

## Enhancing Vocational Students' Critical Thinking Through Creative Short Story Writing Training

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| Article Info                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
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| <p><b>Article history:</b><br/> Received: December 15, 2025<br/> Accepted: March 13, 2026<br/> Published: March 27, 2026</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/> Creative writing<br/> Critical thinking<br/> Short story</p> <p>This article is licensed under a<br/> <a href="#">Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License</a></p> <p>© 2026 Bubungan Tinggi: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat</p> | <p>This community service activity aims to strengthen the critical thinking skills of vocational high school students through creative short story writing workshops. The main challenges faced by students include low levels of critical thinking and creative writing skills, particularly in identifying problems, formulating conflicts, and structuring a logical plot. This community service employed the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which emphasizes leveraging the potential and assets possessed by students and the school. The implementation method included the Discovery, Dream, Design, Define, and Destiny phases, carried out through training, mentoring, discussions, and a structured short story writing activity. Evaluation was conducted using a pretest and posttest design involving 40 students. The pretest results indicated that students' initial abilities fell into the moderate category, with scores predominantly ranging from 60 to 75. Following the training, the posttest results showed a significant improvement, with the majority of students achieving scores in the 80–90 range. These research results suggest that creative short story writing training is effective in enhancing students' critical thinking skills, writing abilities, and self-confidence in communicating ideas in writing. Thus, creative short story writing training based on the ABCD approach can serve as a relevant alternative learning strategy for strengthening literacy and developing 21st-century competencies.</p> |
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## INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills are essential competencies for vocational high school (SMK) students as they face the challenges of a competitive job market and the literacy demands of the 21st century. The industrial world now demands graduates who not only possess technical skills, but also higher-order thinking skills such as information analysis, decision-making, and independent problem-solving. Consequently, enhancing critical thinking abilities is a vital component of vocational education, enabling students to adjust to technological advancements and occupational requirements.

Empirical observations reveal that students' critical thinking skills are comparatively deficient. A multitude of students encounter difficulties in problem identification, objective information evaluation, and logical argument construction. These limits are frequently

apparent in jobs necessitating comprehensive analysis, cohesive organization of concepts, or the capacity for deliberate expression of thoughts. This situation underscores the necessity for a learning approach that can stimulate critical thinking skills more effectively and enjoyably.

Community service activities in the form of creative short story writing workshops are viewed as an effective strategy for developing students' critical thinking skills. Creative writing, particularly in the short story genre, is an activity that involves deep thinking processes. Students are required to observe phenomena, select an issue or problem as a theme, develop characters, construct conflicts, and logically structure the story's resolution. These activities directly enhance critical thinking skills, namely in problem formulation, cause-and-effect analysis, character choice evaluation, and cohesive narrative construction. Moreover, composing short stories provides a platform for students to express creativity, expand their imagination, and build confidence in translating ideas into written form.

Creative writing skills are intricately associated with the enhancement of critical thinking skills. Writing encompasses not just the transcription of ideas but also a methodical, analytical, and reflective cognitive process ([Purwatiningsih et al., 2025](#); [Yuniarty et al., 2025](#)). The act of writing, particularly fiction writing, is a multifaceted cognitive endeavor necessitating the writer's continual engagement in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In writing short stories, authors must not only depend on imagination but also rationally formulate ideas, establish a plot grounded in cause-and-effect relationships, and evaluate the narrative structure to maintain consistency and clarity for readers. Therefore, short story writing workshops possess significant potential as an effective alternative educational approach to augment students' critical thinking skills.

In creative short story writing workshops, students are guided through a series of stages in the creative process, including idea exploration, theme identification, character development, conflict construction, and story finalization. At each stage, students are instructed to assess judgments, analyze the logical connections among narrative pieces, and appraise storytelling choices. This process inherently and pleasantly fosters critical thinking skills. Additionally, the participatory nature of the training enhances student engagement. The program also provides opportunities for students to discuss, exchange ideas, and reflect on their work with peers. This corresponds with the principles of experiential learning, which strengthens students' understanding through hands-on practice.

Composing short stories involves not just unleashing one's creativity but also engaging in creative thought that necessitates critical skills. In an educational setting, teaching students to write short stories has the potential to enhance their critical thinking skills. Prior research has demonstrated a substantial and significant correlation between creative thinking skill and short story writing skill, evidenced by a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.902, alongside a regression equation affirming the impact of creative thinking on writing skill ([Puspitasari, 2017](#)).

The emphasis on creativity in short story writing encourages participants to explore their ideas and imagination in producing innovative and meaningful works, as evidenced in studies on short story writing training ([Nur et al., 2020](#); [Pulungan et al., 2023](#)). Thus, it can be concluded that short story writing is not merely a literary activity but also a strategic tool for developing students' creative and critical thinking skills. The close relationship between creative thinking abilities and short story writing skills indicates that creative writing training makes a significant contribution to enhancing students' literacy and cognitive capacities. In the digital age, short story writing training has emerged as a pertinent and efficacious approach to cultivating innovation, imagination, and the enhancement of literary character in students.

Short story writing workshops not only enhance literacy and foster critical thinking skills but also significantly contribute to students' character development. Writing fictional narratives fosters empathy in students as they are required to understand the various perspectives of different characters. Short stories, as a narrative form, frequently convey moral lessons, social values, and critiques of particular realities, rendering the writing process a means for the internalization of values. This practice enables students to cultivate intellectual, emotional, and spiritual maturity. Thus, writing short stories not only trains cognitive aspects but also serves as a humanizing process that elevates students to the highest level of humanity through the optimization of their works and creativity ([Erni & Herwandi, 2018](#); [Luthfiani et al., 2021](#); [Taqwim et al., 2022](#)). This training emphasizes on the technical elements of writing and the development of students' social awareness and reflective skills.

In light of these factors, the community service team developed a program entitled “Enhancing Vocational Students’ Critical Thinking Through Creative Short Story Writing Training.” This initiative was executed at SMK Islam Sabilal Muhtadin in Banjarmasin, a partner institution dedicated to advancing students’ literacy and character skills. The activity was carried out through a training and mentoring approach. Students were provided with basic material on short story writing, guided to understand the intrinsic elements of fiction, and directly mentored in composing their works. The training was designed to provide an interactive and enjoyable learning experience while prioritizing the development of students' critical thinking skills.

The research inquiries for this community service initiative encompass three primary aspects. First, how can creative short story writing training serve as an effective tool for improving the critical thinking skills of vocational high school students? Second, how can the mentoring process in short story writing help students develop creative writing skills in a structured manner? Third, to what extent does this training impact students’ ability to identify problems, formulate conflicts, and construct storylines in a logical and creative manner?

This community service activity also offers significant benefits. For the students, this program enhances their critical thinking skills and creative literacy via an engaging, demanding, and motivating approach. Students gain the opportunity to develop creativity, expand their imagination, and hone their ability to construct coherent and logical stories. This training can enhance their self-confidence and their capacity to articulate thoughts in writing. For the school, this practice enhances the quality of literacy teaching and facilitates the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which prioritizes critical thinking and creativity. The school benefits from the availability of a student self-development program that is relevant and tailored to their needs. Meanwhile, for the service team, this activity serves as an opportunity to engage in community service aligned with their expertise in language education, expand their academic networks, and make a tangible contribution to partner schools.

This activity corresponds institutionally with the curriculum development agenda that advocates for contextual and experiential learning. The creative short story writing workshop provides students with the opportunity to learn not only from theory but also through hands-on practice. The process of writing short stories requires various competencies, including observational skills, evaluative reasoning, and reflective thought—all of which pertain to critical thinking. This activity promotes collaborative experiences via discussion sessions, work presentations, and a peer-feedback process that enhances students' communication skills.

The implementation of community service activities through creative short story writing workshops at SMK Islam Sabilal Muhtadin in Banjarmasin is a strategic step toward

developing students' critical thinking skills while enhancing their creative literacy. This activity is expected to make a tangible contribution to improving the quality of learning, particularly in terms of developing literacy skills and higher-order thinking. Through a structured and participatory training approach, students are expected to produce high-quality short stories while demonstrating improvement in their critical thinking skills.

## METHODS

This community service activity was implemented using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) method, an approach to designing learning objectives that has been widely adopted in various educational contexts, including in creative short story writing workshops. This method consisted of five stages: 1) Discovery, 2) Dream, 3) Design, 4) Define, 5) Destiny ([Mudiyanto & Jaelani, 2023](#); [Farikhah et al., 2025](#); [Köpeczi-Bócz, 2025](#)) The potential mentioned in relation to this creative writing training encompassed students' interests, support from Indonesian language teachers, and the school's commitment to developing students' literacy.

### Discovery

At this stage, the service-learning team observed and identified various assets possessed by the school and students related to literacy and creativity, such as students' interest in storytelling, basic writing skills, support from Indonesian language teachers, and learning facilities.

### Dream (Collaboratively Constructing Aspirations)

Teachers and students were invited to formulate an ideal vision of creative writing activities capable of enhancing critical thinking skills. At this stage, the school and the volunteer team envisioned a training format that was inspiring, interactive, and capable of fostering the creation of meaningful short stories.

### Design

Based on shared assets and dreams, the volunteer team developed a training activity plan, including the creation of creative writing materials, learning strategies, workshop scenarios, and mentoring methods. This plan ensured that every step of the learning process supported the development of students' critical thinking skills.

### Define

This stage established the division of roles among the volunteer team, teachers, and students, including the training schedule, competency goals, and success indicators. At this stage, evaluation instruments were also determined to measure improvements in writing and critical thinking skills. Evaluation through pre- and post-tests in the form of writing assignments was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the training. Assessment via pre- and post-tests in the format of writing assignments was performed to gauge the efficacy of the training. This assessment rubric covered several key aspects, namely: (1) the appropriateness of the theme and story ideas, which assesses students' ability to determine clear and relevant story ideas; (2) story structure, which includes the completeness of short story elements such as orientation, conflict, climax, and resolution; (3) character and setting development, which assesses the depth of characters and the clarity of the story's setting; (4) creativity and originality of the story, which demonstrate students' ability to develop ideas imaginatively; (5) accuracy of language use, which includes word choice, effective sentences, and the proper and correct use of Indonesian language conventions; as well as (6) indicators of critical thinking, as evidenced by students' ability to construct logical

conflicts, develop cause-and-effect sequences, and convey the story's message in a reflective manner. Pretest and posttest results were compared to assess improvements in students' creative writing skills and critical thinking abilities following the training. Assessments were conducted by a team of community service volunteers in collaboration with Indonesian language teachers to ensure objectivity and consistency in evaluation.

### **Destiny (Execution)**

In the final stage, the training was implemented through writing exercises, discussions, and reflections. Students were guided to apply critical thinking skills in composing short stories. This stage also included follow-up and reinforcement to ensure that the culture of creative literacy continued to develop after the community service activities were completed.

Digital presentation media and online platforms were utilized to enhance the effectiveness of the training. This was carried out to ensure that training sessions are engaging, interactive, and help students better understand the concepts of creative short story writing. Engaging, visually-based digital presentations were used to convey material in a more communicative and easily understandable way, such as displaying story plot structures in the form of infographics, character mapping using visual charts, and snippets from well-known short stories. This supports the idea that learning short stories can be enhanced by visual media, making it more engaging and fun ([Widyatnyana, 2021](#)).

The Google Docs platform served as a medium for collaborative writing and editing of short stories, enabling students and facilitators to offer rapid feedback. Padlet served as a digital ideation platform where students contributed story inspirations through photographs, keywords, or excerpts of personal experiences that could be transformed into short narratives. Furthermore, Canva was used to help students create simple storyboards that visualize the plot, setting, and characters in the story. Utilizing storyboards in short story writing teaching has demonstrated an enhancement in students' engagement with writing, as it helps them organize their story ideas more systematically ([Nafasya et al., 2022](#)). Google Classroom was used for coordination and assignment collection, facilitating communication between facilitators, teachers, and students. This website enables students to submit drafts of their short tales, while facilitators offer revision feedback prior to the finalization of the work.

Post-training mentoring and evaluation were performed by allowing students to finalize their work with the comprehensive support of the service-learning team. Consultation and mentorship sessions occur both in-person and virtually. Evaluation was conducted by analyzing the development of students' writing from the preliminary draft to the final edition. Indonesian language instructors participated in the evaluation process to ensure the program's sustainability following the completion of service-learning activities.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This community service activity was carried out using the ABCD method, which consists of five stages: discovery, dream, design, define, and destiny. Each stage yielded findings that served as the basis for conducting creative short story writing workshops aimed at enhancing students' critical thinking skills.

The first stage, discovery, involves identifying the assets possessed by the partner institution. At this stage, the service team engaged in observations and talks with school officials to ascertain various potentials that could facilitate the execution of the training activities. The results of the identification revealed that students demonstrated a fairly high interest in reading and storytelling activities, although their ability to write short stories still needed improvement. Furthermore, Indonesian language teachers demonstrated robust

support for the advancement of literacy activities at the school. Adequate learning facilities and the availability of digital devices also served as assets that could be utilized in the training activities. The results of the short story writing pretest conducted in the initial stage indicated that most students still struggled to develop a coherent plot, create logical conflicts, and convey the story's message clearly. These findings served as the basis for the service team to design training activities that could help students improve both their creative writing skills and their critical thinking skills.

The second stage is "dream," which entails constructing a collective vision of the intended training activity for all stakeholders involved. At this stage, the service-learning team held participatory discussions with teachers and students to formulate an ideal outline for a creative short story writing workshop that aligns with the participants' needs. These discussions aimed to explore the aspirations, expectations, and perspectives of students and teachers regarding the writing instruction they have experienced in the classroom.

The discussion results reveal that students seek learning activities that are more engaging, participatory, and offer enhanced possibilities for them to articulate their thoughts, experiences, and creativity through writing. Students sought activities that emphasized not only theoretical knowledge but also offered increased opportunities for actual writing practice and feedback on their output. Indonesian language teachers anticipated that the training activities would facilitate a more systematic comprehension of the short story writing process for students, encompassing the stages of idea generation, plot structuring, character and setting development, and the clear and meaningful conveyance of the story's message.

The teacher underscored the need for training activities that cultivate students' critical thinking skills. This pertains to students' capacity to logically construct plot conflicts, build cause-and-effect links within the story, and articulate reflective themes through their short stories. In accordance with these objectives, the service team developed a training concept that prioritizes a participatory approach, incorporating writing exercises, group discussions, and intensive mentorship throughout the short story writing process. Therefore, the training activities aim to enhance creative writing skills while also fostering students' critical thinking abilities through the creation of literary works.

During the design phase, the volunteer team began systematically drafting the training program based on the potential identified in the previous phase and the expectations jointly formulated by teachers and students. This phase was essential for confirming that the developed training activities were genuinely pertinent to the participants' requirements and could effectively utilize the school's available resources. Through a thorough planning process, the service team aimed to provide activities that emphasize content delivery while also ensuring active, interactive, and meaningful learning experiences for students through meticulous planning.

The training program was structured to align with the phases of the creative short story writing process. The training resources encompassed comprehension of short story elements, methods for recognizing and cultivating story ideas, producing a coherent narrative, establishing robust characters and locations, and articulating a message pertinent to the students' life experiences. The material was structured in phases to facilitate students' comprehension of the short story writing process, encompassing narrative planning, composition, and manuscript refining.

The training approach not only emphasizes mastery of short story elements but also aims to cultivate students' critical thinking abilities. This was accomplished through diverse learning activities, including the analysis of conflicts within a narrative, the identification of cause-and-effect links in the sequence of events, and the reflection on the messages or values included in the short story. Consequently, writing is perceived not only as a creative

endeavor but also as a cognitive process that requires analytical abilities, reasoning, and reflection on the various events presented in the story. This method is anticipated to assist students in crafting short stories that are both captivating in narrative and rich in significance and applicability to real-life situations.

In the definition phase, the service team established various key aspects related to the implementation of the activities, particularly the division of roles among all parties involved and the selection of evaluation tools to measure the program's success. This phase was conducted to ensure that all training activities proceeded in a focused, systematic manner and aligned with the previously established objectives. Through this stage, the cooperation mechanism between the service team, teachers, and students was also agreed upon to ensure the activity's implementation proceeds effectively. In this division of roles, the volunteer team acted as facilitators responsible for designing training materials, delivering the content, and providing guidance to students throughout the short story writing process. The volunteer team also provided direction and feedback on the students' work so they could improve and further develop their writing. Meanwhile, Indonesian language teachers served as partners supporting the implementation of activities at the school. Teachers helped coordinate activities with students, supervised the training sessions, and provided feedback on the learning process and students' written work. Teachers also played a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of literacy activities after the community service program concluded. As for the students, they acted as active participants who were directly involved in the entire series of training activities, starting from attending lectures, doing writing exercises, discussing with peers, and revising and refining the short stories they wrote.

This stage entailed assigning roles and identifying the evaluation instruments to assess the effectiveness of the training activities. Evaluation is performed via pre- and post-tests consisting of short story writing tasks administered prior to and following the program. The purpose of this activity is to assess the development of students' creative writing skills while also observing improvements in their critical thinking abilities following the training. The evaluation of students' work is performed utilizing a rubric that encompasses several critical elements namely the appropriateness of the theme and story ideas, story structure including the introduction, conflict, climax, and resolution, character and setting development, creativity and originality of the story, accuracy of language use, and critical thinking skills reflected in the development of conflict, cause-and-effect relationships within the plot, and the delivery of a reflective message. The results of the assessment of the students' works indicate an improvement in short story writing skills following the training activities, particularly in the aspects of plot development, clarity of conflict, and the ability to convey the story's message in a more coherent and meaningful manner.

The final stage, "Destiny," involved conducting training activities and ensuring the program's sustainability. The training activities consisted of workshops featuring presentations, short story writing exercises, group discussions, and collective reflections. During these activities, students were given the opportunity to develop story ideas based on their personal experiences and their surrounding environment. The mentoring process was carried out in stages, beginning with the development of story ideas, through the writing of initial drafts, and culminating in the revision of the manuscripts. The service team and teachers provided feedback on the students' work so that they can improve the story structure, strengthen the conflict, and clarify the message the story aims to convey. The community service team delivered the material as shown in Figure 1.





Figure 1 Community service team was delivering material

The training activities were also supported by the use of digital tools such as Google Docs, Padlet, Canva, and Google Classroom. These tools were used to facilitate collaboration, share ideas, and provide immediate feedback on students' work. The use of these digital tools made the training activities more interactive and engaging for the students.

Student feedback indicates that the use of digital tools like Canva, Google Docs, and Padlet is highly beneficial for developing story concepts and visualizing plot structures. Google Docs enables students to collaborate and receive immediate feedback, which accelerates the revision process. Students also benefited from the facilitator's step-by-step guidance, which enhanced their comprehension of story structure and allowed them to discern areas requiring enhancement in logic and creativity.

The results of the training indicate that creative short story writing is an effective means of enhancing students' critical thinking skills. This improvement is evident in the development of their ability to analyze problems, identify the main conflict, establish cause-and-effect relationships, and construct a coherent and logical plot. The writing process requires students to create a fictional reality grounded in logical principles, thereby placing them in complex problem-solving situations, such as formulating character motivations, considering various alternatives for resolving conflicts, and ensuring the consistency of characters' actions with the plot's development.

The ongoing revision process enhances the reflective dimension of critical thinking, as students are required to reread their work, pinpoint illogical elements, and amend them according to feedback. This revision allows students to assess their cognitive processes, therefore enhancing the learning experience. Furthermore, intensive guidance through direct discussions and digital collaboration has a significant impact on improving the ability to write short stories in a structured manner. Guidance is provided through stages ranging from the presentation of foundational material, short story analysis, idea discussions, draft preparation, to final revisions. This mentoring style not only offers education but also motivates students to autonomously seek solutions to difficulties that emerge during the process.

A significant enhancement was apparent in the students' capacity to discern the principal issues in a narrative, devise pertinent conflicts, and develop coherent and imaginative storylines. At the beginning of the training, some students struggled to identify a strong conflict or one that aligned with the story's theme. However, after receiving intensive guidance and exposure to well-written short stories, they began to understand that conflict is the primary element that drives a story. A more mature formulation of conflict is evident in the students' final works, where they began to pay attention to the alignment between conflict, characters, and plot, and were able to build the story's climax in a more coherent manner. The story's resolution was also structured based on a logical connection to the



preceding conflict. Thus, the students' critical thinking skills developed alongside their ability to construct fictional narratives in a more focused, coherent, and creative manner.

### Evaluation

The training evaluation included a pretest and posttest design to thoroughly assess enhancements in students' short story writing skills. A total of 40 students took the pretest, which aimed to assess their initial abilities, covering aspects such as problem identification, conflict formulation, plot development, logical coherence, and creativity. The pretest results showed that most students still had difficulty determining the focus of the story, formulating a strong conflict, and constructing a coherent plot. The majority of students were only able to produce short stories with a basic structure, without adequate character development or a clear conflict. These findings indicate that critical thinking skills in the context of short story writing remain in the low to moderate range.

The results of the student pre-test are shown in Figure 2.

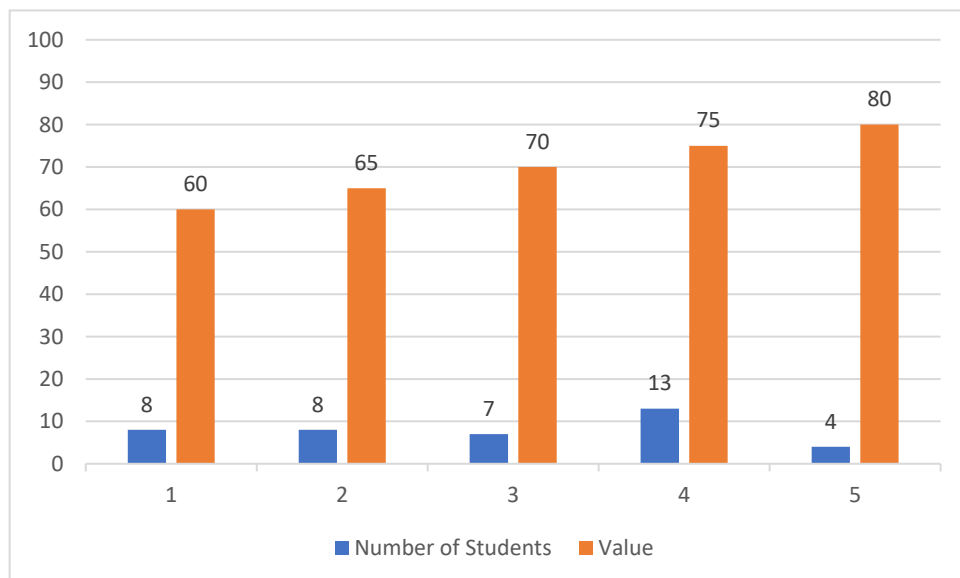


Figure 2 Student pretest results

The pretest findings indicated that the students' preliminary competencies in creative short story writing and critical thinking skills remained moderate and inconsistent. Among the 40 students who participated in the pretest, the majority achieved scores ranging from 60 to 75, suggesting that their underlying skills in comprehending narrative concepts, generating ideas, and constructing conflict remain underdeveloped. Eight students achieved a score of 60, signifying persistent challenges, especially in recognizing narrative structure and integrating concepts into a coherent plot. Furthermore, eight additional students attained a score of 65, indicating a little enhancement in comprehension, while their analytical abilities and inventiveness continued to be constrained. Seven students achieved a score of 70, suggesting they are starting to articulate concepts more coherently, although still necessitate assistance in enhancing conflict and characterization. Thirteen students achieved a score of 75, placing them in the higher group. This group had a more consistent proficiency in plot structuring; nonetheless, the depth of ideas and character development needs enhancement to align with the norms of advanced creative writing. Only four students attained a score of 80, the maximum score in the pretest phase. They typically have robust basic skills in narrative construction and display superior creative potential compared to their classmates. Nonetheless, while a minority of students excelled, the

overall score distribution reveals that their skills in creative short story writing and critical thinking are significantly lacking.

The score distribution pattern reveals that most students lack sufficient skills in understanding a story's essential parts, formulating a logical storyline, and artistically conveying conflict. This demonstrates that students need more structured, practice-oriented instructional interventions, especially for developing critical thinking skills, which are essential for creative writing tasks. Consequently, training in creative short story writing is critically pertinent and urgently required to enhance students' literacy, creativity, and analytical abilities thoroughly.

The results of the student post-test are shown in Figure 3.

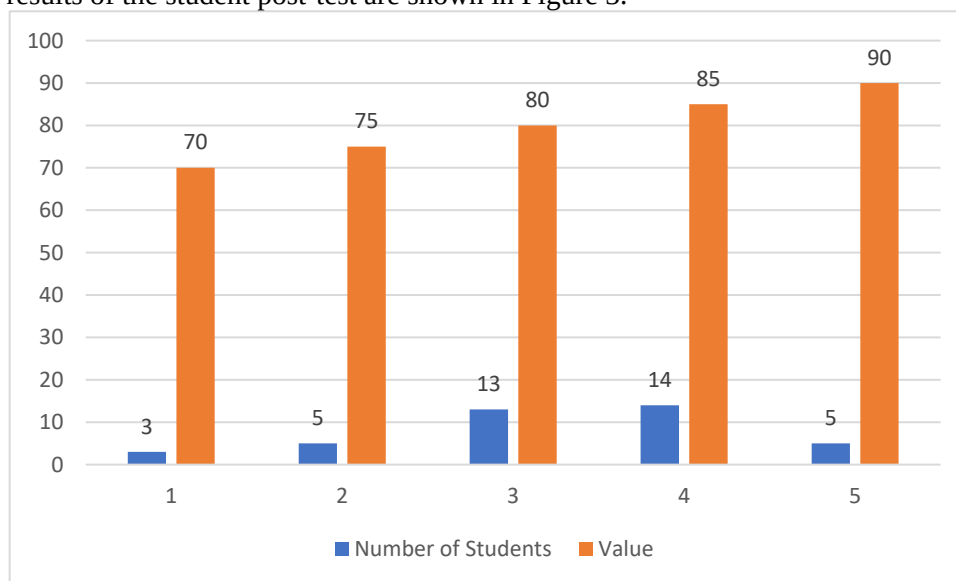


Figure 3 Student posttest results

Following the intensive creative short story writing training, the post-test results showed a very significant improvement in students' abilities compared to their initial performance on the pre-test. These findings reflect the effectiveness of the training intervention as an effort to strengthen both creative literacy and critical thinking skills. In the post-test phase, no students scored below 70, meaning all participants had reached the "good" proficiency category. This change is significant, given that previously most students fell within the 60–70 score range. The number of students scoring 70 dropped drastically to just 3, indicating that the majority of participants had surpassed their initial achievement levels.

The enhancement in scores inside the upper-middle category indicates substantial advancement. Five students attained a score of 75, signifying their enhancement in narrative structuring, characterization clarity, and logical development of cause-and-effect links. The most significant enhancement is shown in the transition of children to the high-scoring category, with 13 students achieving a score of 80 and 14 students attaining a score of 85. This group exhibits a heightened proficiency in recognizing issues, delineating the primary conflict, developing a cohesive narrative, and expressing concepts through enhanced diction and style.

Furthermore, five students attained a score of 90, the highest on the posttest. This group not only demonstrated more mature technical skills in writing short stories but also exhibited a stronger capacity for critical thinking, such as the ability to evaluate the relevance of story elements, develop themes consistently, and create more creative narrative ideas. This upward shift in the score distribution toward the 80–90 range indicates

that the creative short story writing training provided has a profound impact on students' cognitive and literacy skills. This aligns with the view that creative writing activities can encourage students to engage in higher-order thinking through the process of refining ideas, evaluating story structure, and devising imaginative solutions to constructed conflicts ([Mana, 2025](#)).

A comparison of the pretest and posttest results shows that the improvement in students' writing skills was consistent and significant. In the pretest results, students' skills were concentrated in the 60–75 range, or the moderate skill category. However, after participating in the training, the majority of students shifted to the 80–90 range, indicating a more substantial improvement in quality. This change illustrates that the training not only succeeded in improving technical aspects of writing, such as understanding intrinsic elements, narrative coherence, and conflict development, but also strengthened critical thinking skills as a higher-order cognitive process. Training with step-by-step guidance, repeated writing exercises, and the ABCD method proved to provide a structured and contextual learning experience, enabling students to internalize short story writing techniques more effectively.

The persistent enhancement in scores signifies that all participants gained from the program, rather than merely a limited group of students with higher initial abilities. This demonstrates that the training approach used was inclusive, adaptive, and capable of meeting the learning needs of students at various ability levels. The creative short story writing program positively influences creative literacy, as well as students' critical thinking, problem-solving, logical reasoning, and overall creativity. These data substantiate the assertion that this training program is significantly pertinent and has the potential to substantially improve the literacy skills and cognitive abilities of students at SMK Islam Sabilal Muhtadin.

The overall results of the training indicate that creative short story writing is a relevant learning approach for improving the critical thinking skills of vocational high school students. The creative process, which requires analytical, evaluative, and reflective skills, naturally engages students in higher-order thinking. Structured guidance and the use of technology make the learning process more effective and enjoyable. Evaluation data showing high scores confirms that this training successfully achieved all of its stated objectives. Thus, this community service initiative not only improved students' writing skills but also strengthened their critical thinking abilities, boosted their self-confidence, and enriched their learning experiences. This training can serve as a model for sustainable creative literacy training that can be implemented in other schools as part of efforts to improve the quality of Indonesian language and literature education.

## CONCLUSION

The community service activity at SMK Islam Sabilal Muhtadin demonstrated that creative writing training can significantly improve students' literacy and critical thinking skills. Pretest results indicated that students' initial abilities were still in the moderate category, particularly in understanding the intrinsic elements of short stories, formulating conflict, and systematically structuring a plot. The training, designed using the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, provided students with the opportunity to explore their potential through the stages of discovery, dream, design, define, and destiny, thereby making the learning process more participatory and centered on developing the assets students possess. After the training was conducted, the post-test results showed a significant improvement in scores, with a dominant shift in the 80–90 range. This indicates that students have been able to identify problems in stories, develop conflicts more logically, and express ideas through writing in a more coherent and effective manner.

The research results suggest that systematically organized and participative creative writing training can effectively enhance students' writing skills and critical thinking abilities. Therefore, similar activities can be recommended to Indonesian language teachers as an alternative instructional model that can be implemented in classroom literacy activities, particularly in teaching short story writing. In addition, schools can also develop sustainable creative writing training programs by leveraging students' potential as well as the support of teachers and school facilities. Consequently, creative writing training enhances students' academic skills while fostering a culture of literacy and creativity within the school environment.

#### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

#### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT**

Conceptualization: J, SH, MR, and RE; methodology: LL, F; formal analysis: AT, LL, F; writing—preparing the original draft: LL, AT.

#### **AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

The authors declare that this research was prepared, researched, written, and edited without the aid of artificial intelligence (AI) techniques.

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