

Analyzing Students' Needs in Learning Short Story Writing: An Exploratory Case Study in Indonesian Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the learning needs of senior high school students in West Sumatra, Indonesia, regarding short story writing. Understanding these needs is essential to develop effective instructional strategies that enhance students' writing skills. A qualitative research design employing a descriptive analysis method was used. Data were collected through an exploratory case study involving 295 students and 15 teachers from four senior high schools. Instruments included short story writing tests, student questionnaires, and interviews with both students and teachers. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques. Findings indicate that students benefit from a problem-based flipped classroom model, where they study materials at home and complete tasks in class. They also require a problem-based learning approach that emphasizes autonomy, motivation, creativity, logical reasoning, and experiential learning. Preferred learning media are digital, engaging, and flexible—accessible from home and adaptable to individual pacing. In terms of assessment, students favor ongoing, collaborative evaluations that align with the learning process. They also value assessments that directly support the development of their writing skills through constructive feedback and skill-targeted assignments. The results suggest that integrating digital tools and active learning models can better support students' engagement and progress in short story writing. Instructional designs should reflect students' preferences for autonomy, creativity, and continuous feedback.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to write short stories is a vital component of mastering creative writing skills that should be possessed by senior high school students (Afnita, 2022; Efrianto et al., 2024). However, the short story writing proficiency of Indonesian high school students remains relatively low (Jasril et al., 2023). A review of research findings on high school students in West Sumatra reveals that many students struggle to develop story ideas, construct logical plots, and create compelling

characters and settings (Elfia, 2020; Yuhartanti et al., 2018). Their writing often follows repetitive patterns, lacks conflict, and shows limited originality. Furthermore, students frequently demonstrate poor command of language conventions, including spelling, sentence structure, and diction, which often do not adhere to proper Indonesian grammar and usage. These issues are exacerbated by students' low reading interest, limited exposure to quality literary works, pedagogical approaches that emphasize theoretical aspects over practical application, and a lack of engaging learning media that support enjoyable writing experiences (Hastuti & Rakhmawati, 2023; Jasril et al., 2024). As a result, writing short stories is perceived as a burdensome task rather than a medium for expression and imaginative development. This situation underscores the importance of identifying students' needs in order to design more contextualized and engaging short story writing instruction (Asmawati et al., 2023; Marlina et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2024).

Given the current state of short story writing instruction in West Sumatra, as described above, a needs analysis is essential as an initial step in designing effective short story writing instruction in Indonesia, particularly in West Sumatra. Needs analysis is a process conducted to gather information about instructional practices, which can then be used for a variety of purposes (Pushpanathan & Professor, 2013). The concept of needs analysis was first introduced in India in the 1920s (West, 1994). Needs analysis involves collecting information that serves as a foundation for developing educational programs that address the specific needs of a group of learners (Haseli Songhori, 2008). There are two types of needs: objective needs and subjective needs. Objective needs refer to factual information about learners, such as their skills and performance, while subjective needs relate to the cognitive and affective aspects of learning, including learners' preferences, motivations, and attitudes (Brindley, 2012).

According to West (West, 1994), needs analysis can be examined from various perspectives, including instructional, historical, theoretical, and methodological standpoints. From an instructional perspective, needs analysis involves evaluating the teaching materials, instructional models, and assessment methods employed in the learning process. Teaching materials refer to the content used by teachers to facilitate instruction and are a critical component in supporting the smooth delivery of educational activities (Amelia et al., 2022). Instructional models represent conceptual frameworks that systematically outline procedures for organizing learning experiences to achieve (Bruce Joyce, Marsha Weil, 2011; Eggen & Kauchak, 2012; Leontyeva, 2018). Moreover, teaching models serve as instructional designs that define and create specific environmental conditions aimed at fostering student interaction, which in turn promotes behavioral change (Pateliya, 2013). Assessment, as another key element of instruction, is essential for determining the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. Essentially, testing is an integral component of the broader evaluation system (Chang et al., 2024). Instructional evaluation not only measures student learning outcomes but also takes into account the entire instructional process experienced by both educators and learners (Adom et al., 2020; Goss, 2022). In this context, the needs analysis is viewed through the instructional lens, focusing on teaching materials, instructional models, and assessment practices.

Needs analysis is a relatively recent area of research in the field of writing instruction. Numerous scholars have conducted studies focusing on various aspects of writing-related needs. For example, Shah et al. (2014) investigated learners' needs in acquiring argumentative writing skills through mobile platforms, while Heong et al. (2012) explored the need for higher-order thinking skills. Bipinchandra et al. (2014) carried out a needs analysis for teaching argumentative writing. Other notable studies include Adiyaman et al. (2018), who analyzed the needs of Turkish language learners; Asri et al. (2022), who conducted an exploratory case study on students' needs in creative writing courses at Indonesian universities; and Yundayani et al. (2017), who examined needs analysis for developing academic writing teaching materials. Additionally, Flowerdew (2018) investigated the needs of second language learners in writing classes. Shen et al. (2019) explored the experiences of EL1 and EL2 doctoral students in writing discussion sections, while

Cai (2017) analyzed Chinese students' perceptions of academic writing within EAP contexts. Lastly, Ma'rufah et al. (2021) examined what students truly need in writing courses through a comprehensive writing skills needs analysis.

While many previous studies have focused on writing instruction in general, this research places specific emphasis on short story writing at the secondary school level in Indonesia. Conducting a needs analysis in this area is essential to identifying solutions to the challenges students face in writing short stories. Accordingly, this study aims to address the following objectives: (1) to investigate students' needs regarding content, instructional models (methods), and media used in short story writing instruction; (2) to explore students' needs for learning approaches or strategies that can enhance their short story writing skills; and (3) to provide recommendations for the development of an instructional model that is responsive to students' needs in learning to write short stories.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Model

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, aimed at exploring and analyzing students' perceived needs in short story writing instruction within senior high schools in West Sumatra, Indonesia. Descriptive qualitative analysis was used to interpret participants' perspectives through detailed descriptions of their experiences and opinions (Creswell, 2014). The approach involved identifying patterns and themes from test responses, questionnaires, and interviews related to three key domains: teaching materials, instructional models, and learning evaluation. Unlike purely quantitative methods, this model allowed for an in-depth understanding of students' subjective learning needs within their socio-cultural context. The term "descriptive analysis" in this study refers specifically to thematic coding and content analysis of qualitative data obtained from interviews. This process followed the stages outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. For the quantitative components (i.e., test and questionnaire data), descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant responses and identify dominant trends in learning needs.

2.2 Participants

A total of 295 senior high school students and 15 teachers participated in the study. All participants were selected from public and private schools in urban and rural areas across West Sumatra, Indonesia. The inclusion criteria for selecting schools were as follows: (a) Schools had received an accreditation rating of A. (b) Schools were located in both coastal and inland regions of West Sumatra. (c) Schools offered short story writing instruction as part of their curriculum. (d) Schools were willing to participate in all phases of the research.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	115	37.09
	Female	195	62.90
Role	Student	295	95.16
	Teacher	15	4.84

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using three primary instruments: (1) a short story writing test, (2) a structured questionnaire, and (3) semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. Each instrument was designed to capture different dimensions of students' learning needs. Short Story Writing Test: Students were asked to write a short story based on a given prompt. Their outputs were assessed using a validated rubric covering eight aspects: idea generation, plot development,

character creation, setting description, conflict integration, language style, title creation, and mechanics/language use. This rubric was adapted from Yamanishi et al. (2019) and reviewed by two experienced language educators for face validity. Questionnaire: A researcher-developed questionnaire was administered to gather students' perceptions regarding their learning preferences and challenges in short story writing. The instrument was piloted with a sample of 30 students not included in the main study to assess its clarity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated at 0.82, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 teachers and a stratified sample of 30 students to triangulate findings from the test and questionnaire. An interview guide was developed based on the research questions and validated by experts in educational linguistics. Interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim for analysis. All procedures adhered to ethical guidelines and were approved by all participants.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. For quantitative data (test scores and questionnaire responses): (1) Raw scores from the writing test were converted into percentages using a standardized scoring rubric. (2) Questionnaire responses were coded numerically and entered into SPSS for descriptive statistical analysis. (3) Mean scores and frequency distributions were calculated to identify prevalent learning needs across the sample. Furthermore, qualitative data (interview transcripts) results followed these steps: (1) Thematic analysis was conducted following the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (a) familiarization with data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. (2) Open coding was applied first, followed by thematic grouping to identify overarching categories such as *learning materials*, *instructional strategies*, and *evaluation practices*. (3) Themes were verified through member checking and peer debriefing with co-researchers. The analytical process followed the principles of data reduction, display, conclusion drawing, and verification (Miles, M.B, Huberman, A.M, dan Saldana, 2014).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

This section presents the results of the study on students' needs in short story writing instruction at senior high schools in West Sumatra, Indonesia. Data were collected through tests, questionnaires, and interviews. To enhance readability and align with international journal standards, findings are grouped thematically under five key categories: Learning Materials, Learning Models (Methods), Learning Media, Motivation, and Evaluation. Supporting data are summarized in tables.

3.1.1 Learning Materials

Students consistently expressed a strong need for structured instructional materials to support the development of various elements of short story writing, including plot development, character creation, setting, conflict resolution, and thematic depth. Test results further revealed that a solid conceptual understanding of these narrative components was critical to their success. Without clear guidance, many students struggled to organize their ideas, leading to fragmented narratives and underdeveloped storylines. Structured materials not only help clarify these foundational concepts but also provide models, prompts, and step-by-step frameworks that enhance students' creative expression and technical proficiency. Therefore, integrating comprehensive instructional resources into the learning process is essential to improving both the quality and coherence of student writing.

Table 2. Students' Conceptual Needs in Short Story Writing (Test Results)

No	Conceptual Need in Short Story Writing	Necessity (%)
1	Generating ideas from real-life events	88.83
2	Crafting engaging openings and conclusions	80.52
3	Developing plot, character profiles, and integrating conflicts	82.62
4	Describing the setting, atmosphere, and important details	81.64
5	Creating suspenseful story conflicts	83.52
6	Using a distinctive and appealing language style	72.88
7	Writing an intriguing and relevant title	76.56
8	Understanding mechanics and language use in writing	87.67

Further interviews showed that students preferred the following three things. (a) Systematic teaching materials supplemented with examples. (b) Short story samples based on real-life experiences. (c) Digital formats that are flexible, accessible, and user-friendly.

"We need learning materials that are packaged in digital media—flexible, easy to access, and usable anywhere." (Student 1)

3.1.2 Learning Models (Methods)

The questionnaire and interview results highlighted several methodological preferences among students.

Table 3. Perceived Learning Needs in Short Story Writing (Questionnaire Responses)

No	Learning Method Needed
1	Students need fun and engaging learning experiences
2	Students require sufficient time to practice writing
3	A pleasant and supportive school environment is desired
4	Motivation during the writing process is necessary
5	Effective teaching methods and learning media are needed

From the interviews, students emphasized the importance of the following four things. (a) Problem-based learning rooted in real-life situations. (b) A flipped model where theory is studied at home and writing practice occurs in class. (c) Instructional approaches that are imaginative, creative, collaborative, and hands-on. (d) Teachers who act as motivators, facilitators, and evaluators.

"We want a learning model where we study materials at home and do writing exercises in school because writing takes time to think and analyze." (Student 3)

3.1.3 Learning Media

Digital media emerged as a critical component in meeting students' learning needs. Interview responses indicated a strong preference for the following three things. (a) Digital-based learning resources. (b) Flexibility in accessing materials anytime and anywhere. (c) User-friendly platforms that enhance engagement and reduce barriers to learning.

"We need digital-based learning media so that we can access them from anywhere." (Student 5)

3.1.4 Motivation

Both questionnaire and interview data underscored the role of motivation in sustaining student engagement in short story writing. Students reported that they needed the following three things. (a) A need for encouragement and positive reinforcement. (b) A desire for meaningful assignments that go beyond rote memorization. (c) Supportive interactions with teachers and peers.

"Engaging learning should start with literary works before moving into theory." (Student 10)

3.1.5 Evaluation

Students expressed a clear need for evaluation practices that contribute meaningfully to their writing development.

Table 4: Students' and Teachers' Perspectives on Learning Needs (Interview Results)

Perspective	Evaluation Needs
Timing	Immediate evaluation after each session
Involvement	Joint teacher-student evaluation
Purpose	Enhancing writing skills rather than grading alone
Assignment Focus	Tasks that reinforce writing ability, not just recall or memorization

These findings comprehensively overview students' perceived needs in short story writing instruction. They serve as a foundation for designing more effective, student-centered pedagogical strategies tailored to the Indonesian context.

3.2. Discussion

This study identifies three core dimensions shaping students' needs in short story writing instruction at senior high schools in West Sumatra, Indonesia: teaching materials, learning models, and evaluation practices. Students require relevant, life-connected content that supports idea generation and narrative structuring; engaging, interactive, and technology-integrated learning models such as problem-based and flipped classroom approaches; and timely, meaningful evaluations that enhance writing development. These findings provide insight into how current instructional practices can be improved to better support students' creative writing skills within the Indonesian educational context.

3.2.1 Teaching Materials

Students expressed a strong need for short story writing materials grounded in real-life experiences. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of connecting literary instruction to students' personal contexts to enhance engagement and creativity (Karimi & Sanavi, 2014). When students are encouraged to draw from familiar situations, they not only find it easier to generate ideas but also develop deeper emotional connections with their narratives.

Moreover, students require structured guidance in transforming ideas into complete stories—particularly in crafting openings and closings, developing plots, creating characters, and integrating conflict. This suggests a gap in current teaching materials, which may lack scaffolding strategies that support novice writers through each stage of the writing process. The demand for varied references further highlights the role of extensive reading in language and writing development (Komek et al., 2015), reinforcing the notion that exposure to diverse texts enhances vocabulary, comprehension, and creative thinking (Aditiawarman et al., 2025; Rachman et al., 2024; Ulya, 2024). However, while many curricula emphasize reading and writing, there is often a disconnect between available resources and what students actually need. In this context, digital-based teaching materials could bridge this gap by providing accessible, diverse, and interactive content tailored to students' interests and levels.

3.2.2 Learning Model

Students emphasized the importance of enjoyable, motivating, and imaginative learning environments. This finding resonates with studies showing that affective factors such as motivation and enjoyment significantly influence writing performance (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024; Li et al., 2024). A joyful classroom atmosphere encourages risk-taking, experimentation, and persistence—key traits for creative writing.

The preference for problem-based learning (PBL) indicates students' desire to engage with authentic, context-rich tasks. PBL allows learners to explore complex issues, fostering critical thinking and narrative depth (Anggraeni et al., 2023; Sajidan et al., 2022; Wang, 2021). Similarly,

the flipped classroom model was identified as a promising approach, especially in regions like West Sumatra where internet access is increasingly common. By shifting content delivery outside the classroom, flipped learning enables more time for collaborative writing and teacher feedback during class.

However, the effectiveness of such models depends heavily on teachers' competencies and readiness to adopt new methodologies. Many educators in Indonesia may still rely on traditional, lecture-based instruction due to limited training or institutional support (Haluti et al., 2025; Kumayas et al., 2025; Leatemia et al., 2025). Furthermore, implementing a flipped classroom requires reliable internet access and digital literacy among both students and teachers—challenges that persist in rural areas.

Digital media's importance lies in its ability to personalize learning, offer immediate feedback, and connect students with global literary examples. Yet, without proper integration into the curriculum, digital tools may remain underutilized or misused. Thus, teacher training programs must evolve to prepare educators for technology-enhanced instruction (Ferdiansyah et al., 2023).

3.2.3 Evaluation

Students highlighted the need for ongoing, formative assessment throughout the writing process. Immediate feedback helps learners identify strengths and areas for improvement, aligning with research indicating that timely, specific, and constructive evaluation significantly improves writing outcomes (Hill & West, 2020; Lim & Bowman, 2024; Williams, 2024). However, many Indonesian classrooms still prioritize summative assessments over developmental ones, limiting opportunities for growth-oriented feedback.

The quality of evaluation also matters. Note, assessment tools must be clear, fair, and aligned with learning objectives (Wasfy et al., 2021). Rubrics must be well defined, grading procedures must be consistent, and feedback must be actionable. Without these elements, students may become disengaged or confused about how to improve. To meet students' needs, evaluation practices should shift toward portfolios, peer reviews, and self-assessments—methods that promote metacognition and ownership of learning. These approaches not only assess final products but also value the writing process itself, encouraging continuous refinement and reflection.

3.2.4 Implications for Pedagogy in Indonesian Schools

The findings suggest several important implications for teaching short story writing in Indonesian senior high schools. First, there is a critical need to update curriculum materials to reflect contemporary student experiences and learning needs. Instructional resources should incorporate real-life themes, provide step-by-step writing guidance, and offer a wide range of literary examples that reflect cultural diversity and current issues. Digital repositories and open-access platforms can play a vital role in supporting this development, making quality materials more accessible to both teachers and students.

In addition to curriculum reform, teacher training must be prioritized. Educators need ongoing professional development focused on innovative learning models such as the flipped classroom and project-based learning (PBL), along with training in effective feedback techniques. Without sufficient preparation, even the most advanced instructional strategies are unlikely to yield meaningful results in the classroom.

Technology integration also presents a valuable opportunity but must be implemented thoughtfully. Digital tools and media offer significant potential to enhance student engagement and creativity. However, to ensure successful integration, schools and policymakers must invest in infrastructure, promote digital literacy, and provide teacher-friendly platforms. Such measures are essential to creating equitable access to educational technology across diverse school environments.

Another key factor in improving short story instruction is student motivation. Fostering a supportive and inspiring learning environment requires collaboration among teachers, parents, and school leaders. Encouragement, recognition, and the assignment of meaningful, student-centered tasks are powerful tools for sustaining motivation and promoting long-term engagement with writing.

Finally, assessment practices should shift toward formative and process-based models that emphasize writing as a continuous skill development journey rather than a single evaluative moment. This transition demands a fundamental change in grading policies and teacher perspectives, encouraging students to focus on growth, reflection, and revision as integral parts of the writing process.

Addressing students' needs in short story writing demands a holistic approach—one that combines appropriate materials, engaging pedagogies, and responsive evaluation. The insights gained from this study contribute to ongoing discussions about improving language and literature education in Indonesia, particularly in regions like West Sumatra where cultural relevance and accessibility play crucial roles.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the needs of senior high school students in West Sumatra regarding short story writing instruction. The key findings revealed that students require structured, real-life-based teaching materials enriched with examples and delivered through flexible digital media. In terms of learning models, students benefit most from interactive, problem-based approaches that stimulate creativity, imagination, and active participation, with teachers serving as facilitators rather than mere knowledge transmitters. Regarding evaluation, students expressed the need for timely, collaborative assessments that focus on skill development rather than rote memorization. The findings have several implications for educational practice. First, educators should design and implement digital-based instructional materials that are not only accessible but also contextually relevant to students' lived experiences. Second, integrating a learner-centered model—such as problem-based or flipped classroom learning—can foster engagement and deepen creative writing skills. Third, assessment strategies must evolve to become more formative, participatory, and constructive, enabling students to reflect on and improve their writing processes continuously. Finally, collaboration among teachers, students, and parents is crucial to support a holistic and effective learning environment.

Future research should focus on the development and validation of a tailored learning model specifically designed to meet the identified student needs. This includes outlining a clear syntax, defining the social systems involved, and identifying necessary support systems. Additionally, future studies should explore the effectiveness of digital tools in enhancing writing performance and investigate how contextual factors in different regions of Indonesia may influence learning outcomes. Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. It primarily relied on qualitative data from a limited number of participants in one region of Indonesia, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future quantitative and comparative studies involving larger and more diverse samples are recommended to further validate the conclusions and ensure broader applicability across different educational contexts.

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