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Students' Psychological Challenges in English Writing: A Qualitative Study at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro

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Abstract - Writing abilities are specialized skills that enable authors to communicate their ideas in meaningful ways and engage readers on a deeper level. Therefore, Indonesian learners frequently struggle with generating ideas, organizing content logically, and producing grammatically accurate sentences. The students' writing standards are poor, and they do not align with the standard required. Therefore, there is a need to nurture students' writing skills to meet the standard by exploring the benchmarking factors for English writing skills. The objective of this research was to find out psychological factors out the psychological factors faced by fourth-semester students. This research was a qualitative research design. The population of this study was fourth-semester English students at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro. The data collection technique used was interviews. The result show psychologically, writing anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence are powerful factors that can hinder students' ability to apply their knowledge to actual writing practice.

Keyword: Psychological factor, Writing Skill, Factors influences

Abstrak- Kemampuan menulis adalah keterampilan khusus yang memungkinkan penulis menyampaikan gagasan mereka secara bermakna dan melibatkan pembaca pada tingkat yang lebih dalam. Oleh karena itu, pelajar Indonesia sering kali mengalami kesulitan dalam menghasilkan gagasan, menyusun isi secara logis, dan menyusun kalimat yang tepat secara tata bahasa. Standar menulis para siswa masih rendah dan belum sesuai dengan standar yang diharapkan. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan upaya untuk mengembangkan keterampilan menulis siswa agar memenuhi standar tersebut dengan mengkaji faktor-faktor penentu keterampilan menulis bahasa Inggris. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor psikologis yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa semester empat. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif. Populasi penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa jurusan Bahasa Inggris semester empat di IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah wawancara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara psikologis, kecemasan menulis, motivasi, dan kepercayaan diri merupakan faktor-faktor kuat yang dapat menghambat kemampuan mahasiswa dalam menerapkan pengetahuan mereka ke dalam praktik menulis yang sebenarnya.

Kata kunci: Faktor Psikologi, Kemampuan Menulis, Faktor Pengaruh

INTRODUCTION

English is now a very important language because it functions as an international and global language and has also become a second language in many countries. In Indonesia, English is studied as a foreign language and taught from elementary school to university, and is even introduced as early as kindergarten. This reflects the importance of the language for Indonesia as a developing country (Nurdianingsih & Purnama, 2017). In learning English, there are four main skills divided into receptive and productive skills. Reading and listening are receptive skills because through these two activities, students acquire information, ideas, and perspectives. Meanwhile, writing and speaking are categorized as productive skills because students generate ideas, concepts, and meaning. Writing, as a productive skill, deserves serious attention in education. However, writing is not easy for most students, as they must pay attention to various aspects such as correct punctuation, appropriate vocabulary selection, sentence structure, and paragraph organization (Chicho, 2022).

Writing is a challenging and deliberate form of communication, often undertaken within limited time and space. Compared with speaking, listening, and reading, writing is a much more difficult skill to master, leaving many students unsure where to begin (Nunan, 1991). Based on this, this study examines the writing process of a group of students majoring in English. The subjects were selected from the English study program because this study focuses on the writing challenges students face. As EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, they are considered an appropriate representation of the target respondents (Nurdianingsih et al., 2025). Writing is a specialized skill that enables writers to convey their ideas meaningfully and establish deeper connections with readers. Writing also plays an important role as part of broader learning activities, although the primary focus may lie on other aspects such as speaking, simulations, or language practice (Nurdianingsih et al., 2023)

In the Indonesian EFL context, writing remains a persistent challenge for university students. A study by Islami et al., (2022) indicated that Indonesian learners frequently struggle with generating ideas, organizing content logically, and producing grammatically accurate sentences. These difficulties are attributed to

various factors, including limited exposure to English outside the classroom, inadequate writing practice, and the influence of first language interference (Amir & Pammu, 2023). The low writing ability of students, which does not meet established standards, is a major concern, so efforts are needed to improve their writing skills by referring to benchmark factors in English writing skills (Sophomore Talle Vacalares et al., 2023). According to Brookes and Grundy (2017), motivation is the most crucial factor in developing writing skills. Motivated students tend to show a greater interest in writing activities, thus encouraging them to practice writing more actively. Furthermore, highly motivated students are also more enthusiastic about participating in classroom learning activities and demonstrate a commitment to honing their writing skills.

Writing anxiety together with a lack of motivation and self-confidence make up the psychological barriers that students experience while learning to write. The pressure to achieve scholarly standards causes writing blocks in students who end up becoming stressed and delaying their work (Pecorari, 2015). Writing obstacles stemming from cognitive abilities that prevent students from organizing their thoughts and expressing them clearly intensify the difficulty of writing tasks (Zamel, 2017). The psychological factors lead students into a damaging cycle that makes their tendency to avoid errors block their natural writing process thus worsening their writing challenges.

To address this gap, this study investigates the specific research question, "What are the psychological factors faced by fourth-semester students in their writing skills?" By identifying these specific psychological factors, researchers to find out the psychological factors faced by fourth-semester students.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the researcher employed a descriptive analysis research design with a qualitative approach because the researcher sought to identify the psychological factors experienced by fourth-semester students at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro, particularly those related to writing ability. In this regard, the researcher sought to analyze the psychological factors of fourth-semester students in relation to

their writing practice. The data used in this study were collected through interviews. Interviews were used to identify the psychological factors faced by fourth-semester students. The steps data analysis includes (1) data reduction, compiling all raw data obtained from interview transcripts, (2) data categorization, grouping data, (3) data interpretation, meaning and explain the categorized findings to answer the researcher's questions about psychological factors.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After interviewing fourth-semester students in the English Language Education Department, researchers identified several factors that influence students' writing skills. These factors significantly contribute to student writing skills. These factors include motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence, classroom situation and teaching method can be seen in the following:

1. Motivation

Some students expressed their feelings that they were quite motivated in writing activities:

Student 1: *"I am quite motivated, I want to improve my English skills for the future and be able to communicate better."*

Student 1: *"I am quite motivated, My main reason is my future job, as many good jobs require good writing skills for emails and reports. I also want to excel in my studies, as I have to write essays and papers. Getting good feedback from my teachers also helps me stay motivated"*

Student 1: *"I am quite motivated, I also want to improve my writing skills and be able to use English well."*

Students demonstrated strong motivation related to their professional needs and future academic goals. This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory proposed by Ryan & Deci (2020), a theory of human development and well-being that has significant implications for education. This theory emphasizes the innate motivational tendencies of humans to learn and develop, and how these tendencies can be optimally supported. Self-Determination Theory provides a broad framework for understanding the factors that can foster or hinder intrinsic

motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, and psychological well-being all of which have direct relevance in educational contexts. Numerous studies within this theoretical framework demonstrate that both intrinsic motivation and well-internalized extrinsic motivation contribute to a variety of positive outcomes across educational levels and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, Suliman et al (2024) explain that students with instrumental motivation learn a second language primarily for their future careers, while students with integrative motivation are more motivated by a desire to connect with native speakers and the surrounding community.

Although motivational reasons appeared to be slightly more dominant, all participants shared one fundamental similarity: the desire for self-development. This indicates that the spirit of self-development is a shared value held by all fourth-semester students. Self-development in this context refers to the desire to become better, more confident, and more competent English writers. Thus, these findings underscore the importance of utilizing motivational factors in writing instruction to maximize students' writing skills.

2. Anxiety

The majority of respondents admitted to feeling a lack of confidence in writing: Student 1: *"A little anxious, especially if the writing will be formally assessed. This anxiety usually arises from the fear of making grammatical errors or the worry that the message I want to convey will not be conveyed clearly to the reader."*

Student 2: *"I feel a little anxious because I am afraid of making mistakes, especially in writing using grammar."*

Student 3: *"I feel a little anxious when asked to write in English. I worry about making grammatical errors and sounding strange. I also feel nervous when there's a time limit, because I can't check my work carefully. But I feel less anxious if I understand the topic well or have enough time."*

The majority of students admitted to feeling anxious or embarrassed when writing sentence structures in English. This finding aligns with Al-Sawalha, (2012), view, which defines writing anxiety as a set of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors either individually or in combination that prevent someone from starting,

continuing, or completing a writing task, even though they are cognitively capable of doing so. This finding aligns with Wahyuni (2017) who concluded that most EFL learners in Indonesia experience moderate to high levels of writing anxiety, with grammatical errors being the most dominant source of anxiety. Wahyuni also found that writing anxiety was significantly inversely related to writing performance, implying that anxiety management has the potential to directly improve students' writing outcomes.

This anxiety is generally caused by a fear of making mistakes, both in writing and grammar, and a fear of not being understood by others. To overcome these feelings, many students try various methods, such as practicing grammar at home or asking friends if they have difficulty understanding. These simple steps are enough to help them feel more prepared and confident when writing. These findings suggest that writing anxiety is a significant barrier that prevents students from writing freely and confidently.

3. Self Confidence

Most students reported that their confidence in writing has not fully increased because they still need consistent practice and environmental support, including encouragement from friends and lecturers.

Student 1: *"My confidence level is intermediate. I understand the basics of linguistics and sentence structure, but I realize that writing is a skill that requires constant practice to reach a proficient level."*

Student 2: *"I'm somewhat confident. I can write simple paragraphs without too much difficulty. But I'm not very confident when it comes to writing long academic essays or difficult topics. I know I still need to learn more, but I believe I can improve with practice."*

Student 3: *"Not completely confident yet because I still need a lot of practice."*

Based on interview data, most students demonstrated moderate levels of confidence in their English writing abilities. Self-confidence also influences students' writing abilities. Some describe themselves as intermediate learners with basic knowledge but recognize the need for continued practice. Others feel quite confident while acknowledging that there are still areas for improvement. Still

others feel capable of writing simple paragraphs but struggle with longer, more complex academic essays. In line with Bandura (1997) conceptualized self-efficacy as a person's belief in their ability to successfully complete a task. If a person's self-efficacy is slightly higher than their actual ability, they tend to view challenging tasks as achievable and are motivated to invest more time and effort. Conversely, if a person's self-efficacy is low, they may view the same task as something unattainable, leading to reduced effort or even giving up.

Although some students expressed relatively good confidence, none claimed to be fully proficient, reflecting a sense of humility and a strong desire for continuous improvement. These findings suggest that students' confidence is still developing, and that consistent practice, constructive feedback, and a supportive learning environment are crucial to helping them build greater confidence in their writing abilities.

4. Classroom Situation

Some students emphasized that a collaborative classroom environment can help reduce the pressure of writing and encourage the exchange of ideas:

Student 1: " *Yes, a collaborative classroom situation, where students can exchange ideas through group discussions, really helps reduce the pressure of writing and broadens my perspective.*"

Student 2: " *Yes, a comfortable classroom situation can make me more confident in writing.*"

Student 3: " *Yes, when the atmosphere is comfortable, I feel more enthusiastic about writing.*"

Based on these findings, a welcoming classroom environment signals to students that making mistakes is a natural and essential part of the learning process, thereby reducing writing anxiety and building resilience. In line with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as applied to the context of writing, Vygotsky (1978) states that children learn and develop cognitive abilities through interaction with others who are more knowledgeable, whether teachers or peers. In the context of collaborative writing, studies informed by this theory indicate that collaborative writing warrants further investigation in classroom settings, particularly within

small groups that engage in active interaction. Furthermore, collaboration has been shown to help reduce anxiety and low self-confidence, providing students with opportunities to support one another, build second-language knowledge together, and receive immediate feedback.

A conducive situation ensures that every student, regardless of ability level, feels valued and motivated to participate. Meanwhile, a collaborative environment encourages the exchange of ideas, broadens students' perspectives, and strengthens their sense of belonging in the learning community. By consciously designing such an environment, instructors can play a role in optimizing students' writing development, both psychologically and academically, ultimately producing more confident, motivated, and capable writers.

5. Teaching Method

All participants in this study emphasized the crucial role of clear examples and helpful feedback in supporting their writing development.

Student 1: "The lecturer's teaching methods are very influential. Providing detailed feedback and discussing examples of good texts helps me understand the writing standards expected at the university level."

Student 2: "The lecturer's methods are very helpful, especially when they provide clear examples and feedback."

Student 3: "Very helpful, especially if the explanations are clear and there are exercises."

Regarding teaching methods, all participants in this study emphasized the crucial role of clear examples and helpful feedback in supporting their writing development. Burton et al., (2024) developed the concept of "proactive receptiveness," which refers to a form of active engagement in which learners share responsibility for ensuring that the feedback process is effective by actively seeking out, interpreting, and applying that feedback to regulate their own learning. Students are positioned as active participants in the feedback process, engaging in ongoing feedback interactions with instructors and peers, and actively seeking, interpreting, and acting on feedback to self-regulate and improve their learning.

Specifically, students highlighted the importance of clear explanations, concrete examples, and constructive feedback as three core elements they expected from their instructors. They also stated that when lessons focused too much on grammar rules and theoretical aspects without providing adequate opportunities for actual writing practice, students felt confused and unable to apply what they had learned. This suggests that a purely rule-based approach to teaching writing is insufficient and can hinder students' ability to develop practical writing competencies. Therefore, students considered a more balanced teaching method and direct writing practice to be crucial for fostering meaningful learning outcomes. These findings underscore the need for instructors to redesign their teaching strategies by allocating more time for guided writing practice and providing regular and detailed feedback to support students' overall writing growth.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the psychological factor contributing to writing ability among fourth-semester English students at IKIP PGRI Bojonegoro. Psychologically, writing anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence are powerful factors that can hinder students' ability to apply their knowledge to actual writing practice. This study found that anxiety about grammatical errors led to unnatural-sounding writing and suboptimal performance in formal assessment settings. On the other hand, appropriately designed motivation helped students build meaningful personal connections with English writing activities, while also developing a compelling and future-oriented vision. The limited self-confidence identified in this study does not reflect students' incompetence, but rather reflects their ongoing competency development.

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