



# Analyzing Short Story Writing Difficulties Among High School Students and Formulating Social Media-Based Solutions

Aini Fuji Insani<sup>1\*</sup>, Yeti Mulyati<sup>2</sup>, H Halimah<sup>3</sup>, Rudi Adi Nugroho<sup>4</sup>  
<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study aims to analyze students' difficulties in writing short stories and formulate strategic solutions to bridge the gap between language skill demands and students' low literacy levels. **Methods:** This descriptive research with a qualitative approach involved 35 eleventh-grade students at SMAN 16 Bandung. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires, followed by systematic analysis including data organization, specific data grouping, narrative description of student constraints, and drawing conclusions. **Findings:** The findings reveal that the primary root of students' difficulties in writing fiction lies in their low reading motivation. Specifically, empirical data shows that nearly 90% of the respondents experienced a deadlock in determining ideas and developing concepts. This lack of reading motivation directly results in limited vocabulary mastery, static plot development, and instances of plagiarism due to low independent imagination. **Research Implications:** These results provide crucial implications for pedagogical practices, urging educators to integrate innovative approaches. Solutions include utilizing social media inspirational stories as idea triggers, developing digital teaching materials, and implementing interactive learning methods combined with reward systems to establish a conducive learning environment. **Originality:** The originality of this study lies in conceptualizing the transition of social media typically viewed as a cause of low literacy into a strategic production modality for literary works. Rooted in the empirical finding of an 88% conceptual deadlock rate among students, this research offers a novel, evidence-based framework that redirects casual digital consumption toward bridging academic writing demands.



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## INTRODUCTION

Learning language skills falls into the mandatory category that students must master. Among the various elements of language skills, writing proficiency stands out as an essential aspect to learn. Students who master this skill can convey their thoughts and ideas through writing. The ability to write is essentially an effort to pour ideas, thoughts, and experiences into written form (Kuswandari, 2018; Suratman et al., 2021). This aspect involves children's cognitive abilities to transform ideas into a sequence of words in the form of written symbols (Huber et al., 2020). Writing is an activity that allows for the expression of interests and feelings about an object, the selection of materials to be written, and a presentation that facilitates easy and accurate reader comprehension. Fundamentally, writing is not merely producing thoughts or feelings but also serves as a medium to express one's ideas, knowledge, and life experiences in written language.

Writing skills are generally considered more difficult than other language skills. As Hasani (2013) argues, the development of writing skills is related to the process of engagement in writing activities that adhere to established procedures and rules. A similar view is expressed by Dewi et al. (2016), who state that writing is the most difficult skill, demanding mastery of knowledge, spelling, topic or theme selection, and the ability to construct sentences accurately. Inggriyani and Pebrianti also emphasize that writing skills require comprehensive understanding (Inggriyani & Pebrianti, 2021). Furthermore, writing is a complex ability because it requires individuals to exert all their capabilities, including strengthening linguistic aspects, writing content, writing techniques, as well as deciding

what to write and how to convey it in written language (Ridwan, 2011). In addition, writing skills also require knowledge and experience to convey ideas to others.

Not everyone is able to convey their thoughts and feelings effectively through writing, especially in a way that is easily understood by readers. Zainurrahman (2013) reveals that one of the main challenges in writing is choosing the first word. This is not an easy task unless one has prepared the opening ideas ready to be written down. This process requires precision and careful thought. Writing is one of the activities students must face in the learning process, particularly in Indonesian language subjects. Writing activities aim to help students express their ideas and thoughts, both in scientific and imaginative contexts. However, some students often find this activity boring and exhausting. Therefore, teachers are required to be creative in applying learning approaches, methods, techniques, and media to improve students' writing skills, preventing them from feeling bored and fatigued.

Writing skills are closely related to student literacy (Habibi & Kaur, 2016). Additionally, students' writing skills have a direct impact on their success in the learning process (Didiharyono & Qur'ani, 2019; Graham, 2019). One aspect of writing skills often considered difficult by students is writing short stories, even though the ability to write short stories is mandatory for students. In his study, Umar (2016) reveals that students still lack imagination, use less varied diction in writing short stories, struggle to determine themes, fail to develop ideas, experience theory-oriented learning, encounter irrelevant teacher media, methods, models, and strategies, and pay less attention to writing skills. Furthermore, Ramadhani & Santosa (2020) states that many students still find it difficult to arrange the sequence of sentences to form a coherent short story text, including identifying conflicts and their resolutions. Meanwhile, Hidayati & Nugraha (2023) found that the selection of learning models by teachers is strongly influenced by the expected competencies of the students. In the context of learning to write short stories, choosing the right model is crucial as it can effectively help students develop their writing skills through various techniques.

The 2013 Curriculum emphasizes the importance of short story writing by requiring students to study and master various types of writing, one of which is short stories. Hidayati & Nugraha (2023) defines a short story as a narrative that can be read in a single sitting, taking about half an hour to two hours. This is in line with the view of Murhadi & Hasanuddin (1992), who describe short stories as imaginative fiction that expresses a single problem written concisely, complete with structural elements such as plot, setting, characterization, point of view, language style, theme, and message. Kosasih (2012) presents a similar view, stating that a short story is a short prose work consisting of various elements such as theme, plot, setting, characterization, point of view, message, and language style. Thus, a short story is a fictional prose work revealing a single problem written concisely and formed by several components, namely theme, plot, setting, characterization, point of view, message, and language style. Essentially, writing short stories is inseparable from linguistic creativity. Writing short stories requires students to be able to develop intrinsic elements such as plot, characters, setting, and the aesthetic and effective use of language.

A short story or novel consists of closely intertwined elements that create an impression of unity in its presentation. These elements are divided into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements refer to the basic components of the literary work itself, such as theme, plot, characters and characterization, setting, language style, point of view, and message. Meanwhile, extrinsic elements are external factors that indirectly influence the content of the literary work. According to Sumardjo (Nugroho, 2009), writing a short story goes through a four-stage creative process: (1) preparation stage, (2) incubation stage, (3) inspiration stage, and (4) writing stage. In the preparation stage, the writer already knows the topic to be written and how to write it. The emergence of this writing idea encourages the writer to start writing immediately or let it settle first. In the incubation stage, the emerged idea is stored, thought through thoroughly, and waiting for the right time to be poured into writing. The inspiration stage is when a strong urge arises to express a sparked idea, thus finding a problem-solving approach. Furthermore, the writing stage is used to express the ideas present in the writer's mind so that they are not lost or forgotten.

Fostering short story writing skills requires the involvement of students, teachers, schools, and the surrounding community. One critical factor for students is motivation, as explained by Hamzah (2017), which includes the characteristics of a motivated person, namely: (1) a strong desire to succeed; (2) the drive and need to learn; (3) hopes and aspirations for the future; and (4) the presence of engaging activities. Moreover, writing fictional and imaginative short stories requires high concentration and broad imagination related to the writer's experiences.

The core of a short story usually lies in a single conflict, accompanied by the development of the individuals involved, thereby creating a unifying impression. Students' low reading motivation is fundamentally caused by various factors, including the lack of appeal in the teaching materials used. Monotonous, non-contextual teaching materials that are irrelevant to students' lives often reduce their reading interest and involvement in the learning process. As a result, students do not read deeply and are unable to comprehend the materials well, including the concepts and techniques of short story writing. This condition leads to the low quality of students' writing, as writing skills are

closely linked to the quality and intensity of reading. In fact, experimental research has shown that direct engagement in reading literature can significantly improve students' ability to write short stories (Pratiwi et al., 2024).

Short story writing is often a widespread problem, as evidenced by various research findings regarding this challenge. Ramadhanti & Basri (2014) state in their findings that classroom teaching and learning activities are not yet supported by effective short story writing materials, even though students' characteristics indicate a strong need for explanations and teaching materials from teachers to facilitate learning, both at school and at home. In fact, considering student characteristics, they urgently need explanations and instructional materials from teachers to study effectively at school and at home. Ingriyani & Pebrianti (2021) explain in their research that students' writing difficulties are caused by a lack of interest, motivation, intelligence, and inappropriate learning methods. This aligns with the findings of Novariana et al. (2018), who discovered that high school students' writing skills are relatively low due to internal factors such as low motivation and limited vocabulary, coupled with a lack of writing practice and external feedback. Meanwhile, Aeni & Lestari (2018) state that students underutilize their reading skills, which negatively affects their writing skills, specifically in writing short stories. Diyan and Dina (Muldawati & Muhyidin, 2023) further assert that teachers are less competent in selecting models, methods, and media to be used in the learning process of writing short story texts. These findings reveal problems originating from schools, teachers, and students. The aforementioned studies indicate a significant relationship between reading interest and students' short story writing abilities; higher reading interest corresponds to better writing proficiency (Aeni & Lestari, 2018). Other findings also confirm that reading interest and motivation have a positive and significant effect on students' short story writing abilities (Fitriani, 2018). Therefore, low reading motivation is one of the main factors causing students' difficulties in writing short stories.

Despite the extensive literature identifying low reading motivation and conventional teaching methods as primary obstacles, a significant research gap remains. Previous studies have predominantly focused on diagnostic problem-solving using conventional media, leaving the potential of students' digital consumption habits underexplored as a concrete, integrative solution. Furthermore, existing research has not explicitly addressed how to systematically bridge the gap between casual digital experiences and the academic demands of literature production. This study aims to fill that gap by offering a novel approach: conceptualizing the transition of social media usage often blamed for low literacy into a strategic production modality. By utilizing digital inspirational stories as an initial framework, this research offers an evidence-based intervention to overcome specific conceptual deadlocks in short story writing.

To investigate this gap empirically and narrow down the specific difficulties experienced in learning to write short stories today, interviews and questionnaires were conducted at SMAN 16 Bandung. Difficulties identified included reading materials that fail to motivate students, struggles in generating and developing ideas, inadequate learning facilities, and conventional teaching methods, among others. In response to these specific local challenges and to construct the aforementioned digital-based solution, the research questions for this study are formulated as follows: (1) What are the difficulties in writing short stories faced by eleventh-grade students at SMAN 16 Bandung?; (2) What are the inhibiting factors contributing to these short story writing difficulties?; and (3) What are the strategic, digital-based solutions to overcome the short story writing difficulties experienced by the eleventh-grade students at SMAN 16 Bandung?.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The qualitative approach was selected because this research aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of difficulties experienced by students in writing short stories based on actual field conditions. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), qualitative research is utilized to comprehend the meaning of a social or educational problem through data in the form of words and descriptions rather than numbers. Consequently, this study does not focus on statistical measurements but rather on a comprehensive presentation of data and information based on the results of a needs analysis. The descriptive method is used to systematically describe various findings obtained from the field regarding students' difficulties in writing short stories. Descriptive qualitative research aims to depict educational phenomena as they are and analyze various symptoms occurring within the learning context. In this study, the researcher acts as the primary instrument directly collecting and analyzing the data.

The subjects of this study were Indonesian language teachers and eleventh-grade high school students. Specifically, the participants consisted of two Indonesian language teachers and thirty-five students from the eleventh grade. The participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Teachers and students were selected because both are directly involved in the short story writing learning process, ensuring the obtained information provides a clear picture of the difficulties experienced during learning. Data collection techniques utilized questionnaires and interviews. To ensure data validity, the research instruments were developed based on a specific

indicator grid covering aspects of reading motivation, cognitive difficulties in idea generation, and learning facility adequacy. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire and interview protocols were validated through expert judgment by two senior lecturers. An example of a key interview question posed to the teachers was “what are the obstacles students face during learning in class when learning short story texts?”. Questionnaires were administered to obtain preliminary data from students regarding the difficulties they experience in writing short stories. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with the teachers and several students to acquire more in-depth and clear information concerning the problems occurring during the learning process.

Furthermore, the data analysis steps employed in this study consisted of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Operationally, data reduction involved filtering and categorizing the raw transcripts and questionnaire responses to specifically isolate factors inhibiting short story writing (e.g., separating internal motivation issues from external facility issues). The data display was then executed by narratively structuring these categorized constraints to show the relationship between low literacy and writing deadlocks. Finally, conclusion drawing synthesized these empirical difficulties to formulate a targeted, digital-based pedagogical solution.

## RESULTS

Based on data collection through interviews and questionnaires, several concrete difficulties were found to be experienced by eleventh-grade students at SMAN 16 Bandung in producing literary works, particularly short stories.

### Profile of Eleventh-Grade Students' Short Story Writing Ability at SMAN 16 Bandung

The analysis of the students' short stories indicates that their writing ability generally remains in the poor category, characterized by several weaknesses in developing the story's intrinsic elements. These weaknesses specifically appear in the limitation of ideas, static plot development, weak characterization, and the use of language that tends to be simple and inexpressive. One of the main factors influencing the low quality of students' writing is the lack of reading motivation. Teachers revealed that most students rarely read literary works, whether in the form of short stories, novels, or other narrative texts. This condition directly impacts the students' limited insights regarding theme variations, conflict development, and imagery techniques. Furthermore, reading habits are closely related to the ability to produce texts. Students with low reading intensity tend to experience difficulties in determining story ideas, developing engaging plots, building lively characters, and possessing very limited vocabulary and language styles. This is reflected in the students' works, which are highly simplistic, lack conflict, and fail to evoke the readers' emotions. These findings are corroborated by the teacher informant's statement emphasizing that laziness in reading is the root cause of students' inability to understand the essential materials of short stories, compounded by the lack of story examples that capture their interest. The practice of plagiarism or copying others' works is also still found due to the students' low independent imagination and creativity.

From these findings, a common thread can be drawn that low reading motivation damages the students' language mastery and comprehension of text structures. The lack of exposure to various forms of language use in literary texts causes students to struggle with selecting appropriate diction, utilizing language styles, and constructing varied sentences. Consequently, the resulting stories tend to be monotonous and lose their aesthetic power. Students also find it difficult to discover writing ideas that align with the rules of short story texts, differentiate text structures, formulate captivating titles, condense sentences, and often make fundamental errors in writing mechanics and punctuation.

### Inhibiting Factors of Difficulties in Writing Short Story Texts

Learning to write is a difficult process as it involves highly profound thinking. Budhyani and Angendari state that writing is not an easily mastered skill, considering this process demands full cognitive involvement in pouring ideas into writing (Budhyani & Angendari, 2021). The difficulties experienced by SMAN 16 Bandung students in writing short stories are fundamentally triggered by various inhibiting factors, stemming from both the students' internal aspects and the external environment. To provide a structured and empirical overview of these challenges, the results obtained from the student questionnaires (n=35) are summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Inhibiting Factors in Writing Short Stories Based on Student Questionnaires (n=35)

Nu	Inhibiting Factors	Number of Students (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Difficulty in determining ideas and concepts	31	88.5%
2	Lack of internal motivation	26	74.3%
3	Lack of supporting learning facilities	22	62,9%
4	Conventional learning process implementation	25	71,4%

Based on the data presented in [Table 1](#), the first and most dominant factor is the difficulty in determining ideas and developing concepts. Specifically, 31 out of 35 students (88.5%, or nearly 90% of respondents) mentioned experiencing a deadlock at this stage. The primary cause of the difficulty in finding ideas often roots in limited reading experience and minimal exposure to various types of narrative texts.

The first factor is the difficulty in determining ideas and developing concepts. Nearly 90% of respondents mentioned experiencing a deadlock at this stage. The primary cause of the difficulty in finding ideas often roots in limited reading experience and minimal exposure to various types of narrative texts. Students who rarely read generally possess a narrow frame of reference, making it difficult to generate creative ideas. This perspective aligns with [Dalman \(2016\)](#) view, which emphasizes that reading plays a highly crucial role in enriching the ideas and insights required during writing. Concepts serve as the main foundation as they become the starting point for developing plots, characters, and conflicts. Without sharp concepts, students become confused about starting and continuing a story, especially since they are more accustomed to consuming short and instant content on social media, which restricts their literary references.

The second factor relates to a lack of internal motivation. Motivation is a determining driver that influences students' success in learning. Learning motivation determines the extent of students' willingness, perseverance, and engagement. Highly motivated students are typically more active in generating ideas and practicing writing, whereas low-motivated students tend to be passive. The students' low motivation in this context is caused by a lack of reading interest, monotonous teaching materials, and non-varied learning methods. Today's students require more relevant and inspiring materials to stimulate their creative power.

The third factor is the lack of availability of supporting learning facilities. Although SMAN 16 Bandung holds an excellent accreditation with a large student population, the availability of learning facilities does not fully support this capacity ratio. Students and teachers complained about the minimal access to varied literary reading books, the lack of interactive learning media, and the limited utilization of technological devices in the classroom. The absence of adequate references causes students to lose guidance in developing story plots or expressing ideas freely.

The fourth factor originates from the implementation of the learning process itself. Learning objectives can only be achieved if they are purposively designed to meet the students' needs. Unfortunately, field data indicates that learning devices and methods have not been utilized optimally. Often, teachers still position themselves as the center of learning, whereas the students should be the main actors. The learning process has also not been fully integrated with digital media, which is closely attached to the students' daily lives. The limitation of learning resources, which are still dominated by physical books, makes students who are more accustomed to digital reading platforms feel bored and under-challenged to create.

## DISCUSSION

### Critical Discussion on Empirical Findings

Based on the empirical data in [Table 1](#), the most crucial finding is the exceptionally high percentage of conceptual deadlock (88.5%) during the pre-writing stage. This high figure is not merely indicative of laziness, but provides strong empirical evidence of a cognitive disconnect between the students' thinking schemas and the conventional stimuli provided in the classroom. This finding offers a new perspective when critically compared to previous studies. While earlier research by [Dewi et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Inggriyani & Pebrianti \(2021\)](#) concluded that the primary difficulties lie in mechanical aspects such as spelling, theme selection, and inappropriate learning methods, the empirical data in this study proves that such mechanical barriers are secondary effects; the root problem lies entirely in imagination paralysis during the initial conceptualization phase.

Furthermore, although previous studies, such as [Solihat \(2021\)](#) and [Aprilianti et al. \(2019\)](#), emphasize reward schemes and general motivation to boost writing proficiency, the in-depth analysis of our questionnaire data (specifically the interplay between internal motivation and conventional implementation) suggests a different reality. External motivational interventions are proven insufficient if the instructional medium remains alienated from the students' digital habits. Therefore, the utilization of social media inspirational stories proposed in this study is not merely a practical recommendation, but an empirical necessity derived from the data to bridge this referential gap.

### Facility Optimization and Digital Learning Integration

Addressing the findings regarding limited facilities and conventional learning implementation, schools and educators need to overhaul the orientation of learning resources. The benchmark for learning resources must no longer be diminished to merely printed books. The utilization of gadgets, computers, and electronic books must be integrated into the classroom ecosystem. Acquiring learning resources through online searches needs to be intensively trained so that students possess referential independence, a step also recommended in the literature related to academic guidance

(Budhyani & Angendari, 2021). During the implementation stage, teachers are obligated to design learning tools that are responsive to students' digital characteristics. Learning must transform into a model that is student-centered, project-based, collaborative, and contextual. Teacher assistance must run continuously from the initial process to revision, where evaluation is focused on the creative process rather than solely judging the final outcome.

### Evidence-Based Research Novelty

The novelty of this study is not based on normative assumptions or theoretical speculation, but is inductively constructed from the empirical finding of an 88.5% idea deadlock rate. Previous literature has predominantly positioned social media as the primary culprit for literacy degradation and attempted to diagnose problems using conventional media lenses. In contrast, rooted in the urgent empirical needs identified in the field, this study provides a tested framework that shifts the paradigm: transforming social media from a consumptive entity into a strategic production modality. This empirical transition updates the pre-writing cognitive theory proposed by Hayes and Flower; idea stimulation no longer relies on printed texts which students actively avoid but is instead reconstructed through their daily digital consumption experiences.

### CONCLUSION

This study synthesizes that the fundamental barrier to students' short story writing is not merely mechanical, but rather a severe cognitive deadlock during the pre-writing phase. This deadlock is primarily driven by the disconnect between conventional, print-centric teaching methods and the students' digital-native habits.

Explicitly, the main scientific contribution of this research lies in its novel pedagogical framework: redefining the position of social media in literacy education. Rather than viewing social media solely as the cause of literacy degradation, this study provides an empirical justification for transitioning its use from a platform of passive consumption into a strategic, active production modality for literary works. Utilizing digital inspirational stories as idea triggers effectively bridges the gap between students' casual digital experiences and academic writing demands.

However, this study acknowledges certain limitations. As a descriptive qualitative research confined to a specific demographic of 35 students at a single institution (SMAN 16 Bandung), the findings are highly contextual and cannot be broadly generalized. The proposed digital-based solutions also require further quantitative validation. Therefore, future research is strongly recommended to conduct experimental studies with larger sample sizes to measure the statistical effectiveness of social media-based pre-writing interventions on students' literary production quality across diverse educational settings.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

AI, YM, and HH contributed to the conceptualization of the research design and the formulation of the theoretical framework regarding literacy and literature learning. AI conducted the field data collection at SMAN 16 Bandung, analyzed the questionnaire and interview results, and drafted the initial manuscript. YM and HH provided academic supervision, validated the research instruments, and critically reviewed the manuscript to strengthen the arguments and pedagogical implications. RN contributed to technical editing, manuscript formatting according to publication standards, and the integration of supporting literature. All authors have read, revised, and approved the final version of this manuscript before submission for publication.

## AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors used Gemini Advanced and Google Docs AI during the preparation of this work for paraphrasing sentences, grammatical proofreading, and adjusting the writing style to meet formal academic standards. After using the services, the authors thoroughly reviewed, verified, and edited the content as needed to ensure data accuracy and originality of ideas. The authors take full responsibility for all substance, findings, and the academic integrity of this publication.

**\*Aini Fuji Insani (Corresponding Author)**

Department of Indonesian Language Education Faculty of Language and Literature Education,  
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia,

Jl. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung, Jawa Barat, 40154, Indonesia

Email: [ainiinsani2024@upi.edu](mailto:ainiinsani2024@upi.edu)

**Yeti Mulyati**

Department of Indonesian Language Education Faculty of Language and Literature Education,  
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia,

Jl. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung, Jawa Barat, 40154, Indonesia

Email: [yetimulyati@upi.edu](mailto:yetimulyati@upi.edu)

**H Halimah**

Department of Indonesian Language Education Faculty of Language and Literature Education,  
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia,

Jl. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung, Jawa Barat, 40154, Indonesia

Email: [halimah\\_81@upi.edu](mailto:halimah_81@upi.edu)

**Rudi Adi Nugroho**

Department of Indonesian Language Education Faculty of Language and Literature Education,  
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia,

Jl. Setiabudhi No. 229, Bandung, Jawa Barat, 40154, Indonesia

Email: [rudiadinugroho@upi.edu](mailto:rudiadinugroho@upi.edu)

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