



Exploring the Role of Personal and Digital Resources in EFL Students' Creative Writing Development

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of personal and digital resources in EFL students' creative writing and investigates how these resources shape the development of students' stories throughout the writing process. A qualitative approach employing thematic analysis was adopted. Data were collected from 40 undergraduate EFL students through reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, and creative writing outputs in the form of short stories. The analysis showed that students primarily drew on personal experiences, such as childhood memories, friendships, family life, and emotionally meaningful events, when generating story ideas. These experiences provided an authentic foundation that students subsequently developed into fictional narratives through creative adaptation. Alongside personal experiences, students relied on digital resources, including YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Wattpad, and ChatGPT, to visualize settings, expand ideas, revise drafts, and improve narrative coherence. Reflections written during the project also demonstrated that students regarded both personal experiences and digital resources as complementary rather than competing sources of creativity. Synthesizing evidence across the three data sources suggests that creative writing developed through an interaction between experiential knowledge and digital support. Personal experiences initiated the narrative, while digital resources enriched and refined it without replacing students' own voices or originality. These findings extend current understanding of creative writing development by demonstrating how authentic experiences and digital technologies can work together throughout the writing process.

Keywords: role of personal, digital resources, EFL student, creative writing development

Menjelajahi Peran Sumber Daya Pribadi dan Digital dalam Pengembangan Penulisan Kreatif Mahasiswa EFL

ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengeksplorasi peran sumber daya pribadi dan digital dalam penulisan kreatif mahasiswa EFL dan menyelidiki bagaimana sumber daya ini membentuk pengembangan cerita mahasiswa sepanjang proses penulisan. Pendekatan kualitatif yang menggunakan analisis tematik diadopsi. Data dikumpulkan dari 40 mahasiswa sarjana EFL melalui jurnal reflektif, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan hasil penulisan kreatif berupa cerita pendek. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa terutama menggunakan pengalaman pribadi, seperti kenangan masa kecil, persahabatan, kehidupan keluarga, dan peristiwa yang bermakna secara emosional, ketika menghasilkan ide cerita. Pengalaman-pengalaman ini memberikan fondasi otentik yang kemudian dikembangkan mahasiswa menjadi narasi fiksi melalui adaptasi kreatif. Selain pengalaman pribadi, mahasiswa mengandalkan sumber daya digital, termasuk YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Wattpad, dan ChatGPT, untuk memvisualisasikan latar, mengembangkan ide, merevisi draf, dan meningkatkan koherensi naratif. Refleksi yang ditulis selama proyek juga menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menganggap pengalaman pribadi dan sumber daya digital sebagai sumber kreativitas yang saling melengkapi dan bukan bersaing. Sintesis bukti dari ketiga sumber data menunjukkan bahwa penulisan kreatif berkembang melalui interaksi antara pengetahuan pengalaman dan dukungan digital. Pengalaman pribadi memulai narasi, sementara sumber daya digital memperkaya dan menyempurnakannya tanpa menggantikan suara atau orisinalitas siswa sendiri. Temuan ini memperluas pemahaman saat ini tentang perkembangan penulisan kreatif dengan menunjukkan bagaimana pengalaman otentik dan teknologi digital dapat bekerja sama sepanjang proses penulisan.

Kata kunci: peran pengalaman pribadi, sumber daya digital, mahasiswa EFL, pengembangan penulisan kreatif

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INTRODUCTION

Creative writing is part of the English Writing course in the English Literature study program at a private university in Jakarta. With changes in the curriculum and the required graduate orientation, students are required to produce short stories as a project result in the English Writing course. However, writing short stories requires the ability to generate original, coherent, and creative ideas that convey emotion and meaning (Azizah et al., 2026; Chotimah et al., 2025). The creative writing process, such as writing short stories, focuses not only on improving English writing skills but also on enhancing their critical thinking, creativity, and communicative competence in written form (Gilbert, 2021; Kormos & Suzuki, 2024; Munir & Hendaryan, 2023; Wati et al., 2025).

Preliminary observations conducted during the odd semester of 2025-2026 at Bina Sarana Informatika University, Jakarta, and the finding in previous research studies have identified various issues related to students' creative writing activities, including limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, challenges in generating meaningful ideas for writing, limited learning resources, and limited use of digital technology. These obstacles often lead students to produce formulaic narratives that lack originality and personal engagement. Students often report that they know the linguistic forms needed for writing but struggle to determine what story to tell and how to develop it into a compelling narrative.

Thus, the process of teaching writing is not only related to understanding accurate grammar or text organization; learning to write English through short stories is also related to exploring creativity based on students' personal experiences and resources (Barton et al., 2024; Rohmi & Wahyuni, 2024). If taught in this way, students can express themselves and tell stories with interesting and original ideas, without being limited by their ability to transform their learning experiences and daily lives. Students can also

utilize various technological facilities as learning resources for creative writing.

Furthermore, digital technology has transformed the delivery of education and teaching, and learning is now geared towards utilizing various digital resources for creative writing activities (Adeshina, 2024; Eragamreddy & Joseph, 2025; Javed, 2024; Oakley, 2026). Online videos, social media platforms, digital storytelling apps, image-sharing websites, podcasts, blogs, and generative artificial intelligence have expanded students' opportunities to access diverse sources of inspiration before writing (Asif & Gouqing, 2024; Cano et al., 2026; Salam et al., 2025; Smith & Storrs, 2023). Thus, students are not dependent on classroom materials but can interact intensively with authentic, multimodal digital environments. Research has shown that digital storytelling and technology-supported writing activities improve students' writing performance, creativity, motivation, and engagement by encouraging multimodal composition and collaborative learning (Shahjalal et al., 2026; Yu & Wang, 2025).

These digital learning resources serve as a source of inspiration for students in developing writing ideas. This means that students' prior learning experiences, observations of daily life, hobbies, backgrounds, and other external factors can serve as resources for students in creative writing activities. According to the sociocultural perspective of language learning, creative writing emerges through the interaction between the learner's internal experiences and external social resources. Students continuously negotiate meaning by integrating personal knowledge with environmental stimuli, enabling them to construct narratives that reflect their individual identities and broader social contexts (Afrezah et al., 2024; Allami et al., 2025; Kaufhold, 2025; Nugroho, 2025; Sun & Zhang, 2021). Therefore, understanding how learners combine personal experiences with digital resources offers valuable insights into the creative writing process.



Previous research studies have shown that digital media has been extensively tested for its effectiveness or influence on English writing skills. These studies have focused more on the pedagogical value of technology and interventions on learning outcomes than on students' sources of inspiration. However, studies focused on utilizing students' personal experiences during learning or the digital technology they possess have not been widely studied as resources for creative writing. This gap is significant because creative writing is essentially a meaning-making activity that begins long before students begin composing texts. The quality and originality of a story are heavily influenced by the origin of an idea, how the writer evaluates those ideas, and how various sources of inspiration interact during the writing process.

Therefore, this study investigates the role of personal and digital resources in the development of EFL students' creative writing. By examining students' experiences with various sources of inspiration, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of creative writing development in contemporary digital learning environments. Therefore, this study aims to examine personal and digital resources that can contribute to the development of creative writing among EFL students. The findings are expected to enrich current discussions on creative writing pedagogy by highlighting the interrelated roles of personal experiences and digital resources in supporting idea generation, narrative construction, and creative expression among EFL learners.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative narrative inquiry design. Narrative analysis is a qualitative research method used to understand how individuals create stories from their personal experiences. Emphasis is placed on understanding the context in which a narrative is constructed, recognizing the influence of historical, cultural, and social factors on the storytelling process (Inayat & Younas, 2025; Younas & Inayat,

2025). Therefore, this study explores how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students develop creative writing by utilizing personal and digital resources throughout their writing process.

The study was conducted in the English Literature study program at Bina Sarana Informatika University, Jakarta, during the odd semester of 2025-2026. Participants were third-semester students taking the Creative Writing course. A total of 40 students, representing one class, were selected. Participants were selected because they had completed a series of creative writing assignments requiring them to produce original short stories based on self-selected themes. Participants represented various levels of writing ability and demonstrated diverse preferences regarding sources of inspiration during the writing process.

Data were collected using reflective journal, semi-structured interviews, and students' creative writing output in the form of short stories. The rubric evaluates student reflections on four key aspects of the creative writing process: identifying sources of personal inspiration, describing the use of digital resources, explaining how an initial idea developed into a complete story through the development of theme, characters, and plot, and reflecting on challenges and learning experiences encountered during writing. Each criterion is scored on a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (very limited reflection) to 4 (excellent reflection). Assessment is conducted by the course instructor to ensure that each journal entry demonstrates sufficient depth and comprehensiveness before being analyzed thematically (Moon, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were designed around two main themes: personal experiences and digital resources. The questions explored the origins of students' story ideas, the personal experiences that influenced their narratives, how they transformed real-life experiences into stories, and the contributions of family, hobbies, and daily life to story development. Students were also asked about the digital platforms they used, how these resources

supported idea generation and story development, the role of ChatGPT during the writing process, and whether digital resources influenced or changed their original story ideas. Interviews were conducted individually.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis procedure (Braun et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved six stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated readings of interview transcripts, reflective journals, and creative texts; (2) creation of initial codes representing various sources of inspiration and writing strategies; (3) organizing codes into broader thematic categories; (4) reviewing and refining emerging themes across

the data set; (5) defining and naming final themes; and (6) creating an integrated narrative that illustrates the relationship between personal experiences, digital resources, and creative writing development. To strengthen trustworthiness, data triangulation was achieved by comparing findings across interviews, reflective journals, and students' written products.

RESULT

The data was analyzed to identify findings aligned with analytic themes, resulting in the identification of personal and digital resources frequently used by students to develop their creative writing skills in English.

Table 1
Initial Code Finding for Students Personal and Digital Inspiration in Creative Development Writing

Theme	Code	Analytics Focus	Initial Code Finding & Number of Students Answer	
Personal experiences (PE)	PE.1	Initial idea for the story	1	Childhood memory (9 students)
			2	Personal experience (23 students)
			3	Parent story (8 students)
	PE.2	The personal experience that most influenced the story	1	Friendship (17 students)
			2	Emotional attachmen (11 students)
			3	Travelling (5 students)
			4	Holiday moment (7 students)
	PE.3	The reason the personal experience was chosen as the basis for the story	1	Friendship (17 students)
			2	Emotional attachmen (11 students)
			3	Travelling (5 students)
			4	Holiday moment (7 students)
	PE.4	How the student transformed a real experience into a fictional or non-fictional story	1	Fiction adaptation (19 students)
			2	Developing a new or follow-up story (21 students)
	PE.5	Family, hobbies, or everyday life contribute to the development of students' stories	1	Hobbies (12 students)
			2	Real-life settings (21 students)
			3	True stories (7 students)

Digital Resources (DR)	DR.1	Students seek inspiration online before writing	1	Pinterest (7 students)
			2	Visual inspiration (14 students)
			3	Short drama apps (7 students)
			4	Social media (12 students)
	DR.2	Most frequently used digital platforms	1	YouTube (12 students)
			2	Wattpad (4 students)
			3	Instagram (9 students)
			4	TikTok (8 students)
			5	Facebook (7 students)
	DR.3	Digital resources perceived by students as supporting story development	1	Visualization (20 students)
			2	Story atmosphere (12 students)
			3	Color characteristics (8 students)
	DR.4	ChatGPT is utilized as a tool during the writing process.	1	Brainstorming (16 students)
			2	Idea generation (9 students)
			3	Proofreading (8 students)
			4	Checking for coherence (7 students)
	DR.5	Digital resources can transform original story ideas	1	Story revision (20 students)
			2	New perspectives (20 students)

Table 1 shows that 1) most of the students' creative writing ideas were inspired by personal experiences, such as friendships, emotions, and their own daily lives, as these experiences felt authentic and emotionally meaningful. Many of them then developed these real-life experiences into fictional narratives or longer narratives. In addition to personal inspiration, students actively used digital resources such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Wattpad, and ChatGPT to support their writing. These platforms helped them visualize settings, generate new ideas, and create the atmosphere of the story. Overall, the findings suggest that creative writing development is shaped by a combination of students' personal experiences and the effective use of digital resources throughout the writing process.

The students generally responded positively to all aspects of the creative writing project. Personal sources of inspiration received the strongest responses, with 27 students rating this aspect as excellent and only two selecting the fair category. Similar patterns were found for the use of digital resources and the development of ideas

into complete stories, where most students gave excellent or good ratings. Reflection on challenges and learning experiences also received favourable responses, although the number of excellent ratings was slightly lower than in the other aspects. Notably, none of the participants selected the limited category across all indicators. These results suggest that students not only relied on personal and digital resources to generate story ideas but also perceived these resources as valuable in helping them develop narratives and reflect on their learning experiences throughout the project.

From the findings of the reflective journal and interview data, it can be synthesized that students' personal and digital resources are reflected in the short stories they completed. The writings they produced reflect the final manifestation of the creative writing process described by the students throughout the study. This synthesis demonstrates how personal experiences generate authentic narrative content, while digital resources facilitate the expansion of ideas, visualization, and refinement of the narrative. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Manifestation of Personal and Digital Resources in Students' Creative Writing Output

Higher-order manifestation	Evidence from Table 1 (Initial Codes)	Evidence from Reflective Journal (Graph 1)	Manifestation in Creative Writing Output	Second-order interpretation)
Authentic narrative foundation	Students mainly generated ideas from personal experiences, childhood memories, friendships, emotional attachment, and everyday life. Authenticity and emotional connection were the strongest reasons for selecting these experiences	Personal sources of inspiration received the highest reflective ratings, indicating that students consistently regarded personal experiences as the most valuable source of ideas.	The completed stories predominantly centred on realistic interpersonal relationships, emotional conflicts, family interactions, and everyday situations that were creatively reconstructed into fictional narratives.	Personal experience functioned as the narrative foundation, providing authenticity and emotional depth rather than simply supplying story topics.
Creative transformation of lived experiences	Students reported adapting real experiences into fictional stories or extending them into new narratives through imaginative development.	Students positively evaluated their ability to develop ideas into complete stories involving theme, characters, and plot.	Rather than reproducing autobiographical events, students transformed real experiences through modified characters, alternative conflicts, expanded plots, and reconstructed endings	Creative writing involved narrative transformation, where imagination extended authentic experiences into original fictional works.
Digital enrichment of narrative construction	Students used YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Wattpad, and ChatGPT to visualize settings, generate ideas, revise drafts, and improve coherence.	High reflective ratings on digital resource use indicated that students perceived these tools as valuable throughout the writing process.	The stories demonstrated richer descriptions of settings, clearer atmosphere, more coherent sequencing, and more detailed narrative development that reflected the supportive role of digital resources.	Digital resources primarily enriched narrative quality by supporting visualization, organization, and refinement rather than replacing students' original ideas.



Integration of experiential and digital knowledge	Personal resources generated initial ideas, whereas digital resources contributed new perspectives, brainstorming, revision, and story development	Students reflected positively on both inspiration sources and the overall writing process, suggesting complementary use of both resources.	The final stories integrated authentic experiences with digitally inspired visualization, resulting in narratives that combined originality, emotional authenticity, and coherent storytelling.	Creative writing development emerged through the complementary interaction between experiential knowledge and digital resources rather than dependence on a single source of inspiration.
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DISCUSSION

This study found that students engaged in complementary interactions by using personal experiences and digital resources in creative writing learning activities. This means that students did not rely solely on a single learning resource. Personal experiences frequently used by students as sources of inspiration for developing creative writing ideas included childhood memories, family relationships, friendships, emotional experiences, hobbies, and everyday life. Students believed that personal experiences had authentic value in generating story ideas because they fostered greater emotional engagement. Thus, personal experiences became more meaningful when they were translated into fictional or non-fictional narratives, depicted through adaptations of characters, conflicts, and plotlines.

This finding supports the concept of literacy, where writing becomes more meaningful when learners utilize significant personal experiences (Hanauer, 2012). This concept reinforces findings from other studies that found that autobiographical experiences enhance creativity and emotional engagement in writing (Lubis et al., 2024). It means that authentic experiences experienced by students can facilitate the development of original story ideas (Bryant, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022). Previous studies have established that personal experiences are an important source of writing topics. This study

expands on this understanding by demonstrating that personal experiences continue to function throughout the writing process as a narrative foundation that students use to develop and modify their stories.

In addition to personal experiences, digital resources were found to play a crucial yet complementary role in students' creative writing development. Participants reported using YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Wattpad, and ChatGPT to visualize settings, stimulate imagination, broaden perspectives, generate ideas, revise drafts, and enhance narrative coherence. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that digital technologies create multimodal learning environments that enrich creativity and expand opportunities for idea development. Students can interact with various communication modes through digital technologies, encouraging them to participate in rich, co-creative language learning experiences and equipping them with key competencies to approach complex problems in a globalized and hyperconnected world (Anderson et al., 2018; Selfa-Sastre et al., 2022a, 2022b; Tang et al., 2024).

Even AI-assisted writing tools and digital platforms can effectively support brainstorming, language development, and revision when used critically as learning resources rather than as automated content generators (Deep & Chen, 2025; Han et al., 2023; Lukešová & Jennings, 2026; Marzuki et al., 2023; Wang, 2025). However, the current findings reveal that students do not rely on

digital technologies to create stories from the outset. Instead, digital resources primarily serve as creative frameworks that enrich visualization, strengthen narrative organization, and refine ideas that have emerged from students' own experiences. This suggests that technology contributes most effectively when it complements students' creativity rather than replaces their original thinking.

The most important contribution of this study lies in explaining the interaction between personal experience and digital resources throughout the creative writing process. A cross-source synthesis of reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, and students' creative writing output suggests that creative writing develops through a dynamic integration of experiential knowledge and digitally mediated support. Students typically originate story ideas from meaningful personal experiences before using digital resources to broaden perspectives, enrich descriptions, organize plot development, and refine their narratives. By integrating evidence from reflective journals, interviews, and students' written products, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how creative ideas are generated, developed, and transformed into complete narratives.

These findings directly address a research gap, namely the limited understanding of how personal experiences and digital resources jointly influence the development of creative writing in EFL contexts. If creativity is viewed as both authentic experiences and the support of digital technology, then this study proposes that originality emerges from the complementary interaction of these two resources. This integrated perspective is a key contribution of this study by extending previous research beyond identifying sources of inspiration to elucidating the mechanisms by which students transform lived experiences into creative narratives with the support of digital technology. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that creative writing instruction should encourage students to explore their own lived experiences

while simultaneously guiding them to critically use digital resources for visualization, idea development, revision, and reflection. Such an approach has the potential to foster greater originality, creativity, and reflective engagement, enabling students to produce more authentic and meaningful creative writing in an increasingly digital learning environment.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that personal experiences and digital resources are crucial aspects in developing creative writing, and that students can interact with various communication modes to produce creative writing. Personal experiences such as childhood memories, friendships, family life, emotional events, and everyday experiences serve as the primary basis for generating authentic story ideas and constructing meaningful narratives. Meanwhile, digital resources such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, Wattpad, and ChatGPT enrich the writing process by supporting visualization, idea expansion, narrative organization, revision, and coherence.

This study contributes to the literature by expanding the current understanding of creative writing development from examining isolated sources of inspiration to explaining how experiential knowledge and digital support interact throughout the creative writing process. Pedagogically, these findings suggest that creative writing instruction should encourage students to draw on their own life experiences while developing critical digital literacy to use online resources and generative AI ethically and effectively. Such an approach can foster greater creativity, originality, reflective learning, and sustained engagement in EFL writing classes. Future research could investigate how different educational contexts, proficiency levels, or teaching models influence the balance between personal experiences and digital resources in creative writing development, including longitudinal studies examining changes in students'



creative processes over time.

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