The Analysis of Personal Writing in *Freedom Writers* Movie and Its Application in Teaching Writing

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ABSTRACT

Personal writing, as depicted in the film "Freedom Writers," offers valuable insights for writing instruction, particularly for students from diverse and challenging backgrounds. This study aims to investigate how personal writing activities—such as diaries and reflective journals—can be applied to foster self-expression, emotional growth, and identity development in the classroom. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through content analysis of the movie and supported by relevant literature. The findings reveal that integrating personal writing into teaching not only enhances students' motivation and writing abilities but also creates a more supportive and engaging learning environment. These results suggest that personal writing strategies can empower students, boost their confidence, and promote authentic written communication.

I. Introduction

The ability to write well is a crucial foundation for achieving success in both academic and professional fields, as it opens opportunities for clear communication and the development of analytical thinking skills. The importance of writing is increasingly recognized. Many researchers have found that writing skills remain difficult for students. Proficient writing abilities allow people to articulate their perspectives, concepts, and understanding in an organized and comprehensible way[1]. As many students usually get difficulty to convey their idea or concept. Moreover, the difficulties appear because before they write, they do not arrange their idea or concept. [2].

Writing is more than just converting oral thoughts into written form; it becomes a process of self-expression and discovery, fostering a deeper connection with writing itself[3]. In order to produce quality writing, it is essential to apply correct grammar rules, select suitable vocabulary, and ensure both coherence and cohesion within the text. This approach aligns well with the understanding that writing is a process of creating written content that conveys ideas, emotions, thoughts, and desires to others[4]. Personal writing also provides students with a greater sense of autonomy and purpose, allowing them to feel more invested in their work and develop a more positive attitude toward writing. By encouraging students to explore personal experiences, personal writing provides a way to express emotions, build empathy, and strengthen self-awareness. Bayraktar & Acar, 2023 states that personal writing activities encourage students to improve their writing skills by also highlighting important phases of their lives[5].

Several previous studies have examined the role of personal writing in education. Bayraktar and Acar (2023) revealed that writing about childhood memories can help students enhance their storytelling skills and increase self-awareness. Dinda and Erviana (2023) demonstrated that the regular use of diaries is effective in improving the writing skills of tenth-grade students. Gandeza and Ridor-Unciano (2022) reported that implementing personal narratives as a teaching method can boost students' interest and motivation in writing. Meanwhile, Tabuk and Banjar (2023) emphasized that personal writing activities also support both language development and students' emotional growth. However, there is still limited research linking personal writing practices with their representation in the *Freedom Writers* movie and how this can be applied in teaching writing. By analyzing the personal writing techniques described in *Freedom Writers* movie, teachers can explore

ways to adapt similar methods to teaching writing, thereby helping students improve their writing skills by fostering an emotionally supportive learning environment.

In conclusion, *Freedom Writers* demonstrates the important role of personal writing in education, especially in helping students find their voice and express themselves freely. Through writing a personal journal, the students in the movie were able to process their experiences, face personal challenges, and gain a stronger sense of identity and belonging. For teaching writing, this approach suggests that integrating personal stories and reflective writing can improve student engagement, foster emotional resilience and build confidence in expressing their ideas.

II. Literature Review
A. Definition of Personal Writing

Personal writing in the form of writing personal experiences is a writing activity that records and reveals the writer's life experiences in a chronological and reflective manner. It allows individuals to express their inner selves and reflect on their life events, often leading to greater self-awareness and emotional clarity. Personal writing is a form of subjective, introspective expression in which writers communicate their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Making personal writing is done with the aim that the writer can remember all the memorable things he has experienced so that he is not forgotten. It serves as a powerful tool for self-exploration and can lead to insights that enhance both personal and creative growth. Personal writing allows writers to explore their identity and share their perspectives in a meaningful way, authentic, making it a powerful tool to connect with readers on a more intimate level.

Engaging in personal writing enables students to manage everyday stress, utilize writing as a means of interacting with others, and strengthen their individual expression[5]. When writers engage in personal writing, they are actively engaged in introspection, which creates self-awareness and emotional intelligence. By writing about their experiences, individuals often gain more clarity about their lives, values, and aspirations, making writing personal as a creative and therapeutic endeavor.

In addition, personal writing allow students to see how their language and expressions affect their classmates. In personal writing, writers can feel free to choose appropriate language, tone, and structure to express their experiences and emotions. Personal writing not only recounts events, but also gives shape to experiences through carefully chosen words. Personal writing combined emotional depth and clarity, providing a sense of intimacy without sacrificing coherence and readability.

B. Types of Personal Writing

Personal writing encompasses several types of writing forms, each with unique characteristics and purposes. These types allow writers to express their thoughts, feelings, and reflections in different ways. Some studies suggest that personal writing can be categorized into various genres such as journals, autobiographical narratives, reflective essays, and personal letters. Each form serves a different purpose, allowing writers to explore and convey personal experiences, analyze their lives, or communicate a personal message to a specific audience. The types of personal writing are as follows:

a. Diaries

Diaries is one of the media that can be used in learning to write, especially writing experience texts[6]. In the diaries, writers have the opportunity to explain personal problems, release frustrations or document achievements. This form of personal writing it is often used in educational settings to encourage students to reflect and learn from their experiences, thus fostering the habit of knowledge and reflection.

b. Autobiographical stories

Autobiographical narratives are stories based on events in the author's life. Autobiographies, whether personally written or not, are a clear testimony of one's life journey[7]. This type is particularly effective to convey deep emotional experiences or significant life changes, which can inspire empathy and understanding in readers.

c. Reflective essay

Reflective essays are a type of personal writing that involves deep introspection about specific topics, experiences, or ideas. In reflective essays, authors analyze and evaluate their thoughts, often connecting their personal ideas to larger concepts or theories.

d. Personal letters

Personal letters, whether addressed to friends, family, or even yourself, represent another form of personal writing that conveys thoughts and feelings in a direct and intimate way. Personal letter is a type of personal writing made by a person to another person[8]. The content of a personal letter is usually something that expresses the sender of the letter. In a school context, personal letters can be a significant exercise in empathy and emotional expression, as students learn to clearly express their thoughts and feelings to others.

e. Poetry

Poetry is often used as a form of personal writing that emphasizes emotional expression through metaphor, rhythm, and imagery. Unlike prose, poetry allows greater artistic freedom, allowing writers to convey complex emotions in a condensed form. Poetry represents a form of creative writing crafted with attention to beauty and rhythm, serving as a medium to convey personal experiences, ideas, and emotions[9]

f. Personal Statement

Personal statements are another type of personal writing that is often used in academic or professional contexts. These essays allow authors to discuss their goals, accomplishments, and motivations in a structured format. Personal statements require authors to reflect on their personal experiences, achievements and aspirations in a way that aligns with their future ambitions.

In conclusion, the types of personal writing depicted in *Freedom Writers* movie, such as journals or diaries, personal letter and poetry, are essential for understanding the deeper emotional and social processes involved in personal writing. The journals in the film provide the students with a private space to express their emotions and struggles, offering a powerful tool for self-reflection.

C. Definition of Movie

Movies are particularly powerful in that they combine visual and auditory elements, making them a very effective way to communicate complex messages or topics. Movie as a mass communication medium is able to represent various perspectives and convey social and cultural values to the public, not only as entertainment but also as a means of education and social reflection[10]. Movies also allow students to see real-life applications of the concepts being learned, thus providing a more relevant context to the subject matter. Furthermore, movie can encourage students' interest and motivation to learn.

D. Genre of Movie

Film genres help identify the characteristics of the story, the style, and the elements that make up the viewing experience[11]. A wide variety of film genres have been created to cater to movie enthusiasts, including action, horror, thriller, romance, animation, drama, and adventure [12].

1. Horror

Horror movies seek to generate feelings of fear and tension, frequently incorporating supernatural or psychological aspects to elicit intense emotional reactions from the audience. Horror tackles universal fears, challenges social taboos and explores the dark side of human nature. Horror is a film genre that enjoys widespread popularity, particularly among Indonesian audiences. This is supported by data from the Film Indonesia website, which indicates that horror movies have regularly ranked among the top 15 most-watched films in recent years.[13]. For example: *The Conjuring, The Night House, Barbarian, SMILE, A Quiet Place, etc*

2. Thriller

Thriller movies, sometimes referred to as suspense movies, represent a wide-ranging genre characterized by the frequent inclusion of suspenseful elements in their storylines. Filmmakers in this genre place particular emphasis on building suspense throughout their movies.[14]. Thriller movies frequently involve situations where characters' lives are at risk, such as when the main character unknowingly steps into peril. The genre often features not only physical danger but also internal disputes among characters or struggles against external forces, and sometimes these conflicts are presented in a more abstract form. For example: *Reptile, Sharper, 13 Bom di Jakarta, etc.*

3. Romance

According to the Oxford Dictionary, romance refers to a feeling of excitement and mystery connected with love. It often describes love that is sentimental or idealized, including love affairs that may be brief or not very serious. Additionally, romance can denote a book or film that portrays love in a sentimental or idealized manner, or a genre of fiction centered around such romantic themes[15]. Example of romance genre movies including, *Your Place or Mine, Marry Me, Checimal Hearts, The Photograph, The Lost City, etc.*

4. Animation

Animated films are created using drawings and paintings made by artists, commonly referred to as cartoons[16]. Animated movies differ from live-action movies primarily in their production process. Instead of continuously filming real-time outdoor scenes, animation is created by producing a sequence of individual frames, each captured separately to form the complete motion picture. For example: *Inside Out, Encanto, Frozen, Toy Story, Jumbo, etc.*

5. Drama

Film dramas often portray inner conflicts and deep character development[17]. Often rooted in real-world issues, dramatic films explore complex interpersonal relationships and ethical dilemmas, with the goal of creating a deeply emotional experience. Drama's often highlight social issues, making them effective in raising awareness and encourage reflection on the human condition. For example: *Freedom Writers, 5 cm, Budi Pekerti, The Journalist, etc*.

6. Adventure

The adventure genre has been a major force, significantly boosting the success of film distribution. The dynamic relationship between commercial interests and creative efforts has played a key role in the evolution of cinema since its early days[18]. For example: *Jungle Cruise, Onward, Wish, Uncharted, The Batman, etc.*

E. Teaching Writing

Teaching writing is essential in language teaching because it develops students' ability to communicate ideas, structure their thoughts and express themselves clearly. According to Rohayani (2021), teachers are encouraged to discover and experiment with innovative methods in the classroom to assist students in enhancing their writing skills and to help them see writing as an enjoyable activity. This approach helps students see writing as a developmental process rather than a finished product, thus reducing the anxiety of making mistakes and encouraging them to focus on expressing ideas first. Teaching writing refers to the process of guiding and facilitating students in developing their writing skills to effectively communicate ideas, emotions, and informationTeaching writing presents its own challenges. Educators must carefully select suitable and engaging media to capture students' interest. In addition, students need to be able to comprehend written forms for effective communication [19]

III. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at gaining a deep understanding of social phenomena by closely examining both text and context. Qualitative methods study objects in their natural state, with the researcher as the primary tool. Data is collected through various means (triangulation) and analyzed inductively, focusing on understanding meaning rather than generalization[20] . The researcher focuses on analyzing instances of personal writing featured in the "*Freedom Writers*" movie and investigates how these can be utilized in writing instruction. This qualitative approach enables an exploration of the writers' subjective experiences and interpretations, as well as their influence on the learning process. Through this lens, the study seeks

to uncover how personal writing methods portrayed in the film can inform and enrich teaching practices in the classroom.

This research used a multi-faceted approach to data collection and analysis, focusing on "*Freedom Writers*" movie to explore themes related to personal writing. Data was obtained by downloading the movie from a website. In the first step, the researcher watched the movie thoroughly to understand its context, themes and character dynamics. Secondly, the researcher downloaded the film script to extract detailed text, including personal writing and relevant dialog. Third, key scenes featuring personal writings and character interactions were observed, with important elements noted for further analysis. Fourth, the data was then coded by marking important excerpts from personal writings that aligned with the research theme. In the final step, the coded data was grouped into categories based on emerging themes.

IV. Findings and Discussion
A. Findings

The aim of this research is to explore how personal writing is utilized in movie for the purpose of teaching writing skills. The researcher will outline the various forms of personal writing as well as the themes found in the personal writings created by the characters in the *Freedom Writers* movie.

Table 1. Personal writing in *Freedom Writers* movie

Type	Character	Theme	Content of Personal Writings	Percentage
Diaries	Eva	Struggle	*I don't even know how this war started. It's just two sides who tripped each other way back. Who cares about the history behind it? I am my father's daughter. And when they call me testify, I will protect my own no matter what.*	77%
	Sindy	Struggle	*During the war in Cambodia, the camp stripped away my father's dignity. He sometimes tries to hurt my mom and me. I feel like I have to protect my family.*	
	Gloria	Violence	*If you look in my eyes, you'll see a loving girl. If you look at my smile, you'll see nothing wrong. If you pull up my shirt, you'll see the bruises. What did I do to make him so mad?*	
	Alejandro	Violence	*I was having trouble deciding what candy I wanted, then I heard gunshots. I looked down to see that one of my friends had blood coming out of his back and his mouth. The next day, I pulled up my shirt and got strapped with a gun I found in an alley by my house.*	
	Tito	Struggle	*No body cares what I do. Why should I bother coming to school?.*	
	Andre	Struggle	*My brother taught me what the life is for a young black man. Do what you have to, pimp, deal, whatever. Learn what colors to learn, gang boundaries. You can stay on one corner, you can't stay on another. Learn to be quiet, A wrong word can get you popped.*	

	Miguel	Social Support	*On the morning of the eviction, a hard knock on the door woke me up. The sheriff was there to do his job. I looked up at the sky, waiting for something to happen. My mother has no family to lean on, no money coming in. Why bother coming to school or getting good grades if I'm homeless? The bus stops in front of the school. I feel like throwing up. I'm wearing clothes from last year, some old shoes and no new haircut. I kept thinking I'd get laughed at.*	
			"Instead, I'm greeted by a couple of friends who were in my English class last year. And it hits me, Mrs. Gruwell, "my crazy English teacher from last year, is the only person that made me think of hope. Talking with friends about last year's English and our trips, I began to feel better. I receive my schedule and the first teacher is Mrs. Gruwell in Room 203. I walk into the room and feel as though all the problems in life are not so important anymore. I am home.	
Autobioghrapical Stories	-	-	-	-
Reflective Essay	-	-	-	-
Personal Letters	Marcus		*I miss my mom, ...*	11%
Poetry	Jamal		*At 16, I've seen more dead bodies than a mortician.*	11%
			Every time I step out my door, I'm faced with the risk of being shot.	
			To the outside world, it's just another dead body on the street corner.	
			They don't know that he was my friend.	
Personal Statement	-	-	-	-

Based on the data obtained, 3 types of personal writings were found in the movie Freedom Writers. These personal writings include diaries, personal letters, and poetry.

1. Diaries

According to Cintya et al., 2023 a diary is a person's regular record about themselves and their surroundings, which is often appreciated from a literary perspective due to its honest and spontaneous nature. These characteristics result in sincere and clear personal expressions, a quality that is highly valued in literature. In the Freedom Writers movie, diaries are written by 7 students named Eva, Sindy, Gloria, Alejandro, Tito Andre and Miguel. They use diaries as a form of expression of their experiences. With different backgrounds, they use the diary to convey their emotions, complaints, and whatever feelings they felt when the experience they are describing happened. For example, the role of Eva in the Freedom Writers movie, at **00:52:44** Eva writes about her experience witnessing her family's conflict with strangers that made her feel like she had to defend her family, especially her father, when she was called to testify. Unlike Eva, the other six characters have their own ways of writing down their experiences in their diaries.

2. Personal Letters

According to Supriyatna et al., (2024) personal letter is a letter made by a person to another person. The content of a personal letter is usually something that expresses the sender of the letter. In the movie freedom writers found one type of personal writing in the form of a personal letter written by a student named Marcus. At minute **01:09:00** he wrote "i miss my mom" on a piece of paper addressed to his mother. His letter expresses how he misses his mother who has not met for a long time. He hopes that with the letter he sends, he can meet his mother at the time of school graduation.

3. Poetry

Composing poetry encourages students to think critically as they interpret a poem, prompting them to consider both its meaning and the author's underlying intentions for creating it. [8]. In addition to diary, in the Freedom Writers movie, researchers also found a type of personal writing in the form of a personal letter. The letter in the movie was written by a student named Jamal. His poem reads

"*At 16, I've seen more dead bodies than a mortician.*
Every time I step out my door, I'm faced with the risk of being shot.
To the outside world, it's just another dead body on the street corner.
They don't know that he was my friend."

This poem is at minute **00:52:06**. This poem is his expression of his personal experience of living in a violent neighborhood, where the deaths of his friends were commonplace. While for others it was just a number or news, for him every death was a profound personal loss.

B. Disscussion

The *Freedom Writers* movie illustrates how personal writing, especially through journals, became a highly effective educational tool to transform the lives of students from marginalized backgrounds. Erin Gruwell, a teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School, introduced a writing method that freed students to express themselves without the pressure of grammar or formal structure. By giving each student a diary, she created a safe space where they could honestly and openly write about their life experiences, feelings, and stories. This approach not only helped students overcome the trauma and difficulties they faced but also built their self-confidence and a new positive identity.

In addition to diaries, the use of personal letters and poetry provided varied forms of expression that supported students' emotional and creative development. Through a writing process focused on honesty and freedom of expression, students began to see themselves as valuable individuals capable of achieving academic success. This method challenged the more rigid traditional educational approaches and demonstrated that writing could be both a means of healing and learning. Previous studies support that personal writing can increase learning motivation, aid emotional processing, and strengthen literacy skills, especially for students facing social and psychological challenges. Thus, the experience depicted in *Freedom Writers* offers a real example of how humanistic and student-centered writing instruction can bring significant change to students' lives.

V. Conclusion

The *Freedom Writers* movie illustrates the transformative potential of personal writing in education. By providing students with a safe space to express themselves honestly, Erin Gruwell enabled profound personal and academic growth among students previously considered unreachable. The principles demonstrated in the film - prioritizing authentic expression, creating psychological safety, connecting personal experience to broader themes, and gradually building academic skills - offer a powerful framework for teaching writing across educational contexts.

Teachers who implement these approaches may face challenges, but the potential benefits are substantial: increased student engagement, improved writing fluency, enhanced empathy, stronger student-teacher relationships, and academic growth. As demonstrated by the *Freedom Writers*, personal writing can serve as both a therapeutic intervention and an educational strategy, helping students find their voices and develop the skills to express them effectively.

The enduring impact of the *Freedom Writers* story - inspiring a foundation that continues to promote these methods in schools worldwide - speaks to the universal need for self-expression and the powerful role writing can play in personal transformation and academic success. By adapting these

approaches to their own contexts, educators can help students discover the power of their own stories while developing essential writing skills.

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