



## Transforming Spiritual Experiences into Poetry: The Role of Religious Tourism in Creative Writing Pedagogy

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| <p><b>Info Article</b></p> <p>Received :<br/>01 Juni 2026</p> <p>Revised:<br/>02 Juli 2026</p> <p>Accepted:<br/>01 August 2026</p> <p>Publication:<br/>30 August 2026</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/>Creative Writing,<br/>Poetry Writing,<br/>Religious Tourism,<br/>Experiential<br/>Learning, Literary<br/>Education.</p> <p><b>Kata Kunci:</b><br/>Menulis Kreatif,<br/>Penulisan Puisi,<br/>Wisata Religi,<br/>Pembelajaran<br/>Eksperiensial,<br/>Pendidikan Sastra</p> <p><b>Licensed Under a</b><br/>Creative Commons<br/>Attribution 4.0<br/>International<br/>License</p>  | <p><b>Abstract:</b> <i>Creative poetry writing requires linguistic competence and meaningful experiences that stimulate imagination and idea generation. This study describes the implementation of a creative poetry-writing strategy using a religious tourism model and explores students' experiences. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study involved students enrolled in a Creative Literature course at Universitas Negeri Surabaya. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation of students' poems, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. Findings show that religious tourism helps students generate ideas, expand imagination, and produce more meaningful poetic expressions. Visits to religious sites provided spiritual, emotional, and cultural inspiration, while also increasing motivation, creativity, and confidence. Although difficulties in diction and poetic expression remained, religious tourism proved to be an innovative experiential strategy for creative writing instruction and contributed to contextual, experience-based literary learning in higher education.</i></p> <p><b>Abstrak:</b> Menulis puisi kreatif memerlukan kompetensi kebahasaan dan pengalaman bermakna yang mampu merangsang imajinasi serta pengembangan gagasan. Penelitian ini mendeskripsikan penerapan strategi menulis puisi kreatif melalui model wisata religi dan mengeksplorasi pengalaman mahasiswa selama proses penulisan. Dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian melibatkan mahasiswa mata kuliah Sastra Kreatif di Universitas Negeri Surabaya. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi puisi mahasiswa, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa wisata religi membantu mahasiswa menghasilkan gagasan, memperluas imajinasi, dan menciptakan ekspresi puitis yang lebih bermakna. Kunjungan ke situs religi memberikan inspirasi spiritual, emosional, dan budaya, sekaligus meningkatkan motivasi, kreativitas, dan kepercayaan diri. Meskipun masih terdapat kendala dalam pemilihan diksi dan ekspresi puitis, wisata religi terbukti menjadi strategi pembelajaran eksperiensial yang inovatif serta mendukung pembelajaran sastra kontekstual berbasis pengalaman di perguruan tinggi bagi keterampilan menulis kreatif mahasiswa secara berkelanjutan.</p> |
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## INTRODUCTION

Creative poetry writing is an important component of literary education in higher education because it enables students to express ideas, emotions, imagination, and lived experiences through aesthetic language. Writing itself is not merely a linguistic activity but also a process of constructing meaning, organizing ideas, and communicating personal perspectives. Nugraha (2020) argues that writing requires the ability to systematically develop ideas and arrange language effectively, while Abidin (2015) emphasizes that writing functions as a medium through which individuals express thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of reality. Consequently, writing plays a significant role in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills among university students.

Within literary education, creative writing occupies a unique position because it prioritizes imagination, originality, and aesthetic expression. Roekhan (1991) defines creative writing as a literary production process that begins with the emergence of ideas, followed by reflection, interpretation, and artistic transformation. Similarly, Kurniawan (2014) argues that creative writing involves the imaginative reconstruction of experiences into meaningful literary forms. Therefore, creative writing is not limited to arranging words; it is a process through which writers develop innovation, creativity, and personal expression. Through creative writing activities, students are encouraged to transform experiences and observations into literary works that possess both artistic and reflective value.

Among various forms of creative writing, poetry represents one of the most complex literary genres because it requires the integration of imagination, emotional sensitivity, and linguistic artistry. Poetry is characterized by condensed language, symbolic meanings, and aesthetic expression. Djojuroto (2005) explains that poetry is constructed through carefully selected words and interconnected elements that create harmony and artistic beauty. Likewise, Wetty (2011) describes poetry as a literary form that transforms thoughts, feelings, and experiences into language that differs from everyday communication through its aesthetic and symbolic qualities. As a result, poetry writing demands not only linguistic competence but also the ability to interpret experiences and represent them creatively through imagery, diction, and figurative language. Despite its importance, poetry writing remains a challenging activity for many university students. Students frequently experience difficulties in generating

ideas, developing imagery, selecting appropriate diction, and constructing meaningful poetic expressions. These challenges often result in poems that are descriptive rather than reflective and lack emotional depth. Such difficulties are partly attributable to instructional practices that emphasize theoretical knowledge regarding poetic structures and literary conventions while providing limited opportunities for students to engage with authentic experiences that can stimulate imagination and creativity.

The need to connect literary learning with authentic experiences is increasingly emphasized within experiential learning theory. According to Kolb and Kolb (2021), meaningful learning emerges through the transformation of concrete experiences into reflective understanding. Direct experiences provide learners with rich cognitive, emotional, and sensory resources that can support creative production. In the context of poetry writing, experiential learning offers opportunities for students to draw inspiration from real-world encounters and transform those experiences into artistic expression. Therefore, instructional approaches that integrate authentic experiences into literary learning may contribute significantly to the development of students' creative writing abilities.

One potential approach is the utilization of religious tourism as an experiential learning model. Religious tourism refers to travel activities associated with spiritual, religious, cultural, and historical experiences, often involving visits to places of worship, pilgrimage sites, religious monuments, and sacred heritage locations. Such environments contain rich cultural narratives, historical values, spiritual meanings, and aesthetic elements that can stimulate reflection and creativity. Unlike conventional classroom learning, religious tourism enables students to interact directly with meaningful cultural and spiritual settings, thereby generating experiences that can serve as sources of literary inspiration.

The educational significance of religious tourism extends beyond cultural observation. Julianti et al. (2023) argue that religion-based tourism integrated with local culture provides authentic learning experiences that enhance students' understanding of values and traditions. Similarly, Ritonga et al. (2025) suggest that spiritual experiences obtained through religious tourism contribute to deeper personal reflection and meaningful learning. Furthermore, Arifin et al. (2022) emphasize that religious tourism facilitates social and moral development through direct engagement with religious and cultural practices. These perspectives indicate that religious tourism possesses

considerable pedagogical potential as a learning model that promotes reflection, imagination, and creative expression.

In poetry writing instruction, experiences gained through visits to religious sites may function as powerful stimuli for poetic imagination. Encounters with sacred architecture, religious rituals, historical narratives, and spiritual atmospheres can evoke emotions, memories, and reflections that are highly relevant to literary creation. Through such experiences, students may develop richer imagery, more meaningful symbolism, and deeper emotional engagement in their poems. Consequently, religious tourism can be positioned not merely as a tourism activity but as a pedagogical framework that supports creative writing development through experiential and reflective learning.

Several previous studies have highlighted the educational benefits of tourism-based learning approaches. Alam et al. (2021) demonstrated the effectiveness of religious tourism contexts in developing descriptive writing materials. Suyanta (2023) reported that tourism-based literary learning enhanced students' engagement and appreciation of literary works. Likewise, Firmansyah et al. (2024) found that tourism-themed creative writing instruction positively influenced students' creativity and writing performance. Although these studies confirm the value of tourism-based experiences in language and literature education, they primarily focus on descriptive writing, literary appreciation, or general creative writing activities.

Research specifically examining the use of religious tourism as a structured instructional model for creative poetry writing remains limited. Existing studies have not sufficiently explored how spiritual experiences derived from religious tourism can facilitate poetic imagination, emotional expression, and aesthetic meaning-making among university students. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the pedagogical potential of religious tourism in creative poetry instruction. Therefore, this study aims to examine the implementation of a religious tourism-based creative writing strategy and explore students' experiences in composing poetry through religious tourism activities. The study contributes to the development of innovative creative writing pedagogy by positioning religious tourism not merely as a contextual theme but as an experiential learning framework that supports imagination, reflection, and poetic creativity. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide insights into

how authentic spiritual experiences can be integrated into literary education to enhance students' creativity and the meaningfulness of their poetic works.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The selection of a qualitative approach was based on the objective of the study, which was to explore the implementation of a creative poetry-writing strategy using a religious tourism model and to understand students' experiences throughout the learning process. Qualitative research enables researchers to investigate participants' perceptions, interpretations, and experiences in natural settings, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of educational phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A descriptive design was used because the study did not aim to test hypotheses or measure causal relationships but rather to describe systematically how the religious tourism model was implemented and how it influenced students' creative poetry-writing processes. Through this approach, the researcher was able to capture the dynamics of learning activities, students' reflections & the characteristics of the poems produced during the instructional process.

### ***Research Setting and Participants***

The study was conducted during the 2025/2026 academic year in the Creative Literature course of the Master's Program in Indonesian Language Education at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia. The participants consisted of students enrolled in the creative literature course who actively participated in the religious tourism-based poetry-writing activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because they possessed direct experience with the learning model being investigated. In qualitative research, purposive sampling allows researchers to obtain rich and relevant information from individuals who have firsthand experience with the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015).

### **Religious Tourism-Based Poetry Writing Procedure**

The learning activities were conducted through several stages.

#### **Preparation Stage**

At this stage, the lecturer introduced the concept of creative poetry writing and explained the objectives of the religious tourism-based learning model. Students were

also provided with guidance regarding observation techniques, reflective note-taking, and poetry-writing strategies.

### **Religious Tourism Exploration Stage**

Students visited religious tourism destinations, including mosques, Islamic historical sites, pilgrimage destinations, and other places with spiritual and cultural significance. During the visit, students observed the physical environment, social interactions, cultural practices, and spiritual atmosphere of the sites. They documented their experiences through field notes, photographs, and personal reflections.

### **Reflection Stage**

After the visit, students participated in reflective discussions to share impressions, emotions, and insights obtained during the exploration activities. This stage encouraged students to transform concrete experiences into personal meanings that could later be developed into poetic ideas.

### **Creative Writing Stage**

Students composed poems based on their observations and reflections. The writing process emphasized the use of imagery, symbolism, emotional expression, and aesthetic language derived from their religious tourism experiences.

### **Evaluation Stage**

The completed poems were presented and discussed in class. Feedback was provided regarding thematic depth, imagery, diction, creativity, and overall poetic quality.

### **Data Sources and Research Data**

The primary data sources consisted of students participating in the Creative Literature course. The research data included:

1. Interview transcripts concerning students' experiences and perceptions of the religious tourism model.
2. Observation notes documenting classroom activities and field visits.
3. Students' poetry manuscripts produced during the learning process.
4. Supporting documentation, including photographs, reflective journals, and instructional materials.

These multiple sources enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive information regarding both the learning process and its outcomes.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation.

1. Observation. Participant observation was conducted to examine the implementation of the religious tourism model and students' engagement during learning activities. Field notes were used to document interactions, participation patterns, and learning dynamics.
2. Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students following the completion of the learning activities. The interviews explored students' perceptions of the learning experience, challenges encountered during poetry writing, and perceived benefits of the religious tourism model.
3. Documentation. Documentation was used to collect students' poems, reflective writings, photographs, learning materials, and other relevant artifacts that supported data interpretation.

### **Research Instruments**

In qualitative research, the researcher served as the primary instrument responsible for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data. To support the data collection process, several auxiliary instruments were employed: Observation guidelines, interview protocols, documentation checklists, and poetry analysis sheets focusing on themes, imagery, diction, symbolism, and creativity.

### **Data Trustworthiness**

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation and source triangulation were employed. Information obtained from interviews was cross-checked with observational data and students' written works. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming the researchers' interpretations with selected participants to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of four stages.

1. Data Collection. Data were gathered through observations, interviews, and documentation throughout the implementation of the learning activities.

2. **Data Condensation.** The collected data were reviewed, coded, categorized, and condensed according to the research objectives. Particular attention was given to information related to students' experiences, creative processes, and poetry-writing outcomes.
3. **Data Display.** The organized data were presented in the form of narrative descriptions, thematic categories, interview excerpts, and textual analyses of students' poems to facilitate interpretation.
4. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification.** The final stage involved identifying recurring patterns, interpreting relationships among themes, and drawing conclusions. Verification was conducted continuously throughout the research process to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the objectives of the study and the voluntary nature of their involvement. All participants provided informed consent. Their anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the use of participant codes, such as P1, P2, and P3, when presenting interview excerpts and research findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **Implementation of the Religious Tourism Model in Creative Poetry Writing**

The findings reveal that the implementation of the religious tourism model significantly facilitated students' creative poetry-writing processes. Through direct visits to religious destinations such as mosques, pilgrimage sites, and historical religious locations, students obtained authentic experiences that served as sources of inspiration for poetic creation. Unlike conventional classroom-based writing activities that often rely on abstract imagination, the religious tourism model provided students with concrete sensory, emotional, and spiritual experiences that could be transformed into poetic expression. Interview data indicate that students perceived religious tourism as an effective strategy for generating ideas and stimulating imagination. One participant stated: "Strategi ini memudahkan saya dalam menemukan ide dan gambaran terhadap penulisan puisi, selain itu membuat saya lebih mengingat kepada Tuhan." (P1) This statement suggests that the learning process extended beyond the acquisition of

writing skills and entered the domain of spiritual reflection. Religious tourism enabled students to engage in self-reflection (*muhasabah*), contemplate religious values, and connect personal experiences with poetic expression. Consequently, the poems produced were not merely descriptive texts but also reflections of students' spiritual awareness.

The findings demonstrate that direct engagement with religious environments enriched students' observational abilities. Participants reported paying attention to architectural elements, ritual activities, sounds of worship, historical narratives, and the emotional atmosphere surrounding religious sites. These observations subsequently became raw materials for poetic construction. Such findings support experiential learning theory, which argues that meaningful learning originates from concrete experiences that are later transformed into reflection and creative production (Kolb & Kolb, 2021). Furthermore, the implementation of religious tourism broadened students' thematic exploration. Prior to the learning intervention, students tended to produce poems centered on general themes such as friendship, romance, or everyday life. After participating in religious tourism activities, students began exploring themes related to spirituality, gratitude, devotion, mortality, inner peace, religious identity, and human relationships with God. This indicates that experiential encounters with religious spaces contributed to the diversification and enrichment of poetic themes.

The findings also reveal that the religious tourism model created a more engaging learning atmosphere. Students expressed greater enthusiasm during the writing process because they perceived the activities as novel and meaningful. The integration of learning and real-life experiences reduced boredom commonly associated with conventional writing instruction. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that contextual and experience-based learning environments increase student engagement and motivation in creative writing activities. Despite its positive contributions, several challenges emerged during implementation. Some students reported difficulties accessing religious tourism destinations due to distance and transportation constraints. Others experienced challenges in transforming spiritual experiences into poetic language. Although students possessed rich experiences, they occasionally struggled to select appropriate diction and develop aesthetic expressions capable of representing their reflections effectively. These findings suggest that experiential exposure alone is insufficient to produce high-quality literary works.

Students also require explicit instruction regarding poetic techniques, imagery, symbolism, figurative language, and diction development. Therefore, the religious tourism model should be accompanied by structured literary guidance to maximize learning outcomes.

### **Students' Experiences in Writing Poetry Through Religious Tourism**

The second major finding concerns students' experiences during the poetry-writing process. Overall, participants reported highly positive experiences and perceived the learning model as enjoyable, meaningful, and inspiring. Most students indicated that writing became easier because they had concrete experiences to draw upon. One participant explained: "Pengalaman menulis menjadi lebih menyenangkan karena ide lebih cepat muncul dan lebih mudah mengekspresikan perasaan." (P2)

This finding suggests that direct experiences functioned as cognitive and emotional stimuli that facilitated idea generation. Students no longer struggled to imagine abstract situations because they could rely on observations, feelings, and reflections derived from their visits. Consequently, the creative process became more natural and less cognitively demanding. Another important finding relates to the development of creativity. Students reported that religious tourism encouraged them to observe their surroundings more carefully and interpret experiences from multiple perspectives. Such activities fostered imagination and creative thinking because students were required to transform ordinary observations into poetic representations. The findings also indicate that religious tourism strengthened emotional engagement during writing. Students frequently described feelings of tranquility, gratitude, awe, humility, and spiritual connection while visiting religious sites. These emotions subsequently became central elements within their poems. Emotional engagement is particularly important in poetry writing because literary creativity often emerges from the interaction between personal experience and emotional reflection.

From a literary perspective, students' poems demonstrated richer imagery and stronger symbolic representation than their previous works. Religious objects such as prayer halls, mosque domes, calligraphy, prayer beads, graves of religious figures, and sounds of worship frequently appeared as symbols representing faith, hope, remembrance, and spiritual journeys. This suggests that religious tourism not only provided thematic inspiration but also enriched the symbolic and aesthetic dimensions of students' poetry. Moreover, students reported increased confidence in their writing

abilities. The availability of authentic experiences reduced uncertainty regarding what to write, thereby enhancing their confidence in expressing ideas. This finding is consistent with educational research indicating that experiential learning environments strengthen learners' self-efficacy because students possess firsthand knowledge that supports their creative production. The findings further reveal that religious tourism contributes to broader educational outcomes beyond writing proficiency. Through interactions with religious heritage, students developed greater appreciation for cultural traditions, local history, and spiritual values. Therefore, the learning model simultaneously promoted literary creativity, cultural awareness, and character development.

## **Discussion**

Overall, the findings demonstrate that religious tourism constitutes an effective experiential learning strategy for creative poetry writing instruction. Direct engagement with religious destinations provided students with authentic experiences that stimulated idea generation, enriched imagination, strengthened emotional involvement, and enhanced creative expression. These findings strongly support experiential learning theory proposed by Kolb and Kolb (2021), which emphasizes that learning begins with concrete experience, followed by reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation. In the present study, religious tourism functioned as the concrete experience stage from which students constructed poetic meaning through reflection and creative writing.

The findings also extend previous research on literary tourism and contextual learning. While earlier studies primarily examined tourism as a source of cultural knowledge or literary appreciation, this study demonstrates that religious tourism can function as a structured pedagogical model for creative writing development. The direct encounter with spiritual environments provided students with unique experiential resources that stimulated both cognitive and affective dimensions of creativity. A particularly important contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that religious tourism serves not merely as a contextual theme for writing but as a comprehensive instructional framework. The model facilitates idea generation, thematic development, emotional engagement, symbolic thinking, and aesthetic expression simultaneously. Through this process, students transform lived spiritual experiences into literary texts that are meaningful, reflective, and culturally grounded. Therefore, the novelty of this

study lies in positioning religious tourism as an experiential creative-writing model that integrates spiritual reflection, cultural exploration, and literary production. This approach offers an innovative alternative for higher education creative writing courses, particularly in an era when students increasingly require authentic experiences to stimulate creativity and meaningful expression.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the religious tourism model serves as an effective strategy for enhancing students' creative poetry-writing skills in higher education. Through direct engagement with religious destinations, students gained authentic experiences that facilitated idea generation, expanded imagination, and enriched the creative writing process. The findings demonstrate that religious tourism provides meaningful learning experiences that enable students to transform spiritual, cultural, and historical encounters into poetic expression. The study further reveals that the model contributes not only to students' writing performance but also to their emotional engagement, creativity, and self-confidence. Students reported greater ease in developing ideas, expressing feelings, and constructing poems with deeper thematic and symbolic meanings. The integration of firsthand experiences encouraged the emergence of themes related to spirituality, gratitude, faith, identity, and human relationships with the divine, resulting in poems that were more reflective and aesthetically meaningful.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified, particularly in terms of accessibility to religious tourism sites and students' difficulties in translating spiritual experiences into poetic language. These findings suggest that experiential learning activities should be complemented by explicit instruction in diction, imagery, symbolism, and poetic techniques to optimize learning outcomes. Theoretically, this study reinforces experiential learning theory by demonstrating that concrete experiences function as powerful stimuli for creative literary production. Practically, the findings offer an innovative pedagogical alternative for creative writing instruction by integrating religious tourism into poetry learning. The novelty of this study lies in positioning religious tourism not merely as a thematic source of inspiration but as a structured experiential learning framework that integrates spiritual reflection, cultural exploration, and literary creativity. Therefore, religious tourism has significant

potential to support the development of meaningful, contextual, and culturally grounded creative writing practices in higher education.

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