

The Effectiveness of Expressive Writing Therapy in Improving Student Academic Resilience

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Abstract. Pressure in undergoing the academic process in lectures often makes students feel stressed which can reduce student academic resilience. This study aims to see the effectiveness of expressive writing therapy on increasing academic resilience. Using quantitative experimental research method with a Two Group PreTest PostTest Design, this study involved 20 students who were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The measuring instrument used is the Resilient Questionnaire Scale, which is constructed based on seven resilience aspects by Reivich and Shatte. Data analysis using paired sample T-Test in the experimental group showed a pretest score of 130.93 and a posttest score of 213.40 with the Sig. value obtained. (2-tailed) of $0.000 < 0.05$. These results indicate an increase in posttest scores in the experimental group, so the applied expressive writing therapy appears to be effective in enhancing academic resilience in students

Keywords: Expressive Writing Therapy, Academic Resilience, Students



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Introduction

Resilience comes from the English resilience from the word *resile*, which means "to rise again" (from the words *re-* "return" + *salire-* "to jump, leap") (Smith et al., 2008; Riehm et al., 2021). Resilience is the ability to get back up. In the academic context, resilience is the ability of an individual to get through challenging or threatening situations in the middle of the educational process. For example, a student can complete the demands of the thesis as a condition for graduation and pass it as a process, capacity, or result of successful adaptation (Rudd et al., 2021). According to Cassidy (2015) and Rudd et al. (2021), academic resilience is a desirable process that benefits individuals and tends to positively impact aspects of individual well-being, health, performance, and achievement in the learning process. So, academic resilience is the toughness or strength in individuals facing academic challenges.

According to Reivich and Shatte in Rudd et al. (2021), resilient individuals are characterized as follows: (1) emotional regulation, the ability of individuals to control emotions despite being under pressure. (2) impulse control is the individual's ability to control impulses and is related to emotional control. (3) Individual optimism is the ability of the individual to believe that everything will be able to change for the better. (4) analysis of the causes of the problem (Causal Analysis), the ability of individuals to identify the causes of the problems they experience and adjust cognitively to recognize the causes of the difficulties they face. (5) empathy can interpret non-verbal language from others, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language. (6) Self-efficacy is the belief that the individual can solve problems through experience and belief in the ability to succeed in life. (7) achievement (Reaching Out), the ability of individuals to achieve what they want, describes where resilience makes individuals able to improve the positive aspects of their lives.

Grotbeeg (1995) in Ferreira et al. (2021) mentions three resilience-forming factors. First, I Have (External Support). In this factor, it is explained that there is help and sources from outside that increase resilience. I have factors that also consist of support or encouragement to be independent, the presence of role models, and relationships with other individuals. Second, I Am (Inner Strength). In this I Am factor, explained that this power comes from within, such as feelings, behaviors, and beliefs contained in a person. The I Am factor consists of being aware of a feeling of pride in oneself, a feeling of being loved and an attractive attitude, an individual filled with hope, faith, trust, love, independence, and responsibility. Third, I Can (Interpersonal and Problem-Solving Skills). In this factor, explained the existence of a person's social and interpersonal competence. Part of this factor is regulating various feelings and stimuli, seeking trustworthy relationships, using communication skills, and measuring the nature of oneself and others.

The Status of students in formal education requires individuals to be able to study the courses they study, apply, innovate, and have high creativity in their fields. However, these demands can stress students (Saihu et al., 2019). Ferreira et al. (2021) found that most students (77%) preparing their thesis experienced stress. Without students' academic resilience, stress worsens and hinders the continuation of thesis work. This is supported by Yulianti's (2021) research, which found that few final behavior students needed a role of resilience in facing difficulties caused by thesis work. Students need academic resilience to cope and adapt positively to various pressures faced in learning activities.

Research on resilience conducted by Humaira (2023) shows that final-year students need help completing their thesis and have low academic resilience. They need help working on their thesis, such as not thinking in the long term, having negative emotions, being impatient when facing difficult situations, and not wanting to continue. Other studies support this statement and show that the results of the final students tend to be low resilience (Marettih et al., 2022). These students cannot fully exert their abilities and are more resilient and persistent in adjusting to academic challenges in the thesis process. Therefore, efforts are needed to improve the resilience of final students working on a thesis. As an effort, this study focuses on using expressive writing therapy.

Expressive writing therapy uses writing activities to reflect on the most profound thoughts and feelings about events that can cause stress and trauma (Amali, 2020). Expressive writing is a self-help tool that has proven to be effective in reducing depression in students. It can be seen from the results of research by Retnoningtyas (2017) that the level of anxiety in the experimental group decreased significantly after being given treatment in the form of writing about positive and negative emotional experiences. Another study also revealed that giving treatment expressive writing therapy can reduce stress levels in students (Hatmanti, 2019). Expressive writing therapy is significantly able to help final-year students reduce anxiety levels and have good resilience or resilience.

The research results of Baikie & Wilhelm (2005) show that expressive writing therapy has several benefits for physical and psychological health. Reviewed from the literature, psychological health benefits tend to be found more often when individuals experience anxiety, stress, depression, low self-esteem, and so forth. In addition, Li & Peng's (2022) research states that expressive writing therapy given to students during the COVID-19 pandemic has proven accurate in increasing resilience. The effectiveness of treatment is more significant if it is supported by components of problem-solving skills and the support of friends or family after the intervention. Therefore, the background of the research conducted aims to determine the effectiveness of expressive writing therapy in improving student academic resilience so that this study can provide appropriate intervention in problem-solving, especially for the final students in working on the thesis.

Methods

The selection of samples in this study was carried out by purposive sampling technique (Lenaini, 2021). Subjects in this study were 20 students divided into two groups: 10 students in

the experimental group and 10 in the control group. The subject criteria in this study is a final year UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya student working on the final thesis.

This study uses a Group PreTest PostTest Design. The experimental group was given expressive writing therapy, while the control group was not given treatment. The measurement of resilience variables in subjects was carried out using the Resilient Questionnaire Scale. The scale was prepared based on the resilience aspects proposed by Reivich & Shatte (2002), adapted by Laily (2017) with adapted items, so it refers more to academic resilience. The aspects measured in this study include emotional regulation, impulse control, optimism, analysis of the cause of the problem, empathy, self-efficacy, and reaching out. This measuring instrument is used to measure a person's awareness of their environment. This measurement tool uses a Likert scale with five categories of answers: very suitable (SS), suitable (S), neutral (N), not suitable (TS), and Very Not Suitable (STS). This measuring instrument has a reliability value of 0.884.

The data collection procedure in this study was carried out in three stages, namely the preparation stage, the implementation stage, and the evaluation stage. The preparation phase is carried out by preparing a research proposal, determining the research subject, preparing an academic resilience instrument, preparing a screening, and making an intervention design. At the screening stage, researchers convey several stages that participants will pass when following the intervention. Furthermore, participants read the informed consent given digitally and filled out a statement of willingness in the column provided. The implementation stage is done with a Pretest, giving the subject expressive writing therapy, and a Posttest. At the Pretest and Posttest stages, subjects are given academic resilience instruments that can be filled in through the Google Form platform. At the implementation stage, the experimental group will be given four intervention sessions, namely recognition, examination, juxtaposition, and application to the self, with a duration of 60 Minutes in each session, while the control group did not get treatment. During the intervention process, the researcher also made observations on the subject. In the evaluation phase of the process, researchers analyzed the results of Pretest and Posttest using descriptive statistics. At the same time, the observation results were analyzed descriptively through direct observation during the treatment process.

Data analysis techniques in this study using paired sample T-tests were used to answer whether there is an effect of expressive writing therapy to increase student academic resilience. Furthermore, to determine the difference in increasing academic resilience between the control and experimental groups, the researchers analyzed using the second parametric statistical test,

namely the independent sample T-test in the experimental and control group posttest. Researchers also analyzed the data using observation techniques in the entire range of interventions. This observation is used to help provide an indication of the effectiveness of the intervention and strengthen the results of statistical tests that have been carried out. Thus, the difference in pretest and posttest scores and the evaluation of observations will measure the effectiveness of intervention in this study.

Results

The following is a description of the pretest and posttest results in the experimental group and control group:

Table 1.
Results Description Statistics Experimental Group & Control Group

Measurement	Experimental Group (N=10)				Control Group (N=10)			
	Min	Max	Mean	Std	Min	Max	Mean	Std
Pre-Test	87	193	130,93	27.744	93	183	137,43	30.116
Post-Test	165	273	213,40	23.968	88	194	140,17	29.441

The Data presented in Table 1 above shows an increase in the mean value of academic resilience score in the experimental group, where the pretest mean of 130.93 increased on the posttest mean of 213.40 after being given expressive writing therapy. This increase showed that the experimental group that received treatment obtained a higher academic resilience score than the control group that did not. The control group only increased the pretest mean to 137.43 and the posttest mean to 140.17.

To determine the effect of expressive writing therapy on increasing academic resilience, a parametric statistical test is paired with a sample T-test with the following results:

Table 2.
Paired T-Test Results Pretest-Posttest Data Experimental Group & Control Group

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-Test Eksperimen - Post-Test Eksperimen	-82.467	14.168	2.587	-87.757	-77.176	-31.880	29	.000

Based on Table 2 (pair 1), the value of GIS. (2-tailed) of $0.000 < 0.05$, which indicates differences in pretest and posttest scores in the experimental group. Then, expressive writing therapy can be used to increase academic resilience.

Furthermore, to determine the difference in increasing academic resilience between the experimental group and the control group, the second parametric statistical test was carried out, namely the independent sample T-test in the experimental group and control group posttest with the following results:

Table 3.
Unpaired T-Test Results Posttest Data Experimental Group & Control Group

		f	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post-Test	Equal variances assumed	2.288	.136	10.566	56	.000	73.233	6.931	59.359	87.108
	Equal variances not assumed			10.566	55.708	.000	73.233	6.931	59.347	87.120

Based on Table 3, the value of GIS. (2 tailed) of $0.000 < 0.05$, which shows a difference in the increase in academic resilience in the experimental group after getting expressive writing therapy with the control group that did not get expressive writing therapy. This was also reinforced by the results in Table 2, which showed an increase in the mean value of academic resilience score in the experimental group of 82.47 after being given expressive writing therapy. This increase showed that the experimental group that received treatment obtained a higher academic resilience score of 73.23 than the control group that did not. Meanwhile, the control group only increased the mean by 2.73. Expressive writing therapy can significantly improve the subject's academic resilience.

Discussion

Related to the purpose of this study, the results have been obtained that expressive writing therapy affects increasing academic resilience in students. These results are evidenced by differences in academic resilience before and after the provision of expressive writing therapy in the experimental group. This is also evidenced by the difference in post-test results in the experimental and control groups. So, expressive writing therapy can effectively improve students'

academic resilience. The results of this study support previous research conducted by Wen et al. (2018), which revealed that the provision of expressive writing therapy treatment positively increased resilience in students who were less able to adapt to academic conditions.

In this study, subjects were given four stages of expressive writing therapy in 4 meeting Sessions. These stages are recognition, examination, juxtaposition, and application to the self. Before entering these stages, the researcher builds rapport with the subject and explains the process the subject will undergo when following expressive writing therapy. The researchers also told the subjects that during the activity, the subjects might feel uncomfortable because they had to dig out negative things in themselves. The researcher also tells the subject that what the subject writes will only be known by the researcher. So that the subject does not need to worry and can write according to the instructions given honestly. Researchers also pay close attention to the place and time of therapy because it relates to the comfort of the subject who will support the treatment process. After that, the researcher gave the subject blank paper and a ballpoint pen that will be used to implement expressive writing therapy.

In the 10-minute recognition phase, the subject will be asked to introduce himself in writing. The subject must write down his identity, what he knows about himself, activities in the lecture, things that make him uncomfortable, and the expectations of each subject in the lecture. The next stage is the examination stage, which lasts for 20 minutes. This stage is a critical core stage in implementing expressive writing therapy. At this stage, the subject will personally reflect on the issues mentioned in the instructions. Researchers will provide keywords related to academic resilience, namely emotional regulation, impulse control related to emotional control, optimism, problem analysis skills, empathy, confidence in their ability to solve problems, and achieving what is desired in the lecture process. Furthermore, the subject is tasked with writing the relationship of each keyword with the problem or academic condition of the subject by what the subject feels.

The next stage is the juxtaposition or feedback stage, which lasts 5 minutes. In this third stage, the subject will be encouraged to have a new awareness that can inspire the growth of new behaviors. Before that, the researcher will appreciate the subject because it has gone through the previous stage. Furthermore, the subject was asked to write down his feelings after successfully reflecting on himself and the problems in his lecture. The last stage is the application to the self stage, which lasts 20 minutes. At this stage, the researcher helps the subject integrate what has been learned during the writing session.

The subject is asked to reflect on what should be changed, improved, or eliminated and what needs to be preserved. On the last day, the subject was asked to write an evaluation of his benefits after following four treatment sessions. In addition, the subject will also conduct individual interviews related to the subject's plan for continuing academic tasks.

Researchers focused on the recognition and examination stages on the first and second days. The subject can follow the instructions well and write down what is asked on the paper that has been provided. On the first day, the subjects were asked to write the stage of recognition and examination with the keywords emotion regulation, impulse control related to emotional control, optimism, and problem analysis skills. Then, on the second day, it was followed by an examination with empathy, confidence in solving problems, and achieving what was desired. From the observation of the writing on the paper, all subjects felt the weakest regarding optimism, problem analysis skills, confidence in their ability to solve problems, and the ability to achieve what they want. At the same time, only some of the subjects felt weak emotionally.

On the third and fourth day, researchers began to focus on juxtaposition and application to the self. Before starting the stage, the subject is first given time to re-read the writing that has been written in the previous two days. Next, it enters the juxtaposition stage, reflecting on the solutions the subject can carry out to overcome the problems in his writing. From the results of the observations on the third day, some subjects still needed help finding a solution to the problem. In the application to the self-session, the researcher focuses on discussing with the subject so that the subject can find a solution. The third day was closed with a summary of the results of each subject's discussion.

On the fourth day, the stages of juxtaposition and application to the self are repeated. However, on this last day, the researcher allows the subject to explore and develop the results of discussions related to solutions to problems that the subject went through on the previous day. After that, the subjects were asked to write down the benefits they received after following the entire session of expressive writing therapy and conducting individual interview sessions with researchers. In this interview session, the researcher asked the subjects to re-explain each writing that had been written from the first to the last day. The researcher also advises on the subject if necessary. The observation from this last session showed that each subject could formulate a plan to resume their academic tasks, especially thesis work. All subjects also mentioned that the implementation of expressive writing therapy was able to help them recognize what problems

made their academic resilience go down. So that by identifying the problem, the subject can find a solution to solve it.

Conclusion

Based on the study results, expressive writing therapy is influential and effective in improving student academic resilience. This is supported by the difference in the increase in academic resilience between the experimental group that was given treatment and the control group that was not given treatment. The increase in academic resilience in the subject is shown by the growth of seven aspects of academic resilience, namely emotional regulation, impulse control related to emotional control, optimism, problem analysis skills, empathy, confidence in the ability to solve problems, and the ability to achieve what is desired and known through the results of observations during the training. From the interview session at the last stage, expressive writing therapy helps the subject to identify problems that cause a decrease in motivation and academic resilience. From the results of identifying the problem, the subject can formulate solutions and plans that need to be done to resume lectures with better academic resilience.

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