

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING FOR EMOTION
REGULATION IN ADOLESCENTS**¹*Asiva Salma, ¹Panca Kursitin Handayani, ¹Nurlaela Widyarini

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^[1]* Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember, Jember, Indonesia**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of expressive writing in improving emotional regulation in adolescents with low emotional regulation. A quantitative experimental design was employed using a pre-experiment approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The participants were 4 adolescents (2 males, 2 females) with low emotion regulation, as measured by the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire ($\alpha=0.664$). The intervention involved four stages of expressive writing: recognition, examination, juxtaposition, and application to self. The results indicated a significant improvement in emotional regulation post-intervention ($t = -8.392, p < 0.05$). The findings suggest that expressive writing can be an effective preventive intervention for adolescents with low emotional regulation.

Keywords: *(Expressive Writing, Emotion Regulation, Adolescents)*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is one of the stages of development with biological, cognitive and social emotional changes, with an age range of 12 to 21 years (Santrock, 2012). According to (Hurlock, 1980) adolescence is divided into two parts, namely early and late adolescence. Early adolescence lasts approximately from thirteen years to 16 or 17 years, and late adolescence from 16 to 18 years. Adolescence is considered a period of emotional tension, as a result of changes in the stage of development (Hurlock, 1980). The pattern of emotions in adolescence is also identical to that of the previous period or childhood, with the difference lying in the stimulus or stimulus that arouses emotions (Hurlock, 1980). At this stage adolescents have the ability to assess a situation critically before reacting emotionally, no longer reacting without thinking first as in the previous developmental stage or childhood (Hurlock, 1980).

Emotions in adolescents on the other hand have potential, namely emotional knowledge and management skills, this is believed to be the capacity within adolescents to understand

emotions (Larson & Brown, 2007). At this stage of development adolescents have the skills to understand the relationship between emotions and the situations that give rise to them, adolescents are also able to change their emotional expression in response to situational demands and develop strategies to control Harris' emotions (in Larson & Brown, 2007).

Although adolescents have the potential to understand emotions well, not all adolescents have the ability to develop them, this is related to adolescents need to understand and get direction from trusted people to understand situations or stimuli that can evoke emotional reactions (Hurlock, 1980). In addition, at this stage, adolescents have developmental challenges, namely problems of potential development and self-adjustment. This problem exists because adolescents need to adjust to the environment in which the individual lives and develops. In addition, the problems that exist in adolescents are divided into two, first the problem of developing potential and the second is the problem of adjusting to negative environmental nuances such as juvenile delinquency and other maladaptive behaviors (Willis, 2017). These problems are a

form of adolescents who have not been able to adjust to existing conditions. Whereas one of the tasks of adolescent development is required to have the ability to have stable emotions, not with excessive emotions (Hurlock, 1980).

Another reason the adolescent developmental stage is vulnerable to the first emotion regulation problem is due to biological changes (puberty) which are associated with an increase in negative emotions Archibald (in Santrock, 2008). In addition, cognitive changes also influence the development of adolescent emotions. The prefrontal cortex in adolescents is not yet fully mature, and this part is characterized as an executive control center for cognitive control and emotion regulation Casey *et al* (in Weiten, 2017). This immaturity of the prefrontal cortex is one of the factors that make adolescents vulnerable to risky behavior Steinberg (in Santrock, 2008). Other factors also contribute to risky behavior during adolescence. Adolescents spend a lot of time with their peers. Therefore, susceptibility to peer influence also contributes to risk taking Albert, Chein & Steinberg (in Santrock, 2008).

According to James (in Scherer, 2000) emotion has a meaning as the perception of distinct bodily changes, which are determined by expressive and physiological reaction patterns. The components in emotions involve first participantsive conscious experience (cognitive component), second accompanied by physiological components and third clear characteristic expressions (behavioral component) LeDoux (in Weiten, 2017). The emotion process obtained in the interview as initial data. Emotions begin with a stimulus in the form of a participants's brother being mocked and reporting this incident to the participants. Then the participants met the perpetrator who mocked the participants's brother, and the participants did not accept his brother being mocked, because the participants felt humiliated, this is the first component of emotion, namely the participants's conscious experience as a cognitive component. Followed by the participants hitting the perpetrator who mocked his brother, in the emotional component this is included in the physical response (autonomic arousal) or fight or flight, the form of hitting behavior is a physical

response to fight or attack. The emotion shown by the participants at that time was anger (neural circuits) or as a response, and the form of expression to attack was (behavioral component).

Adolescents who do not have the skills to manage emotions are more likely to engage in risky behavior. This inability to manage emotions is a form of obstacle from adolescents who have not been able to channel and manage their emotions appropriately. In accordance with the tasks of adolescence, adolescents must learn to manage their emotions as a form of achieving emotional independence at their stage of development, adolescents can perform emotional catharsis or manage emotions and channel them in an appropriate way and adolescents have a developmental task to achieve emotional maturity (Hurlock, 1980).

Based on the exposure to the phenomena obtained in the initial data and previous research, adolescents need an ability to manage emotions known as emotion regulation, which aims when individuals are in situations that cause emotions, so that they can still manage without harming others and themselves or so that maladaptive behavior can be avoided properly.

Emotion regulation has the understanding as an individual's ability to manage emotions that can be assessed from the behavior that is seen or seen or shown (Gross, 2014). According to Gross and John (in Nurhuda, 2017) individuals have two forms of strategies in regulating emotions, the first is cognitive reappraisal which refers to individuals who can change their emotional influences, without having to do so by changing the way of thinking about situations that can bring up emotions, and the second is expressive suppression which has the meaning of response modulation or changing emotions which involves inhibiting the expression of ongoing emotions.

In research by (Pedrini et al., 2022) adolescents who have high emotion regulation tend to be aware of their own emotions, express their feelings appropriately, and regulate emotional responses effectively, thus supporting emotional and intellectual growth for adolescents and building healthy relationships with peers. This

shows that individuals who have the ability to manage emotions well, when experiencing problems and pressures, these individuals tend not to engage in negative behavior. Individuals who have the ability to regulate emotions can have an effect on managing their behavior well. So that emotion regulation can play an important role as a form of prevention or prevention of maladaptive behavior.

Efforts that can be made to improve emotion regulation can be started by providing opportunities for individuals to channel their emotions. Because not all adolescents are able to develop emotional skills and lead to maladaptive behavior caused by a lack of emotional regulation. This can be prevented by expressive writing because in the expressive writing process there is a reconstruction of the problems that individuals have experienced, so that individuals are able to rationalize the problems faced (Nurhuda, 2017). In addition, in the process of reconstruction, individuals change cognitive or cognitive reappraisal, which is shown from individuals understanding the stimulus that can arouse emotions and being able to change their emotional influences, and this is the process of Gross and John's emotion regulation, (in Nurhuda, 2017). According to Rahmawati, et al., (in Nurhuda, 2017) expressive writing is a form of cathartic media that can be used to organize the emotions felt.

Another reason, why expressive writing is the right method, because according to (Pennebaker, & Chung, 2007) that expressive writing can help to express inner turmoil, so that individuals can release the problems experienced and think and feel again more positively. According to (Rahmawati, 2019) the expressive writing process can help to understand their emotions or the process of reconstruction. This process is divided into three, first recognizing the emotions that are felt and raised, then seeing the consequences caused. Second, evaluating individual emotions begins to understand the consequences of negative emotions that are caused and stored as experiences. Third, individuals begin to modify emotions to be socially acceptable without aggression.

Through expressive writing, students who have low emotional regulation can understand themselves, by expressing or organizing the emotions they feel, the writing media is also a cataract to release the emotions they feel. Expressive writing plays a role in the process of expressing emotions and feelings that the perpetrator feels, with expressive writing can also understand what stimulus makes emotions, so that before maladaptive behavior occurs as a result of not being able to regulate emotions properly (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) individuals can assess which behavior is good or not, so that the output of the behavior issued is not maladaptive behavior.

METHOD

Research Design

This research design is quantitative research, with experimental methods. The experimental approach used is a pre-experiment approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design. In this study, a pretest will be given first before being given treatment, which aims to determine the comparison with the situation before the treatment is given (Sugiyono, 2017). Researchers use quantitative research with an experimental design that aims to determine the effectiveness of expressive writing for emotional regulation in adolescents.

Participants

The population in this study was based on the purposive sampling method, which is a sampling technique with certain considerations (Sugiyono, 2017). In this study, the population used was students of SMK Negeri 2 Jember. With the following participants criteria: a. Active students of SMK Negeri 2 Jember grade 11; b. Get a low score on the emotion regulation survey results.

The sampling technique in this study used purposive sampling or sampling techniques with certain considerations (Sugiyono, 2017). The reason for using purposive sampling techniques makes it easier to find criteria that match the participants of this experimental research, namely students who get low emotional regulation scores.

Measurement

The measuring instrument used in this study is the emotion regulation scale first coined by Gross and John (2003), which divides into two strategies in regulating emotions, namely cognitive reappraisal strategies and expressive suppression strategies. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire has 10 items, with 6 items measuring cognitive reappraisal strategies and 4 items measuring expressive suppression strategies. All items on this measure are favorable items, with 7 alternative answer responses, namely strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The ERQ is designed to assess the habitual use of two emotion regulations, cognitive reappraisal (i.e., changing the way one thinks about a situation to change its emotional impact) and expressive suppression (i.e., suppressing behavioral expression of emotions) (Preece et al., 2021).

The Validity Test of the ERQ measuring instrument in this study is in the range of 0.409 to 0.630. While the reliability test shows the emotion regulation questionnaire scale obtained a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value of 0.664.

Data analysis

The data in this study are in the form of the results of the emotional regulation scale instrument before being given treatment, namely in the form of a pre-test and data from the results of the emotional regulation scale instrument after being given treatment, namely in the form of a post-test. The results of this experimental research will be presented as follows

Tabel 1 Pretest-Posttest

No	Participants	Gender	Score Pretest	Score Posttest
1	A. I	L	42	56
2	A. Z	L	39	55
3	N. J	P	34	58
4	S. A	P	35	54

Tabel 2 Normality Test

No.	Group	sig	Description
1.	Pretest	0,574	normal

2.	Posttest	0,850	normal
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The normality test results show that the emotion regulation data for the experimental group pretest has an Asymp.Sig p (2-tailed) value of 0.574 > 0.05 followed by an experimental posttest which has a value of 0.850 > 0.05. So, because the value is greater than 0.05, it can be said that the data is normally distributed.

Tabel 3 Hypothesis Test

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sig 2-tailed
Pretest	37,50	4,349	2,175	-	0,004
Posttest	55,75			-8,392	

Based on the data from the t test results, it can be concluded that the 2-tailed probability or significance value is 0.004 < 0.05, with a value (t = -8.392; p < 0.05) then H₀ is rejected and H_a is accepted. So it can be interpreted that there is a difference in the level of emotional regulation before treatment and after treatment. This shows that expressive writing can improve emotional regulation in adolescents.

RESULTS

The results showed that expressive writing can improve emotional regulation in adolescents (t = -8.392; p < 0.05). In the participants, there is a difference in the increase in emotional regulation scores before being given treatment (pretest) and after being given treatment (posttest). The difference in emotion regulation scores from pretest to posttest, shows that expressive writing can effectively improve emotion regulation in adolescents.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are in line with previous research from Rismauli (2022) which proves that expressive writing can improve emotional regulation in vocational students. The results of observations and interviews obtained from the

study show that students are able to recognize emotions, understand emotions, know strategies to control their emotions and respond to emotions appropriately. Another study on junior high school students by Nurhuda (2017) also found that through expressive writing students are able to recognize and understand the emotions they feel, know strategies in reducing negative emotions, are able to respond appropriately to emotions and are able to solve emotional problems. In addition, research by Dewi et al. (2020) also supports that expressive writing can reduce angry emotions in juvenile prisoners, expressive writing can be used as a cathartic tool and can also be used as a tool for adolescents to express negative emotions, which in this case are angry emotions.

Based on the results of observations of the experimental process and content analysis of expressive writing texts obtained in the field, students who have low emotional regulation have characteristics that lack self-control, in the sense that students are less able to manage emotions, lack good interpersonal relationships with others, lack tolerance for frustration, so that when there is pressure or problems, students tend to be more sensitive or react easily and have a negative view of themselves and their environment. The reason why adolescents have low emotional regulation is because adolescents have difficulty in modulating responses to inhibit their emotional behavior, tend to overflow emotions and are unable to hide negative emotions (Rahmansyah & Affandi, 2023).

Efforts can be made to improve emotional regulation by using expressive writing. According to Pennebaker & Smyth (2016) expressive writing is a short writing technique about an upsetting experience with a duration of 15 to 20 minutes. This technique can help individuals understand and deal with emotional turmoil. In addition, according to (Pennebaker & Chung, 2012) also added expressive writing is a method that helps in expressing the inner turmoil that has been experienced by individuals, by releasing, thinking and feeling again the problems that have been experienced by individuals, so that the cognitive aspects and affection aspects are stimulated in a more positive direction.

The purpose of expressive writing according to Pennebaker and Chung (2007) in Rohmah, et al. (2019) has the following objectives, namely (1) to help channel the participants's emotions, ideas and hopes into a medium that lasts a long time and helps the participants feel safe, (2) the participants can provide an understanding response to provide a response that matches the stimulation, and (3) help the participants reduce the pressure he feels so that the stress of the participants can be reduced. The stages or process of this experimental research are divided into 4 stages, with 5 meetings. The first stage is recognition/initial writing which aims to make the participants able and accustomed to expressing feelings or problems through writing, at this stage the participants also recognizes his emotions through the emotion wheel. According to Macklem (in Annisa, 2023) knowledge and understanding of emotions is important, because it will be difficult to know what to do.

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The third stage is juxtaposition or feedback, the purpose of this stage is that the participants gets value acquisition, new awareness and inspires behavior that encourages the participants to

understand more about himself. The fourth stage is application to the self, which has the aim that the participants can apply the new knowledge gained from the experimental process, to the real world or the time being lived now. At this stage, the facilitator is also assisted by integrating what the participants has gained during the expressive writing intervention process by reflecting again, thoughts and behaviors that must be changed and what must be maintained. So it is hoped that the participants will have the knowledge and be able to manage emotions properly, so that maladaptive behavior can be prevented, due to a lack of low emotional regulation. According to (Santoso, 2019) emotional expression can be captured in writing as a sensory message represented in the text. The text is a form of emotion that can express various types of emotions. Types and forms of emotions can be identified from an individual's ability to respond to a situation. Emotions expressed through writing or text are representations of meaningful and processed word patterns. This ability depends on the potential capacity possessed by the individual from both the cognitive and emotional aspects. This cognitive ability plays a role in modulating responses and modifying situations, and as a form of emotion regulation strategies, namely cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Santoso, 2019). The process of emotion regulation and expression of emotions can be illustrated from expressive writing.

Based on the results of reflection after the expressive writing experiment, it was found that the participants felt more relieved from the problems he faced, the participants felt that writing could express negative emotions, so that the participants felt the problem that was previously a burden could be reduced. According to (Santoso, 2019) The emotional process of writing in order to express emotions appropriately, can be used to develop self-capacity. The ability to express emotions can be realized by sorting situations, modifying behavior, increasing attention and changing thoughts and self-responses. So that through expressive writing students who were previously at low emotional regulation, after being given treatment

experienced an increase in their emotional regulation. Not only that, in line with the purpose of expressive writing, students can express their negative emotions, and understand their emotions.

Based on observations during the research process, female participantss tend to tell more stories (verbally) compared to male participantss. In addition to expressing verbally, female participantss are also better able to express their feelings through expressive writing on the worksheet compared to male participantss. In line with research by Crawford et al. (in Widyadari & Fitriani, 2023) revealed that women are quite expressive in conveying their emotions both sadness and fear compared to men, who display more anger. Women are easily recognized for their emotions and verbal expressions (Sanchis-Sanchis et al., 2020). Adding research from (Putriningsih & Kusumaningrum, 2022) found that these differences are influenced by socialization, parenting and culture. In controlling emotions in Asian cultures men are required to be able to remain calm in emotional situations and suppress their emotional expressions so that they are not expressive or do not appear outward, this is different from women who are allowed to express their emotions expressively.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results taken from the discussion exposure, the results of the hypothesis test show that expressive writing can improve emotional regulation as shown by the results of the hypothesis test ($t = 8.392$ $p < 0.05$). The results of observations during the experimental process took place, showing that the more the participants is active in writing so that he gets more opportunities to express what he feels and what he experiences. Then the more emotional disclosure occurs, and the higher the therapeutic effect it gets. Based on the results of reflection after the expressive writing experiment, it was found that the participants felt more relieved from the problems he faced, the participants felt that writing could reveal negative emotions, so that the participants felt the problem that was previously a burden could be reduced. In line with the purpose of expressive writing, the participants can channel

emotions, understand emotions, express negative emotions, and reduce the pressure felt.

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DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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