

## **The role of self-reflection using Expressive Writing Therapy in Reducing Stress in Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Self-reflection is the modern term for self-muhasabah from an Islamic perspective. Self-muhasabah is also known as an attitude that always calculates/calculates whether it is appropriate or not to go against the will of Allah SWT, so as to avoid excessive feelings of guilt, anxiety, and so on. This research aims to explore the role of self-reflection through expressive writing therapy in dealing with study and social stress among 4th semester students at Sriwijaya University in the city of Palembang before and after therapy. The research design used was descriptive with a case study approach method. The subject in the research was a 4th semester female student who experienced. The stress score was measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) measuring tool. Data collection and treatment were carried out by researchers using recognition stages, writing exercise stage, juxtaposition/feedback stage, application to the self stage. Pre-test and post-test data were taken before and after therapy, the collected data was subjected to descriptive analysis.

**Keywords:** Self-reflection, Self-Contemplation, Students, Stress, DASS

### **Introduction**

As students or students who have entered a higher stage in the scope of education, of course students also have varying levels of stress and this is one of the challenges felt by students, especially for those who are in the early to middle stages of college. In this research, one 4th semester student at Sriwijaya University was the subject to be researched who often felt complaints and pressure resulting from academic, social and personal demands. In an effort to manage and reduce stress, there are various therapeutic methods that have been implemented according to individual needs related to the same symptoms. One of the therapies or approaches that has attracted the attention of researchers while adapting to the accuracy of the effectiveness of the approach that can be seen in the latest research is expressive writing *therapy*. This article will review the role of self-reflection through the application of an expressive writing therapy approach in reducing the level of stress experienced by a student, especially 4th semester students at Sriwijaya University, and explore how this method can help in developing self-awareness and have an impact on a person's emotional well-being. .

According to Helmi, 2009 in ( (Yumna dkk., 2021)) Self-muhasabah is a form of self-introspection, calculating one's deeds, or examining the good and bad in humans. In the sense that muhasabah is a therapy that uses Sufistic techniques which require the individual undergoing it to reflect and self-introspection by the client to realize their mistakes and try to correct them. Self-muhasabah refers to the values of Islamic teachings on how to introspect oneself as well as how to assess it and use it as a basis for assessment, not based on one's own desires. The Islamic religion recommends to every servant to reflect as a form of self-evaluation in a better direction to prevent

regret in the future (Nurfajri dkk., 2023). Etymologically, muhasabah comes from Arabic, namely the words hasabah, yuhasibu, muhasabah. Muhasabah means calculating, evaluating, correcting, and also means self-introspection (Abdullah, 2016; Karzon, 2010; Al-Ghazali, 2017). Mohamad, Hamjah, & Mokhtar (2017), define muhasabah as an individual's cognitive process, where he carries out a cognitive evaluation process and thinks critically about various behaviors and actions that have been carried out by a person.

Self-reflection, also known as self-reflection, is an activity that requires someone to reflect or become deeply aware of what they have done in their daily life or an activity that gives someone the opportunity to correct and introspect themselves. According to Bound, Keogh & Walker (2013), (Almira dkk., 2023) reflection is a human activity to recapture experiences, think about them, and evaluate them. A process that requires individuals to carry out it in a conscious or *conscious state*. The unconscious reflection process often occurs scientifically, but the process is not focused and systematic, so it is not an effective learning process. Ideas or thoughts must be brought into awareness so that students are able to evaluate and build new understanding. Reflection in this context also involves learning activities which are the intellectual and affective activities of an individual involved in exploring experiences in order to form a new understanding. This process is also said to improve learning during education and can increase a person's self-understanding (Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009). Reflection is a process of critical thinking about a problem which is then analyzed and a solution is provided regarding the problem (Saputri et al, 2023; Seco & Cendana, 2022; Abdillah, 2017). Hatton & Smith, 1995 in (Dwi Saputri dkk., 2023) namely critical reflection, dialogical reflection, and descriptive reflection.

Not only does it apply to students, this self-reflection is also very important for lecturers or teachers in implementing the learning process in the classroom. One of the improvements in learning carried out by a teacher is to reflect at every meeting he holds (Trias dkk., t.t.). According to Bowman (1989), self-reflection is the main element in professionalism. Carrying out these activities on the professional practices of a teacher, especially in learning and teaching, is an important factor in the formation of innovation and learning revolution in the classroom (Loughran, 2005). More clearly, Loughran (2005) said that reflection is an important vehicle for fulfilling the breadth and depth of a teacher's professional knowledge. Because through reflection you will find strengths and weaknesses in classroom learning so that the learning practices carried out in subsequent lessons improve things that are still lacking and maximize things that are already good.

Savitri dkk. (2019) stated (Kross & Ayduk, 2017; Kross & Grossman, 2011) that self-reflection encourages a person to focus on themselves, negative emotions, and the problems they face. This self-reflection can produce two types of impact, namely the impact of adaptive conditions and non-adaptive conditions. In this condition, individuals will also gain insight, meaning and solutions. Doing self-reflection about negative events will generate emotional reactivity. The emotional reactions felt when reflecting on negative events are generally very intense to the point of encouraging an egocentric perspective, or viewing negative events only from one's own point of view (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008), and this causes individuals to be absorbed in their own negative emotions. without being able to use it with a cold head. The same thing happens to students who are stressed academically and also experience pressure in their social environment. Self-reflection was first discussed by Dewey (1933 p. 45; Savitri et al, 2019) who defined it as " *Active*,

*persistent, and caring consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought.*”. Dewey further said that there are two important elements in reflection, namely: a) a state of confusion, doubt, instability; and b) search or investigative actions are directed at uncovering further facts which serve to confirm or invalidate existing beliefs. So it can be said that self-reflection is generally triggered by problems and instability both originating from things outside of oneself and within oneself, including academic stress.

In this situation, students can be said to be individuals who are undergoing a process of self-education which is accommodated by higher education institutions, in which students also experience various challenges and changes which require each individual to adapt quickly to the surrounding environment. In the aspect of life as a student, students are often required to be involved in social interactions with other students to mingle and seek out their identity and lifestyle in order to have a good impact on their development in society in the future, students are even required to interact actively with lecturers. and other educational staff as a means of supporting their learning process during their education. According to Siregar (2016; Khairi Siregar & Rama Putri, 2019) stated that a person's interaction with other people is a very important aspect of human life, as well as in living one's life in various environments.

In interacting, students cannot be separated from the various problems they experience. It can be seen from the activities of students who have to adapt to the learning atmosphere provided by the university. The portions and atmosphere of learning which are quite complex become a daily routine for students, this can be said to be a demand which is often recognized as a heavy burden for students in general, enough to be one of the emphasis situations which are covered by various tasks, independently, in groups, as well as practical assignments. . In an increasing portion at each semester, students also have the hope of being able to understand the concepts of teaching materials, be able to map problems and choose the best solutions to overcome existing problems.

The things that students encounter in the lecture context are not always just about existing learning, but problems that can trigger stress can also arise from the friendship environment if a student cannot position himself well in his interaction patterns with the campus environment. These predicted conditions are very common in the campus life encountered by students. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) Suryani dkk., 2024 say that stress is an intentional act that occurs between an individual and his environment which makes the individual feel burdened and feel that this situation exceeds the resources available within him (Suryani & Harumi, 2024). Apart from that, stress tends to hinder an individual's ability to adapt (Suryani & Harumi, 2024; King, 2017) . According to Sarafino, 2006 (in (Khairi Siregar & Rama Putri, 2019)) defines stress as a condition caused by a mismatch between the desired situation and the individual's biological, psychological or social system. The stress felt by individuals varies and each individual must encounter situations that trigger stress with different causes but the context of the problem is the same. This is also caused by various factors as well. There are internal factors that influence, such as the individual's mindset in getting involved when encountering an existing problem, the individual's personality which determines character when he is in the situation he faces, and individual beliefs are one of the factors that have an influence on a person's stress level. There are also external factors which are other side factors that are found from outside a person or student, namely learning conditions or a tighter schedule, pressure

to always be required to excel both by the institution and by the family, especially parents, encouragement of social status can also make a person obliged to also equates to the level of what is known as the prestige of competition in public.

Academic stress can also include student perceptions in viewing a condition that connects students with information and knowledge as the main task that each student must master according to the field he or she is studying while in college. Academic stress is an event where individuals experience pressure and demands regarding coursework and academic pressure experienced by students. This occurs due to the individual's lack of ability to manage time to do tasks, which will cause individuals to work on tasks until late at night (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2019). In the above section, it was stated that academic stress can be caused by internal and external factors, one of the internal factors that has a big influence is the resilience of each individual. The reason why previous researchers mentioned this as an internal factor that is related to the emergence of stress is because resilience is related to resilience in maintaining an individual's psychological condition (Maddi, 2002). Apart from that, resilience is also said to be tied to an individual's ability to face certain situations (Oktavia et al., 2019).

Expressive Writing is a form of planning in the form of cognitive psychotherapy which is able to reduce levels of depression, excessive anxiety and stress, because this therapy method is a form of therapy to reflect excessive anxious thoughts and feelings towards students (Danarti et al., 2018). Sari (2021), Expressive Writing therapy is a form of writing therapy method developed by a psychologist at the University of Texas, James W. Pennebaker in the late 1980s. Based on experiments made and carried out, writing a journal is a medicine to reduce stress and depression experienced by a person. The application of Expressive Writing as a medium and form for expressing emotional feelings, helps someone express, vent their emotional feelings that are being experienced such as stress, excessive anxiety, depression and problems that a student may be experiencing such as academic stress, completing final assignments and so on. This therapy method can help someone to channel, express the problems they are experiencing through writing. By expressing experiences and problems by writing, feelings of depression and anxiety can be reduced gradually and health can also improve both physically and psychologically, Pennebaker & Smyth (2016).

### **Method**

The research design used was descriptive with a case study approach. Research conducted on 7 May-14 May 2024 at the Laboratory of the Faculty of Psychology, UIN Raden Fatah, Palembang. The population of this research is 4th semester students who are studying the Architecture study program at Sriwijaya University. Researchers used a purposive sampling technique so that the samples taken had to meet the inclusion criteria, including 4th semester students, aged 19-20 years, experiencing academic stress and egocentric stress. The number of subjects used in this research was 1 subject. Data collection was carried out by filling in the respondent characteristics instrument and measuring stress based on the DASS 42 questionnaire. In the therapy chosen, *Expressive Writing* Writing was carried out based on certain steps and criteria that would be carried out, namely structured and routine, for example for 20 minutes 7 days in a row. Writing is very useful as a means of reducing stress and feelings of anxiety. After expressing through writing, it is hoped that individuals will become

physically healthier, help clear the individual's mind and improve behavior and manage emotions (Mutoharoh, 2022). Data collection and treatment were carried out by researchers in the *recognition stage* (5 minutes), *writing exercise stage* (10-20 minutes), *juxtaposition/feedback stage* (5 minutes), *application to the self stage* (5 minutes). *Pretest data* is given before the therapy stage is carried out and *post test data* is given after the therapy stage is carried out, the collected data is subjected to descriptive analysis.

In this study, DASS was used, which is a useful test tool to see the extent of a person's mental disorders. *The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale* (DASS) is a measuring tool that is commonly used, as a self -*assessment scale* which is used to measure a person's negative emotional condition, namely depression, anxiety and stress (NovoPsych, 2018; Kusumadewi & Wahyuningsih, 2020). There are 42 points or assessment items used. The main purpose of measuring with this test tool is to assess the severity level ( *severe level* ) of the core symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress.

## Results

The research that has been conducted shows significant results that self-muhasabah or self-reflection through expressive writing therapy significantly reduces stress levels in 4th semester students at Sriwijaya University. Based on the data obtained, the average stress score felt by students before the intervention was 65 (in the high category), while after undergoing expressive writing therapy for 1 week, the average stress score decreased to 49 (in the medium category). From the results of the interviews conducted, the subject also admitted that he had felt left behind in the academic aspect.

*"...Em (thinking and looking up) there was a time when it was like it was the same, it seemed like it was down like that, well then it was like that time the grades were going down and down really, right? Then I felt like oh why is it going down so much, whereas the other friends It's like you're going well, you're going forward like that, then after that you feel like you're not good, right? In the end, you do self-reflection like prayer and just believe that Allah will give you the best way, and you feel like that means this is my way. People's paths are different, so it's more accepting and calm and it's also more about meeting friends, and feeling like it's okay if their progress isn't as advanced as other friends (While answering this question the interviewee played with his fingers and wiggled his feet)..."*

Apart from that, the subject admitted that at first he felt difficulty in self-muhasabah, so he often had to do self-muhasabah by starting with a self-approach to Allah SWT. through evening worship

*"... Eee, for me, when I've been muhasabah, it's like praying at night, yes, that's how it feels, like after muhasabah I feel calmer, it's true that the problem seems like it won't be resolved, but in myself I already feel like calm acceptance. he's calmed down"*

The subject is also known to have a habit and hobby, namely writing and admits that he enjoys doing expressive writing techniques when he feels depressed or needs media as a forum to express his thoughts when he cannot speak or express his thoughts through telling stories to other people. The subject is also known to have a closed personality and is indicated to have difficulty expressing the feelings or thoughts he is experiencing.



## Discussion

Self-reflection is one of the methods in Sufistic psychology in planning to carry out self-introspection in an effort to be introspective in every behavior in daily life, which has a very important role in human life with the hope that in future life they will be able to behave better, which It is expected to play a role in the individual as self-control and can also become a psychotherapist based on a moral and religious framework (Mutmainah, 2021). This muhasabah method prioritizes conscience to know the good and bad of behavior and also as a form of behavioral responsibility (Permadi. P. 1995). Etymologically, muhasabah comes from Arabic, namely the words hasabah, yuhasibu, muhasabah. Muhasabah means calculating, evaluating, correcting, and also means self-introspection (Abdullah, 2016; Karzon, 2010; Al-Ghazali, 2017). Mohamad, Hamjah, & Mokhtar (2017), define muhasabah as an individual's cognitive process, where he carries out a cognitive evaluation process and thinks critically about various behaviors and actions that have been carried out by a person.

Stress arises as a result of demands that exceed an individual's ability to fulfill them. Individuals who are unable to meet the demands of their needs will feel a condition of tension within themselves. Tension that lasts a long time, is continuous and has no resolution, will develop into stress (Sarafino & Smith, 2012). According to Bressert, 2016 (in Musabiq & Karimah, 2018) also classifying the impact of stress into four aspects, namely physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects. Bressert also stated that there are several signs that stress has had an impact on the physical, including sleep disturbances, increased heart rate, muscle tension, dizziness and fever, fatigue, and lack of energy. This impact on the cognitive aspect is characterized by confusion, frequent forgetfulness, worry, and panic. In the emotional aspect, the impact of stress includes feeling sensitive and irritable, frustrated, and feeling helpless In the behavioral aspect, stress also has an impact on the loss of the desire to socialize, the tendency to be alone, the desire to avoid other people and the emergence of feelings of laziness.

Stress is a situation that is not easy for a person to avoid, every individual must have experienced it, with different levels of lightness and severity (Hidayati, 2020). All of this is the influence or impact of fast-paced social change as a consequence of advances in the fields of science and technology which have had an influence on moral values, ethics and lifestyle, to which not everyone is able to adapt, depending on the personality they have. each individual (Hawari, 2016). The source of stress for students usually comes from academic problems (Elias, 2014). Stress in the academic field among students arises when expectations for academic achievement increase, both from parents, lecturers, peers and people around them (Shahmohammadi, 2014).

Expressive Writing therapy techniques or methods are a branch of expressive therapy methods that focus on emotions. Writing can vent, vent, express the emotions felt by someone. The research focuses on developing a person's emotional expression through writing techniques or methods, where a person's emotional expression will be expressed, expressed while he writes (Fitriani., & Imamah, 2023). The Expressive Writing therapy method can help students reduce stress caused by upcoming exams, academic stress, study stress and assignments. Previous research shows that the Expressive Writing therapy method has been proven to be an effective program for reducing anxiety, stress and can prevent depression experienced by students (Shen, et.al., 2018).

This concept of muhasabah can be the basic essence of writing therapy or Expressive Writing Therapy to reduce stress levels. Various studies have shown that writing therapy can improve the body's immune system and reduce negative thoughts (Cooper, 2013). Expressive Writing can also be used as a form of catharsis and mindfulness (Petrovic et al., 2022). When research subjects carry out all the processes and stages of writing therapy, basically they are channeling the various negative emotions they are experiencing, apart from that, their thoughts, feelings and body conditions will quickly become aware and focused on the writing process. This can reduce stress levels significantly because in the process of writing or expressive writing, a person will experience awareness and acceptance without feeling judged for the experiences or problems they are experiencing so that these feelings will give rise to feelings of relief and calm (Himawanti. I., 2022 ). The Expressive Writing Therapy method or what is usually called writing therapy can be used as an intervention to reduce stress and depression in Indonesia periodically or gradually for preventive action (Sa'idah, 2018). One intervention that can be done independently and is useful for alleviating the symptoms of depression is to use the Expressive Writing Therapy method or emotional state writing therapy or expressing one's condition and experiences by writing. The Expressive Writing Therapy method allows a person to express their deepest feelings, which are not easy to tell to other people or those closest to them (Nursolehah & Rahmiati, 2022).

Expressive Writing is an activity to express feelings, thoughts and experiences through writing methods (Susanti & Supriyantini, 2013). Adolescents with stress disorders are not often found at first glance, but these disorders can occur in adolescents with special circumstances such as experiencing disruption in social institutions, orphans, parental divorce, and so on (Danarti, et al. 2018). There are many ways that can be done to overcome psychological disorders, one of which is stress by providing psychotherapy or often called psychiatric therapy, by applying cognitive psychotherapy it can be applied with the aim of restoring a person's cognitive function, namely the ability to think rationally, concentrate and restore a person's memory. who experience psychological disorders (Hawari, 2011).

Expressive Writing Therapy can be used as the main therapy, can also be integrated with other psychotherapy or counseling approaches, and can also be done individually or in groups. This reflection provides facilities or treatment for individuals to change their cognition, regulate emotions better, become a means of catharsis, can gain new energy, direct attention, relieve emotional stress, and provide a person the opportunity to focus on their goals and behavior (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009 ). This therapy is a short writing technique or method that helps a person understand and overcome emotional turmoil in a person's life (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

In this research, it was found that self-reflection through expressive writing therapy can significantly have an influence on reducing students' stress levels. The results mentioned also show that this intervention approach helps students manage and reduce the stress experienced by individuals, as well as providing a strong basis for the application of this method in academic circles.

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