

Gender Gap in the Writing Practice and Identity Experienced by Male University Students in South Kalimantan

M. Arinal Rahman^{1*}

¹*Akademi Maritim Nusantara Banjarmasin*

*arinalrahman@gmail.com

Abstrak: Perbedaan gender antara penulis remaja laki-laki dan perempuan menyebabkan banyak kesulitan dalam penulisan. Dalam penelitian ini, saya menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif untuk menggali narasi mendalam berdasarkan pengalaman pribadi remaja laki-laki yang tidak dapat dianalisis melalui pendekatan penelitian kuantitatif. Saya menggunakan format wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk berbicara dengan peserta secara mendalam tentang pandangan mereka. Lima mahasiswa berusia 17 hingga 19 tahun bersedia berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian ini ditemukan bahwa belum adanya penerapan kesetaraan gender dalam pengembangan pembelajaran menulis pada anak laki-laki, sehingga menjadi faktor penyebab terjadinya kesenjangan gender dalam perkembangan menulis pada anak laki-laki. Dengan mempelajari lebih mendalam tentang pengalaman menulis para remaja laki-laki yang telah menjadi mahasiswa, saya dapat memperoleh wawasan yang dapat digunakan untuk meningkatkan kebijakan dan praktik pendidikan. Oleh karena itu, penting untuk memahami identitas tulisan remaja laki-laki dan membiarkan mereka mengekspresikan pandangan mereka. Selain itu, penting untuk mempelajari lebih lanjut dan memahami kebijakan dan praktik yang dapat membantu menutup kesenjangan keberhasilan gender dalam praktik menulis.

Kata Kunci: *remaja; laki-laki; perempuan; kesetaraan gender; tulisan; kebijakan, identitas*

Abstract: The gender gap between male and female teenage authors causes considerable difficulty in literature. In this study, I employed qualitative research methods to unearth the intricate narratives of personal experiences masked by quantitative research approaches. I used a semi-structured interview format to discuss their ideas in greater detail with the participants. Five university students aged 17 to 19 took part in the study. According to the findings, the absence of gender equality in the writing development of male adolescents is a contributing factor to the gender gap that exists in male adolescents' writing growth. By learning more about the writing experiences of male university adolescents, I could gain insights that could be used to improve educational policy and practice. Therefore, it is essential to understand male adolescents' writing identities and provide them with a voice. Additionally, it is essential to learn more about and comprehend the policies and practices that can assist in closing the gender success gap in writing practice.

Keywords: *adolescent; male; female, gender equity; writing; policy; identity*

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the roles and personal factors in how well a student writes can help teachers give all of their students' essential writing tasks (Frey et al., 2019; Whitehead et al., 2022). It can also help students become more aware of their writing skills. In addition, the issues with teaching males and females are also related to their ages. When the students are still adolescents (10–19 years old), their immaturity influences their perspective about what, why, and how to do something. Thus, it is essential to understand male and female adolescents' identities. Teachers should also remember that adolescents can create their identities as writers (Daniel, 2019). This may help to counteract the effects of gender construction on adolescents' thoughts and actions in the classroom (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Syarif, 2022).

Male adolescents are typically stereotyped as less capable of writing successfully than female adolescents (Bacang et al., 2019). According to Pratiwi's (2019) research findings, the average score for female students in narrative writing is more significant than that for male students. However, scholars also say that not all males have difficulty writing because they think how males write is not the typical role of males in society (Eisen, 2019). Teachers should not equate their approach to teaching with male and female adolescents because that ignores how gender and class influence each other and the need for female adolescent students to do better in school (Saraswati & Andini, 2022).

Additional research is reportedly needed to fill gaps in the literature and support male adolescents writing identities. More qualitative research is required to determine how the social construction of gender and other factors may be different for male adolescents in Indonesia, as the majority of the current research and theory on this topic originates from Australia, the US, the UK, and Canada (Engebretson, 2006; Gambell & Hunter, 2000; Haddix, 2012; Hughes & Morrison, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Kendrick et al., 2022; Tatum & Gue, 2012; Vetter et al., 2022; Whitehead et al., 2022). Cultural distinctions exist, and they are essential because how male adolescent writers define manhood has a significant impact on how they regard themselves as writers.

Also, experts like Cer (2019) and Muñoz (2020) recommend a qualitative study on the writing experiences of male adolescent university students in Indonesia to back up or question their results. A qualitative study of male adolescents in their first and second university years could build on this. A study of male adolescents examined how the participants' life goals and motivation to write when they were younger affected their writing practice in university. Male adolescents in their first year of college have a great chance to think about what they learned about writing in high school and apply it to their writing in college. Students also have the chance to share the information they have learned at the university. They can give a different view of what has helped or ruined their success as writers. Thus, it would be helpful to study how male adolescents make connections between their writing experiences, their knowledge and subjectivity, and the gender gap they see in their writing development.

METHODS

I was especially interested in what male adolescents thought about writing and how they did it at university. As a writer for male adolescents (and the boys they used to be), I was interested in how they see, understand, and respond to work made just for them. With this in mind, I used qualitative study methods to find the complex stories of personal experiences hidden by quantitative methods. I put the stories of the people who participated in the study into groups based on their similarities or differences. In addition, my study was based on the theory of phenomenology, which asks, what are the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people? (Neubauer et al., 2019). The phenomenological method is built on the idea that personal knowledge and subjectivity are essential, emphasising experience from the individual's perspective (Sundler et al., 2019). My study's analytical approach, methods, and final goal were affected by a deep look at what the subjects knew and how they felt about writing. The goal of phenomenology, and my goal in this study, is to understand the inner world of experience of the subject (Fuster, 2019). Contextualising male adolescents' writing and giving them a voice will help people learn more about and understand policies and practices that can help close the gender success gap in writing.

For this study, five male students from a university in South Kalimantan, Indonesia, signed up for lessons in the Essay Writing class. They were in the third semester, and their age range was 17 to 19 years old. These individuals were selected because they participated in a course on essay writing. They were picked because of who they are and how invested they are in the course material. Abdila and Maulana, the first and second participants, respectively, were excellent students who worked diligently and completed their assignments on time. The third person (Ahmad) was also an engaged student. Even though he participated in the writing course, he was often late to collect his assignments. Dani and Rahman, participants 4 and 5, were unengaged listeners who never once contributed to the class discussion by asking or answering questions. The assignment was never collected on time from them. However, everyone in the essay writing course showed up on time every week and remained with the program until the conclusion of the semester. These participants have been writing in class since the first semester of their first year. They volunteered to participate and had an interview after the class. I used a semi-structured interview to discuss their ideas in-depth with the participants. I also looked at them carefully to see if they supported or contradicted the interview information or if they brought up any new themes that could help me understand how the people wrote.

In this study, most likely, my subjects acted more "teacher-pleasing" because they wanted me to feel comfortable with their answer as I was their tutor. However, I did not want to seem like I was looking for comments that my participants thought I was looking for. Instead, I guided them into a serious but enjoyable situation, gave honest answers, and sometimes led them to answer my questions carefully. Also, I give a complete interview transcript and my early analysis so the participants can decide if my conclusions genuinely reflect their views.

Moreover, the analysis in this study used interpretive phenomenology (Smith & Nizza, 2022), also known as existential or psychological phenomenology, which acknowledges that the researcher cannot completely bracket their perspective and background and that data analysis involves a co-construction of meaning between the researcher and the participants. Three stages are involved in the data analysis process: reading, reflecting, and writing. Reading entails diving into the data and finding key quotes from participant interviews. Reflecting entails comparing claims to the study's context, goal, and literature. Writing involves telling a narrative that expresses the author's understanding

of reality and its ramifications.

Given that, I thought about and questions I asked after the interviews, as well as the field notes and papers I wrote afterwards, after reading the excerpts many times and thinking about how the talk as a whole led to the same ideas coming up again and again. When I found a lot of different themes, like how gender affected the writing experiences of my participants, it gave me new insights into how male adolescents experience writing and think of themselves as writers. On the other hand, when many participants came up with the same themes, it tended to back up my claim of reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

My research revealed a range of students' awareness of gender bias in the classroom and the factors that influence male adolescents' capacity to express themselves in writing. Moreover, some important topics to be covered in these findings include the value of having encouraging and supportive teachers and classmates. These findings are elaborated on in the following discussion.

Male Adolescents' Awareness of Writing-Related Gender Stereotypes

The concept of "gender stereotyping" pertains to the act of evaluating an individual solely based on their gender, regardless of whether they identify as male or female. Gender stereotyping in fiction occurs when an author consistently portrays individuals of the same gender in a negative light or adheres to antiquated gender roles. According to the observations made by Davies and Hoskin (2021), female-authored narratives tend to feature characters who exhibit heightened emotional expression and more significant tendencies towards prosocial conduct, such as acts of assistance, generosity, and empathy. Conversely, male-authored narratives tend to feature characters that exhibit more aggressive behaviour and engage in high-risk, perilous activities. Salavera and Usán (2021) have observed that the writing of female students frequently centres on personal experiences and interpersonal connections, while male students' writing tends to delve into broader topics and occurrences.

Numerous studies have been conducted in the past few decades on the social construction of masculinity, how male adolescents observe how they and their peers exhibit heteronormative masculinity, and the many ways that these limiting constructions may influence male writers' attitudes and performance (Abdelmohsen, 2022; Camacho et al., 2021; Hansen, 2001; Lee, 2013; Saraswati & Andini, 2022). Upon uncovering empirical evidence in the early 21st century of gender differences in student writing, Peterson (2001) conducted a survey of educators to ascertain their attributions to the phenomena mentioned above. He provided an explanation that the observed variations were solely attributable to developmental processes. It was postulated that children, particularly males, were deficient in comprehending diverse perspectives. According to Dittmar (1989), it was their belief that children lacked the cognitive ability to create original gender roles and relationships in their writing. As a result, they continued to reinforce outdated stereotypes. If the assertions made by Peterson (2001) and Dittmar (1989) are valid, that writing is a cognitive process that mirrors personal growth, then it is perplexing why there is a uniform and extensive dissemination of developmental trends in children's writing across various countries. Students in educational contexts recognise society's standards and are willing to question restricting expectations, which is consistent with the idea that gender stereotypes in student writing indicate that writing is highly affected by societal norms. As a result, how children feel about using writing to communicate non-stereotypical gender implications and what characteristics of each sex they feel comfortable expressing are significant issues to be

talked about together with the information I got from the interview.

However, only a small number of the people in my study thought writing was a "feminine" thing to do when they were younger. All of my participants were male adolescents in university, so it is possible that they were less affected by or better able to resist gender constructions related to writing and school engagement than male adolescents who did not care enough about school to make it to university. This could explain why many of my questions about gender attitudes and expectations about writing during their school years did not resonate with many of my participants. Because many of my participants attended schools where writing was widely promoted and seen as very important, everyone could write well. Several of the writers I know kept writing because their friends told them to. At the end of this part, I will share a few of their statements to give you a fuller idea of what they went through.

When it came to writing, other male adolescents either did not notice or were able to get past gender bias. For example, Abdila said, "Yes, I feel that as a man, it is more difficult to write because the focus is divided, and I feel that writing requires full focus and is difficult to be accompanied by other work/tasks". This is in line with the statement by Maulana, a student who has always had trouble putting his ideas on paper, who told me, "As a man, it is not too difficult to write; it is just that laziness is an obstacle." He thought, "Maybe yes, because women choose more fantasy than men." But he could not say for sure why he thought this. He said, "Not all, but most," hinting that he now thought the other point of view was racist. Maulana has a hard time understanding this question. He told me that even though he thinks writing is "a lot easier" for women, he knows a lot of women and girls who "cannot write at all," as well as many men, like his classmate, who are great writers.

"It is not just a matter of writing because what I feel now is that, in the current era, women are more dominant in terms of doing assignments diligently, and it can be concluded that yes, women can be faster than men," he said, "but now, I mean, there is Tere Liye and a lot of other male writers." He told me that he had to read some novels in the Indonesian language in his leisure time that involved acting out the story. Maulana's increased respect for male writers is probably due to what he learned in university.

Unlike Abdilla and Maulana, some of the participants in my study did not notice any pressures or standards based on their gender in their writing activities or results.

Some participants who answered said they learned about gender stereotypes and how to write them in high school, but they said that did not stop them. When I asked Ahmad if he ever felt pushed to do his work according to gender norms in school, he told me,

"In general, the difficulty of writing is not related to one's gender. Writing skills can be influenced by factors such as education, experience, interests, and writing habits. As individuals, there may be differences in preference and writing power, but not significantly for gender."

Ahmad did not notice any gender bias when he wrote about his feelings: "No, because every woman must have bad writing, including men." He believes that male and female adolescents have the same difficulties, so no one is more dominant than others.

Many of these male adolescents, like Dani, may have been safe from the bad effects of traditional ideas of manhood because they were sure of themselves and went to schools that welcomed all genders. He said that

"For the current system, there may be a balance between men and women, but the method of implementing the learning system is different for men and women. How do I carry out the learning? Do they (men) enjoy it, or vice versa? Because the ways of men and women are different, either from their point of view or how to enjoy learning."

We might not notice these effects if we are too wrapped up in our culture. Many participants who answered my interview may have unintentionally shown that their schools did not have gender norms.

Personal Challenges of Male Adolescents in Writing

Some of my participants told me that physical illness and problems with their handwriting, writing worry, and having trouble putting their thoughts into words were all problems that had affected their writing for many years. Teachers may be able to help students who do not want to write if they are aware of the problems they face.

Rahman told me that he would rather write than talk because "my difficulty when it comes to writing is to focus too much on one point or topic so that it causes much time to be wasted giving ideas or ideas in one sentence, theme, or picture so that others do not have time or do not get enough explanation." He has had a stutter for as long as he can remember. I did not know that Rahman stuttered during our two-hour conversation. He told me that he has learned to time his speech and plan his words so that they flow smoothly.

Ahmad, like Rahman, has had focus problems that have made writing hard. He stated, "My difficulty in writing is that when I want to start it, I am often confused about how to start writing. Then, in the order of supporting ideas in my writing, I often write random things in that section that are still related to the main idea." Besides, grammar accuracy and vocabulary knowledge are also claimed as big obstacles in writing. Rahman said, "My difficulty in writing is arranging grammar correctly. The lack of variety in vocabulary that I know is also a personal difficulty for me in writing." He thought that if he had the time, he might try to learn basic English so that his performance in writing would be much better. Rahman had specific advice for his younger self if he could return in time. He said, "I would go back to elementary school, and I wish I could go back in time and learn it and work on my writing for longer. He said that if he does not take his time when writing, he tends to highlight difficult words and more advanced grammar." Maulana still has trouble with grammar and spelling, but his self-discipline helps him write the papers required in writing class.

The Roles of Teachers and Classrooms

Some of my results, like how vital loving and valued teachers are for male adolescents in school (Calp, 2020; Fukuoka & Takita-Ishii, 2022; Milton et al., 2001), have been written about a lot. Almost all of my answers stressed how vital each teacher is. Teachers have been remembered with thankfulness and appreciation, from Maulana's mastery of structures, which helped him learn how to write an essay, to Ahmad's knowledge of structures, which helped him learn how to write a paragraph, to Rizky and Rahman's teachers encouraging them to use their imaginations and be creative. Also, many studies (Leonardo & Boas, 2021; Peercy et al., 2019; Toropova et al., 2021) have found no link between the gender of a teacher and the stories people tell about essential teachers. Barksdale et al. (2021) say that students like it when their teachers care about them and the classroom is friendly. Because this was such a constant finding, I will go into more detail

here to show how the participants' teachers and school groups affected them.

Bonell et al. (2019) say that several studies show direct support is given to the theory of human functioning and school structure, and it is argued that secondary school students' sense of belonging in the classroom may be a particularly protective aspect. According to theory, impoverished students are frequently more influenced by the effects of education on risk. From what I have seen, students' comments about their writing experiences show how important it is to make the classroom a nice place. Maulana said that a classroom where "the class situation looks fun with feedback or input and the use of other media in terms of learning keeps us as students from getting bored and monotonous because writing is a form of learning that focuses on time and effective sentences so that students can easily understand it." If there are some problems, distress, and unexpected things, in the end, we are all trying to help each other.

Moreover, if one person falls, another will help them up; if you fall, the same thing will happen to you. Rahman was moved when his tutor led a class talk about strengthening thesis statements. "So far, in my opinion, the class situation is good; learning is not too tense and relaxed," he told me. After hearing Ahmad talk about his essay writing class, Rahman said, "That was just brilliant." The classroom had become a place where people worked together, "we just talked a lot", and where ideas were made, shared, and built upon.

Abdila has said more than once that he does not understand why most of the real writing in university does not happen in class. University has been a "slap in the face" because, unlike high school,

"I think my class is still quite passive in writing class. Sometimes, this is influenced by the topic being discussed, which is foreign, so it takes time to digest, or it is also influenced by the way friends explain the material during the presentation session. I think it goes back to each other."

Studies by Graham (2019) agree with Abdila's focus on the importance of social aspects of writing. The class should be more active so that the motivation to learn will be better. Almost everyone who participated in the study said that a certain teacher interested them in writing and schooling. Abdila said of a teacher who had become a friend and whose classroom was where a group of children hung out after school,

"The teacher's role itself was quite helpful in improving my writing skills. However, I feel like I want the teacher in question to not only convey theory but also provide examples of his writings and explain them step by step when writing an essay. Where did he get the idea, and how did he organise every paragraph he wrote? I would be quite happy if this could be demonstrated in a video tutorial if it is impossible to demonstrate during class time."

Maulana said he wanted to thank many teachers in person for helping him. His last point was,

"Teachers can help students develop writing skills by providing clear and constructive feedback, motivating students to write more often, and providing useful guidance. Good input for teachers is to provide specific feedback and provide opportunities for students to practice writing regularly."

Having those kinds of teachers made it clear that my participants became interested

in writing and, in the end, volunteered for my study. My participants could quickly tell which teachers cared about their students and which ones were going through the motions. Rahman said of his lecturer, "The role of the teacher or lecturer in guiding this course has been very good by providing reviews and many additions after the discussion." Similarly, Ahmad said that his favourite teachers "are not just teaching; it would be nice if the teacher not only teaches but can motivate students to be more active in writing." These male adolescents could tell the difference between their teachers, who were supportive, and those who did not seem to care about anything but hitting a time clock and getting paid.

Reflection on the Gender Gap in the Writing Practice and Identity Experienced by Male University Students

I tried different ways to present my research and quickly realised that the topic of male adolescents' writing experiences has so many moving parts that any attempt at a new approach would result in an outline that connects in nearly infinite ways. Should, for example, love be seen as a part of creation or a part of male adolescents' identities as writers, as I have decided? My participants will soon think of many more ways to talk about these things concerning each other. A clear link between creative flow and provocative comedy can be seen in the case of male adolescents' literary identities.

I finished this study by sharing what a group of male adolescents had to say about a topic that kept coming up in my writing classes over the years: the social nature of writing, which can be a fun way for people to talk with each other. This makes me think of other writing groups I have taught, conversations I have had with male adolescents over a long time for this project, and how my present students interact with each other. Those of us who want all students to enjoy and find writing challenging should never lose sight of how crucial it is that both male and female adolescents do this when they write. Every teacher can encourage their students to write for the good of society as a whole. Every boy, every girl, and every level of reading can also set up situations and attitudes that encourage our children to use their literacy skills in personally meaningful and satisfying ways, even when they are not around their parents, teachers, or other children. Given the findings of this research, it seems that there is a significant difference across disciplines in terms of various elements of the way teachers approach the classroom, especially when the dynamic between disciplines and gender is taken into account.

CLOSING

The gender gap between male and female adolescent writers is a problem that needs to be addressed to understand the gender gap in writing better. This study aimed to discover how male adolescents connect their writing experiences, their knowledge and subjectivity, and the gender gaps they see in their writing development. My research confirmed that societal norms significantly impact writing by revealing a variety of students' awareness of writing-related gender stereotypes in the classroom and the factors that affect male adolescents' capacity to express themselves in writing. The results of this research revealed that there are significant differences across disciplines in terms of various elements of the way teachers approach the classroom, especially when the dynamic between disciplines and gender is taken into account. Moreover, some of my results challenge widely held and widely spread ideas about male writers and the writing process. However, after talking to my subjects and reading our interviews, I was sure that gender might not be a helpful way to examine male writing problems in school. Gender norms and ideology did not have the same impact on everyone in my study. Hence, comprehending more about the writing identities of male adolescents and affording them a platform to express themselves is imperative. Moreover,

it is imperative to acquire further knowledge and understanding regarding the policies and practices that can aid in mitigating the gender achievement disparity in writing proficiency. While employing appropriate methodologies to ensure dependable outcomes, it is essential to interpret my research findings cautiously because of the study's limitations, such as the small sample size; similar studies should be conducted with a larger sample size in the future so that findings may be confirmed and expanded upon.

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