# Language Expressions of High School Students on Covid-19

Edi Dwi Riyanto[1]
(Corresponding author)
Universitas Airlangga Surabaya

Christinawati[2]
Universitas Airlangga Surabaya

**Abstract:- Early 2020, unexpectedly, the world was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The world of education has also been greatly affected. Students are forced to study from home for extended periods of time and in increased uncertainty. Various problems arise, ranging from the atmosphere at home to the child's mental self. Broadly speaking, the problems arising from the Covid-19 pandemic: 1) have been reported in the mass media in the form of various difficulties in doing assignments during the study from home, both problems with an internet connection, absence of direct companions, unsupportive home atmosphere, and online workload; and 2) possible long-term problems that have been reported in various studies related to the long-term impact of the pandemic, namely, psychiatric disorders (i.e., stress and trauma). This research discusses student writing that reveals problems in the form of creative writing which is the result of community service activities by the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga in 2020. Expressive creative writing allows bad experiences to be expressed and becomes a path to catharsis to reduce the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by high school students.**

*Keywords:- Pandemic, Covid-19, Stress, Creative Writing for Healing.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2020, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which was unexpected. The outbreak, which started in China, spread so quickly that in less than three months, the WHO called the situation a pandemic. Indonesia is one of the countries heavily infected by this kind of virus which has impacted various sectors during the pandemic. Various problems arise, ranging from home problems to mental and educational problems experienced by high school children. Jannah (2020), a reporter for the online news site Tirto.co.id, summarizes the various problems students experience when studying from home:

1. The atmosphere of the house is not supportive, i.e., too crowded, too narrow. Thus, they often do not have enough spirit of doing the task.

2. There are students who are already used to being accompanied by a teacher and will panic when they lose the teacher figure. When he encounters difficulties while doing assignments, students become annoyed because they do not know who to ask.

3. Sometimes the selected application is not appropriate, or even not available to students.

4. Apart from application problems, the internet connection is even inadequate in some areas.

5. Internet connection must be met by students. In this case, not all students can afford to buy a sufficient amount of quota.

6. Some students also said that they had too many assignments. Sometimes they pile up at the same time.

A drastic change from studying at school to being at home accompanied by prolonged uncertainty can cause stressful conditions for students. A number of studies have shown that the pandemic caused anxiety in 24% of people in the UK (Rubin, Amlot, et al., 2009 in Taylor, S., 2019). American students who were preparing for college selection also experience anxiety, accounting for 83% of the sample surveyed (Kanadiya & Sallar, 2011). The anxiety that arises is not only caused by the possibility of being infected but also by the social impact of being infected itself, namely in the form of rejection or exclusion by the community (Cheng, Wong, et al., 2004). The disruption caused by the reported prolonged pandemic can be said to be quite serious. The long-term impacts that occur are depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Taylor, 2019). Taylor also reports memories of close people who have fallen victim to the pandemic, exacerbating symptoms of the disorder.

In September-October 2020, the Faculty of Cultural Sciences carried out community service with the aim of reducing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred among high school students. The activity focused on expressive writing training for high school teachers with the aim that these teachers were able to assist students in writing down experiences during the pandemic. This article examines how high school students express their experiences during the pandemic by looking at the structure of student work.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Because there are three kinds of student works, namely poetry, short stories, and pictures, it was decided that the analysis was carried out in two stages: an element analysis according to each genre and an analysis of the prominent patterns that connected the story with the pandemic.

Theoretically, the student's work can still be debated whether it can be called a literary work. However, the focus of this study is to analyze the type of expressive writing and its potential and benefits for the healing process of mental problems. Therefore, literary theories are used to help understand the students' works, not to assess the level of literature. Therefore, the theory used here emphasizes more on how the students' writing is related to the pandemic of COVID-19.

Expressive writing is a technique of writing briefly for about 15-20 minutes every day for 3 or 4 days by expressing experiences that disturb the mind or emotions (Pennebaker and Smyth 2016). Writing for therapy is part of expressive art for therapy that is increasingly getting the attention of experts in various fields, such as education and self-development (Mazza, 2011). Mazza also said that research on writing for therapy is mostly focused on poetry, especially the language, symbols, and stories conveyed. Psychological studies from humanistic and cognitive-behavior approaches also study writing for therapy. Mazza noted that in life, many people who have survived the tragedy of their life then undertake writing activities as part of an effort to release emotional burdens, rebuild human relationships, and remember and honor those closest to them who have died. Creative writing for therapy is characterized by expressing feelings or personal experiences through exploratory and expressive processes (Bolton 2011).

A person is very likely to experience things that are disturbing and unpleasant. Even tragic and sad experiences can occur. Deep grief needs to be expressed so that catharsis is possible (Ryden 2010; Kearney 2007; Richards 2007). The disclosure of these feelings can help the writer overcome the negative impact of his own thoughts and feelings. The title of the first chapter of Bolton's book (2011) is 'Becoming Our Own Shaman, Introduction to Therapeutic Writing' which explains and invites the reader that humans have the ability to understand themselves and others through art to express feelings and become self-healing. Bolton's statement is supported by various previous studies which state that writing can relieve stress and anxiety (Anderson and MacCurdy, 2000) and writing can significantly have a therapeutic or healing effect (Help the Hospices, 2005).

Two psychologists, James Pennebaker and John Evans (2014) wrote a book based on various academic research about the benefits of writing for therapy. Pennebaker emphatically states that research evidence strongly supports the notion that writing can be an effective method for dealing with trauma and emotional problems. This is because writing is able to express anger, fear, anxiety, and oppression to be communicated so that self-understanding can be obtained (Staricoff 2004). Writing can be a self-reflection on death, love, and a very heavy loss (Steel, 2010).

The forms of therapeutic written expression may vary, e.g., poems, short stories, and diaries. Poetry is not just a channel of one's emotions but is an emotional odyssey from one thought to another (Hedges, 2005). The odyssey can come to an answer to a problem or end up in self-awareness of the inability to get an answer. The most important thing is self-disclosure, not problem-solving.

According to Marinella (2017), there are various processes that occur where making expressive writing can be therapeutic. However, in general, the usual process is as follows:
1. The author has experienced or is currently experiencing a deep sense of grief;
2. The author does not let his grief be felt only by himself, but decides to reveal it;
3. The author reminisces and collects pieces of grief;
4. The author interprets and tries to understand the grief that happened to him;
5. The author expresses his sad story in written form and then finds a foothold in the process of revival.
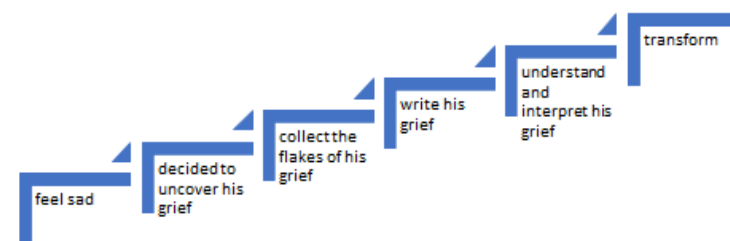


Figure 1. Stages of Writing for Healing adapted from Marinella's writings.

Marinella emphasizes that the final part of this process is not only healing but the process of transformation from grief to resurrection. Thus, grief should not drown or destroy, but instead can be a stepping stone towards improving one's quality.

## III. METHOD

The data taken in this study is very specific, namely in the form of the works of high school students collected as part of a series of community services by the Faculty of Cultural Sciences. The community service team of the Faculty of Cultural Sciences conducted training for high school teachers under the topic of expressive writing.

During the training, it was also explained to the participants how to apply the knowledge they had acquired during the event. It was done by assisting students until they succeeded in writing out their feelings about Covid-19, either in the form of poetry, short stories, or others. At the end of the program, a total of 55 students' works were collected. The works consisted of poetry, short stories, and graphic posters. All of these works express the students' feelings of tension, anxiety, and others.

The works were the main data of this current research. Because the writers were not professional writers, the quality of works was not the focus of attention in this context. The primary concern of this research was to know how high school students expressed their feeling regarding

the Covid-19 pandemic. The main question of this paper was at what stage the student's writing was based on the expressive writing stage presented by Marinella (2017).

The collected data were then analyzed for its structure with the following steps:

a. Genre classification. Students' works were classified based on the form of their work, e.g., poems, short stories, and other forms.

b. Structural analysis. Students' works were analyzed for their structure, i.e., plots, characterizations, themes, and language style.

c. Relationship with Covid-19. This step identified the relationship between the existing elements related to COVID-19 and identified the stages of writing based on Marinella's theory (2017).

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By adopting the concept of stages proposed by Marinella, the following results are obtained:

All writings have reached the 4th stage, which is writing grief. Thus, it can be assumed that all writers have gone beyond the stage of feeling, deciding to uncover, and collecting pieces of grief. Therefore, the analysis carried out in this context is identifying whether the writings are only at that stage or whether they have reached the next stage, namely understanding and interpreting grief; or maybe even higher, namely transforming into a better condition.

*Writing sorrow*

This stage shows that the writers describe their grief, but has not yet reached the stage of meaning. Starting from the genre aspect, the majority of these works express deep sadness. From the whole work consisting of poetry, short stories, pictures, to essays, it narrows down to one main point: grief.

The grief that is manifested through these various works also has various causes. There is the grief of being isolated during the isolation of the pandemic, the grief of losing his freedom suddenly, the grief of having to adapt to a new routine, the grief of loss, and the grief of fearing tomorrow.

Several writings contain optimism and hope from this dark time. However, the essence or content of the work still leads to grief because of the uncertainty they are currently experiencing. This can be seen in the intrinsic elements contained in these works: plot, characterization, setting, theme, etc.

In the 20 works of poetry, all of the writings explicitly and implicitly tell about the Covid-19 outbreak, which still exists today. This pandemic confines their freedom and leads to a feeling of depression and fear. This can be seen in the following excerpt from Ivanno Winoto's poem entitled The Faceless Enemy:

*This is where I contemplate*
*Why, why, and why*
*Day after day*
*But it's not finished*

Another poem entitled No Longer the Same by Bilqis Anindri Meisyah Putri also describes similar confinement:
*We are just like that bird*
*Once free, now restrained*
*As if time is running slower*
*Makes us helpless waiting for it to end*

In addition to the 20 works of poetry that clearly voice their fears during the pandemic, 16 short stories tell the same thing.

Slightly different from the works of poetry, in these short stories the feeling of grief is very intense. Some of these feelings of grief are described explicitly, such as in Serafim Autumn Putrifajar's work entitled COVID-20 and Nabila Rahma Nisa's work entitled Fossilized Regret.

The work entitled COVID-20 tells how the narrator's life as a student is trying hard to adapt to online schools during the pandemic. Not long after, his father, who was a doctor, had to pass away while serving in helping patients infected by the coronavirus. This time, the narrator doesn't just feel 'alone'. However, a veil of grief is also present in his isolation.

*July 22nd, 2020. The darkest of all days. He is gone. Mom won't come out of her bedroom. I can hear her whimpers of despair choking her. Even from the kitchen. As for me, no matter how numb I felt, I had to be okay. I tried to be okay. But when the last glaze of dozen rays was dimmed by the glow of the night sky, I lay my frail body down and mourned. God knows how long.*

In addition, the Fossilized Regret also tells of similar grief as a result of being left by a loved one.

*It feels hard, very hard to turn to the next page. . . Until the last page, he didn't blink his eyes and read two fragments of sentences – what Linaya wanted to convey for a long time: Protect yourself, love your life.*

Both works represent how grief is depicted in a real and loud way through the loss that each character experiences.

Besides these works, however, there is one short story that tells it implicitly. This can be seen in Khoirin Prabaningtyas's work entitled 'Underestimate Something Small'.

She was sad, disappointed, scared, and feeling guilty. These feelings are mixed into one. She wanted to cry but could not. She regretted not properly carrying out the government's recommendations for PSBB and implementing health protocols. Not only did she lose, but even other people who had followed the health protocols and PSBB well were also affected.

The short story tells the story of a young girl named Nana who ignores the dangers of this pandemic at all. He continued to play outside during PSBB and did not immediately clean himself when he arrived home. One day, the father was exposed to Corona and then followed by his mother, brother, and himself.

At first glance, Nana's indifferent attitude during this pandemic only describes the naughtiness of a teenager who easily underestimates something. But behind it, there is a hidden sadness in it. The grief was present because his freedom was suddenly lost by the pandemic and he did not know how to express it. So, it can be said that this short story illustrates and represents the hidden grief felt by teenagers.

Furthermore, some various pictures or paintings and essays describe Covid-19, namely as many as 11 pictures and 4 essays. Both the pictures and the essays both lead to grief and worries about the future that is still unclear as a result of the pandemic that has not faded.

For example, one of the pictures by Hayu Maristha. In the picture, a girl is crying in front of her laptop. Around her are balloons, which are the girl's thoughts, which read: PTN, UTBK, Tryout, etc.

Then in terms of essays, these 4 works can indeed be said to be straightforward because their grammar is entirely literal. However, both of the four works voiced how dangerous and deadly this epidemic is, which implicitly illustrates the grief in it because of the uncertainty of tomorrow.

So, judging from all of these works – poetry, short stories, pictures, and essays – it can be said that the grief expressed by these students is both explicit and implicit.

The grief is present because of feelings of isolation, fear of tomorrow, tiredness of waiting for this pandemic to end, to the loss of the closest people. These works voice that both the world and its people are not doing well.

*Understanding and interpreting grief*

At this stage, the author not only expresses his understanding of the pandemic but also demonstrates his ability to give meaning. Not all of these works have reached the point of deep understanding and meaning of grief. Only a few works can get to this point number five. This is reflected through various intrinsic elements that can be built strongly, and the use of a deep figure of speech or imagery.

A poem entitled COVID-19 by Aris Insiyah illustrates how his perception of COVID-19 is very different. He can make good illustrations. This can be seen in the following excerpts of the poem:

*Corona. . . .*
*The first time I heard his name it was very good to hear*
*Beautiful to feel, beautiful in hope, to want to peek at it*

*I don't know. . . . it's a name for a virus for which there is no cure.*
*A frightening, shocking name*
*Terrible, worrisome, attacks anyone who hits it.*

In the two pieces of poetry, it can be seen how the author wrote verses that contrast with each other. This shows not only as a comparison but also as an explanation of how the corona that exists on earth is very dangerous. He certainly mourned the condition, but in this context, the author was able to describe his understanding of this pandemic through the contrast of the name corona. But of course, it still takes several more steps to arrive at a truly complete understanding and meaning.

Furthermore, the poem in English by Nurul Isli Fateha entitled Little Thing is also very good at describing COVID-19. The entire content of the poem contains a very deep meaning of the pandemic. This can be seen in one of the following stanzas:

*A little thing. . . Separated everyone from the important matter.*
*Unconditionally weakness,*
*Distracting everything,*
*Distancing our business,*
*Depressed is the only thing that we get.*

Through this fragment of the verse, it is seen deeply and clearly how desperate the author feels about this pandemic. However, in the last stanza, he wrote a stanza that seemed to describe optimism.

*But...*
*That's okay,*
*We're going against you.*

*Nothing should be scared,*
*With the name of the wide world*
*We are human,*
*Ready to sweep you off*
*As soon, as possible.*

The author in this context shows a feeling of optimism. However, upon closer inspection, there is a desperation that is similar to the earlier stanzas. The author is well aware of this situation and he interprets the grief even though it must be disguised through false optimism. This can be said because the atmosphere of despair and sadness is very thick throughout this poem and the atmosphere is related to the uncertainty of the pandemic that the author feels and makes him despair and fear.

One of the students' works that were able to process what was experienced during the pandemic and then try to give meaning is a poem by Beny Aji Ifaudi Rahman from SMA 1 Situbondo entitled God Teaches Through Corona. This title already gives the impression that this poem will go far beyond just describing Corona itself.

*CORONA*
*You taught me the meaning of "silent"*
*And teach facts about 'holy'*

For Benny, Corona is understood as a teacher who teaches the meanings of life. The word 'silence' is not easy to understand without direct experience in living solitude. In this bustling age, it is not easy for one to find a quiet place. However, Covid-19 has forced many people to be silent. Man himself determines whether he will be able to take the meaning of the silence or not.

In this silence, humans have more time to observe their surroundings. That's when humans realize that there are things that are sacred or need to be purified. These sacred things, for example, are God, places of worship, and so on. As for humans themselves, the context of 'holy' means that they need to purify themselves.

### Transformation

At this stage, the author can make the grief experienced due to COVID-19 be used as a foothold towards better conditions. This is reflected in the following two examples of high school students' work which have shown that they are capable of learning and ready to transform. However, it should be noted that the transformation referred to here is the transformation of the mind from experiencing suffering, understanding, and transcending it. The analysis carried out is purely text analysis.

The first work is a poem entitled The Faceless Enemy by Ivanno Winoto. He underlined the lessons he had learned during the pandemic. This poem invites the reader to always think positively about the power of God and to practice patience.

*However, I never once thought*
*The Lord closes his eyes*
*Wisdom and blessings are always present*
*Whenever it is, I'm patiently waiting*

This fragment of the poem shows how the author has transformed like a butterfly out of its cocoon. He not only writes, understands, and interprets grief, but it is more than that. He accepted this uncertain condition and transformed by always depending on God. This transformation can be said very good and positive, considering that adolescents are at an unstable age. However, the author was able to muffle this and accept the situation in front of his eyes.

Meanwhile, Beny in his poem entitled God Teaches through Corona learned a lesson from the pandemic condition in the form of increasing opportunities to find God. This is due to the silence created by the pandemic which in turn creates a calmer mood. Silence and calm are favorable conditions for getting closer to God.

*CORONA*
*You taught me the meaning of "silent"*
*And teach facts about 'holy'*
*That God can be found alone in solitude and serenity.*

In line with the previous poem, the author in this case understands and interprets grief, then surrenders himself by getting closer to God through silence. He accepts this uncertain condition and continues to contemplate which makes it transform into something very positive. Not everyone can get to this point of transformation. This can be seen through 2 poems from 51 students' works which means that out of 51 individuals, only 2 can reach the transformation stage.

## V. CONCLUSION

It is evident from the analysis above that high school students have been able to express their experiences during this pandemic in various kinds of writings. Most of the writings can express the feelings of grief they experience. Some of the writers have been able to reach the stage of understanding, meaning. However, only two people were able to climb the transformation stage.

The students' works also show that teachers gain new knowledge, namely that writing can be a path to the healing process. This knowledge is expected to increase the motivation of teachers in teaching and encourage students to write. Moreover, this knowledge is also expected to give a deeper meaning to the writing activity itself.

## REFERENCES

[1]. Anderson, C.M. and MacCurdy. (2000). Writing and Healing: Toward and Informed Practice Urbana, IL. The National Council of Teachers of English.

[2]. Pennebaker, J.W. dan Smyth, J.M.(2016) Opening Up by Writing it Down: How expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain. The Guilford Press. New York.

[3]. Bolton, Gillie. (2011). Write Yourself, Creative Writing and Personal Development. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. London.

[4]. Cheng, S.K., Wong, C.W., Tsang, J., & Wong, K.C. (2004). Psychological distress and negative appraisals in survivors of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Psychological Medicine, 34, 1187-1195.

[5]. Fateha, Nurul Isli. Little Thing . SMAN 14 Surabaya, Surabaya.

[6]. Help the Hospices (2005) Guidelines for Arts Therapies and the Arts in Palliative Care Settings. London: Hospice Information.

[7]. Insiyah, Aris. Covid-19 . SMAN 14 Surabaya, Surabaya.

[8]. Jannah, Miftahul (2020). Segudang Masalah Belajar dari Rumah karena Corona Covid-10. https://tirto.id/segudang-masalah-belajar-dari-rumah-karena-corona-covid-19-eGqQ

[9]. Kanadiya, M. K., & Sallar, A. M. (2011). Preventive behaviors, beliefs, and anxieties in relation to the swine flu outbreak among college students aged 18-24 years. Journal of Public Health, 1 9, 139-145. doi:l0.l007/s10389-010-0373-3.

[10]. Kearney, Richard (2007) The Power of Catharsis. Paragraph, Vol 30 No. 1 Trauma, Therapy and Representation (March 2007) pp. 51-66)

[11]. Marinella, Sandra. (2017) The Story You Need to Tell: Writing to Heal from Trauma, Illness, or Loss. New World Library. Novato.

[12]. Maristha, Hayu. Covid-19. Sekolah Alam Insan Mulia (SAIM), Surabaya.

[13]. Mazza, Nicholas F. (2011). Foreword. in Write Yourself, Creative Writing and Personal Development. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. London.

[14]. Nisa, Nabila Rahma. Penyesalan yang Memfosil. SMAN 15 Surabaya, Surabaya.

[15]. Pennebaker, J.W. and Evans, J.F. (2014). Expressive Writing: Words that Heal. Idyll Arbor Inch. Enumclas.

[16]. Prabaningtyas, Khoirin. Meremehkan Sesuatu Hal Kecil. SMA Budi Utomo, Surabaya.

[17]. Putri, Bilqis Anindri Meisyah. Tidak Lagi Sama . SMAN 15 Surabaya, Surabaya.

[18]. Putrifajar, Serafim Autumn. Covid-20. SMAN 15 Surabaya, Surabaya.

[19]. Rahman, Beny Aji Ifaudi. Tuhan Mengajar Melalui Corona. SMAN 1 Situbondo, Situbondo.

[20]. Richards, James (2007) The Catharsis of Poetry. Forthnight, No 455 (Nov. 2007) p 27.

[21]. Ryden, Wendy (2010).From Purgation to Recognition: Catharsis and the Dialectics of Public and Private in Healing Writing. JAC, Vol 30 No ½ (2010) pp 239-267.

[22]. Staricoff, R.L. (2004) Arts in Health: A Review of the Medical Literature. London. The Arts of Council of England.

[23]. Steel, M. (2010) Do You Realize? A Story of Love and Grief and the Colours of Existence. Ropley. Hampshire. John Hunt Publishing.

[24]. Taylor, S. (2019) The Psychology of Pandemics: Preparing for the Next Global Outbreak of Infectious Disease. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

[25]. Winoto, Ivanno. Musuh tak Berwajah. SMAK 1 Sinlui Surabaya, Surabaya.