

## EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF STUDENT AT WRITING SKILLS FROM CREATIVE WRITING COURSES : A CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRAK

Studi kasus ini mengungkap tantangan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris UIN K.H Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan dalam meningkatkan keterampilan menulis melalui kursus menulis kreatif. Menggunakan metode kualitatif yang melibatkan wawancara mendalam dengan beberapa mahasiswa yang telah lulus mata kuliah tersebut. Studi ini mengungkap beberapa tantangan utama yang dihadapi siswa termasuk kurangnya inspirasi, penggunaan bahasa yang kuat dan imajinatif, faktor ekstrinsik siswa dalam belajar. Pada penelitian ini juga menyoroti pentingnya faktor individu seperti motivasi, pengalaman kepercayaan diri dalam mempengaruhi keberhasilan siswa dalam kursus.

**Kata Kunci** : menulis kreatif, keterampilan menulis, tantangan siswa

### ABSTRACT

*This case study revealed the challenges faced by experiences students at English Education Department UIN K.H Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan in improving their writing skills through creative writing courses. Using the qualitative methode involving in depth interview with a several students who has passed that courses. The study revealed several key challenges faced by students including lack of inspirations,using strong and imaginative language, the student's extrinsic factors in learning. At this study also highlighted the importance of individual factors such as motivation, self confidence experience in influencing student's success in the courses.*

**Keywords** : creative writing, writing skills, challenges students

### INTRODUCTION

As a college student with an English major, it should be able to master skills in English, such as reading, speaking, listening, or writing skills (ELL Fronties, 2017). The four basic English skills, have been learned simply during school (Zein, 2017). In the campus institution environment, it will be more in-depth to learn these four skills starting from reading, speaking, listening and writing skills (Mohammad et al, 2016).

Out of many skills that the students need in the university, writing is most important. Writing is not only the words which is write on the piece of paper, but

also the effective communication of complex ideas in the simplest form of words that everybody can understand. That is why it is the most important skill the students need in university life (Rohim, 2019). with writing skills we are required to be able to write a writing that makes readers understand and know what we have written. so that with this the message that we want to convey as writers can be conveyed to readers (Emig, 2020).

There are many kinds of writing that have been taught in University. The component of writing skill is introduced in 5 levels (Writing 1: Writing paragraphs, Writing 2: narrative writing, Writing 3: argumentative writing, Writing 4: Academic writing, Writing 5: Report and research (Manara, 2015).

From some of these writing levels we have learned. simply in high school and junior high school, although in practice it is still very basic and simple. such as the author's experience of learning to write argumentative texts in junior high school there was taught by the teacher how to string sentences into a paragraph that can be understood by the reader the message in the text.

Then in the context of writing, it is further expanded on campus, especially majors related to the English department. In the English department, students' skills to learn English are further deepened in each semester through skill courses such as in reading, speaking, writing, listening skills (Hossain, 2015). One of the courses that will be discussed here is the creative writing course which focuses on the context of writing skills.

At 3rd semester English Education Department UIN K.H Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan the students has gotten the courses namely creative writing. Creativity is defined as the ability to produce something novel, original, appropriate, high in quality, innovative, unusual, and truly valuable (Snow,1986; Amabile, 1988;Torrance, 1965;Rothenberg, 1990; Lucas,2001; Robinson, 2001). Many scholars and educators believe that every individual has a potential to be creative and a completely uncreative person does not exist (Amabile, 1996;Cropley, 1997;Maley, 2006; Kaufmann & Sternberg, 2010). Creative writing at the levels of writing skills a because at this courses also learn how to make some interesting text such as short story, novel, poem, poetry, etc. Creative writing is a chance to free

imagination in which people get satisfaction feel interest to read the text (Senel, 2018).

Behind the bright lights of the literary world lies the dedication of writers who deliver outstanding works. Creative writing courses are designed to improving this talent, guiding students in exploring the words and crafting mesmerizing stories (Fitria, 2024).

However, various studies have revealed a variety of barriers that students face in producing quality written work. Difficulties in brainstorming ideas, crafting captivating narratives, and expressing themselves with language that evokes emotions are some of the main challenges (Fareed, 2016).

One study conducted by Rahmiati (2013) identified some of the main obstacles in creative writing courses, such as lack of motivation, lack of opportunities to practice, and lack of support and recognition from authorities. These factors hinder students from writing effectively in an academic context.

However, Şenel (2021) offers a different perspective. Her research shows that integrating creative writing into academic writing can actually improve students' success in the field. This is because the creative process helps develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This study used a one-group pretest-posttest experimental design. Participants underwent pre and post tests to evaluate creative thinking skills before and after a four-week creative writing training program. The SCAMPER method was used throughout the activities, and progress was assessed by comparing midterm and end-of-semester quiz results.

Meanwhile, in research that has been conducted by Ekaterina (2015) it was found that creative writing in a second language course increased students' enthusiasm and writing skills, with all students finding the tasks enjoyable and useful. There were calls to increase the future use of creative writing in English. In line with Ekaterina's research, creative writing can be a powerful tool to increase students' enthusiasm and writing skills. Her findings support the idea that students find these tasks enjoyable and rewarding, thus encouraging increased integration of creative writing into future English courses. Based on the challenges that have been identified, the research conducted by Ekaterina offers a promising solution. Her research found that creative writing in second language courses increased students'

enthusiasm and writing skills, with all participants reporting enjoyment and finding the tasks useful. This is in line with wider calls to increase the use of creative writing in English language education, demonstrating its potential to overcome motivational and skill barriers.

Interestingly, in research with title experimenting with language through creative writing tasks found that creative writing tasks, such as writing poems, short stories based on images, and creative journaling, can overcome motivational challenges and anxiety. Through these tasks, students are given space to experiment with language and expand their vocabulary knowledge. This study showed positive results in terms of learner autonomy, linguistic creativity, and vocabulary expansion (Manara, 2015).

This literature review takes a deep dive into the challenges that students face in creative writing courses. We will find out how to overcome these obstacles and explore the potential of creative writing to improve overall writing skills. Let's explore together how best to cultivate talented writers in this modern era. Integrating creative writing into the formal education curriculum should be considered as a solution to improve the quality of student writing.

## **DISCUSSION**

This case study employs a qualitative research method to explore the challenges faced by experienced students in the English Education Department at UIN K.H Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan as they strive to improve their writing skills through creative writing courses. In-depth interviews were conducted with a selection of students who had successfully completed these courses. Qualitative research is a methodological approach that seeks to understand the social world by exploring people's experiences, perspectives, and histories (Kemparaj, 2013).

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Mayer, 2020). This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Ormston, 2014). Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe

routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. It is an iterative process that aims to make new distinctions and achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied (Aspers, 2021).

The participants of this study were taken several students as samples for interviews to answer several questions about their experience in attending creative writing classes so that students could share their experiences in the interview, after conducting the interview, the results of the interview were then analyzed.

As is typical in qualitative research (Kemperaj, 2013; Aspers, 2021), the goal was to understand the students' experiences and perspectives on the challenges they faced. For instance, the interviews revealed that a lack of inspiration was a common obstacle. Students expressed difficulty coming up with engaging plots for their creative writing pieces. Analysis of the interview data aimed to identify key challenges encountered by the participants. These challenges included developing engaging plots, utilizing strong and imaginative language, and overcoming external factors influencing their learning. Furthermore, the study shed light on the significance of individual factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and prior writing experience in shaping student success within the creative writing curriculum.

Creative writing is an art and skill to produce literary pieces which is traditionally known as literature with its varied genre (Anae, 2014). Creative skills play an important role in language learning. Drama, Music, Storytelling, Projects, and Creative Writing all require a lot of creativity and imagination (Anderson, 2018). Creativity is a skill. It's the competence to create the unique and innovative ideas or products. Stories, Quotes, Rhymes, Motivational and inspirational words, Songs are unique results to express as the creative media in Creative Writing lesson (Pentury, 2020). Whether one wants to become a journalist or a communication expert, creativity in writing is in the first place. Writing for television, radio, film, magazine (Hussain, 2018).

Creative writing, far from being a whimsical pursuit, is an art form that hones a fundamental skill:

### *Master the power of language*

Creative writing exercises push students to experiment with vocabulary, sentence structure, and figurative language (Wicaksono, 2021). This dexterity with language becomes a potent tool in any communication field. In creative writing, employing a rich vocabulary filled with descriptive words allows readers to visualize the setting and characters more vividly (Le, 2018). Consider J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings." Tolkien masterfully employs descriptive words like "shimmering," "majestic," and "desolate" to paint a picture of Middle-earth, allowing readers to truly immerse themselves in the fantastical world. *The Lord of the Rings* is an epic high fantasy novel by the English author and scholar J. R. R. Tolkien. Set in Middle-earth, the story began as a sequel to Tolkien's 1937 children's book *The Hobbit*.

### *Think Creatively*

Problem-solving and critical thinking are crucial aspects of the creative process. These skills are equally valuable for navigating the complexities of professional communication. Creativity is the ability to imagine or invent something new. Creativity is not the ability to create out of nothing, but the ability to generate new ideas by combining, changing, or reapplying existing ideas. Some creative ideas are astonishing and brilliant, while others are just simple, good, practical ideas that no one seems to have thought of yet (Achilov, 2017).

### **Challenges Faced by Students in Creative Writing**

Creative writing, with its promise of unleashing imagination and crafting captivating stories, beckons students with a sense of adventure. Yet, the journey from blank page to a flourishing narrative is rarely a smooth one. Students often encounter a multitude of challenges that can hinder their progress and stifle their creative flow. Based on an interview with a student who has passed the courses well, we found that five key struggles commonly faced by students in creative writing courses.

#### 1. The lack of Inspiration:

One of the most significant challenges students face is overcoming the dreaded "writer's block." Writer's block is a frustrating phenomenon experienced by many writers. It's a feeling of being stuck, unable to generate new ideas or progress

on existing writing projects Writer's block has been defined as the inability for a writer to produce new material (Ahmed, 2019). Generating original ideas and maintaining a steady flow of inspiration can be daunting. Blank pages become a daunting obstacle, and the initial spark of an idea can struggle to ignite into a full-fledged story. This lack of inspiration can lead to frustration and a sense of stagnation, hindering students from exploring the full potential of their creativity.

“In my opinion, the difficulty in writing in a creative writing course is the difficulty of not having inspiration or an idea in my writing. Sometimes this bothers me when I write a story. For example, when I was assigned to make a short story on the web Storybird, I ran out of ideas in my writing and didn't know what else to write to continue my story”

Based on that interview found that the students ran out of ideas in writing and did'n know how to continue writing. This situation called “writer's block” and occur everytime while writing something. A study by Noon Hanim Ahmad (2020) found that explored the causes of writers' block among different levels of writers, revealing varying reasons such as focusing on perfection and fearing lack of reader understanding.

In another previous studies (Ahmed, 2019) found that another the causes of writer's block such as Common factors associated with writer's block generally fall into four categories:

- a. Physiological or affective causes include stress, anxiety, intense affective states (such as depression or grief) and burnout/fatigue.
- b. Motivational causes, Evaluation anxiety (or fear of criticism or rejection) and loss of enjoyment have been identified as motivational components to blocking. A writer fears that others will judge their work poorly.
- c. Cognitive causes some cognitive causes of blocking include perfectionism, writing with a fixed perspective in mind, and using time or effort inefficiently (such as spending a disproportionate of time planning compared to writing or not planning sufficiently for a complicated text.
- d. Behavioral causes becoming too busy to write, changing one's routine, or not following a structured schedule have been associated with writer's block.

Behavioral factors are not thought to impact the writer's ability to recognize connections between ideas, come up with ideas, or communicate them in an articulate manner. A writer may be capable of writing, but choose to put off writing until a later time.

“Based on my experience, when I feel like I don't know what to write anymore, sometimes I take a short break from my writing to find other inspiration. My break is very simple, I just refresh my brain by looking at social media like scrolling TikTok so that my brain feels fresher and doesn't get too stressed thinking about what to write”

Based on the interview found that the student's strategies to handle writing block is by scrolling socmed, it can helpful to reduce stress by writing block, by scrolling socmed its means that taking a break from writing activity. taking short breaks can significantly improve focus, concentration (Peter, 2021).

## 2. The lack of grammatical structure

Being aware of grammatical structures can help learners develop their reading comprehension skills (Mellanby et al, 2014). Lack of grammar in creative short story writing can be an obstacle for both writers and readers. For writers, a lack of understanding of grammar can make it difficult for them to express their ideas clearly and effectively. This can lead to stories that are confusing, difficult to understand, and uninteresting to readers. For readers, a lack of grammar can make stories difficult to read and understand. This can lead to frustration and disappointment, and may discourage the reader from continuing to read the story.

“I think my difficulty when taking creative writing courses is that when I create a short story using storybird media, I sometimes feel difficulty in making a sentence, namely with the grammar structure, sometimes I forget how to use the correct tenses that match the context in my writing. although there are some opinions that grammar is not important, but still in creative writing I am required to be able to create good work and make readers feel comfortable when reading these results”

Students might struggle to strike a balance between adhering to grammatical rules and pushing the boundaries of language in a creative way.



They may find themselves grappling with proper sentence construction, verb tense consistency, and maintaining a cohesive story structure.

Grammar is often defined as the rule system of a language, but it is also useful to think of it as a resource for expressing meaning (Lynch and Anderson, 2013:4) . The components of grammar and sentence structure in writing a good paragraph can be described as follows: (Utari, 2019).

- a. the paragraph has correct verb tenses;
  - b. the paragraph has the correct use of subjectverb agreement,
  - c. the paragraph has a correct use of articles (a, the);
  - d. the paragraph has the correct use of pronoun agreement,
  - e. the paragraph has no choppy sentences; the paragraph has no stringy sentences,
  - f. the paragraph has no sentence fragment,
  - g. the paragraph has no run-on sentences/comma splices.
3. The Fear of Feedback

Self-doubt and a fear of criticism can be crippling roadblocks for aspiring writers. Students might hesitate to share their work for fear of judgment, hindering their ability to receive constructive feedback and learn from others (Stevens, 2023). This can also lead to a reluctance to experiment with different styles and approaches, ultimately limiting their creative growth.

“in writing creative writing I also experienced difficulties that bothered me, when I finished writing I felt insecure about the results I had written and I was afraid that I would make readers disappointed with my very simple work.”

Self-doubt and fear of criticism are like monsters that haunt many writers, including beginners. The shadow of negative judgment from others can silence the creative voice and hinder the learning process. However, research shows that the right mindset, such as Carol Dweck's growth mindset “*There are two main mindsets we can navigate life with: growth and fixed. Having a growth mindset is essential for success*”. it can help writers to move forward. Neil Gaiman, a renowned author, reminds us that writing is a discipline, not waiting for inspiration.

Fear and self-doubt are hurdles that all writers must face. Brené Brown, an expert on courage, asserts that courage does not mean being fearless, but daring to act despite fear. Constructive criticism is a valuable tool for improving writing skills. Research such as showed that writers who received detailed feedback on their writing showed greater improvement in writing skills compared to those who did not (Nicol, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this investigation into the experiences of students within the English Education Department at UIN K.H Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan sheds light on the challenges they encounter while striving to improve their writing through creative writing courses. Employing a qualitative approach through in-depth student interviews, the study revealed a lack of inspiration, difficulties with crafting strong and imaginative language, and external factors impacting learning as key obstacles.

However, the research also emphasizes the significant role individual student characteristics play in course success. Motivation, self-confidence, and prior experience were identified as crucial factors influencing student achievement. These findings hold valuable insights for educators seeking to refine creative writing instruction within the department. By fostering a more inspiring learning environment, incorporating targeted language-strengthening exercises, and implementing strategies to address external learning barriers, educators can equip students with the tools they need to flourish in creative writing. Further research could explore the effectiveness of various teaching methods in specifically addressing these challenges and promoting successful experiences for students in creative writing courses.

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