

Students' Identities in Digital Platforms: EFL Creative Writing Practices in Indonesia

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Background of the Study

The rapid increase of digital technology has influenced the context of identity negotiation and identity construction in the present era. Studies have proven that social media platforms significantly affected how individuals express themselves and build social relationship (Chauhan & Bharati, 2025; Tariq et al., 2025). Even though digital platforms have been widely discussed as a medium for identity expressions and construction, few studies have specifically examined digital identity construction through EFL creative writing on digital platforms. However, little attention has been given to how identity is constructed through creative writing shared digitally.

Creative writing accommodates the needs for aesthetic expressions (Maley, 2009), highlighting emotions (Kumar, 2020; Maley, 2012), delivered in "an imaginative, often unique, and poetic way" (Mansoor, 2015, p. 206). Writing through digital platforms, students become aware of their position as "global, digitalized citizens". They can develop and negotiate their digital identities through creative writing shared on digital platforms (Dooly, 2017).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) creative writing reflecting learners' identities can lead to positive learning attitudes because students can share what is meaningful in their culture in English. Digital EFL creative writing can both develop students' language mastery and a space to represent themselves in the digital communities.

Research Question and Objective

Research question: How are the students' digital identities expressed in EFL creative writing in Indonesia?

This research aims to fill a gap by observing students' digital identities through EFL creative writing. This research highlights how the students in the English Letters Department of a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, express their digital identities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Creative Writing.

Theoretical Framework

Studies by Herawati (2021) and Widyastuti (2023) agreed that others' experiences, observations, and others' creative works served as sources of inspirations. In the EFL contexts, studies by Sui (2015; 2021) in China and Siegel (2022) in Taiwan confirmed that students' cultural background could actually affect their writing.

Yusof (2008) and Boudjadar (2015) agreed that the publication of students' work on online platforms allowed students to interact with wider audiences, implying that self-representation occurred in the interactions. Jenkins (2006) argued that audiences of media no longer passively consume the feeds. They become active participants in producing and modifying messages on social media. This implied that digitally, audience define their identities in participatory culture. The choice of the social media to publish their writing also influenced their desire to display their identities digitally.

Viewing students' creative writing using the lens of identity study in language learning developed by Norton and Toohey (2011) and Peirce (1995) in combination of creative writing studies (Herawati, 2021; Widyastuti, 2021), this research intended to analyze students' digital identities in EFL creative writing. This research also considered theories on participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006).

Methodology

This qualitative research applied the textual and thematic analysis. The research, involving eighteen students from a compulsory creative writing class, was conducted in the English Letters Department in a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The research was conducted on two phases. In Phase 1, the researcher observed students' works uploaded on social media platforms of their own choices. The data collection included reading the works, taking screenshots of the work on social media. In Phase 2, the data were collected from the responses to the questionnaire. By answering the questions, the students described (1) the topic chosen and (2) the reason for choosing the topic; (3) the resources and (4) the reasons for choosing the resources; (5) the writing intention; and (6) the social media platform chosen and (7) the reasons for their platform choice.

Result and Discussion

1. Creative Writing Topics (Table 1)

Table 1:
Creative writing topics

No	Topics	Number of Creative Writing
1.	Culture	8
2.	Environment	5
3.	Technology	1
4.	Mix of all of them	4

Table 2:
Creative writing resources

No	Resources	Number of Creative Writing
1.	Experiences	6
2.	Observations	9
3.	Other creative works	3

2. Creative Writing Resources (Table 2)

4. Social Media Platforms (Table 3)

Table 3:
Social Media Platform

No	Social Media Platform	Number of Creative Writing Posted on the Platform
1.	Instagram	12
2.	TikTok	1
3.	X	1
4.	Medium	2
5.	Wattpad	2

3. Writing Intentions

The intention of writing this work is to communicate and discuss about an issue that needs to be aware of. This issue significantly appears among young people. It is a mental health issue influenced by social media addiction which this work tries to communicate. This work is expected to create awareness amongst the society regarding the issue, which is seemingly trivial but actually not. (Mery, Questionnaire Survey, 2025)

I want to attract people for caring and rejuvenate the nature again once more for the equilibrium of nature and all creatures. (Bernard; Questionnaire Survey, 2025)

Conclusion

This research highlights four main findings.

1. The first finding highlights how technological advancement is used to abuse the power and the culture that endangered the environment.
2. the resources of their digital writing products are taken from their personal experiences, their observation, and inspired by other creative works.
3. participants' writing intention, which are to raise awareness, express emotions, and affirm their cultural belongingness.
4. The last finding shows the choice of digital platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, X, Medium, and Wattpad, which also reflects how the participants curate their digital identities.

EFL Creative Writing in digital platforms enables the participants to express their ideas and feelings without being judged by others while at the same time they can negotiate and express evolving digital identities.

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