

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON JOURNALING IN DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS AMONG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN KIDAPAWAN CITY, PHILIPPINES

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Abstract: Journaling is a component of writing macro skills in English, commonly practiced in educational settings. It lays the foundation for producing better and more polished writing. Despite this, there is a significant gap regarding the experiences of young Filipino professionals and their perceptions of the role of journaling in their writing development. To address this gap, the present study examines how journaling develops the writing skills of young professionals. Using a phenomenological research design, this study collected the data through in-depth interviews with nine participants residing in Kidapawan City, Philippines. They are aged 22 to 32, from diverse professional backgrounds, regardless of gender, and all have prior experience with journaling. Colaizzi-informed thematic analysis was used in data analysis. Results revealed that journaling developed the writing skills of young professionals in their writing competence, language use, self-expression, and logical reasoning. Additionally, journaling was found highly advantageous when consistently practiced, balanced between free-form writing and scaffolded prompts, and integrated with reflective thinking practices. Furthermore, young professionals engaged in journaling through format and medium selection, routine establishment, and individualized self-direction. Findings imply that journaling is an effective tool in developing writing skills among young professionals to support their personal and professional growth.

Keywords: *Journaling; writing skill development; descriptive qualitative; young professionals; Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Journaling is the process of recording personal reflections, life experiences, and insights (Stevens & Cooper, 2023). Acquiring this vital skill in English is necessary for the transition from preliminary conceptualization of ideas to the realization of a polished writing output. It has various benefits. It improves writing skills by making the process more pleasurable, stimulating, and engaging (Zatalini & Assassi, 2025; Wijaya, 2025); serves as a means to practice, grasp, structure, and further refine writing (Sandoval Bernal, 2023); and sharpens creativity and total personal development through emotional strength and deeper self-understanding (Bellringer, 2024; Senel & Bagçeci, 2019).

Existing studies on journaling and writing skill development have primarily focused on learners within the educational context (Kinik et al., 2025; Segev, 2024;

Sobel, 2020), as well as on personal (Hensley & Munn, 2020). While valuable, this perspective emphasizes the academic setting and overlooks the lived experiences of individuals who engage in journaling beyond institutional requirements (Dinç et al., 2024). There remains a significant gap concerning the experiences of Filipino young professionals, their perceived writing development, and phenomenological accounts of writing improvement through journaling.

Hence, the present study aimed to address those gaps through examining how journaling contributed to the perceived writing development of Filipino young professionals in their personal and professional lives, their suggestions to make journaling more effective, and the ways in which journaling is practiced.

This study examines how journaling develops writing skills. Particularly, it sought

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to address the following:

1. How does journaling develop writing skills?
2. What can be suggested to make journaling even more effective?
3. How is journaling done?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Journaling

Journaling is a vital skill in English that requires further cultivation, for it is a foundation in developing drafts that can be refined into better writing. Researchers defined journaling in multiple ways, ranging from personal practice for thought expression (Bryson, 2021) to a professional tool for workplace reflection (Raj et al., 2025). Studies have shown that journaling improves writing skills among young professionals. However, a gap remains in understanding Filipino young professionals' experiences and perceptions of writing development through journaling. Researchers reported that journaling is closely linked with increased proficiency in the metacognitive aspect and awareness among young professionals (Sihite & Simanjuntak, 2016); it allows expression of complex emotional states and self-concept (Berezan et al., 2023); enhances writing precision (Pham & Tran, 2021); improves idea organization (Nückles et al., 2020); reinforces disciplined behavior like goal-setting (Ramadhanti et al., 2020); unlocks innovative skill (Todd-Adekanye, 2017); encourages critical reflection (Mathew et al., 2017); a key for personal expression and a way for documenting daily experiences (McNichol, 2016); ensures overall development (Tröger et al., 2021); provides space safe for free writing without judgement (Sudirman et al., 2021); improves both learning outcomes and professional growth (Chan & Lee, 2021) and ensures content and organization through feedbacking (Rodliyah & Khoirunnisa, 2023). Masdianti et al. (2021) and the findings of Sholah (2019) support the advantages of journaling as a comprehensive practice that simultaneously strengthens

individuals' writing engagement and cultivates writing proficiency.

Despite its benefits in developing writing skills, various studies consistently reveal that journaling presents challenges. Participants were found to struggle with organizing ideas, language limitations, and the conventions of writing (Thomas, 2017); difficulty in generating topics, limited language proficiency, and inconsistent writing habits (Sholah, 2019); motivational challenges in sustaining regular writing, apprehension, and time management (Stevens & Cooper, 2023; Collins et al., 2025; Segev, 2024); insufficient vocabulary of non-native speakers to sufficiently express ideas in their journals (Azizah & Budiman, 2017); and professionals faced challenges in sustaining journal entries, clearly articulating reflections, and making time for journaling due to busy schedules (Mauroux et al., 2016).

Journaling among Young Professionals

Various studies focusing on professional growth highlight how structured journal writing enhances critical thinking, self-directed learning, and the application of theory to practice among young professionals. To illustrate, Kinik, Magallanes, and Martell (2025) found that reflective journaling can be effectively integrated into project-based courses to strengthen learning outcomes, while Ahmed (2019) reported that instructors recognize its value in promoting reflective teaching and enhancing professional growth, but practical challenges, especially time constraints and a lack of structured training or support, often limit its sustained use in academic settings. Similarly, Dumlao and Pinatacan (2019) emphasized journaling's role in fostering critically reflective practice, transformative learning, and professional development for teacher candidates. Other studies demonstrated journaling's effectiveness in healthcare and social work education. Sobel (2020) showed that reflective journaling cultivates cultural humility and professional awareness among healthcare students, and Segev (2024) reported its role in integrating

theoretical knowledge with practical experiences for social work students. Furthermore, Carter and Kurttts (2019) highlighted the transformative potential of dialogic e-journaling for preservice special education teachers, while Apgar (2024) showed how journaling enhances students' confidence and competence in applying research skills. Even in academic skill development, Madkour (2016) demonstrated that digital reflective journaling significantly improved EFL students' writing competence.

Also, journal writing has been found to support self-awareness, emotional insight, and behavior change. Wood (2012) emphasized that reflective journaling facilitates personal growth by fostering self-awareness and emotional insight, particularly among individuals in the helping professions. Likewise, Hensley and Munn (2020) found that structured journaling about procrastination enabled learners to gain self-insight, recognize behavioral patterns, and adopt more productive strategies.

Journaling Strategies

Several studies emphasize various journaling strategies, such as the use of guided prompts, structured reflection, and regular journal entries to stimulate higher-order thinking and professional growth.

Bryson (2021) found that the use of structured reflection on professional experiences, goal-setting, and tracking progress helps them evaluate practice and areas for development, while Collins et al. (2025) emphasized guided prompts and consistent journaling to reflect on experiences, emotions, and professional decision-making. Similarly, Stevens and Cooper (2023) encouraged guided prompts and reflection on personal and professional experiences, and Raj et al. (2025) highlighted journaling strategies in the field of work, encompassing daily entries, task tracking, and documenting emotions and interpersonal interactions.

Other approaches expand the tools and modes of reflection in journaling. Corbin Frazier and Eick (2015) encouraged the use

of prompts, guided questions, and multimedia to deepen reflective thinking, while Rivera et al. (2020) proposed structured prompts, iterative reflection, and creative exercises to enhance creativity. Additionally, Makaiau et al. (2015) underscored reflective self-study, collaborative dialogue, and documentation of personal and professional insights.

METHOD

Research Design

A phenomenological research design employing Colaizzi-informed thematic analysis (1978) was used in this study. The researchers extract statements from participants' accounts, cluster them into themes and sub-themes, and organize them into a thematic map. This is exploratory in nature, in which it explains that any aspect of explanation derived from the data is personal and subjective, as lived experiences of the participants were the sole source of the data.

Participants

The participants of this study were the selected young professionals of different occupational fields within the city of Kidapawan City, Philippines. Participants were deliberately selected using a purposive sampling procedure based on predefined inclusion criteria aligned with the objectives of the study.

The participants were required to meet the following: (1) they must be within the age range of 22-32 years old, (2) they must be graduates of a bachelor's and/or master's degree, (3) they had to be early or at least five to 15 years of journaling experience, and (4) they must be based in Kidapawan City, Philippines. The parameters were applied to ensure that the participants were in direct and continuous contact with the phenomenon under study to enable them to provide detailed reports on the experience-based information that they had about the research questions.

This study was conducted on nine (9) participants. The process of informed consent and data-gathering was started by presenting

the introduction of the study, whereby the researchers explained to the participants the purpose of the study, the process involved, and the potential benefits of the study, as well as the potential risks. They were then asked to provide a clear consent for their voluntary participation, audio recording of the interview, and note-taking. They were assured that whatever information obtained would not be released and that this would only be put to use in the research, and that they could leave the research at will with no consequences. The in-depth interviews were conducted at a convenient time and location. The process ensured the ethics were practiced and qualitative data were collected through informed consent, rapport-building, and an adoptive and flexible approach that was more participant-centered.

Instrument

To facilitate data collection, the researchers formulated guide questions structured to mirror the research questions. These were used to conduct in-depth interviews, employing a conversational approach in communication to extract the data from the participants' lived experiences.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and analysis were carried out through a systematic process designed to ensure the credibility, depth, and integrity of the findings. The procedure undertaken in this study is outlined as follows:

First, the researchers contacted the prospective participants and conducted an initial interview about their writing practice. Those who responded with journaling experience were listed in the poll of participants, and those who had not experienced journaling were removed from the list.

Secondly, after listing all qualified participants, researchers picked nine young professionals to determine the final participants of the study and obtained verbal or written consent from them.

Thirdly, after the permission was granted, the researchers conducted an orientation explaining the research details.

This orientation went on for several occasions as researchers built rapport and friendship with the participants. This was done to obtain genuine, natural data from the participants.

Lastly, an in-depth interview was conducted with a conversational approach, which uses natural tone, pitch, and pace. With the participant's consent, the interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis. Each session lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes, depending on how much the participant was willing to share.

The questions asked during the interviews were translated into the local language where they were deemed necessary so that the participants clearly understood and could help in expressing their opinions. Participants were also given opportunities to answer in their language of choice or dialect. Recorded interviews were transcribed and prepared for later data analysis.

Following the transcription of the recorded conversation, the researchers thematically analyzed and subsequently interpreted the responses into themes and core ideas. Colaizzi's seven steps were summarized and presented in a three-column table format. The table consisted of the following columns: (1) Global Themes, (2) Organizing Themes, and (3) Basic Themes. More so, the transcribed, coded, and analyzed data were given back to the participants for review and confirmation following Colaizzi's data analysis and ethical research conduct. This tabular presentation enabled the researchers to clearly trace the analytical progression from raw data to interpreted themes while maintaining transparency and rigor in the analysis process.

Trustworthiness

To ensure that the study could be trusted, the four elements of trustworthiness put forward by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, were adhered to in the course of this study.

Credibility was achieved by ensuring

that the responses of the participants were recorded carefully, interview data were examined strictly and clarified, and by using investigator triangulation with the help of the engagement of several researchers in the data collection and data analysis. Researchers deliberately avoided their own personal preferences when making interpretations, and the results were only based on the perspectives of participants that they recorded. Moreover, the analysis data were offered to the participants to enable them to review and verify.

Transferability was supported by offering a description of the participants, the setting, and the data collection process in detail. Such detailed background knowledge helped the readers to determine whether the findings of this research can be applied in other contexts or communities.

Dependability was ensured by having a clear record of the research process. This involved documenting all the steps that were taken in the planning, data collection, and analysis, allowing others to replicate the study, if necessary. An audit trail was also observed, involving all the decisions made at each stage of the research process, which makes it traceable and conducive.

Confirmability was ensured by demonstrating that the research findings were made on the data that the participants provided, and not on the researchers' own beliefs and expectations. Feedback provided by the research adviser and peers was used to refine the analysis in order to eliminate the chances of bias. Furthermore, peer debriefing with research advisers was conducted to review the interpretations, and the conclusions were drawn based on the data.

Ethics Committee Approval

The study has been conducted within the framework of the established human subject protections to ensure safety and dignity of all participants. Data collection started only after the Research Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of the University of Southern Mindanao - Kidapawan City Campus gave formal consent. A detailed

explanation was given to all the participants about the purpose of the study, the methods, and their rights, including the voluntary engagement and the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Each participant was requested to sign an informed consent before participating in the interviews. The privacy and integrity of the information were ensured by means of protocols, audio records, and the following transcriptions were anonymized, and the names of participants were not disclosed during the analysis and publication of results (Approval Date: August 16, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. *Importance of Journaling and Writing Development*

Global Theme	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Importance of journaling and writing development	builds writing competence	focusing on freely expressing thoughts and ideas.
	enhances awareness of language use	directing attention to grammar, vocabulary, and sentence/paragraph construction
	encourages self-expression	open expression of ideas, feelings, and personal experiences strengthens self-confidence
	develops logical reasoning	deepening self-awareness and self-discipline

Table 1 shows the importance of journal writing and developing writing skills. Journal writing builds writing competence as they can focus on expressing thoughts and ideas. It builds writing competence, as revealed by the participants, as detailed below:

“Journaling has helped me become more fluent in expressing my thoughts. I can now form sentences more easily and write continuously without overthinking.” ID11

“Journaling has made writing feel more natural for me. It’s like a warm-up exercise that allows ideas to flow. As someone active in our campus publication, it gives me the confidence to start writing

without hesitation.” IDI5

The statements discussed above show that journaling helped the participants to attain writing competence. They affirmed that they can write spontaneously and coherently without hesitation. Participants described journaling as an essential tool that enhances them to express themselves with greater ease over time.

Other than that, journal writing develops language awareness among participants by encouraging consistent attention to grammar, vocabulary, and sentence/paragraph organization. Participants said:

“Before, I struggled with sentence construction and grammar. But now, I can write longer entries with fewer errors, which makes me feel more capable.” IDI1

“Ever since I started journaling, my vocabulary has expanded, and I have become more careful with my grammar. I still sometimes struggle with my sentence structure, but with consistent practice, it has also improved.” IDI9

The aforementioned statements indicate that journaling enhances participants' awareness and attentiveness to language structures. This suggests that through journaling, learners develop greater sensitivity to grammar and related linguistic elements, resulting in more accurate and intentional language use with fewer grammatical errors.

Furthermore, the process of journal writing promotes self-expression and builds confidence, as participants are able to articulate their ideas, feelings, and experiences freely and without restraint. They stated:

“Journaling serves as my writing practice and preparation. It boosts my confidence, especially when I use my journal content in preaching.” IDI2

“As for me, it is a yes, because the more I write, the easier it becomes. I'm not scared of a blank page anymore, and I feel like I have more control over my writing. Journaling seems like a training ground for

me as a writer, and I also love writing poems and any random things. So, as for me, I became more confident of my writing ability because of journaling, it helps a lot.” IDI4

“As an English major and student journalist, I've learned to trust my voice. Journaling taught me that even simple reflections can turn into meaningful narratives. Now, I approach writing tasks with more ease and less anxiety.” IDI5

The statements above reveal that journal writing served as an avenue for participants to freely express themselves through writing. This suggests that journaling helps develop writers' unique voice, particularly among those who are often constrained by more formal writing tasks. As a result, it fosters confidence in writing, encourages a willingness to take risks, and increases motivation while reducing anxiety.

Moreover, journal writing enhances participants' critical thinking skills as it deepens their self-awareness and strengthens self-regulation in the writing process. They said:

“Yes, I've become more mindful of grammar. I now check my grammar more often. Before journaling, I used to avoid writing for fear of making mistakes.” IDI2

“...I am also being reflective of what I write and it helps me a lot because journaling is actually like you have no limits or you have, you just have to be yourself when you're writing, and that makes it more enjoyable for me.” IDI4

The statements discussed above reveal that journaling contributes to the development of participants' critical thinking skills in various ways. Participants perceived that journaling stimulates reflection and analysis, which in turn enhances the critical thinking abilities of journal writers.

The importance of journal writing and its impact on writing development, as identified by the participants, play a significant role in improving writing competence. It enables students to strengthen their language awareness and encourages self-expression, while also fostering the

development of critical thinking skills.

Journal writing offers several advantages in writing development, particularly in promoting competence and self-expression. Zatalini and Assassi (2025) emphasize that regular journaling helps students enhance writing competence through consistent practice. This sustained engagement leads to improved writing speed, increased word production, and greater coherence, ultimately contributing to overall writing proficiency. The low-pressure and repetitive nature of journaling also encourages experimentation with vocabulary, syntax, and structure, making the writing process more efficient and less intimidating.

Furthermore, the findings align with those of Macías and Dack (2023), who highlight the essential role of journal writing in improving writing skills. Journaling promotes self-reflection, enhances language awareness, and provides consistent practice, all of which contribute to long-term improvements in English proficiency. Ruini and Mortara (2022) further emphasize the versatility of journal writing, noting that it serves multiple purposes, including self-expression, documentation of personal experiences, and therapeutic benefits.

In addition, Sahin et al. (2019) point out that journal writing is commonly integrated into teacher education programs, where it fosters critical reflection and self-awareness among students. This practice not only supports writing development but also strengthens the ability to critically evaluate and improve one's own work.

Table 2. *Strategies to Enhance Journaling Outcomes*

Global Themes	Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
strategies to enhance journaling outcomes	promotes constant practice and routine	developing the habit of regular writing as part of learning

balances free-form writing and scaffolded prompts	balancing free creative expression with structured reflective prompts
promotes reflective thinking practices	engaging in metacognitive reflection on learning and development

Table 2 presents the strategies to enhance journaling outcomes. Participants highlighted that journaling was best practiced when it was a daily routine, evenly blended with both free-form writing and scaffolded prompts and when it is used to develop personal reflection.

Over time, these writing practices naturally expand into meditation on the self and a form of life that helps to grow as a person and think about oneself over the long term, providing the opportunity to notice their own development and improvement. As participants said:

“Journaling becomes more effective when used as a growth tracker. By reflecting on past contents, we can see areas for improvement and track our progress over time.” IDI1

“Personalizing my journal with highlights and colors makes it more enjoyable. I also make time for it by following a schedule.” IDI2

Participants also considered journal writing to be a precursor and a preparation to taking more formal academic tasks. One participant expressed:

“Journaling feels like practice, a training ground for me. So, when it’s time to write something more formal, like an essay, I already have some ideas to work with, and I feel more prepared.” IDI4

It was also found that flexibility in journaling in terms of free-form writing and prompt use offers a meaningful contribution in the effectiveness of this technique. Most of the participants prefer free writing as it has no structure, while some find satisfaction in the benefits of prompts, particularly for those

with a tendency to getting stuck for words when they need to write. As participants commented:

"I prefer free writing because I can write freely about what I feel and think without being limited by prompts. It helps me be more honest." IDI1

"There are no rules or restrictions, like, I don't have to worry too much about structure or grammar at first. It just lets my ideas and creativity flow freely. I can just be myself on paper. And most of the time, that's when the best ideas come out." IDI3

"...I like being open about my ideas in my own comfort zone. However, I sometimes use scaffolded prompts when I run out of things to write about." IDI9

The abovementioned responses suggest that free-form writing encourages honesty, intuitive response, and personal voice which are all key aspects of self-reflection. Others, however, also had found prompts useful when they lacked inspiration for writing. As participants declared:

"I prefer scaffolded prompts, especially in interviews." IDI6

"Prompts are helpful when I feel stuck or uninspired." IDI4

Another had contributed this well-rounded insight:

"I prefer a balance of both. Prompts are helpful when I feel sick or uninspired, but free writing gives me the freedom to explore my thoughts more deeply. With today's access to technology and AI tools, we can easily find writing ideas but authentic journaling from the heart creates the deepest connection." IDI5

Additionally, journal writing has been reported as an advantage for personal perception and growth. It was seen as a useful strategy to use when participants were engaging in reflective work as it gave them space to deepen their thinking, feelings and experiences.

Journaling has also presented an opportunity to engage in a creative exercise, as one participant noted:

"I wrote a lot of songs, and most of

them came from what I wrote in my journal. I turn my random thoughts into lyrics. And every time I finish a song that captures how I see things; it just feels really fulfilling." IDI3

Another shared how writing is an effective tool for introspection and critical thinking:

"Journaling has helped me reflect on life itself. It's a mirror of my emotions, ideas and dreams. It develops my critical thinking, enhances my expression..." IDI5

One participant said that the use of journaling was a secure forum of support:

"Journaling helps me organize my thoughts by giving me a safe space to reflect and express my ideas freely..." IDI9

The results of this study indicate that when journaling is employed as a learning tool in an effective manner, it lends itself best towards advancing learning development, promoting reflection, and facilitating the expression of self. The effectiveness of using a journal is enhanced when it becomes habitual and an effective tool that satisfies the individual's needs. This aligns with the theory set forth by Thropp (2017), who posits that over time, journals promote personal and academic development.

The other forms of writing seen as supported by journaling were also perceived by participants as a practice that helps them with confidence and fluency. This corroborates with Park (2020), who claims that academic writing is enhanced by journaling because it gives the writer more freedom. The value of flexibility in journaling was also highlighted in relation to the free-form writing and scaffolded prompts. Most participants regarded positively to the freedom that was allowed with free writing, and others relied on prompts during writer's block. These perspectives are in line with Geroda et al. (2025), who found that the combination of free and scaffolded prompts fostered students' insight, creativity, and reflective practices.

Furthermore, Sudirman et al. (2021) cited the innovative and dynamic nature of

personal and academic journal writing. This aligns with the findings that journaling can be a helpful technique in promoting emotional coping, critical thinking and deep insights. Participants utilized it as an instrument for self-expression and soul-searching, leading to cognitive development. Reflective journaling also promotes critical reflection on learners' study methods, fostering purposeful goals and enhanced learning success (Zafeer et al., 2023).

Table 3. *Journaling Practices of Young*

Global Themes	Professionals		Basic Themes
	Organizing Themes		
journaling practices of young professionals	selects format and medium		writing in notebooks, apps, or digital documents
	establishes a routine		journaling daily, weekly, or as needed
	practices self-direction		choosing topics and timing based on personal relevance

Table 3 presents the journaling habits and routines of the young professionals involved in the study. One prominent practice identified was the choice of journaling format and platform. Participants utilized various methods for recording their thoughts, including handwritten journals, mobile applications, and electronic documents. These tools and platforms emerged as the most commonly preferred mediums for their journaling activities:

“I mostly use a physical notebook and refer to the Bible directly. Scriptures help guide my thoughts and improve my writing, especially when preparing exhortations.” IDI1

“I use both a digital Bible and physical books as sources of inspiration. They give me deeper insights and help me grow spiritually and professionally.” IDI2

“I prefer using a notebook, but I also use the Notes app on my phone or Google Docs for longer entries. These tools help me

capture ideas for songs, poems, or personal reflection.” IDI3

The responses indicate that journaling is no longer confined to conventional handwritten methods, as participants also make use of various digital platforms for their writing practices. They recognized that journaling may be carried out through notebooks, mobile applications, or electronic documents depending on personal preference and convenience. The availability of digital tools provides greater ease of access and adaptability, allowing individuals to choose the platform that best supports their lifestyle, comfort, and writing habits.

In addition, participants developed personal journaling routines that varied according to their schedules, preferences, and emotional conditions. Some engaged in journaling every day to consistently organize their thoughts and maintain concentration, whereas others preferred writing on a weekly basis as a way of evaluating their experiences, progress, and objectives. Several participants also viewed journaling as a dependable and adaptable coping mechanism during emotionally challenging situations or important life circumstances. These practices demonstrate how journaling contributes to emotional balance, self-reflection, and personal well-being. The participants shared the following responses:

“I journal every morning at 5:30 a.m. in my personal space. I use a notebook, and it is part of my daily spiritual routine.” IDI4

“I usually journal during evenings in my room when everything is calm. Sometimes I do it in the library or at the campus writing center when inspiration strikes. I use either a notebook or my phone, depending on where I am. I started by writing how I feel, what happened during the day, and any thoughts that keep coming back. I am having a conversation with myself.” IDI5

“I usually write during weekends in my room. I prefer writing in my notebook.” IDI6

“Sometimes Sunday is the day for me to write, especially in the evening because in

the evening my mind works. The platform I use is the cellphone in the notes by encoding it in the note app.” IDI8

“I journal two to three times a week. Usually in the evening since that’s when I update my schedule for the next day. I try to make my schedule more flexible so it doesn’t feel too pressuring for me.” IDI9

The responses demonstrate that participants follow different journaling patterns and writing routines depending on their personal circumstances and daily activities. Their narratives suggest that lifestyle, comfort, availability of time, and individual preferences strongly influence how often, when, and where they engage in journaling. Each participant developed unique strategies and rhythms that helped them maintain consistency in their writing practices.

In addition, participants showed a strong sense of self-direction in their journaling activities by independently deciding the subjects they wanted to write about and the most appropriate time to write. Their journal entries were often guided by personal experiences, emotions, interests, and immediate relevance to their lives. The participants explained the following:

“I focus on scripture-based reflections, personal realizations, and life experiences. As a lady minister, this helps strengthen my foundation for sharing meaningful messages.” IDI2

“I write about emotions, personal experiences, and random thoughts. Journaling helps me understand myself better and fuels my creativity, especially in songwriting and writing pieces I share with others.” IDI3

“Journaling has helped me not only to grow as a writer but also reflect on life itself. It’s a mirror of my emotions, ideas and dreams. It develops my critical thinking, enhances my expression, and even improves my speaking skills...” IDI5

“My journals are more focused on my self-reflection, my daily life especially during my internship. I reflect on my actions during

class. It helps me identify if there is any improvement in my teaching.” IDI7

“I am more focused on my learning of the week, also my goals for the next week and my past experience and what I attained in a week to remind me to stay motivated in my life.” IDI8

The responses indicate that participants explored a wide range of journal topics that were closely connected to their occupations, experiences, and personal concerns. Their chosen subjects often reflected the specific demands, interests, and responsibilities associated with their professional and individual lives. This suggests that journaling becomes more meaningful and effective when it is aligned with the real-life context and unique needs of the writer. Moreover, the practice does not only contribute to the enhancement of writing and communication skills but also supports growth and deeper understanding within their respective professions as emerging young professionals.

Journaling serves as a meaningful strategy for personal growth by allowing individuals to record and process their thoughts, emotions, and experiences, as reflected in the participants’ narratives. The young professionals highlighted the significance of selecting journaling methods that best suited their preferences, whether through traditional handwritten notebooks or digital platforms such as mobile applications and online documents. Their decisions were largely influenced by factors such as ease of use, accessibility, flexibility, and personal convenience. These findings support earlier studies suggesting that the type of journaling medium used may affect both the regularity of writing practices and the quality of reflective thinking (Vincent, 2016; Berezan & Garcera, 2023).

According to Alt et al. (2022), Reflective activities tend to become more meaningful and productive when they are adjusted according to an individual’s personal circumstances and preferences instead of being bound by strict routines or

fixed schedules. Several participants noted that having the freedom to journal at their own pace reduced feelings of pressure and exhaustion, allowing the activity to remain motivating, enjoyable, and personally rewarding rather than stressful or obligatory. (MacIsaac et al., 2023) The adaptable nature of journaling played a significant role in helping participants sustain the practice over an extended period. By allowing them to write according to their own availability and circumstances, journaling became less pressured and more manageable despite the demands of their daily responsibilities. This sense of flexibility enabled the activity to continue serving as a meaningful avenue for reflection and personal insight rather than becoming an additional source of stress.

A notable trend observed among the participants was their preference for writing reflections centered on experiences and concerns that carried personal, emotional, or contextual importance in their lives. Their tendency to independently select meaningful topics highlights a strong sense of learner independence and self-guided engagement in the reflective process, which Loeng (2020) describes self-directed reflection as a fundamental element of adult learning, emphasizing that reflective practices become more meaningful when individuals are given autonomy over the process. This idea supports the view of Sudirman et al. (2021), who argued that reflective activities strengthen self-regulation and personal awareness. Likewise, journaling conducted without rigid external control allows individuals to express themselves more openly and thoughtfully, creating opportunities for deeper self-examination and authentic personal reflection.

Across all identified themes, a common insight emerged: young professionals appreciate journaling practices that align with their everyday realities and personal preferences. For many participants, journaling is viewed as a flexible and individualized activity influenced more by personal experiences, emotions, and interests

than by formal standards or external pressures. Rather than treating journaling as a task governed by strict rules, they regard it as a meaningful avenue for creativity, emotional expression, and self-exploration. Because of this adaptability, journaling becomes easier to maintain over time and naturally blends into both their personal routines and professional responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of journal writing as an effective tool in developing writing skills, particularly among young professionals. Despite challenges such as insufficient vocabulary of non-native speakers to sufficiently express ideas in their journals and varying proficiency levels, when guided by structured support and constructive feedback, it can contribute meaningfully to professional and personal growth. Therefore, integrating journal writing into a professional setting is an excellent strategy to build proficient, reflective, and confident writers.

Nevertheless, the results of the study are to be interpreted considering a number of limitations. The sample size used in the study was small and represented a specific local context, which could restrict the possibility of generalizing the findings to the rest of the population of young professionals. Also, the self-reported writing development, as opposed to objectively determined writing proficiency, might not fully reflect real improvement in writing performance.

Future research could explore the long-term impact of journal writing on personal and professional development among young professionals. Studies may examine how journaling enhances discipline-specific skills in fields like law, education, and healthcare, or the use of digital and collaborative platforms to boost engagement and reflection. Research should also address barriers such as time constraints, inconsistent writing habits, difficulties in organizing and articulating ideas, limited vocabulary, lack of training, and low motivation to identify

strategies for more effective integration. Finally, investigating journaling's effects on emotional well-being, self-regulation, creativity, and critical thinking may provide a holistic understanding of its benefits.

With the results established, it has been found that journaling is most effective when it fits into a routine and can be sustained over time, becoming part of an individual's lifestyle and professional needs. Participants have expressed that autonomy in designing and choosing format, content, and frequency is highly beneficial. Through this self-directed practice, reflective habits can be promoted and reasoning and creative expression enhanced.

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The authors disclose that an artificial intelligence (AI) tool was utilized in the preparation of this manuscript. Grammarly was specifically used for language refinement.

The outputs were all thoroughly reviewed, adjusted, and verified by the authors. The authors take full accountability for the content within this manuscript.

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Appendix A

(Interview Guide Questions)

Introductory questions:

1. Will you share a bit of your experience with journaling?
2. How many times do you write in your journal?
3. What is your feeling toward the journaling process?

Research question 1: How does journaling help in developing writing skill?

- 1.1 In what manner do you believe journaling made an impact on developing your writing skill?
- 1.2 Is there an improvement in your grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure as you use journaling?
- 1.3 How did it aid you in structuring your ideas when writing?
- 1.4 Did it boost your writing confidence? Why or why not?
- 1.5 Is it simple for you to write long narratives or essays? Why?

Research question 2: What can be suggested to make journaling even more effective?

- 2.1 How did you make your journaling into a fun or engaging activity?
- 2.2 Is feedback helpful in improving your writing? Why or why not?
- 2.3 Which one do you prefer, free writing or being guided with prompts in writing?
- 2.4 What are ways to improve journaling to reinforce your writing skill?
- 2.5 Will you give specific suggestions to make journaling even more effective?

Research question 3: How is journaling done?

- 3.1 Will you share your specific journaling practices?
- 3.2 What writing instruments or gadgets do you use in journaling?
- 3.3 How many times do you journal?
- 3.4 In what time of the day do you usually journal?
- 3.5 How do you choose topics for your journals?