1992; Cuba & Lincoln, 1981).

In addition to the observation that the initial level of narrative skill in Second Language Learners (SLL) can be enhanced through targeted interventions emphasizing narrative techniques, creative writing demonstrated its effectiveness as a valuable method for instructing multilingual students. One key assumption in support of the effectiveness of the creative writing learning method would be the elimination of spelling, grammar, syntax, and structural barriers from the SLL produced narrative speech. Such a strategy boosts their willingness to produce speech and enhances their attempts and trials on writing activities (Arshavskaya, 2015). Another key assumption supporting the suitability of narrative techniques, such as narrative framing, narrative basic structure, intertextual character, and plot subversion, would be the fact that, as shown in previous research (Kalaitzi & Panos, 2023), the first two narrative elements are partially embedded into children's narrative ability from the age of 4 and the other two elements could be acquired and used from ages 5-6. Hence, the low initial SLL narrative ability (A1-A2) could be elevated into a more complex one (B1-B2) by embedding these narrative elements in it.

Consequently, the findings show that there is a need of enhancing teaching practices with effective and appropriate tools such as creative writing, aiming at the development of narrative skill at multilingual students, which subsequently can lead to their second language acquisition.

6. Limitations & Future extension

As far as the limitations of the current research are concerned, in the future, a larger and more diverse sample might be a worthwhile research endeavor. What is more, a diverse sample in regards of different levels of Common Application Text for European Languages should be tested. Regarding the prospects, a multi-level analysis of nested data is recommended, which could lead to a holistic evaluation of data collection tool's reliability (Level 1 – questionnaire's use & performance assessment / Level 2 - teacher's attitude towards the questionnaire & the effectiveness of teaching intervention / Level 3 - demographics of SLL regions) (Frenzel et al., 2007). What is also advisable is the evaluation of the questionnaire's reliability by different examiners (Cuba & Lincoln, 1981).

7. Conclusion

Apart from the fact that SLL initial level of narrative skill can be developed to a higher one, through an intervention which focuses on narrative techniques, creative writing has been proved, once more, an effective approach, appropriate for teaching multilingual students. What becomes evident in this context, is the imperative to bolster educational strategies that prioritize the cultivation of narrative skills in SLL, as this can ultimately pave the way for more successful second language acquisition for these learners. This underscores the significance of further efforts in enhancing instructional practices geared towards narrative skill development in SLL, with the goal of facilitating their proficiency in acquiring a second language.

Acknowledgments

We greatly appreciate the valuable contributions of the participating Greek public schools.

Authors contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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