PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY STUDENTS IN ONLINE *CREATIVE WRITING* CLASS AND THE SOLUTIONS

Denny Satrya Andy Nugraha [1], Listyani[2]
[1] English Language Education Program, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga, Indonesia
112017037@student.uksw.edu
[2] English Language Education Program, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga, Indonesia
listyani.listyani@uksw.edu

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the problems faced by the students in online Creative Writing class and the solutions to overcome those problems. Thus, the research questions of this study are "What are the problems that are faced by the students in online Creative Writing class?" and "How do the students overcome the problems?" Twenty-three participants were involved in this study which used a mix of open-ended and closed-ended items in the questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The participants were 2020 students of ELEP, UKSW, Indonesia. From the data from the study, it was found that the problems faced by the students in their online Creative Writing class were the course materials, bad internet connection, students' motivation, and teachers' unclear explanations. Besides that, there were also four strategies used by the students to faced their difficulties such as, finding better connections, asking friends or lecturers, doing self-motivation, and learning the material after class. The findings from this study are expected to be helpful for teachers to know the problems faced by the students in online Creative Writing classes.

Keywords: *Creative Writing, online lass, online learning, problems, solutions*

Writing is one of the four main skills in English learning. It has always been seen as an important and must-developed skill in EFL classes. Writing is a demanding skill since learners have to think in their language and translate their thoughts into English sentences. Herdi (2015) stated that writing is one of the productive skills that might be complex for teachers and students since several aspects should be achieved. This means writing skills are important to be mastered since it is a part of the four main skills in learning the English language.

This year, many schools and universities are using online learning as an alternative to face-to-face interaction in learning because starting from March 2020, the world has been facing a pandemic situation. Online learning had already been introduced as the alternative teaching and learning process before the pandemic began. Over the past two decades, online learning has been used in global institutes (Mahyoob, 2020). Yang and Cornelius (2004) stated that due to the fast development of the Internet, many educational fields offered online courses as a feasible alternative to face-to-face interaction. Also, online applications were used by every teacher to teach their students online. Technology was upgraded time by time, e-learning was becoming well-known and is increasingly being used these days in teaching, for example in writing.

In an English Language Education Program (ELEP), of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia, there are four writing courses and each level is a requirement for taking the next writing course. The course names are *Creative Writing, Procedural Writing, Professional Narrative Writing, Writing for the Media,* and the last course is *Academic Writing*.

When the pandemic situation started in March 2020, in English Language Education Program, all the teaching and learning processes were conducted online including the teaching and learning of *the Creative Writing* course. On the other hand, some of the students in this course faced some difficulties during the semester. Therefore, e-learning or online learning also showed some problems in the writing context. For example, the students' writing is difficult to understand because of the unstructured sentences (Bakeer, 2018). Another problem is, online writing takes a lot of resources like Internet connection and devices that usually appear in every student. Rana, Rajiv, and Lal (2014) stated that online learning resources that meet the users' requirements need to be upgraded.

Considering the problems in this course, this study aimed to know the problems faced by the students in online *Creative Writing*. Based on the significance of this study, the writer also expected this study could be useful for teachers and students to know and overcome the problems that appeared in online *Creative Writing* classes. Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions:
1. What are the problems that are faced by the students in online *Creative Writing* Classes?
2. How do the students overcome the problems?

Writing Skills

There are four primary skills in learning English that students must achieve. Those skills are writing, listening, reading, and speaking. There are some skills that EFL students need to master in writing. Those skills are vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Writing is often considered an optical representative of conversation. According to Komariyah (2015) writing presents writers' concepts to understand an issue that is shown to the public. The writing was also considered as an active text creation that involves the hand transcription skills such as handwriting, punctuation, spelling, and so on. Kent (2016), as cited in Berninger, Garcia, & Abbott (2002) stated that the aid of self-regulation during the writing process in transcription abilities can be affected by functional writing skills. Furthermore, to achieve good writing skills students must learn diligently. Developing language learning skills is not like the construction of a wall, but like the growth of a plant, taking its own time (Durga and Rao, 2018, p.3).

The Definition of Creative Writing

Creative writing can be defined as free writing. Creative writing may be defined as writing that involves the writer's imagination and creativity (Manara, 2015). *Creative Writing* is a course in which the writer is an artist of his/herself and connected; therefore their writing is connected to their life. Creative writing is an art and the writer is an artist although they need to be connected between writing and life (Mokhtari, 2015). *Creative Writing* allows the students to choose or use their method or subject in writing. In this course, the students can think freely and creatively in producing a product which is writing. Creative writing is an opportunity or chance to free your imagination (Mokhtari, 2015). According to Harshini (2020), Creative Writing helps students in various levels of language skills such as grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, and discourse. This means in this course, the students also can develop their language skills.

In an English Language Education Program (ELEP) of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia, Creative Writing is one of the writing courses which is offered to students in their first year of study. In this class, the students must think to write creatively. This course's objective is to equip

the learner with knowledge and practice of writing several kinds of poems about relationships, biography, and a short story about an unforgettable moment in a creative way.

The Definition of Online Learning

According to Bartley and Golek (2004), flexible learning can be referred to as part of the learning collection in online learning. Online learning or distance learning is becoming popular these days especially for the flexibility of the learning process through the Internet and it almost changes our lives in doing something. According to Nguyen (2015) online learning has significantly changed almost all of our lives by the internet. Furthermore, according to Stern (n.d. p.1) "online learning is education that takes place over the Internet". This means students can use the online platform to complete their homework or attend a class. Additionally, Mayes and Frietas (2004) state that it is interactions between teachers to students or one student to another student in an online environment. It means the flexibility of learning in E-learning can be useful to teachers and students in the learning process.

Problems in Online Learning

There are several problems that students face in writing class during *Creative Writing* online class. The concept of E-learning in education also changes some of the components in the learning process. All components of teaching and learning are changed in online education, especially in higher education. (Kebritchi, Lipschuetz, and Santiague, 2016). Also, online learning has limitations in the learning process, for example, teachers and students cannot do face-to-face teaching in class. "In online learning, one does not have the opportunity to have face to face interaction with the teacher which is very significant for establishing a bond between the student and the teacher." (Dhull and Sakshi, 2017 p.33). Then, there are limitations in E-learning such as anxiety, lack of quality, and poor communication in face-to-face terms.

Research Method
Context of the Study

The research was conducted in an English Language Education Program (ELEP), of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. In *Creative Writing* class, Academic Year of 2020/2021 of English Language Education Program. Therefore, this course was selected because it was conducted by using an online platform and it was started on the first-year course of the batch of 2020 students. Other than that, the students did not have much exposure to the English language other than the third and fourth-year students.

Participants of the Study

They were twenty-three participants were from the four *Creative Writing* classes which used online learning in Semester I 2020/2021 Academic Year. Four *Creative Writing* classes consisted of 14 to 15 students in each class. The respondents of the study were the new students that represented the all of students of batch 2020 who were taking *Creative Writing* in the first year and were willing to fill the questionnaire that the researcher sent to their email.

Research Instrument

This study used a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions in the questionnaire to collect data on students' difficulties and the solutions to the problem that they faced during the online *Creative Writing* class throughout the semester. The participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire. There were eight questions in the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of questions about the students' difficulties in the online *Creative Writing* class and their solutions in encountering the problems. The questions were made by the researcher himself, the items of the questionnaire were to know the students' problems and their solutions to face the problems during the online classes.

Data Collection Procedures

There were several steps to collect the data. First, the questionnaire was piloted to three of 2018 and 2019 students who had taken *Creative Writing* class in the previous year to check the comprehension and clarity

in answering each question. After piloting the questionnaire, the researcher asked permission from the lecturers of the *Creative Writing* course for collecting the data in his/her class. Second, the questionnaire was distributed to the ELEP students who had taken their *Creative Writing* class at the end of Semester I of the 2020/2021 Academic Year.

Data Analysis Procedures

First, the researcher read the participants' answers to all questions in the questionnaire. The data were categorized into two sub-headings and categorized the data based on the focus of the research. Then, the researcher classified the data under the themes that have been created by the researcher. After analyzing the data from the questionnaire, the researcher concludes the discussion on the findings.

Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study are divided into two sub-headings, the problem faced by the students in online *Creative Writing* class and how the students overcome the problems in online *Creative Writing* class.

Students' Problems

After obtaining the result of data from the questionnaire, the researcher found that there were four problems that students faced during online *Creative Writing* class. The problems were course material, bad Internet connection, students' environment, and the teacher's unclear explanation.

Figure 1. The students' problems
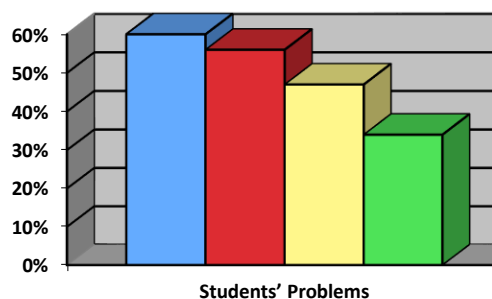
The Course Materials

The course materials were the biggest problem faced by the participants during the

online *Creative Writing* class. According to the data, the researcher found that 16 of 23 participants (69%) agreed that they faced the same problems in understanding the course materials. They have to read and study again to understand the material given by the lecturers so they could do the assignment. Below are two statements from the participants. This problem was stated by Participants 14 and 19,

> Excerpt 1:
> "...I have to watch the video repeatedly given by the lecturer first, then I understand the lecturer's assignment." (Participant 14/Questionnaire on November 19, 2020).

> Excerpt 2:
> "Because with this kind of online class, I experienced difficulties in understanding the material provided so I had to study again so that I understood the material presented..." (Participant 19/Questionnaire on November 12, 2020).

Besides that, Participant 21 stated that understanding the material would be easier if the class was held offline or in a direct meeting.

> Excerpt 3:
> "Because I find it easier to understand the material through face-to-face meetings." (Participant 21/Questionnaire on November 23, 2020)

Hence, it can be concluded that the students felt that online *Creative Writing* class was difficult especially in understanding the course material. Moreover, in the online class, they had to take time to learn the course material again to be able to understand the material given by the lecturer. Thus, the students felt that offline class was better than online class in understanding the course material. According to Damayanti (2020) the

students may feel that online learning can not replace the offline learning experiences and is easy to understand in learning the materials.

Bad Internet Connection

In an online environment, Internet connection has become an important thing. These days, learning and teaching can be done online. The internet connection becomes the bridge between teaching and learning in online classes. Therefore, there may be problems in the learning process usually faced by the students, for example, the unstable or bad internet connection. Students in the online *Creative Writing* class also faced this kind of problem. According to the analysis of the data, around 13 students (56%) faced this problem. The problem was a poor signal and bad Internet connection. However, the students also have to pay more attention to the lecturer's explanation because of the unstable internet connection. Below were the statement from Participants 8, 12, and 13 about this problem.

Excerpt 4:
"In the online lecture system, sometimes the signals that support the online lectures make me feel difficult for me to reach the gap." (Participant 8/Questionnaire on November 16, 2020)
Excerpt 5:
"Because sometimes it requires a good network connection to follow the explanation well." (Participant 12/Questionnaire on November 18, 2020)
Excerpt 6:
"...There are some signal interference problems during virtual meet" (Participant 13/Questionnaire on November 19, 2020)

Thus, it can be concluded that a good Internet connection during online learning has become a necessary thing in the learning process." Lack of ICT knowledge, poor network infrastructure and weakness of content development were the main challenges of e-learning systems" (Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, and Althunibat, 2020 p.4 as cited from Aung and Khaing 2015).

Students' Motivation

Motivation is the key to learning. According to Filgona, Sakiyo, Gwany, and Okoronka (2020), motivation is the key to success in teaching-learning. In this part, students' motivation is another issue that was faced by the students in the online *Creative Writing* course. According to the data analysis, 11 (47%) students faced this problem. The students felt that they were bored and could not focus during the learning process and were not excited because it was an online class. Below are the two statements from Participants 3 and 11.

Excerpt 7:
"Because I was not excited beforehand online." (Participant 3/Questionnaire on November 16, 2020)
Excerpt 8:
"Because students will start to feel bored with learning online so they don't focus on lessons" (Participant 11/Questionnaire on November 16, 2020)

Besides that, one of the participants said that she felt less creative in writing because she was tired of online lectures.

Excerpt 9:
"Because tired with online lectures it makes me less creative in writing" (Participant 22/Questionnaire on November 23, 2020)

Therefore, it can be concluded that motivation has an important role in students' behavior in the study. Motivation is probably the most important factor that educators can target to improve learning (Vero and Puka, 2017 p.57 as cited from Olson, 1997). Therefore, in this case, lack of motivation made students not motivated in the learning process, specifically in online learning.

In the online *Creative Writing* class, according to the data, there were 11 students (47%) who felt that they were bored, less excited, and less creative. This problem occurred because of a lack of motivation by

the students themselves. Therefore, dealing with motivation was challenging these days, especially in an online class. The motivation for learning has become the main issue in education, and its drawback represents a decrease of quality in learning (Ferreira, Cardoso, and Abrantes, 2011)

Teachers' Unclear Explanations

For this part, the researcher found that there were 8 students (34%) who were dealing with the teacher's unclear explanation. This problem sometimes happened because of the unstable Internet connection, especially during virtual meetings. The students sometimes found it hard to understand what the teacher said when explaining the materials. The statements below were stated by Participants 4 and 20.

Excerpt 10:
"The delivery of the material is unclear which makes me have to repeat reading and watching learning videos." (Participant 4/ Questionnaire on November 16, 2020).

Excerpt 11:
"....it is difficult for some materials that need explanation and with our situation of online learning, it is difficult to understand the explanation given by the lecturer…." (Participant 20/ Questionnaire on November 23, 2020).

On the other hand, one of the students, Participant 18, said that he was confused because the teacher was not clear enough to give the instructions to the students. The statement below was stated by Participant 18.

Excerpt 12:
"Sometimes I am still confused with the assignment instructions given by the lecturer...." (Participant 18/ Questionnaire on November 19, 2020).

Hence, the teacher's unclear explanation has become the main issue in online learning. In line with that, Sidelinger (2010) in his research stated that the teacher's clarity could enhance the students' perceptions of teacher instructional competence, and it is an important component in facilitating students learning. Other than that, it can be a problem in online learning. It usually occurs because of an unstable Internet connection. The bad connection and students' understanding are the drawbacks in implementing the learning (Rasmitadila, Aliyyah, Rachmadtullah, Samsudin, Syaodih, Nurtanto, and Tambunan, 2020). Therefore, when the clarity of teachers in giving instruction was not clear, it became another challenge that was faced by the students in their online learning, especially in this *Creative Writing* class.

Solutions to Overcome the Problems

Under this sub-heading, the solutions done by the students who had faced the various challenges in the previous parts such as the course materials, bad internet connection, students' motivation, and teacher's unclear explanations are discussed further. Based on the data analysis, the researcher found that the solutions that the students used in this online *Creative Writing* class were to find better connections, asking friends or lecturers, doing self-motivation, and learn the materials after the class.

Figure 2. The solutions to overcome the problems
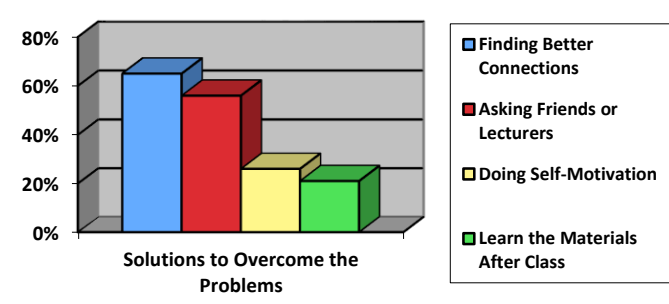
1. Finding Better Connections

The first solution that the students mentioned was to find a better connection. From the data, there were 15 out of 23 (65%) students solved their Internet connection problem by finding a better connection. To overcome this problem, the students were usually looking for a better Internet connection to attend the online class. The students also used Wi-Fi instead of their mobile data to overcome the Internet

connection problem. The statements below were stated by Participants 7, 13, and 17.

> Excerpt 13
> "Using WIFI with a good quality network….". (Participant 7/Questionnaire on November 16, 2020)
> Excerpt 14
> "Make sure that the internet signal is supported before the virtual meet, and record any explanations the teacher gives through the learning video or virtual meet". (Participant 13/Questionnaire on November 19, 2020)
> Excerpt 15:
> "Find a place with a fast internet connection". (Participant 17/Questionnaire on November 19, 2020)

Besides that, one of the students (Participant 11) said that she went to an Internet cafe to attend the online class instead of using her mobile data or internet data.

> Excerpt 16:
> " I had to go to an Internet cafe to get a better network". (Participant 11/Questionnaire on November 18, 2020)

Thus, 15 out of 23 students (65%) solved their Internet connection problem by changing their Internet connection or using Wi-Fi for a better connection. Also, one of the participants, Participant 11 stated that she overcame the problem by going to an Internet cafe. Ideally, students must have a good Internet connection to attend this online class. However, many students faced a bad internet connection during these online classes. Therefore, to solve the problem, the students had to change their internet connection into a better one. Using better connections was a good solution since it is needed for assessing online learning. Better bandwidth or a good Internet connection is needed for online learning (Saminathan, 2020). Also, online learning needs tools to make it run smoothly (Dhull and Arora, 2019).

2. Asking Friends or Lecturers

The second solution that the researcher got from the analysis of the data 13 of 23 (56%) students said that they asked their friends or lecturers when facing difficulties in the course materials. The students usually asked their friends or even contacted their lecturer through *WhatsApp* chat or groups to ask the materials that still confused them. The statement below was stated by Participants 11, 14, and 20.

> Excerpt 17:
> "I sometimes ask the lecturer when I have difficulty studying". (Participant 11/Questionnaire on November 18, 2020)
> Excerpt 18:
> "Usually I overcome these difficulties by asking my friends". (Participant 14/Questionnaire on November 19, 2020)
> Excerpt 19:
> "Asking my friends or teachers using *WhatsApp* chat". (Participant 20/Questionnaire on November 23, 2020)

Besides that, another method that the students used was not only asking their lecturer but also asking their seniors as mentioned by Participant 4.

> Excerpt 20:
> "....asking my lecturer and seniors …." (Participant 4/Questionnaire on November 16, 2020)

Having a problem in understanding the course materials was one of the problems, especially in online *Creative Writing* class. Therefore, 13 out of 23 (56%) students used the same method to overcome that problem. Asking their lecturer was a good way to overcome a problem in understanding the course material. The use of asking questions allows students to understand the topic, create the idea, and become aware of things they do or do not know (Chin and Osborne, 2008). The use of SNS, for instance, WhatsApp chat or groups can help the students to overcome this problem. WhatsApp media is an application that is often used in online learning (Suriyani, Djamdjuri and Kamilah, 2020 as cited in Army, 2014). They can share

their ideas with other students or even shared them with the lecturer. That is why asking friends or lecturers is a good solution that students should do if they facing a problem in understanding the course material. The students also can ask or contact the lecturer for help if they do not know the materials (Sun and Chen, 2016).

3. Do Self-motivation

In this part, the researcher found that 6 of 23 students (26%) overcame their motivation problem in the learning process by motivating themselves and fully concentrated on doing their assessment. Also, the students used to increase their enthusiasm in the study, so they could follow the learning process. The statement below was stated by Participants 13 and 15.

> Excerpt 21:
> "Stay focused on learning activities and keep pushing yourself to fight feelings of laziness." (Participant 13/Questionnaire on November 19, 2020)
> Excerpt 22:
> "Because we learn from home, sometimes I feel lazy. So I have to increase my enthusiasm in following the lessons." (Participant 15/Questionnaire on November 19, 2020)

Other than that, one of the students said that if this lecturer gave a short deadline, he should motivate himself to finish his assignment given by his lecturer.

> Excerpt 23:
> "I have to intend because feeling lazy and bored must exist. Then I saw the deadline too. For example, if the deadline is tomorrow, I have to stay all night." (Participant 6 /Questionnaire on November 16, 2020)

Motivation is the key to the learning process, especially in online learning. Filgona et. al (2020) stated that motivation is the key to success in teaching and learning. Therefore, the way the students forced themself to learn and focused on the study had become the motivation for them to follow the learning process in an online environment, especially in this *Creative Writing* class.

The students' self-motivation occurred from the students' will in learning their study. Students' motivation can be seen or appear from their behavior in learning (Fligona et. al, 2020). Thus, doing self-motivation is the best way to overcome the problem of lack of motivation in the learning process. Self-motivation takes an important part in online learning (Saminathan, 2020). Self-motivation is a necessary thing for the students to build their interest in learning (Odanga, 2018 as cited from Ryan and Deci, 2000).

4. Learn the Materials After Class

There were 16 of 23 students (69%) who faced problems with the course material. Therefore, to solve that problem the students usually learned the material again after the class was held. There were 5 of 23 (21%) students who overcame the problem by practicing or learning the material after the class. The students used to practice the material by themselves and try to find it by using the internet platforms. The statement below was sated by Students 7, 9, and 12

> Excerpt 24:
> "Reread the assignment given, think carefully, and look for references." (Participant 7/ Questionnaire on November 16, 2020)
> Excerpt 25:
> "I have to train myself self-taught in my studies and have to study even harder so that if there is a signal barrier later I won't miss my lessons." (Participant 9/ Questionnaire on November 16, 2020)
>
> Excerpt 26:
> "Find out the material on YouTube or Google." (Participant 12/ Questionnaire on November 18, 2020/ translated by the researcher)

There are many ways to solve problems in the course material, for instance practicing before and after class, looking on the internet, and asking lecturers or friends. Therefore, in this finding, the students used to

face the problem in course materials by reviewing or practicing the materials again after class. They also use Internet platforms such as YouTube and Google to find the particular material they did not understand. The use of internet platforms such as YouTube and Google can be great resources for the students in learning the materials. Internet and YouTube were great potential language learning resources (Maziriri, Gapa, and Chuchu, 2020 p.122)

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate students' problems and the solutions to overcome the problems in online *Creative Writing* classes. To investigate the students' problems and solutions, an open-ended and close-ended item questionnaire was used to obtain the quantitative data.

Writing is one of the four skills that should be mastered by the students. However, in the way learners master the writing skills, there may be some difficulties faced by the students especially in the online class, online *Creative Writing* class.

This research focused on two big parts. The first part is the students' difficulties and the second one is the students' solution to overcome the problems. For the first part, the researcher found that they faced four major problems during the online *Creative Writing* class. The four problems that the students faced in this online class are the course material (69%), bad Internet connection (56%), students' motivation (47%), and teachers' unclear explanations (34%).

The second part discussed the students' solutions in facing the problems in online *Creative Writing* class. Based on the previously mentioned problems, the data about how the students overcame or faced the problems were analyzed. There were four solutions that the students usually did to face the problems during the online class. The first method was finding a better connection (65%). This method was done by changing the network connection, going to an Internet cafe, and finding a better connection.

The second method was asking friends or lecturers (56%). The students usually asked their friends and lecturers or even their seniors about things that they did not know about particular course material. The third method was self-motivation (26%). The students forced themselves to learn the material that they did not understand as their self-motivation. The last solution that the researcher found based on the data analysis was to learn the material after class (21%). This method was done by the students by looking for explanations about a particular material they did not understand through the internet platform such as Google and YouTube. Those solutions were done by the students, so they were able to survive during the online classes.

The results from this study are hoped to be beneficial for the students who faced the same problem during online learning. The findings of this study were specifically the students' problems and solutions to face the problems in online *Creative Writing* class in an English Language Education Program (ELEP), of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia.

There were several limitations related to this study. This study was conducted on a small scale. There were only 23 students that were involved in this study but surely it can be developed for a larger number of participants. For further study, the researcher believes that it will be great if other researchers will do researches with a similar topic to find out other problems and solutions in online *Writing* classes. Therefore, it will be better if future researchers use questionnaires and interviews to collect more specific and richer data.

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