


Islamic Expressive Writing for Psychological Healing

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Abstract

Expressive writing, a therapeutic technique shown to alleviate emotional distress, has not been widely adopted in Islamic education despite its proven benefits. This study aims to integrate expressive writing with Islamic principles to support anxiety relief among adolescents in educational settings. Specifically, it compares the outcomes of this intervention in state schools versus Islamic schools, examines gender differences, and assesses the impact of participants' personalities and social support on the effectiveness of the intervention. The study employed a pretest-posttest control experimental design involving 124 adolescents aged 13 to 15 years from a state school and an Islamic junior high school. Participants were selected based on self-reported anxiety symptoms measured by the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD-7) questionnaire, which has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating high reliability and construct validity supported by correlations with other established anxiety measures. The intervention included expressive writing exercises integrated with Islamic teachings, and anxiety levels were measured pre and post-intervention. The results show that in the state school, the intervention significantly reduced anxiety levels, with an average decrease of 2 points in anxiety scores ($p = 0.04$). In the Islamic school, the intervention resulted in an average increase of 2.4 points in scores. Integrating expressive writing with Islamic principles can effectively address anxiety among students, creating a more supportive and holistic educational environment. The culturally and spiritually relevant framework enhances the therapeutic impact, indicating significant potential for this approach in both state and Islamic schools.

INTRODUCTION

Expressive writing, recognized for its therapeutic benefits in various psychological frameworks (Kupeli et al., 2019; La Marca et al., 2019; Myers et al., 2021), presents a promising avenue yet to be thoroughly explored in Islamic educational settings. This technique, which involves structured writing about one's thoughts and feelings related to traumatic or stressful experiences (Pennebaker, 2018), has been empirically validated to alleviate emotional distress and improve mental and physical health (Algristian, 2019; Ayers et al., 2018). The potential for expressive writing to complement traditional Islamic educational methods offers a novel area of study that could significantly benefit student well-being.

The concept of writing for healing mental problems is still not found in counseling or therapy in Islamic education. However, writing for healing has empirically been successful in overcoming anxiety, depression, mental disorders, trauma, and even physical health problems (Chu et al., 2020; Cordero, 2022; Lukenda et al., 2023; Qian et al., 2020). Likewise, Islamic

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therapy effectively reduces stress and other psychological problems (Hajra & Saleem, 2021; Isgandarova, 2019). Despite these successes, there remains a significant gap in the holistic integration of these approaches within the educational paradigms of education institutions.

Writing for healing began to be recognized in the 1980s and became a prominent method for addressing mental and physical health issues (Pennebaker, 2004). Expressive writing, a key component of writing for healing, is distinct in its lack of stringent rules regarding grammar, punctuation, spelling, or rigid sentence structure (Pennebaker, 2018). The primary directive in expressive writing is to begin writing and to continue, allowing different themes or topics to emerge spontaneously from the writer's heart. This form of writing encourages individuals to explore their feelings and experiences in a confidential and highly personal manner, akin to the release and enlightenment one might feel after a therapeutic session. Initially introduced by James W. Pennebaker in 1983, expressive writing was first tested on students suffering from severe trauma. They were asked to write freely about their experiences for 15 minutes over four consecutive days, illustrating the method's potential for significant psychological relief (Pennebaker, 1997).

The variety of results across these studies highlights the nuanced and context-dependent effectiveness of expressive writing interventions. One study suggests that positive experience writing may reduce depressive symptoms among undergraduates, though it is similarly effective as negative experience writing, questioning its unique advantages (Danarti et al., 2018). Another finds that neither expressive writing nor instructional interventions significantly reduce test anxiety or improve exam performance, citing issues with generalizability and brief intervention durations (Frattaroli et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2017). A different study indicates that alexithymia can impair the efficacy of expressive writing, particularly for those with high alexithymia due to their struggles with emotional involvement and symbolization (Danarti et al., 2018). Additionally, findings support the analytical rumination hypothesis by showing that expressive writing increases causal analysis but not problem-solving analysis, underscoring its potential to explore mental health theories (Park et al., 2014; Sanders et al., 2019). Lastly, the therapeutic benefits of expressive writing are linked to its deep resonance with fundamental human experiences, such as processing emotional upheavals and managing secrets (Schreuder, 2022; Syah & Dewiuliana, 2023). Together, these studies demonstrate that the impact of expressive writing can vary greatly, influenced by individual differences and specific psychological states.

However, these studies have only used equipment standardized without specific cultural considerations or conducted without integrating religious teachings. Given this context, the application of Islamic principles in expressive writing interventions is still unclear and deserves further study, potentially revealing new insights into its effectiveness across different cultural and religious backgrounds. Thus, there is a gap in integrating Islamic principles into this study area.

Islamic principles refer to the teachings, values, and moral guidelines derived from the Quran, Hadith, and broader Islamic tradition (Bentley et al., 2021). These principles encompass concepts such as faith (Iman), spirituality, ethical conduct, and the importance of fostering a strong connection with the Creator. Integrating Islamic principles with expressive writing for anxiety healing involves using Quranic verses, Hadith, and teachings about hope, resilience, gratitude, and forgiveness as therapeutic tools (Hajra & Saleem, 2021; Masjedi-Arani et al., 2020). Additionally, it includes emphasizing the concept of *qalbun* (heart) and its connection to the soul, as well as teachings about morality (*Aqedah Akhlaq*) to guide adolescents in navigating their emotional and psychological challenges.

In Islamic principles, the development of *Al-'Aql*, *Al-Qalb*, and *Al-Nafs* in Islamic psychotherapy offers a framework for addressing psychological disturbances while aligning with Islamic teachings (Zulkipli et al., 2022). This approach emphasizes managing thoughts,

feelings, and behaviors following Islamic sources, ensuring that the healing process remains consistent with Islamic values. In the realm of Islamic teachings, the concept of religious psychosocial healing offers a unique perspective on addressing trauma through a religious lens (Miftahuddin et al., 2022). Integrating expressive writing with Islamic principles in educational settings aligns with applying central concepts in Islamic Psychology, highlighting the distinct approach from conventional psychology (Othman & Mohamad, 2019). By incorporating religious principles and practices into the healing process, individuals can find solace and guidance in their faith while navigating psychological challenges.

This research holds significant importance because Islamic teachings can contribute to healing. Accordingly, the study aims to compare the effects of Islamic expressive writing between public schools and Islamic schools, explore gender differences, analyze the influence of participants' personalities, and assess the role of social support in the success of expressive writing interventions. Through these comparisons, the research seeks to provide a detailed understanding of how Islamic expressive writing can effectively reduce anxiety in adolescents. This study emphasizes the potential of combining Islamic principles with therapeutic methods to improve psychological well-being and supports the creation of customized interventions that address the unique needs of students.

METHODS

Participants

This study employed a proper experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of integrating expressive writing therapy with Islamic principles for anxiety relief among adolescents. The research specifically aimed to compare outcomes across different school types (state schools vs. Islamic schools), analyze gender differences, assess personality traits, and evaluate the role of social support in influencing the effectiveness of the intervention. Participants were selected from state and Islamic schools (madrasa) in Malang, Indonesia. Table

Table 1. Participants Characteristics

Description	Details	State Schools	Islamic Schools
Sex	Male	23.44%	23.33%
	Female	76.56%	76.67%
Age	13 years	18.75%	23.33%
	14 years	71.82%	76.67%
	15 years	9.38%	0
Environment support	Often	50.00%	18.33%
	Sometimes	45.31%	73.33%
	Never	4.69%	8.34%
Religiosity	Diligent worship	73.44%	78.33%
	Sometimes worship	26.56%	21.67%
	Never worship	0	0
Frequent anxiety problems	Economy	7.81%	3.33%
	Bullying	6.25%	5.00%
	Friendship	25.00%	30.00%
	Family	26.56%	31.67%
	Social	26.56%	23.33%
	Spiritual	3.13%	11.67%
	Romance	7.81%	5.00%
	Physical illness	6.25%	0
	Future	15.63%	43.33%
	The past	4.69%	16.67%
Personality	School	35.94%	15.00%
	Self-confidence	18.75%	21.67%
	Emotional control	12.50%	28.36%
	Introvert	67.19%	68.33%
	Extrovert	32.81%	31.67%

1 shows a total of 124 adolescents (60 students from state schools and 64 students from madrasa) aged between 13 and 15 years who self-reported symptoms of anxiety were recruited for the study. Anxiety levels were measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD-7) questionnaire, a standardized screening tool widely used to assess anxiety symptoms (Huang et al., 2022).

Procedures

In the design phase, the first step was creating a worksheet to guide the participants through the expressive writing sessions. This worksheet was carefully developed to integrate Islamic beliefs, stories from the Quran and Hadith, and motivational Islamic quotes, providing a religious framework to support participants during the intervention. Before the research began, participants were given a brief training on expressive writing to familiarize them with the process. They were taught how to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences without worrying about grammar or structure, focusing on the therapeutic aspect of writing.

The study was conducted over seven-week sessions, each lasting 1.5 hours. The schedule allowed participants to engage with the intervention without feeling overwhelmed. The researchers introduced the theme and motivation in each session, followed by an Islamic approach to set the spiritual tone. The task was explained, guiding participants on how to reflect on Islamic values while writing. They were encouraged to connect personal experiences with the principles of gratitude, patience, and acceptance taught in Islam. This integration allowed the participants to see the relevance of Islamic teachings in their daily lives. After the writing time, there was an opportunity for sharing, followed by a group discussion to deepen their understanding. The session concluded with a homework assignment to further reflect on the day's topic. This combination of religious guidance and expressive writing created a holistic approach to help participants connect their personal experiences with Islamic values.

The initial phase involved surveying 124 students to identify those with significant anxiety symptoms. From this larger pool, 124 students who met the criteria based on their GAD-7 scores were selected for the experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental group, which received the integrated therapy, or the control group, which did not. Both groups participated in therapy writing sessions designed for emotional exploration and expression, using workbooks explicitly developed for this study (Algristian, 2019).

There were three experimental groups in each school, one state school and one Islamic school, with each experiment group consisting of 15 to 16 students. Additionally, there was one control group in each school. The state and Islamic schools participated in the therapeutic writing sessions. The therapy writing sessions, designed for emotional exploration and expression, were facilitated using workbooks explicitly developed for this study.

An observer took a role throughout the sessions to maintain objectivity and monitor the process without directly intervening in the writing activities. No research assistants were involved, and the sessions were conducted in classrooms at the respective schools. This setup ensured that the students in the experimental group were exposed to the integrated Islamic principles while engaging in therapeutic writing, while the control group followed the regular writing sessions without this integration.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument used for measuring anxiety levels was the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD-7) questionnaire (Lopez-Urias, 2021). This standardized screening tool is widely recognized for its reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency. The validity of the GAD-7 is well-established, with studies demonstrating strong construct validity through correlations with other anxiety measures, the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and high sensitivity (89%) and specificity (82%) in identifying generalized anxiety

disorder. The GAD-7 consists of seven items, each describing a common symptom of anxiety, and evaluates the following aspects of anxiety: 1). Feeling agitated, tense, or restless. 2). Feeling very anxious, scared, or uncomfortable. 3). Difficulty controlling anxiety or worrying excessively. 4). Physical discomfort such as shaking, sweating, or tension. 5). Difficulty sleeping due to anxiety. 6). Feeling irritable or restless. 7). Experiencing unexplained anxiety.

Participants were asked to rate how often they experienced each symptom over the past two weeks using a four-point Likert scale: (0 = not at all, 1 = several days, 2 = more than half the days, 3 = nearly every day). The student's anxiety levels were determined by summing up the scores from all seven items, resulting in a total score ranging from 0 to 21. The total score was used to classify the severity of anxiety, with 0-4 = minimal or no anxiety, 5-9 = mild anxiety, 10-14 = moderate anxiety, and 15-21 = severe anxiety. Participants completed the GAD-7 before the intervention (baseline assessment) and during a follow-up assessment conducted seven weeks post-intervention. A reduction in GAD-7 scores indicated a decrease in anxiety levels, while an increase suggested elevated anxiety or enhanced emotional awareness.

Intervention

The intervention involved a seven-session therapy program, each lasting approximately one and a half hours, conducted once a week over seven weeks. Participants in the experimental group engaged in expressive writing activities integrated with Islamic principles. The workbooks in the sessions incorporated Quranic verses, Hadith, and moral teachings into the writing exercises. In addition to the student participants, the study included two counseling teachers, one from each school. These teachers had backgrounds in psychological counseling and Islamic studies and were experienced in providing emotional and spiritual guidance to adolescents. The counseling teachers played a crucial role in facilitating the intervention sessions. They were responsible for introducing the topics and relevant Islamic teachings at the beginning of each session, guiding participants through the expressive writing exercises, offering emotional support and clarifying Islamic teachings during the writing process, helping students reflect on their thoughts and emotions in alignment with Islamic values, and monitoring participants' progress, addressing concerns, and providing feedback throughout the seven-week program.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before the intervention, participants completed baseline assessments to measure their anxiety levels using standardized psychological assessment tools. After the seven therapy sessions, participants underwent post-intervention assessments to measure any changes in their anxiety levels. A follow-up assessment was conducted one month after the intervention's completion to evaluate the therapy's long-term effects.

Quantitative data collected from the pre-intervention, post-intervention, and follow-up assessments were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (Howwit & Cramer, 2020). A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of anxiety levels before and after the intervention within each group (state school and Islamic school). A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean GAD-7 scores before and after the intervention within each group (state school and Islamic school). The null hypothesis (H0) stated that there would be no significant difference in anxiety levels before and after the intervention, while the alternative hypothesis (H1) stated that there would be a significant difference. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was used for all statistical tests. The results of these tests will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the therapy writing integrated with Islamic principles in reducing anxiety levels among adolescents.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, we conducted a series of independent sample tests. These tests compared the anxiety reduction outcomes between different groups,

as outlined in the following tables. This comparison helps to identify any differences in the effectiveness of the intervention based on the type of school attended. Analyzing this data can determine how personality traits may influence the effectiveness of the expressive writing intervention.

Participants' personality traits, specifically introversion and extroversion, were measured using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) (or specify the instrument used, if different). This questionnaire assesses individuals on a scale of introversion-extroversion, providing insight into their sociability, emotional responsiveness, and tendencies toward inward or outward focus (Ivantchev & Stoyanova, 2021). Each participant completed the questionnaire before the intervention, and their introversion or extroversion scores were incorporated into the analysis to evaluate how these traits moderated the intervention's effectiveness.

Social support was measured using a frequency-based scale developed for this research, with response options such as "never," "sometimes," and "often." This scale assessed how frequently participants perceived or experienced support from various sources (e.g., family, friends, or peers). Participants were asked to indicate how often they received emotional, informational, or practical support, and these responses were used in the analysis to evaluate the influence of social support on the intervention's effectiveness. This analysis allows us to see the impacts of varying levels of social support on anxiety reduction outcomes. Each table provides detailed statistical analyses to assess the impact of Islamic expressive writing, identify specific conditions under which the intervention is most effective, and understand the broader implications for educational settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The study provides insightful data on the effectiveness of Islamic expressive writing as a therapeutic intervention for reducing anxiety among adolescents. Independent sample tests were conducted to compare outcomes across different groups and variables, including comparisons between state and Islamic school students, differences based on personality traits, gender distinctions, and the influence of social support levels. This result can be seen in Table 2.

The pretest anxiety scores were slightly higher for females (16.92) compared to males (16.34). After the intervention, both groups showed a decrease in anxiety levels, with males reporting a more substantial reduction (12.55) compared to females (15.97), indicating the intervention was more effective for males in reducing anxiety. Regarding personality traits, a significant proportion of participants were introverts, especially among females, with 64 female participants classified as introverts compared to 20 males. Extroverts were fewer overall, with 31 females and nine males falling into this category.

For social support, most participants reported receiving support "sometimes," with a much higher number of females (58) than males (16) reporting this frequency. Similarly, more females (31) than males (12) reported receiving social support "often." A few participants indicated they "never" received support, with one male and six females reporting this. These results suggest that while both genders benefited from the intervention, males showed a more

Table 2. Pre and Post-test Anxiety, Personality Traits, and Social Support Frequencies by Gender

		Male	Female
Score	Pretest	16, 34	16,92
	Posttest	12,55	15,97
Personality	Introvert	20	64
	Extrovert	9	31
Social Support	Sometimes	16	58
	Often	12	31
	Never	1	6

Table 3. Independent Samples Test for Schools, Personality, Gender, and Social Support

Test Category	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
State School vs. Islamic School	1.18	0.28	1.28	122	0.20
Personality (Introvert vs. Extrovert)	2.61	0.11	1.96	122	0.05
Gender (Male vs. Female)	5.15	0.03	-4.14	122	0.00
Social Support	6.37	0.01	-1.11	122	0.27

significant anxiety reduction. Additionally, females were more likely to identify as introverts and reported higher levels of perceived social support than males.

Table 3 presents the results of the independent samples t-tests conducted to examine differences in anxiety scores based on various factors, including school type (State School vs. Islamic School), personality traits (Introvert vs. Extrovert), gender (Male vs. Female), and levels of social support. For each comparison, Levene's test for equality of variances was used to determine whether the assumption of equal variances was met, followed by the t-test for equality of means. These results provide insights into how each of these factors influences the effectiveness of the expressive writing intervention in reducing anxiety.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances for school backgrounds shows that the variances are not significantly different ($F = 1.18$, $p = 0.28$), suggesting that the assumption of equal variances is reasonable. Therefore, the assumed t-test results for equal variances are considered appropriate for interpretation. The t-test shows that while there may be a slight difference in the mean anxiety reduction scores between the two school types, this difference is not statistically significant, $t(122) = 1.28$, $p = 0.20$. Thus, the effectiveness of the Islamic expressive writing intervention appears to be similar for students from both state schools and Islamic schools.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances shows that the variances between introvert and extrovert students are not significantly different ($F = 2.61$, $p = 0.11$), suggesting that the assumption of equal variances is reasonable. Therefore, the t-test results for the assumed equal variances can be interpreted confidently. The t-test for Equality of Means, under the assumption of equal variances, shows a significant difference in anxiety reduction scores between introvert and extrovert students, $t(122) = 1.96$, $p = 0.05$. This finding suggests that extroverts experience more significant anxiety relief than introverts after experiencing the Islamic expressive writing intervention.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances based on gender shows that the variances between male and female students are significantly different ($F = 5.15$, $p = 0.03$), suggesting that the assumption of equal variances may not hold. Furthermore, the t-test for Equality of Means shows a significant difference in anxiety reduction scores between men and women in this study, $t(122) = -4.14$, $p = 0.00$. The gender-based comparisons reveal notable distinctions in how male and female students responded to the Islamic expressive writing intervention, providing essential insights into gender-specific therapeutic needs. This analysis highlights the differential impact of the intervention on anxiety reduction across genders, suggesting the necessity to consider gender when designing and implementing therapeutic strategies.

These results suggest that female students experienced significantly more significant anxiety reduction compared to male students following the intervention. The significant negative mean difference indicates that the scores for female students were lower (implying lower anxiety) than male students. This finding underscores the importance of considering gender-specific therapeutic needs when designing and implementing interventions like Islamic expressive writing, as the impact can vary considerably between males and females.

Finally, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances based on social support shows that the variances between high and low support are significantly different ($F = 6.37$, $p = 0.01$), suggesting that the assumption of equal variances may not hold. However, under both

assumptions, the t-test for Equality of Means shows no statistically significant difference in anxiety reduction scores between students with different levels of social support, $t(122) = -1.11, p = 0.27$. This analysis indicates that higher levels of support are associated with more significant reductions in anxiety. This finding emphasizes a supportive environment's critical role in enhancing the intervention's benefits in Islamic expressive writing. The study highlights how external factors, such as encouragement from family, friends, and the school community, can significantly influence the effectiveness of therapeutic techniques.

This finding also suggests that, while there may be a trend towards more significant anxiety reduction with higher levels of social support, the difference is not statistically significant. This finding indicates that social support alone may not be a decisive factor in the effectiveness of the intervention in Islamic expressive writing. However, the role of social support cannot be entirely dismissed, as it might interact with other factors to influence the overall therapeutic outcome.

Discussion

The Integration of Islamic Principles and Expressive Writing

Traditional research on anxiety often focuses on psychological and physiological aspects (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; Myers et al., 2021). These approaches, while effective, may not fully address the needs of individuals who seek solace in their spiritual beliefs. As humans created by the Creator, the journey towards mental health or well-being can significantly benefit from spiritual understanding and support. Islamic Religious Education emphasizes the balance between worldly life and the hereafter (Ahmed, 2020), aiming to develop a clean conscience, which directly impacts behavior.

Meanwhile, the results of the t-test suggest that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean anxiety reduction scores between students from state schools and those from Islamic schools. While there may be a slight difference in the mean scores, it is not significant enough to conclude that the educational context (state versus Islamic school) has a distinct impact on the effectiveness of the Islamic expressive writing intervention. This finding implies that integrating expressive writing with Islamic principles is similarly effective in reducing anxiety among students from both educational settings. It highlights the universal applicability of this therapeutic approach within diverse communities (Cucchi, 2022), suggesting that students can benefit from it regardless of whether they attend state or Islamic schools.

Expressive writing, as a form of therapy, aligns well with the objectives of Islamic Religious Education. This educational approach seeks to prepare students for well-being in this world and happiness in the afterlife, balancing both the worldly and the *ukhrowi* (hereafter) aspects of life. Encouraging individuals to pour their feelings and anxieties onto paper can serve as a means of self-cleansing and moral reinforcement (Farley, 2011; Haertl & Ero-Phillips, 2019). This method of writing therapy can help individuals achieve inner peace and clarity, echoing the ultimate goal of Islamic teachings – to cultivate a clear conscience and good behavior.

Incorporating Islamic values such as *tawakal* (trust in Allah), patience, and *ikhtiar* (earnest effort) within writing therapy can inspire and strengthen individuals who are facing anxiety. These values offer a spiritual framework that motivates and provides a sense of purpose and direction. For instance, stories from the life of Prophet Muhammad can serve as powerful examples for individuals to emulate in their own lives. Discussing these values in the context of expressive writing therapy can help readers find peace and motivation in overcoming their anxiety (Bentley et al., 2021).

Integrating Islamic Religious Education into the expressive writing therapy workbook includes several key components, such as Islamic inspiration and motivation, using Qur'anic

verses, Hadith, and inspirational stories to provide spiritual strength and guidance. This component helps readers understand anxiety spiritually, offering peace and hope in facing life's challenges. Then, moral guidelines highlight Islamic moral values to guide behavior and interactions, fostering a sense of ethical living and empathy (Mostafa et al., 2023). For example, the story of Prophet Ayyoub and Yousef is a guideline for demonstrating patience and kindness in daily life. Spiritual reinforcement strengthens the spiritual connection with Allah by reciting selected verses and hadiths. Verses like QS. Ar-Ra'd (13): 28, QS. Al-Hijr (94): 56, and QS. Ali Imran (3): 139 are designed to strengthen spiritually and increase awareness of Allah's greatness, which can be a source of calmness and fortitude. The last is writing activities, structured writing exercises that encourage the expression of feelings and reflections, followed by enrichment activities to deepen the spiritual insights gained. This component transforms the workbook into more than a tool for developing writing skills; it becomes a powerful means for spiritual growth, moral reinforcement, and emotional healing.

Integrating these components transforms the workbook into more than just a tool for developing writing skills. It becomes a powerful means for spiritual growth, moral reinforcement, and emotional healing. By embedding Islamic teachings into the practice of expressive writing, individuals can achieve a balanced approach to mental health that honors both their psychological needs and their spiritual beliefs. This approach supports the development of a clean conscience and good behavior, fostering a deeper connection to faith and providing strength and peace in the journey toward mental health and overall well-being.

Significance of Gender in Islamic Expressive Writing

Islamic expressive writing is significantly more favorable for girls than for boys. This gender difference can be attributed to several social, cultural, and biological factors that influence the involvement of women in the study and their higher detection rates of anxiety. Girls may be more inclined to engage in expressive writing as a form of emotional expression due to societal norms that encourage openness about feelings in females. Additionally, cultural expectations often place greater emotional and caregiving burdens on women (Kholis, 2017), which can heighten their experience of anxiety and make them more likely to participate in therapeutic interventions.

Social and cultural factors play a crucial role in how anxiety is expressed and identified between men and women. Women may be more likely to seek help and express their emotional distress due to social norms that permit and even encourage emotional expression in females (Zhao et al., 2021). Conversely, men might suppress or hide their anxiety due to societal expectations that prioritize stoicism and emotional restraint in males (Kwiatkowski, 2023).

Differential exposure to psychosocial stressors and increased biological and psychological vulnerability to anxiety in women contribute to the observed sex differences in anxiety disorders (Farhane-Medina et al., 2022). Women are often subjected to societal pressures to fulfill traditional gender roles, such as being caregivers, which can increase their stress levels (Kerr et al., 2021). While participants in this study are adolescents aged 13 to 15 and may not yet have assumed such roles, the societal expectations placed on young girls can still influence their psychological development and contribute to anxiety. Adolescents may internalize these future gender expectations, feeling the weight of societal norms, which can add to the stress they experience during this formative period. These pressures may also include academic expectations and household responsibilities, which create a dual burden for adolescent girls, exacerbating their anxiety (Docka-Filipek & Stone, 2021).

Experiences of discrimination and gender-based violence can further elevate stress levels and anxiety in women. Adolescent girls, in particular, may face significant stress related to body image, peer relationships, and societal expectations, which are less frequently experienced or acknowledged in boys (Siegel et al., 2021). These pressures can lead to heightened emotional

distress and a greater need for outlets such as expressive writing. Furthermore, girls often encounter dual roles, balancing academic responsibilities with household duties, which can increase their overall stress levels.

Biological factors, such as hormonal changes during adolescence, also play a significant role in anxiety levels. Puberty brings about fluctuations in hormones like estrogen and progesterone, which are linked to mood regulation and stress response (Ho et al., 2022). These hormonal changes can make adolescent girls more susceptible to anxiety compared to their male counterparts.

The combination of societal pressures, dual roles, experiences of discrimination, and biological factors creates more vulnerable conditions for females to experience higher anxiety compared to males. This heightened vulnerability makes Islamic expressive writing particularly beneficial for girls, providing them with a culturally and spiritually relevant tool to express and manage their anxiety effectively.

Personalities Between Introvert and Extrovert in Islamic Expressive Writing

The findings of this study indicate that introverted students prefer expressing their feelings in writing in a coherent and structured manner. This characteristic aligns with the nature of introverts, who are more reflective and inclined to deeply contemplate their feelings and experiences before expressing them (Le et al., 2023). Introverted students often feel more comfortable expressing themselves through writing than verbal communication or direct social interaction (Rajik, 2022). Consequently, expressive writing therapy can be an effective means of relieving anxiety for these students.

Integrating Islamic religious education in expressive writing therapy is particularly relevant for introverted students. The religious values taught in Islamic education, such as introspection, patience, and inner peace, align with introverts' natural tendency for self-reflection. In expressive writing therapy combined with religious education, introverted students can find meaning and purpose in their experiences through a spiritual lens (Jastrzębski, 2023). The coherent writing process allows students to reflect on religious teachings and how they can be applied in dealing with their problems. For example, by writing about their experiences and relating them to the concept of patience in Islam, students can learn to manage anxiety and stress in a calmer and more controlled manner. Additionally, structured writing can help them understand their feelings and articulate their emotions more effectively.

In contrast, extroverted students might benefit differently from Islamic expressive writing therapy. Extroverts, typically more sociable and outwardly expressive, may find writing a less natural mode of expression than verbal communication or social interaction (Thanh Thao et al., 2024). However, the structured nature of expressive writing can still offer significant benefits. For extroverted students, writing can complement their verbal expression, helping them organize their thoughts and feelings in a way that might not be as easily achievable through spontaneous conversation.

Islamic expressive writing can help extroverted students by encouraging moments of introspection that balance their external focus. Writing allows them to slow down and reflect on their experiences more deliberately. By integrating Islamic teachings, extroverted students can learn to connect their outward experiences with inner spiritual principles. The connection can enhance their emotional regulation and give them more profound insights into their actions and motivations. For instance, extroverted students writing about their interactions with others can explore themes of compassion and empathy in Islam, fostering a more thoughtful approach to their social relationships.

Moreover, Islamic expressive writing can bridge the gap between introverted and extroverted students by providing a common platform for self-expression that respects individual differences. Both personality types can benefit from this therapeutic approach's

structured reflection and spiritual grounding. Introverted students may find solace in the solitary nature of writing, while extroverted students can use writing as a reflective pause in their active social lives.

Role of Social Support in Anxiety Reduction

It is essential to consider the multifaceted nature of psychological healing and the various elements that contribute to its success. The findings from this study highlight the complexity of the relationship between social support and anxiety reduction. While social support is often regarded as a crucial component of mental health interventions, its impact may vary depending on individual differences, the nature of the support provided, and the specific therapeutic approach employed.

As the method used in this research, Islamic expressive writing incorporates elements of spiritual reflection and personal storytelling rooted in Islamic teachings. This method provides psychological relief by allowing individuals to express their emotions and thoughts through writing grounded in their faith and cultural context. The potential for healing through Islamic expressive writing is based on the therapeutic benefits of self-expression combined with the spiritual comfort and guidance derived from Islamic principles (Kurniawan & Zulkarnain, 2023).

The role of social support in this context is multifaceted. Social support can enhance the effectiveness of Islamic expressive writing by providing a sense of community and belonging, which can be exceptionally comforting in times of emotional distress. The presence of a supportive network can encourage individuals to engage more deeply with the expressive writing process, knowing that they are not alone in their struggles (Lepp, 2019). Additionally, social support can offer validation and affirmation of the individual's experiences and emotions, reinforcing the therapeutic benefits of expressive writing.

However, in this research, it was not proven that social support significantly reduces anxiety in students participating in Islamic expressive writing. This finding suggests that while social support may offer various benefits, it may not directly impact anxiety levels within the context of this specific intervention. This finding suggests that other factors might play a more crucial role in reducing anxiety and highlights the need to explore these factors further.

Nonetheless, the role of social support cannot be entirely dismissed, as it might interact with other factors to influence the overall therapeutic outcome. For instance, the quality and type of social support, whether emotional, informational, or instrumental, may significantly affect how effectively an individual can process and overcome anxiety (Islam et al., 2022) through Islamic expressive writing. While social support may not independently determine the success of Islamic expressive writing interventions, it remains a relevant factor that could interact synergistically with other elements to enhance overall therapeutic outcomes, fostering a supportive environment conducive to emotional processing and healing.

Implications for Educational Practice and Further Research

The findings from this study underscore the potential of incorporating therapeutic writing within educational curricula, particularly in environments where religious and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping educational methodologies and student engagement. This study offers a model for integrating psychological health strategies with traditional religious teachings for Islamic educational institutions, potentially enhancing students' overall educational experience and well-being.

The intervention was able to tap into the student's existing religious framework, making the therapeutic activities more relevant and effective. The students' familiarity with and dedication to their worship rituals likely enhanced their engagement with the writing tasks, as they could see them as an extension of their spiritual life (Yilmaz, 2019). This approach

underscores the importance of integrating faith-based principles into psychological interventions, particularly in religious educational settings, to enhance emotional expression and promote healing.

For future research, it would be beneficial to expand the sample size and include a control group to validate the findings further and potentially compare the effectiveness of different types of therapeutic writing or other psychological interventions integrated with Islamic principles (Aziz et al., 2020). Additionally, qualitative research exploring participants' personal experiences and the subjective impact of the intervention could provide deeper insights into how such integrative approaches are perceived and which aspects are most beneficial.

Incorporating expressive writing with Islamic principles into the curriculum can significantly contribute to reducing anxiety among students. This approach addresses mental health issues and fosters a nurturing environment that respects cultural and religious identities. Educators can create a more engaging and supportive learning experience by aligning therapeutic practices with students' spiritual beliefs. This model can be particularly beneficial in Islamic educational institutions, where integrating religious teachings with psychological health strategies can resonate deeply with students, enhancing their academic performance and emotional well-being.

Limitations of the Research

While this study provides valuable insights into integrating expressive writing with Islamic principles for anxiety relief, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size, though reasonable, was limited to 124 adolescents from only two schools, one state and one Islamic junior high school, within a specific geographical area. The sample may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Future studies could expand the sample size and include more diverse schools from different regions to enhance the external validity of the results.

Second, while the GAD-7 questionnaire is a widely validated tool for measuring anxiety, it may not fully capture the nuances of emotional and psychological shifts brought about by expressive writing, particularly when intertwined with spiritual and cultural factors like Islamic teachings. Additional qualitative measures, such as interviews or open-ended surveys, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and the emotional processes involved.

Third, the study's short-term pretest-posttest design does not allow for an examination of the long-term effects of the intervention. It is unclear whether the anxiety relief observed, especially in the state school group, would persist over time. Longitudinal studies could help determine the lasting impact of Islamic-based expressive writing interventions on adolescent anxiety. Finally, the observed increase in anxiety scores in the Islamic school, while interpreted as enhanced self-awareness or emotional expression, could also be indicative of other factors such as discomfort with emotional vulnerability or the pressure to adhere to cultural expectations.

CONCLUSIONS

The integration of expressive writing with Islamic principles has proven to be a viable and practical approach to reducing anxiety among adolescents in educational settings. This holistic educational strategy addresses mental health issues and fosters a nurturing environment that respects cultural and religious identities. By bridging the gap between psychological health strategies and traditional religious teachings, educators can enhance students' overall educational experience and well-being, paving the way for a more inclusive and supportive approach to education. Future research should consider expanding the sample size and including a control group to validate further the effectiveness of integrating therapeutic writing

with Islamic principles. A larger sample size would provide more robust data, while a control group would help isolate the intervention's specific impact compared to other variables. Additionally, comparing the effectiveness of different types of therapeutic writing or other psychological interventions integrated with Islamic teachings could offer valuable insights into the most effective approaches for different contexts and populations.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

RK contributed to the inception of the research idea and was responsible for data collection. NK ensured the research script was coherent and well-aligned with academic standards, meticulously refining the manuscript to enhance its clarity and readability. SY was instrumental in designing the research methodology and constructing a robust framework that supported practical exploration in educational settings.

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