

## The effectiveness of expressive writing on students' subjective well-being

### Efektivitas expressive *writing* terhadap kesejahteraan subjektif Mahasiswa

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<b>ARTICLE INFO:</b>  Received: 2024-08-24 Revised: 2024-09-17 Accepted: 2024-09-22  <b>Keywords:</b> Expressive writing, subjective well being, life satisfaction, happiness	<b>ABSTRACT</b>  Writing can serve as a means for individuals to express their feelings or internal meanings. This study aims to determine whether there the expressive writing has an impact on the subjective well-being of students. This study employed a true experimental design using the Pretest Post-test Control Group Design. The participants consisted of 22 new students from the 2023 academic year, selected using convenience sampling techniques. Data were collected the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) and analyzed using the Independent Sample T-Test. The results of the data analysis indicated no significant different in subjective-well being scores between the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG) ( $p = 0.700, p > 0.05$ ). This suggests that expressive writing does not influence the subjective well-being of students. The implementation of the intervention (expressive writing) was carried out when students were taking final semester exams which potentially disrupts their concentration and focus, hindering their ability to fully express their feelings or experiences in writing. Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness of the intervention, it is important to consider the participants' conditions.
<b>Kata Kunci:</b> Expressive writing, kesejahteraan subjektif, mahasiswa	<b>ABSTRACT</b>  Menulis dapat menjadi sarana untuk mengekspresikan perasaan atau makna yang ada pada dirinya individu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah terdapat pengaruh <i>expressive writing</i> terhadap kesejahteraan subjektif mahasiswa. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian eksperimen murni ( <i>true experiment</i> ) dengan desain <i>Pretest Post-test Control Group Design</i> . Partisipan penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa baru angkatan 2023, sebanyak 22 orang, diperoleh dengan teknik <i>convenience sampling</i> . Pengumpulan data menggunakan <i>Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ)</i> . Data yang diperoleh kemudian dianalisis dengan <i>Independent Sample T-Test</i> . Hasil analisis data menunjukkan tidak terdapat perbedaan yang signifikan skor SWB antara kelompok eksperimen (KE) dan kelompok kontrol (KK) ( $p = 0,700, p > 0,05$ ). Hal tersebut menunjukkan bahwa <i>expressive writing</i> tidak berpengaruh terhadap kesejahteraan subjektif mahasiswa. Pelaksanaan intervensi <i>expressive writing</i> yang dilakukan di saat mahasiswa menjalani ujian akhir semester membuat konsentrasi partisipan terganggu dan kurang fokus dalam menuliskan apa yang dirasakan atau dialaminya. Oleh karena itu agar hasil intervensi berpengaruh perlu diperhatikan kondisi partisipannya.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Students experience an adaptation process from high school to the college environment. This adaptation process can impact them with environmental differences that often bring emotional, social, and academic effects to individuals (Julika & Setiyawati, 2019). The differences in environment include culture shock and loneliness for students studying away from home, decreased academic performance, and increased stress (Kurniawan & Eva, 2020). In Coninck et al.'s (2019) study, it was mentioned that new students experience a decline in subjective well-being after completing one semester of college. In college, students not only have to adapt and explore their identities but are also expected to think critically, act maturely, take responsibility for their actions, and become independent. Academically, students are also required to participate in numerous activities during college and achieve satisfactory learning outcomes. These demands become burdens and pressures for new students, thereby reducing subjective well-being levels among students (Azzahra, 2020). Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to a person's feeling of well-being based on their subjective assessment of their life (Chaeruman et al., 2024).

Subjective well-being encompasses happiness or life satisfaction, reviewed from affective and cognitive aspects. Individuals with high subjective well-being are found to experience negative emotions, such as sadness or anger, less frequently (Nakamura et al., 2022). Good well-being will impact how new students face challenges in college, such as making logical decisions and being able to maintain self-control. Furthermore, it can help students easily adapt to new environments, especially in academic settings (Arslan & Coşkun, 2020). Therefore, if low SWB levels are not addressed promptly, they can affect the continuation of students' college life. In addition, research by Victoriana et al. (2023) also showed that students with high SWB tend to have good academic performance. The various presentations of SWB's positive impacts indicate that SWB is an important construct to study.

In examining SWB, it is also essential to understand the factors that can affect an individual's SWB level, especially for those studying while exposed to various surrounding stimuli or factors. Several factors can influence SWB, including age, gender, personality, goals, spirituality, and the quality of social relationships (Bistolen & Setianingrum, 2019). Furthermore, support from faculty, learning experiences, environmental support, and financial support are also found to be other factors that can affect an individual's SWB (Asghar et al., 2022).

Considering the consequences of poor SWB conditions mentioned above, it is necessary to implement an intervention that can help improve an individual's SWB condition. One form of intervention that can be provided is expressive writing, which involves individuals deeply expressing their thoughts and feelings about a topic or event through writing. The primary goal is to explore events, current feelings, and the meanings associated with the experience (Tonarelli et al., 2017). Through expressive writing, individuals can release emotions to reduce stress, which can subsequently positively impact physical health and improve SWB (Dibbets,

2021). This aligns with research findings that its effect on SWB is positive, as it transforms events into narrative expressions, thereby enhancing well-being.

Expressive writing is a cost-effective method to enhance happiness and life satisfaction. However, several studies in Indonesia, such as those by Syafitri et al. (2021) and Wahyuningtyas & Setiowati (2020), have reported that expressive writing does not significantly impact students' SWB. Therefore, in this study, the researchers focus on first-year students as the sample to observe how expressive writing helps them face various significant changes, including the transition from high school to college, adapting to life away from home, exploring their identity, and adjusting to new cultural and environmental differences. This approach is supported by Coninck et al. (2019), who found that first-year students experience a decline in subjective well-being after one semester of college due to these numerous changes. Consequently, focusing on new students as the study's subject is a novel aspect of this research.

Additionally, various studies examining the effects of expressive writing on SWB in students have shown mixed results. Some studies indicate that this method effectively improves SWB, while others show no significant changes. One possible reason for this inconsistency is that previous studies typically focused on students in general. This is evident from prior research, including those by Cayubit (2021), Syafitri et al. (2021), and Wahyuningtyas & Setiowati (2020), which used students with similar characteristics for studying expressive writing and SWB but did not specifically target first-year students. Thus, this study aims to address that gap and provide deeper insights into the effect of expressive writing on first-year students specifically.

Expressive writing may also assist students in resolving intrapersonal issues they encounter. Furthermore, it can enhance communication skills and serve as an alternative for addressing other problems or traumatic experiences (Kristina, 2022). The objective of this research is to determine the impact of expressive writing on SWB in first-year students. Based on the theoretical framework presented above, the hypotheses for this study are:

$H_1$ : Expressive writing has a significant effect on students' subjective well-being.

$H_0$ : Expressive writing has no effect on students' subjective well-being.

## **2. METHODS**

In this study, the research design used is a true experimental design in the form of a Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design. This experimental design includes two randomly selected groups, followed by a pretest to assess the initial differences between the experimental group and the control group (Yuwanto, 2019). Participants in this study were 2023 cohort students from a university in Surabaya. The participants were recruited using convenience sampling, a sampling technique that involves selecting participants who meet the criteria and are conveniently available to the researcher (Neuman, 2014). To recruit participants for this experiment, posters were distributed via social media platforms Instagram and LINE over

one month, from April to May. During this period, 22 participants who met the criteria were successfully recruited for the experiment. The sample for this study was selected based on specific criteria, including (1) male or female, (2) residing in Surabaya, and (3) currently in their second semester.

The participants were then divided into two groups using random assignment through the "Research Randomizer" application. They were assigned to two groups: 11 participants in the experimental group (EG) and 11 in the control group (CG). On the experiment day, a pretest was given to both groups. Next, the experimental group received the expressive writing treatment, consisting of six sessions lasting 30 minutes each, with a one-week interval between sessions. In each session, participants were asked to express themselves in writing on specific topics, including general worries, family, friends, academic tasks, lecturers, and their views on the future. A post-test was given to both groups at the final session.

This study used the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), adapted for the Indonesian context by Rahmawati et al. (2017), to measure participants' SWB before and after the intervention. The OHQ is a unidimensional 29-item scale, with several unfavorable items (items 1, 5, 6, 10, 13, 14, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, and 29) requiring reverse scoring. The adapted OHQ for Indonesia has demonstrated good validity and reliability, indicating that it accurately measures almost all aspects of happiness. The response options are presented on a 6-point Likert scale, with a score of 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and a score of 6 indicating "strongly agree." The blueprint for the adapted Indonesian OHQ is outlined in the table below.

**Table 1** Oxford Happiness Questionnaire Measurement Tool Blueprint

Aspect	Unfavorable items	Favorable items
Happiness	1, 5, 6, 10, 13, 14, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29	2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26

The collected data were then analyzed using Kolmogorov-Smirnov to determine the distribution of data. Furthermore, a homogeneity assumption test was conducted to determine the variance of the two sample groups. Because both assumption tests were met, the researcher used data analysis with parametric hypothesis testing, namely the Independent Sample T-Test.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **RESULTS**

After conducting data collection, this study continued with the data analysis stage. The results of descriptive data analysis in the form of a description of the characteristics of participants in this study, are stated in the following table.

**Table 2** Demographic Data of Research Participants (N = 22)

Demographic Data		Frequencies	Percentages
Gender	Female	11	50
	Male	11	50
Age	18 years	5	22.7
	19 years	14	63.6
	20 years	2	9.1
	21 years	1	4.6

Table 2 indicates that all 22 participants in this study consist of 11 females (50%) and 11 males (50%). Additionally, the participants include 5 individuals aged 18 (22.7%), 14 individuals aged 19 (63.6%), 2 individuals aged 20 (9.1%), and 1 individual aged 21 (4.6%). After grouping the demographic data, the pretest and post-test SWB scores for each group were organized. Below is the table of subjective well-being (SWB) scores for each subject:

**Table 3** SWB Scores of Research Participants (N = 22)

Control Group				Experiment Group			
Subjects	Pre-test	Post-test	Differences	Subjects	Pre-test	Post-test	Differences
K	3,66	3,69	0,03	R	4,45	4,31	-0,14
P	3,93	3,76	-0,17	FD	4,07	3,59	-0,48
N	3,66	3,93	0,27	NB	3,83	3,86	0,03
O	3,76	3,52	-0,24	F	3,62	3,10	-0,52
W	4,21	4,28	0,07	KJ	4,03	3,86	-0,17
J	3,97	3,72	-0,25	M	3,76	4,17	0,41
R	3,38	3,69	0,31	K	3,90	3,69	-0,21
D	3,72	3,93	0,21	F	3,62	3,59	-0,03
E	3,83	4,10	0,27	I	4,28	4,34	0,06
H	3,76	3,83	0,07	W	4,03	3,83	-0,2
RA	3,83	3,48	-0,35	Y	4	3,76	-0,24

Note: The difference score is calculated by using the Post-test score with the Pre-test score.

Based on the SWB score table above, it was found that each research participant had an SWB score in the range of 3-4. Additionally, it was observed that the majority of participants in the experimental group experienced a decrease in SWB levels after the expressive writing intervention. Below is the table for SWB score categories and data interpretation.

**Table 4** Subjective Well-Being Score Results (Based on categorization)

SWB Scores	Interpretations	EG	EG	CG	CG
		Pre-test	Post-Test	Pre-test	Post-test
1	Unhappy	0	0	0	0
2	Less happy	0	0	0	0
3-4	Just okay	11	11	11	11
5	Happy	0	0	0	0
6	Very happy	0	0	0	0

Description: Experiment Group = EG; Control Group= CG

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Based on Table 4 above, the highest frequency of scores in the pretest and post-test results for both the experimental group (EG) and control group (CG) among all participants was in the range of three to four. This score can be interpreted as indicating that participants' SWB falls in the "neutral" category. Meanwhile, the second highest frequency was in the score category of five, which can be interpreted as a feeling of happiness. The data analysis process then continued with assumption testing before conducting the hypothesis test. The first assumption test performed was the normality test. Below is the table of normality test results for the experimental and control groups.

**Table 5** Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test Results

Variable	Groups	Sig.	Descriptions
Subjective Well-Being	Experimental Group	0,200	Normally distributed
	Control Group	0,200	Normally distributed

Based on Table 5 of the normality test results above, it is known that the normality value for the experimental group is 0.200 (sig. > 0.05) and for the control group is 0.200 (sig. > 0.05). This indicates that the data for both the experimental and control groups are normally distributed. Next, the data analysis process continued with a homogeneity test to assess the variance of the research data. Below is the table of homogeneity test results for this study.

**Table 6** Results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

		F	Sig.
Delta Score	Equal variances Assumed	.152	.184

Based on the homogeneity test results (Table 4), the homogeneity significance value for the difference between the pre-test and post-test results of both groups is 0.184 (sig. > 0.05). This indicates that the data are homogeneous, meaning that the two groups being compared, EG and CG, come from the same population. Since the data meet the requirements for normality and homogeneity tests, the researchers proceeded with data analysis using the Independent Sample T-Test to determine the effectiveness of expressive writing. Below is the table of Independent Sample T-Test results.

**Table 7** Independent Sample T-Test Difference Test Results

Groups	N	Mean	Std	t	p
Control	11	-.03	.46	-.390	.700
Experiment	11	.02	.32		



Based on Table 5, the results of the Independent Sample T-Test indicate a significance value of 0.700 (sig. > 0.05). This shows that there is no significant difference between the SWB scores of the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG). In other words, it can be concluded that expressive writing has no effect on SWB.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study was conducted to determine whether expressive writing has an effect on the subjective well-being (SWB) of students. Both assumption tests, namely normality and homogeneity, were met, allowing the researcher to use the parametric analysis test, Independent Sample T-Test. The analysis results indicated a significance value of 0.700 (sig > 0.05), demonstrating that expressive writing does not affect students' SWB. The findings of this study are not in line with the research conducted by Cayubit (2021), which indicated that expressive writing does have an effect on students' SWB.

Many studies show that expressive writing impacts SWB. One study indicating this effect is conducted by Mianti et al. (2024), which found that expressive writing positively influences self-efficacy and SWB. However, based on the results of this study, it aligns with the findings of Syafitri et al. (2021) and Wahyuningtyas and Setiowati (2020), which found that expressive writing does not affect SWB. Several factors may contribute to this lack of effect, including the subject's conditions, the conditions during writing, the subjects' characteristics, methodological differences, subjects' unfamiliarity with expressing their feelings in writing, and variations in treatment that will be discussed further. Additionally, cultural factors may also influence the final results of the study. Unlike Europeans, Asians, including Indonesians, tend to have a culture that does not verbalize their feelings, either verbally or in writing (Knowles et al., 2011).

Moreover, several factors may have caused expressive writing to have no effect on SWB, such as the timing of the experiment sessions, which occurred close to the final exam period. According to research by Wahyuningtyas and Setiowati (2020), final exams can serve as stressors for students that may affect the effectiveness of expressive writing treatment. Other factors related to high stress, anxiety, and depression levels can also lead to lower psychological well-being among students (Doherty & Wenderoth, 2017).

Additionally, there were some limitations during the experiment. First, the expressive writing experiment was conducted during the week of the Final Exams (UAS). During this week, students tend to experience high stress levels, which may not significantly affect their subjective well-being. Second, the number of participants in this study was very limited, as only 22 freshmen were willing to participate in the experiment. This relatively small number of participants makes the study's findings less representative. Third, baseline measurements were not taken, meaning there was no initial mapping of participants' SWB levels before the intervention. This limitation prevented the researcher from categorizing participants based on their initial SWB levels and may have affected the study's outcomes.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that expressive writing is not effective in enhancing SWB. This may be due to several uncontrolled factors in this research, such as the external conditions of the subjects, like conducting the study during the final exams, which impacted participants' stress levels. Additionally, cultural factors may make participants less accustomed to expressing their feelings.

Considering the limitations of this study, future research could focus on conducting experiments while controlling factors that may influence the subjective well-being of individuals undergoing expressive writing interventions, such as timing the intervention to account for participants' psychological conditions. Furthermore, the duration of the experiment could be shortened to help maintain the commitment of the experimental participants. Additionally, regarding the selection of research samples, it would be advisable to first obtain baseline SWB measurements and choose participants with low SWB levels to better demonstrate the potential effects of expressive writing.

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#### Journal Summary :

Jurnal Psikologi Tabularasa (JPT) is a scientific periodical journal issued by the Faculty of Psychology, University of Merdeka Malang. It is published twice a year, in April and October. The journal's scopes include clinical psychology, developmental psychology, educational psychology, and industrial & organizational psychology. This scientific periodical journal is aimed to foster, develop, and enhance knowledge in the field of psychology through scientific communication. Authors are encouraged to submit complete, unpublished, original, full-length articles that are not currently being reviewed in other journals.

JPT has been published since 2007. Start from Volume 9, No. 2 (2024), JPT is published in English.

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**Jurnal Psikologi Tabularasa** as part of the spirit of disseminating the results of research. The journal site provides journal articles for free download. The journal is a national scientific journal which is a reference source for academics or researchers.

Nowadays, it has been nationally accredited by the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of Indonesia by the letter number 204/E/KPT/2022 on October 3rd, 2022. SINTA-4 Rating, from **Volume 15 Issue 1, 2020 to Volume 19 Issue 2, 2024**

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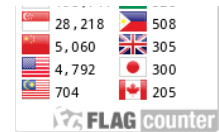
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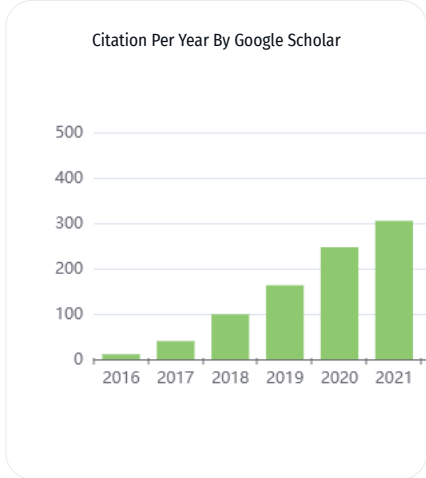
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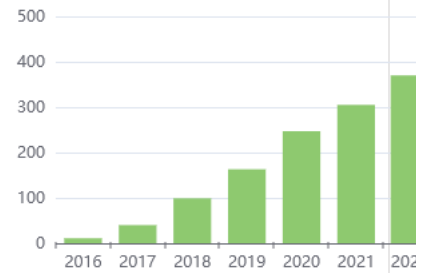
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