

**Gender Differences in Narrative Essay Writing Ability among Indonesian EFL Undergraduate Students****Elina Bayusri¹, Erwin Pohan², Dewi Nopita³**

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Abstract

The research of this study was to determine whether the narrative essay writing abilities of male and female fourth-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program differed noticeably. The study adopted a descriptive comparative quantitative design. A total of 18 students from Class K1 at Raja Ali Haji Maritime University took part, comprising 9 males and 9 females chosen via purposive sampling. To collect the necessary data, participants completed a writing test requiring them to produce a 450-word narrative essay on a shared topic under uniform conditions. Two raters then assessed the essays independently, applying an analytic scoring rubric adopted from Jacobs et al. (1981) that covers five writing dimensions content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Each student's final score represented the average of the two raters' evaluations. The researchers analyzed the data using several statistical procedures: descriptive statistics, the independent samples t-test, Cohen's d to gauge effect size, Levene's test for homogeneity of variance, and Shapiro-Wilk test for normality. Results indicated that female participants scored higher on average (84.11) than their male counterparts (72.89). With a two-sided p-value of 0.033 below the 0.05 threshold the t-test confirmed a statistically significant gender-based difference in narrative essay writing performance. The effect size, measured at 1.10 using Cohen's d, further indicated a substantial (large) practical distinction between the two groups. When combined, these findings indicate that female students in this sample were better at writing narrative essays than male students.

Keywords: Comparative Study, Narrative Essay, Writing Ability, Gender Differences, EFL Students**Citation:**

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most essential language skills in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, express opinions, and present knowledge effectively in both academic and professional contexts. Oanh (2024) states that writing is fundamental to academic success since it allows students to demonstrate comprehension, critical thinking, and the ability to communicate ideas coherently. Likewise, Abdel-Haq and Ali (2017) emphasize that writing is one of the essential twenty-first-century skills required in an era where written communication dominates educational and professional environments. Therefore, writing ability has become an important indicator of students' academic achievement, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

In the Indonesian EFL context, writing remains one of the most challenging language skills for university students. Many learners experience difficulties in organizing ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary, maintaining coherence, and applying correct grammatical structures. Febriani (2022) found that Indonesian university students frequently encountered problems in organizing ideas, using appropriate grammar, and producing coherent essays. Similarly, Asnas (2022) reported that students still struggled with vocabulary, grammar accuracy, and organization in essay writing. These findings indicate that improving students' writing ability continues to be a major concern in higher education.

Narrative essay writing is one of the writing genres that requires students to organize events logically while maintaining coherence, grammatical accuracy, and appropriate vocabulary. According to Oshima and Hogue (2007), effective narrative writing requires writers to organize ideas systematically and employ appropriate language structures to produce coherent texts. Likewise, Dinna Auliya and Afrianto (2016) explain that narrative writing enables students to express experiences and ideas creatively while simultaneously developing their writing competence. Nevertheless, many EFL students continue to experience difficulties in generating ideas, organizing paragraphs, and applying appropriate grammatical structures when composing narrative essays.

Several previous studies have investigated students' narrative writing ability in EFL contexts. Purnama (2018) reported that students experienced difficulties in developing main ideas, using varied vocabulary, and applying appropriate grammatical structures, particularly verb tenses. Similarly, Dinna Auliya and Afrianto (2016) found that students of the English Language Education Study Program at Riau University encountered problems in language use, especially tense usage and sentence construction. Furthermore, Rizkiawan et al. (2025) revealed that female students tended to produce more expressive, descriptive, and coherent narrative essays with better organization and richer vocabulary than male students. Likewise, Sukanob-Nicolau and Sukanto (2016) found that female students generally outperformed male students in writing performance, particularly in organization and grammatical accuracy. These findings suggest that grammar mastery, vocabulary knowledge, organization, and gender may influence students' narrative writing performance.

To improve students' writing ability, several scholars have proposed effective writing instruction. Oshima and Hogue (2007) emphasize that students should be guided through the writing process, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing, to produce well-organized essays. Likewise, Grenville (2001) argues that effective writing instruction should encourage students to construct coherent texts with clear organization and logical development of ideas. These pedagogical approaches indicate that successful narrative writing requires not only language knowledge but also systematic writing practice.

Despite the growing number of studies on narrative writing, several gaps remain. Most previous studies focused primarily on identifying students' writing difficulties or measuring general writing proficiency without specifically comparing narrative essay writing ability between male and female students within the same English Language Education Study Program. In addition, previous research rarely employed an analytical scoring rubric that systematically evaluates students' writing in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Although Rizkiawan et al. (2025) and Sukanob-Nicolau and Sukanto (2016) indicated that female students tended to outperform male students in several aspects of writing, empirical evidence regarding gender differences in narrative essay writing ability among fourth-semester students within the same classroom context remains limited.

This gap is evident among fourth-semester students of Class K1 in the English Language Education Study Program, where students have completed several writing-related courses but still demonstrate varying levels of narrative essay writing ability. However, it remains unclear whether these differences are associated with gender. Therefore, further investigation is needed to provide empirical

evidence regarding the comparison of male and female students' narrative essay writing ability using an analytical scoring rubric.

Based on this research gap, this study entitled *A Comparative Study of Writing Ability in Narrative Essays of Fourth Semester Students in the English Language Education Study Program* aims to determine whether there is a significant difference in narrative essay writing ability between male and female fourth-semester students in Class K1. Employing a descriptive comparative quantitative design, this study assesses students' narrative essays using the adapted Jacobs analytical scoring rubric covering content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The findings are expected to contribute empirical evidence to EFL writing research and provide useful implications for writing assessment and instructional practices in higher education.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive comparative research design with a quantitative approach to compare the narrative essay writing ability of male and female fourth-semester students in Class K1 of the English Language Education Study Program. This design was selected because the study aimed to examine differences between two existing groups without manipulating any variables. The independent variable was gender (male and female students), while the dependent variable was students' narrative essay writing ability, which was assessed using an analytical scoring rubric covering content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The data were collected through a writing test administered under the same conditions for all participants and were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an Independent Samples *t*-test to determine whether a significant difference existed between the two groups.

Population and Sample or Research Subjects

The population of this study consisted of 95 fourth-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program in the 2025–2026 academic year, including 49 students from Class K1 and 46 students from Class K2. The sample comprised 18 students from Class K1, consisting of 9 male and 9 female students, selected using purposive sampling. Class K1 was chosen as the accessible population, while the equal number of male and female students was intended to provide a balanced comparison between the two groups in terms of narrative essay writing ability.

Research Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a narrative essay writing test. Participants were required to write a 450-word narrative essay on the same topic to measure their narrative writing ability. The essays were assessed using an analytical scoring rubric adapted from Setyowati et al. (2020), which adopted the Jacobs ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981). The rubric evaluated five aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

To ensure content validity, the writing prompt and scoring rubric were reviewed by an English lecturer before the data collection. The final scores were obtained based on the assessment of the five writing components and used for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, highest score, and lowest score, were used to summarize students' narrative essay writing performance. Before hypothesis testing, the data were examined for normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test and homogeneity using Levene's Test. A significance value greater than 0.05 indicated that the assumptions were met. An Independent Samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in narrative essay writing ability between male and female students. If the assumptions were not met, the Mann–Whitney *U* test was used as a nonparametric alternative. To determine the practical significance of the difference, Cohen's *d* effect size was calculated using the following formula:

$$S_p = \sqrt{\frac{(n_1 - 1)S_1 + (n_2 - 1)S_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}}$$

Where:

S_p = pooled standard deviation

n_1 = score of male students

n_2 = score of female students

S_1 = standard deviation of male students

S_2 = standard deviation of female students

The effect size is calculated using Cohen's d and the following formula after S_p , has been determined:

$$d = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{S_p}$$

Where:

d = effect size value

$\bar{X}_2$ = mean score of female students

$\bar{X}_1$ = mean score of male students

S_p = pooled standard deviation

The value of Cohen's d is then interpreted based on Cohen's criteria:

Table 1. Effect Size Criteria (Cohen's d)

Range	Criteria
$d < 0.20$	Small
$0.20 \leq d < 0.80$	Medium
$d \geq 0.80$	Large

Adopted from (Anggraini, 2021)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the students' narrative essay writing scores are presented in Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Highest	Lowert
Male	9	72.89	11.94	90	53
Female	9	84.11	8.08	95	71

Table 2 shows that female students obtained a higher mean score ($M = 84.11$, $SD = 8.08$) than male students ($M = 72.89$, $SD = 11.94$). The highest score achieved by female students was 95, while the lowest was 71. Meanwhile, male students obtained scores ranging from 53 to 90. The lower standard deviation of female students indicates that their writing performance was more consistent than that of male students.

Normality and Homogeneity Tests

Before testing the hypothesis, the data were examined for normality and homogeneity. The results are presented in Tables 3.

Table 3. Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test

Test of Normality						
Kolmogorov-Smirnov				Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Male	0.162	9	0.200	0.954	9	0.728
Female	0.161	9	0.200	0.954	9	0.734

The Shapiro–Wilk test showed significance values of 0.728 for male students and 0.734 for female students. Since both values were higher than 0.05, the data were normally distributed.

Table 4. Results of Levene's Test

Test of Homogeneity of Variance		Levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Score	Based on Mean	1.841	1	16	0.194
	Based on Median	1.665	1	16	0.215
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.665	1	14.901	0.217
	Based on Trimmed Mean	1.861	1	16	0.191

The homogeneity test produced a significance value of 0.194 (>0.05), indicating that the variances of the two groups were homogeneous. Therefore, the assumptions for conducting an independent samples t-test were fulfilled.

Independent Samples t-test

The independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in narrative essay writing ability between male and female students.

Table 5. Independent Samples t-test

Independent Sample Test									
		t-test for Equality of Means							
		T	Df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p				
Score	Equal variances assumed	-2.335	16	<.016	<.033	-11.222	4.807	Lower -21.413	Upper -1.032
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.335	14.040	<.017	<.035	-11.222	4.807	-21.528	-0.916

As presented in Table 4, the significance value ($p = 0.033$) was lower than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference between male and female students in narrative essay writing ability. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The negative mean difference (-11.222) indicates that female students achieved higher writing scores than male students.

Effect Size

An effect size analysis using Cohen's d was conducted to determine the practical significance of the difference in narrative essay writing ability between male and female students. According to the descriptive statistics, male students obtained a mean score of 72.89 ($SD = 11.94$), whereas female students achieved a higher mean score of 84.11 ($SD = 8.08$). Each group consisted of nine students. The pooled standard deviation was calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 S_p &= \sqrt{\frac{(9-1)(11.94)^2 + (9-1)(8.08)^2}{9+9-2}} \\
 S_p &= \sqrt{\frac{8(142.56) + 8(85.29)}{16}} \\
 S_p &= \sqrt{\frac{1.140.48 + 522.32}{16}} \\
 S_p &= \sqrt{103.925} \\
 S_p &= 10.19
 \end{aligned}$$

The effect size was then calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 d &= \frac{84.11 - 72.89}{10.19} \\
 d &= 1.10
 \end{aligned}$$

The Cohen's d value of 1.10 indicates a large effect size ($d \geq 0.80$), suggesting that the difference in narrative essay writing ability between male and female students was not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. Female students demonstrated substantially higher writing ability than male students.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the differences in narrative essay writing ability between male and female fourth-semester students. The findings revealed that female students outperformed male students in narrative essay writing. Based on the adapted ESL Composition Profile by Setyowati et al. (2020) from Jacobs et al. (1981), female students achieved higher mean scores across all assessed writing components, namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. These findings suggest that the observed differences in writing ability were reflected across multiple dimensions of narrative writing.

Table 6. Students' Mean Scores in Writing Aspects

Aspect	Male Mean	Female Mean
Content	23	25,4
Organization	15,4	17,2
Vocabulary	14,4	16,7
Language Use	14,7	19,2
Mechanics	3,2	3,7

As presented in Table 4.7, female students obtained higher mean scores than male students across all five writing aspects. The largest difference was found in language use, followed by vocabulary, organization, and content, while the smallest difference was observed in mechanics. These results indicate that female students consistently demonstrated stronger performance in the assessed components of narrative essay writing. Regarding the content aspect, female students demonstrated a stronger ability to develop ideas and provide relevant supporting details in their narratives. As shown in Table 4.7, female students obtained a mean score of 25.4, compared to 23.0 for male students. According to Dinna Auliya and Afrianto (2016), content reflects the writer's ability to elaborate ideas with sufficient supporting details. This finding is consistent with Rizkiawan et al. (2025), who reported that female students generally produce more expressive and descriptive narratives.

Female students also performed better in organization, with a mean score of 17.2 compared to 15.4 for male students, indicating a stronger ability to arrange ideas in a logical and chronological sequence. Firda et al. (2022) stated that chronological markers contribute to the coherence of narrative texts. The higher organizational score suggests that female students were better able to present events systematically, making their narratives easier to follow.

In terms of vocabulary, female students achieved a higher mean score (16.7) than male students (14.4), suggesting a greater use of varied and descriptive lexical choices. This finding supports Aini

(2024), who argued that rich vocabulary enhances the quality and attractiveness of narrative writing. Similarly, Rizkiawan et al. (2025) found that female students tend to use more diverse expressions in narrative texts, contributing to more engaging and meaningful writing.

The largest difference between the two groups was observed in language use. Female students obtained a mean score of 19.2, while male students achieved 14.7. This result indicates that female students demonstrated better grammatical accuracy, particularly in the use of the simple past tense, sentence structure, and overall grammatical consistency, which are essential features of narrative writing. Nahak et al. (2024) explained that maintaining consistency in the past tense remains a common challenge for EFL learners. Therefore, stronger grammatical control may have contributed substantially to the higher overall writing performance of female students. Although the difference in mechanics was relatively small, female students still obtained a higher mean score (3.7) than male students (3.2). This finding indicates better control of punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. According to Phommavongsa et al. (2021), mechanical accuracy plays an important role in improving the readability and overall quality of narrative writing. Better mastery of these conventions may help writers communicate their ideas more clearly and effectively.

Overall, the findings indicate that female students demonstrated stronger performance across all writing components than male students. This result is consistent with Sukanob-Nicolau and Sukanto (2016), who found that female students generally achieve higher writing performance across various linguistic aspects. The statistical analysis also showed a significant difference between male and female students' narrative essay writing ability ($p = 0.045$), supporting the conclusion that gender differences were evident within the sample of this study. However, gender should not be regarded as the only factor influencing writing ability. Other factors, including writing experience, learning motivation, exposure to reading materials, and opportunities for writing practice, may also contribute to students' writing performance Masrul & Erlina, (2024). Since this study involved a relatively small sample from a single class, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the present study and should not be generalized without further research.

SIMPULAN

The findings revealed a significant difference in narrative essay writing ability between male and female fourth-semester students in Class K1 of the English Education Study Program. Descriptive statistics showed that female students achieved a higher mean score than male students, with female students categorized as Very Good and male students as Average. Furthermore, the Independent Samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.033 < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The Cohen's d value of 1.10 indicated a large effect size, suggesting that the difference was not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. Overall, these findings indicate that narrative essay writing performance differed by gender within this sample, although other factors may also have contributed to the observed differences.

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