

# Self-Regulated Learning in Creative Writing: Exploring University Students' Experience on Medium

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## Abstract

The use of digital platforms for creative writing among university students is on the rise. However, limited research has explored how students apply self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies in these contexts. This qualitative study investigates (1) how university students employ SRL strategies when engaging in creative writing on Medium, (2) the challenges they encounter, and (3) the strategies used to overcome those challenges. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, including having published at least two creative pieces on Medium and completing the screening questionnaire. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews through WhatsApp chats and voice notes, and analyzed thematically using Zimmerman's SRL framework. The findings revealed that students employed goal-setting, strategic planning, self-monitoring, and reflection throughout their writing process. Emotional motivation, peer feedback, and AI tools also played supportive roles. The study highlights the importance of integrating SRL-oriented instruction in creative writing education to enhance learner autonomy and creativity.

**Keywords:** Creative Writing; Medium Platform; Qualitative Study; Self-Regulated Learning; University Students

## INTRODUCTION

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is an essential process through which students manage and guide themselves to transform their mental abilities into academic performance (Zimmerman, 2002). It involves learners' ability to proactively plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning activities in achieving specific goals (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2011). In writing, SRL enables students to set their objectives, organize ideas, monitor their progress, and revise their work to produce quality writing (Zimmerman, 2000). This process consists of three phases: forethought (planning before writing), performance (monitoring during writing), and self-reflection (evaluating after writing) (Zimmerman, 2013). Writing itself is a productive language skill that allows students to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas through text (Ahmed, 2019). Beyond its academic function, writing develops students' curiosity, logical thinking, creativity, and self-confidence (Komaidi, 2017). In recent years, creative writing has become an important pedagogical approach that enables learners to write imaginatively and treat writing as an art (Stegner, 2002). Practicing creative writing not only enhances students' writing skills but also develops their creativity, confidence, and fluency (Tariq et al., 2025; Burea, 2023). Through creative writing, students gain freedom to explore different ways of expressing their ideas beyond the rigid conventions of academic writing. With the rapid advancement of digital technology, various online platforms have been integrated into language learning. Blogging has emerged as a popular tool to foster students' autonomy and collaborative learning in writing (Usmanova, 2023). One widely used platform is *Medium*, which allows students to publish their creative works publicly, giving them space to share opinions and receive feedback beyond the classroom boundaries.

Previous studies have examined the impact of digital platforms on students' writing skills. For example, Baker and Lastrapes (2019) found that a digital writing application improved the quantity and quality of elementary students' writing in the US. Similarly, Elswawi (2020) showed that blogging significantly enhanced the creative writing skills of Egyptian secondary school students. However, these studies mainly focused on the outcomes of writing rather than on how students regulate their learning processes while using digital platforms for writing tasks. More recently, Jin, Lin, and Lai (2024) modeled how SRL strategies influence writing outcomes in AI-assisted writing among postgraduate students in the UK, emphasizing the importance of SRL in maximizing digital writing technologies. Yet, their context focused on AI-assisted academic writing, not general digital writing platforms for creative writing among undergraduate students. Despite these studies, there is still limited research exploring how university students implement SRL strategies in their creative writing using digital platforms like *Medium*. Understanding this is crucial to help educators design learning activities that support students' self-regulated learning in writing and to assist platform developers in creating features that enhance students' autonomy and creativity. Therefore, this study aims to explore how university students utilize SRL strategies in their creative writing on *Medium*, identify the challenges they face, and analyze the strategies they use to overcome those challenges. The findings are expected to provide insights for language educators, researchers, and technology developers in integrating SRL into creative writing practices through digital platforms.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, as it aligns with the research questions and purpose to explore students' Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) strategies in digital creative writing on the *Medium* platform. This approach was chosen because it captures students' interactions with digital tools for creative writing and how they self-regulate their learning processes in rich, contextual ways. Qualitative methods enable a deeper understanding of individuals' SRL experiences, highlighting cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects that quantitative methods may not fully capture (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, this study aimed to explore not only the strategies employed by students but also the barriers and challenges they encounter when applying these strategies in a digital context. A qualitative approach facilitated direct investigation into students' lived experiences, including their engagement in pre-writing, writing, and reflection processes, as well as their perspectives on the role of *Medium* in supporting their creative writing. The qualitative descriptive approach allowed for flexible exploration of students' internal experiences. It revealed emerging themes related to SRL strategies, including how technology, self-regulation, and writing practices were intertwined. For instance, students used SRL for goal setting, reflection, peer feedback, and revision strategies. Their perceptions of writing ability influenced SRL implementation, as students who felt confident were more likely to set goals, monitor progress, and adapt strategies. By engaging participants through interviews, this study provided insights into how self-regulation shaped and was shaped by experiences with *Medium*.

### Site and Participants

This research was conducted online, with the research site being the *Medium* platform, an online reading and writing community. Participants were university students who were active writers on the platform. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants meeting inclusion

criteria: (1) university student status and (2) experience publishing creative writing in English on *Medium*.

Participants were identified by tracing *Medium* accounts through their public profiles and writing content. They were then contacted via private message and asked to complete a screening questionnaire adapted from the MSLQ by Pintrich (1991). Four individuals completed the questionnaire, and two agreed to participate in in-depth interviews. These two were a graduate student in English Education at Ahmad Dahlan University and a Master's student in Communication Science at Brawijaya University.

**Table 1.** Participants Information

Participant ID	Gender	Age	University	Study Program	Writing Experience on <i>Medium</i>
P1	F	22	Ahmad Dahlan University	English Education	>2 year
P2	F	24	Brawijaya University	Master Communication Science	>1 year

F = Female

Interviews were conducted online via WhatsApp for flexibility, using asynchronous messaging without time limits to accommodate participants' schedules. Participation required prior *Medium* experience, resulting in a sample skewed toward users with a certain level of digital literacy. Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining informed consent digitally before data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the option to participate voluntarily and withdraw at any time. Personal information was kept confidential and anonymized. Data security was maintained through secure, encrypted storage accessible only to the researcher. Participants were also informed about the use and publication of data, with the right to review and approve any shared information.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore students' SRL strategies and challenges in creative writing using *Medium*. Conducted via WhatsApp chat and voice notes, the interviews were guided by an interview protocol based on Zimmerman's SRL phases (forethought, performance, and self-reflection). The protocol included open-ended questions about students' motivation, planning, writing habits, challenges, and coping strategies.

### Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. A deductive approach was applied, where codes and themes were guided by Zimmerman's (2002) SRL framework: goal setting, strategic planning, self-monitoring, and self-reflection. Transcripts were read repeatedly, coded manually, and grouped into themes reflecting participants' SRL processes.

The analysis procedure consisted of the following six phases:

1. Familiarization with the data

The researcher transcribed the voice note interviews verbatim and read all transcripts repeatedly to immerse themselves in the data and gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' responses.

2. **Generating initial codes**  
Codes were systematically assigned to significant features of the data that related to the research questions, including keywords, phrases, or sentences reflecting Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) strategies, creative writing challenges, and the use of *Medium* as a digital platform.
3. **Searching for themes**  
The researcher then collated the codes into potential themes by identifying patterns and similarities among them. For example, themes such as goal-setting challenges, self-monitoring practices, and *Medium* as motivational support emerged.
4. **Reviewing themes**  
The themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the coded data and the entire dataset. This involved refining or merging overlapping themes and ensuring coherence within each theme.
5. **Defining and naming themes**  
Each theme was clearly defined to capture its essence and significance in the context of SRL and creative writing on *Medium*. Themes were given concise and descriptive names.
6. **Producing the report**  
Finally, the researcher integrated the thematic findings into a coherent narrative, selecting vivid and compelling data extracts to illustrate each theme and linking them back to the research objectives and literature review.

This thematic analysis enabled the researcher to produce a rich, detailed, and nuanced account of the data, highlighting how students implement SRL strategies in their creative writing practices on *Medium* and the challenges they encounter in this process.

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness, this study employed member checking by asking participants to review interpretations of their statements to maintain authenticity (Elo et al., 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of participants' backgrounds, writing experiences, and the research context. These practices ensured the research process and findings were systematic, transparent, and credible, providing accurate representations of participants' perspectives (McKim, 2023).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three major themes: (1) motivation to write on *Medium*, (2) SRL strategies applied in the creative writing process, and (3) challenges and coping strategies.

#### **A. Motivation to Write on *Medium***

Participants described *Medium* as a platform that allowed for anonymous and expressive writing. For Participant 1 (P1), writing on *Medium* served as an emotional outlet during academic burnout:

“Writing became my way of escaping burnout... I started publishing on *Medium* in October 2024 because I didn't have a platform before, even though I had been writing since junior high school.”

Similarly, Participant 2 (P2) was motivated by a desire to reach a broader audience and contribute to English language learning:

“I used to share my writing on Instagram stories. Then I discovered *Medium*, and it felt like the right place. I want my writing to help others learn new vocabulary or English expressions.”

Both participants viewed writing as a therapeutic and meaningful activity, aligning with previous research on emotional expression through creative writing.

## B. Strategies in Creative Writing

Participants demonstrated SRL strategies that aligned with Zimmerman’s framework.

### Goal Setting and Planning:

Participants reported informal goal setting, such as posting once a month or writing based on mood. Planning was often spontaneous.

P1: “I don’t usually make an outline... I just write immediately if I have an idea.”

P2: “If it’s a longer story, I’ll outline. But most of my writing is spontaneous.”

### Self-Monitoring and Reflection:

Participants engaged in reflection and revision before or after publishing. P1 revised independently after publication, while P2 used both peer and AI feedback.

P1: “After I publish, I check again for mistakes and revise privately.”

P2: “I always send my writing to my friends before publishing... I also use ChatGPT to check wording or improve expressions.”

These actions indicate active monitoring and evaluation of their writing performance.

### Challenges and Coping Strategies

Participants faced internal and external obstacles in their writing processes.

Loss of Focus and Motivation:

Both participants reported losing concentration or motivation, often due to stress or distractions at home.

P1: “If I lose focus, the writing just ends up as a draft.”

P2: “At home, I help with the shop, so I get distracted easily.”

### Coping Mechanisms:

Strategies included reading, listening to music, and emotional regulation.

P1: “I read articles or books, or listen to music to find inspiration.”

P2: “I play a specific playlist that matches my emotions to regain the mood. But if I’m really unmotivated, I just stop writing.”

These findings highlight that while students employ SRL strategies, their implementation is shaped by emotional needs and situational contexts.

The results indicate that students' creative writing on *Medium* is deeply connected to emotional motivation and shaped by individual SRL strategies. The next section discusses how these findings relate to existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore how university students apply Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) strategies in their creative writing activities on *Medium*. The findings revealed that participants

demonstrated SRL components such as goal setting, strategic planning, self-monitoring, and reflection, though often implemented in flexible and informal ways. These results align with Zimmerman's (2002) three-phase SRL model and extend its application into digital creative writing contexts. Firstly, participants' motivation to write was rooted in emotional needs and self-expression rather than academic goals. This finding supports Pratiwi et al. (2023), who argue that creative writing platforms function not only as linguistic tools but also as emotional outlets. Writing served as a therapeutic process, especially during periods of academic stress or burnout. Within SRL theory, this emotional motivation corresponds to the forethought phase, where personal goals and beliefs influence learners' engagement (Zimmerman, 2013). Secondly, although both participants engaged in planning, their approaches were often spontaneous and nonlinear. This reflects a personalized application of SRL strategies, where learners adapt methods based on context and task type. Yang et al. (2023) similarly found that pre-writing reading activities helped students generate creative ideas an approach mirrored by participants in this study, who read articles on *Medium* before writing. Thirdly, the use of technological tools, such as ChatGPT for feedback and revision, emerged as a notable finding. While previous SRL research has primarily focused on peer or teacher feedback (Han, 2024), this study demonstrates how students autonomously utilize AI to support their writing processes. This suggests an evolution of SRL strategies, where metacognitive regulation is enhanced through digital assistance, warranting further exploration in future research. Fourthly, participants faced challenges including loss of motivation, distractions, and emotional fatigue. These barriers reflect both internal and external factors influencing SRL implementation (Mazandarani, 2024). However, participants employed personalized coping strategies, such as listening to music or taking breaks, illustrating their flexible regulation of learning behaviors in informal contexts. Finally, the role of *Medium* as a digital writing space influenced students' autonomy and audience awareness. Unlike traditional classroom assignments, *Medium* offered anonymity, authentic readership, and freedom of expression. This supports the views of Churchill (2008) and Kitsantas & Dabbagh (2011), who assert that digital platforms can foster SRL by enabling learner-driven writing environments.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored how university students applied Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) strategies in their English creative writing using the *Medium* platform. The findings revealed that students employed SRL strategies such as goal setting, spontaneous planning, self-monitoring, and reflection in flexible and context-dependent ways. Emotional motivation and personal expression played central roles in their writing processes, suggesting that SRL can be effectively applied even in informal, affective-driven contexts such as creative writing. The study contributes to the growing body of SRL research by illustrating how learners regulate their writing behaviors beyond classroom settings, utilizing digital platforms and AI tools to support autonomy and creativity. These insights emphasize the importance of integrating SRL-focused instruction into creative writing pedagogy, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, to foster students' metacognitive awareness and independent learning skills. However, this study has several limitations. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, and reliance on self-reported data may not fully capture unconscious or habitual SRL behaviors. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, and consider combining interviews with real-time writing observations or digital trace data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of SRL practices in creative writing contexts. Overall, this study suggests that supporting students in developing SRL strategies can

enhance their confidence, autonomy, and engagement in creative writing, particularly when writing on digital platforms that provide freedom of expression and authentic readership. Integrating SRL into digital creative writing instruction can thus equip students with essential skills for academic, personal, and professional growth.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the participants for their time and willingness to share their experiences in this study. Appreciation is also extended to colleagues and lecturers in the English Education Department at Universitas Jambi for their constructive feedback and support throughout the research process. Also, the author's deepest thanks go to the beloved parents for their endless prayers, encouragement, and unwavering support in all aspects of life.

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