
I DON'T KNOW THE WORDS: TEACHER NARRATIVES ON STUDENT CHALLENGES IN CREATIVE WRITING (EVIDENCE FROM BONE, SOUTH SULAWESI)

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Abstract: This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by students in creative writing. A qualitative narrative approach was employed, gathering data through open-ended questionnaires and transcription. The narratives in this study were collected from seven English teachers from seven different schools in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi Province. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method. The primary difficulties encountered by students include a limited vocabulary, student motivation, and a lack of ideas for writing. Teachers provided solutions such as supplying related vocabulary pertinent to the theme, giving students a foundation to build upon. Additionally, assigning writing themes related to the student's immediate environment was found to stimulate their exploration and creativity. The study revealed that students' challenges in creative writing are predominantly rooted in linguistic limitations, motivation, and a lack of ideas. The implications suggested a need for integrating targeted vocabulary development and contextually relevant themes in creative writing curricula, emphasizing the importance of aligning teaching strategies with students' linguistic abilities and environmental experiences.

Keywords: creative writing, student challenges, teacher narratives

Introduction

In education, creative writing often stands as a beacon of self-expression and imagination for students. However, it is an area riddled with unique challenges that can hinder their literary journey. As delineated by Harmer (2007), writing is an essential linguistic skill that students must master. This skill is categorized under productive abilities, necessitating students' active creation of textual content. Rivers (1981) characterizes writing as a methodology for the sequential articulation of novel ideas or transmitting information in a new linguistic context. Brown (2001) conceptualizes writing as an inherently cognitive process, permitting extensive strategizing and multiple iterations of revisions before completion. Writing serves as a reflection of individual thought, encapsulating persistent mental concepts. Further, Elbow (1973), as cited in Brown (2001), decomposes writing into a bifurcated process: initially discerning the intended meaning and subsequently encoding that meaning into language. For students disinclined to transcribe their thoughts, this endeavor poses significant challenges, primarily due to difficulties initiating the writing process and articulating their conceptualizations into coherent sentences.

The ability to create inventive, original literary works that may be applied to a wide range of writing genres is known as creative writing (Ramet 2007). Creative writing is best productively conceived as a unique, theoretically informed pedagogy that occupies a space within multiple disciplines, including English, cultural studies, media and communication, film and theatre studies, and the creative arts (Dawson 2013). Moreover, Morley (2007) asserts that the goal of creative writing classes need not be limited to improving students' ability to produce poetry, fiction, drama, nonfiction, and

children's literature.

Nowadays, some colleges teach creative writing as a separate academic field at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Creative writing emphasizes students' self-expression, in contrast to academic writing classes that teach students the rhetorical conventions and discourse requirements of disciplinary communities (Hyland 2018). There are no guidelines or standards for creative writing, nor are there standards for what constitutes quality writing.

Nevertheless, Smith (2005) offers several writing techniques for creative works. Playing with language and running with the referent is the first tactic. With this approach, authors can begin with any word and follow it to several others until a complete manuscript is generated. Instead of beginning to write from a predetermined notion, this method encourages students to investigate the sounds and meanings of words in order to find ideas. The second tactic is using structural elements like linearity, repetition, and variation. Formulating a viewpoint constitutes the third tactic. Three elements often make up a point of view: sensing (the way an object, event, or person appears, sounds, feels, or smells), feeling (the way an object, event, or person affects you emotionally or affectively), and thinking (how to conceptualize the event and fit it into an ideological framework). The fourth tactic involves reorganizing the story. Speaking with others is the fifth tactic. The act of dialoguing is essential to language use and communication since it involves writing or speaking to another person.

As we navigate the complexities of creative writing in educational settings, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the diverse array of hurdles students encounter. These range from grappling with the nuances of language and structure to the more profound struggle of translating thoughts into coherent, engaging narratives. Through this exploration, the article seeks to illuminate the multifaceted nature of students' struggles in creative writing. It also endeavors to provide teachers with insights and strategies to support and nurture the creative capacities of their students effectively. By bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, we aspire to enhance the educational experience in creative writing classrooms and beyond.

Numerous studies have been dedicated to exploring creative writing. Among these, the study by Nugraha and Listyani (2021), titled *Problems Encountered by Students in Online Creative Writing Classes and the Solutions* aimed to investigate the difficulties experienced by students in online creative writing courses and to propose solutions to these issues. The research findings indicated that the primary challenges faced by students in these classes included the course material, poor internet connectivity, lack of student motivation, and unclear explanations by instructors. In addition, a study conducted by Fenza (2000), entitled *Creative Writing and Its Discontents* delved into the realm of creative writing programs and workshops, specifically focusing on the academic setting. This research provided insights into the broader landscape of creative writing education. Furthermore, Gilbert (2021) conducted research entitled *Why Teach Creative Writing? Examining the Challenges of its Pedagogies* scrutinizing the underlying reasons for teaching creative writing. It explored the complexities of its pedagogical approaches. This research contributed to a deeper understanding of the objectives and methodologies employed in creative writing instruction.

Research Method

The research design was a narrative study. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) postulated that narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants in a certain place. The problems encountered by the students when they learned creative writing are narratively explored. Tedam (2014) stated that a narrative study allowed for a detailed description of placement experiences and an exploration of their meaning. This study aimed to find

out the challenges faced by students of Bone, South Sulawesi in creative writing based on teachers' perspectives.

According to Lofland (in Moleong, 2000), data sources in qualitative research are words and events; the additional data can be documents or others. As a narrative study, the narratives in this study were collected from seven English teachers in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi Province. Those seven teachers taught at seven different Junior High Schools. The data collection techniques were open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews, which resulted in the transcriptions. The open-ended questionnaire was purposely designed for the participants who could tell their stories freely without being given limitations, so the participants were expected to tell the stories based on what truly happened in their schools. Furthermore, an in-depth interview was conducted in this research to confirm the data that was written by the participants in the questionnaire. The list of questions was prepared before the interview, and some participants were chosen to be interviewed.

After data collection, the research data were analyzed using Glaser and Strauss's Constant Comparative Method (1967). The Constant Comparative Method is the process used in qualitative research in which newly collected data is compared with previously collected data collected in one or more earlier studies. Morse and Field (1998) stated that each piece of data must be compared with every other piece of relevant data. The goal of this analysis was to identify patterns and develop themes critically.

Findings

Creative writing poses a significant challenge for students, particularly those in junior high school. The obstacles encountered by students in creative writing can be attributed to factors such as their competence, motivation, and their level of creativity. Presented here are teachers' narratives about the difficulties students face during creative writing classes.

Student Competence

In the realm of English education, teachers frequently encounter a myriad of challenges in their teaching endeavors. A predominant obstacle that frequently emerges is the students' limited initial proficiency. This issue is especially evident in their writing capabilities, which often need to be revised. For instance, introducing English vocabulary is a fundamental initial step in establishing the groundwork of their writing abilities. Subsequently, a compilation of insights from various teachers will be presented, detailing the impact of student competency on the development of creative writing skills.

One of the teachers (P1) highlighted that the proficiency in English of students at their institution significantly influences the students' writing abilities. This situation presents a challenge where teachers must initially focus on introducing English vocabulary.

*"The challenge encountered stems from the notably deficient **initial capabilities of the students**, necessitating that their instruction in writing skills commence from the very basics, such as **the introduction of English vocabulary**."* (P1, November 2023)

*"Broadly speaking, students **struggle to transcribe or note down** what the teacher articulates."* (P2, November 2023)

*"There is a notable **deficiency in the students' vocabulary**."* (P3, November 2023)

*"Additionally, there exists a constraint of **time allocated for teaching grammar** within the students' intracurricular learning. This is due to the **limited scope of grammar topics** that can be imparted, which are also contingent on the prescribed curriculum."* (P4, November 2023)

From the description above, it becomes evident that the primary challenge encountered by students in honing their creative writing skills is associated with their proficiency, particularly in the domains of vocabulary and grammar mastery. Vocabulary refers to the range and variety of words at their disposal, which is crucial for expressing ideas vividly and precisely. A rich vocabulary enables students to convey their thoughts more effectively and creatively. On the other hand, grammar mastery involves understanding and correctly applying the rules that govern how sentences are structured and words are used. Good grammar is essential for clear communication, ensuring the writer's intended meaning is accurately conveyed without ambiguity or confusion. Together, a strong grasp of both vocabulary and grammar is fundamental for students to excel in creative writing, as it allows them to construct compelling, coherent, and sophisticated texts.

Student Motivation

Student motivation plays a pivotal role in the educational journey, driving a student's engagement, learning, and overall success. This intrinsic element shapes their approach to academic challenges, influences their persistence in the face of difficulties, and fuels their desire for knowledge and skill acquisition. The degree of motivation a student possesses can significantly impact their learning process and outcomes. The issues identified in the schools included a prevalent tendency among students towards passivity and a prevailing perception that English is challenging. Additionally, one of the teachers noted a discernible lack of student interest in learning English.

“Students often exhibit a passive attitude towards English and perceive the subject as challenging.” (P5, November 2023)

“Beyond their limited mastery of vocabulary, there is a markedly low level of interest in learning among the students.” (P6, November 2023)

A profound comprehension of the needs and motivations of students can lay the foundation for developing more efficacious teaching strategies, foster student engagement, and, ultimately, lead to enhanced learning outcomes. A profound comprehension of students' needs and motivations is pivotal in shaping effective teaching strategies, as it enables teachers to tailor their approach to the specific requirements of their learners. Such a deep understanding goes beyond basic awareness, delving into the nuances of what drives and influences each student's learning process. With this insight, teachers can develop more effective teaching methodologies that align with their students' needs, thereby significantly enhancing student engagement. Engaged students are more attentive, motivated, and involved, which leads to improved learning outcomes. Thus, a thorough grasp of students' unique motivations and needs is beneficial and essential in fostering an educational environment where effective teaching strategies thrive, student engagement is heightened, and learning outcomes are substantially improved.

Student Level of Creativity

Apart from the two factors mentioned above, teacher P7 also highlighted that students' level of creativity is another issue impacting their struggles with creative writing. Students require a substantial degree of creativity to write effectively. Teacher P7 underscores the necessity of a substantial degree of creativity for students to achieve proficiency in writing. This necessitates that students be able to originate novel ideas, engage in divergent thinking, and tackle writing assignments with an inventive approach, which are paramount in creative writing. The emphasis extends beyond mere grammatical accuracy or the employment of advanced vocabulary; it encompasses how

students utilize these linguistic tools in distinctive and imaginative ways to articulate their narratives and ideas.

“In writing, the challenges students often face include a limited vocabulary and difficulties in formulating their ideas.” (P7, November 2023)

Several notable challenges mark the journey of learning to write creatively. Students often need help with a restricted vocabulary, which can hinder their expression and limit the depth of their writing. Furthermore, student motivation in acquiring English language skills constitutes an independent factor that challenges learners engaged in creative writing. The struggle to crystallize their thoughts and ideas into coherent and compelling narratives is equally significant. Overcoming these hurdles requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing the expansion of vocabulary, enhancing student motivation, and nurturing critical and creative thinking skills.

Several teachers participating in this study subsequently communicated the strategies they had employed to address the challenges encountered by students during creative writing tasks. Presented hereinafter is an account of the solutions these teachers have put into practice. As detailed in the following data, teachers P1, P2, and P6 indicated they offered supplementary sessions or additional meetings beyond regular classroom hours.

*“For students who have not yet achieved proficiency in English, I offer **supplementary sessions beyond the scheduled class hours.**” (P1, November 2023).*

*“**We furnish assistance and reiterate the instruction by writing on the board.**” (P2, November 2023).*

*“I allocate **dedicated time** outside of the students' regular curricular activities.” (P6, November 2023)*

In addition to instruction during designated periods, another approach adopted by teachers involves the utilization of traditional methods, such as the provision of dictionaries or the use of smartphones equipped with electronic dictionary applications. This strategy was articulated by Teacher P3 in the subsequent interview data.

*“**We supply manual dictionaries, and students are permitted to use their mobile phones for electronic dictionaries. Moreover, I assist students in deciphering the meanings of unfamiliar words upon their inquiry.**” (P3, November 2023)*

Teachers assist students in acquiring English vocabulary and act as facilitators to enhance students' motivation in learning the English language. One of the teachers employed visual media, as elucidated by Teacher P4 in the subsequent explanation.

*“I furnish challenging vocabulary and utilize **imagery to captivate the students' interest.**” (P4, November 2023)*

Additionally, concerning the methods teachers employ to enhance students' proficiency in creative writing, there is an emphasis on practicing writing through the use of simple sentences in their activities. This approach was articulated by Teacher P5 in the ensuing description.

*“I encourage them to **construct simple sentences** derived from their daily activities.” (P5, November 2023)*

This sentence delineates various pedagogical approaches adopted by teachers aimed at enhancing the creative writing capabilities of students, with a particular emphasis on three principal domains: the augmentation of vocabulary, the enhancement of motivation, and the cultivation of ideas. Teachers endeavor to expand the students' lexical repertoire by introducing an array of new words and phrases alongside encouraging the exploration of diverse literary genres, thereby enabling students to articulate their thoughts with greater clarity and vividness. In terms of motivation, strategies are implemented to foster a stimulating classroom environment, establish attainable objectives, and provide constructive feedback, all of which contribute to making the process of creative writing more engaging and enjoyable. Furthermore, the facilitation of idea generation is a crucial aspect, achieved through methods such as brainstorming sessions, creative prompts, and exercises that stimulate imagination and original thinking. Collectively, these methods constitute a holistic approach to nurturing the necessary skills and attitudes for effective and imaginative expression in writing.

Discussion

Proficiency in vocabulary is crucial for developing creative writing skills, playing a significant role in enhancing students' motivation and ability to articulate ideas in writing. Mahmudah (2014) examined the relationship between students' writing competencies and vocabulary mastery. This study revealed that a comprehensive vocabulary aids students in reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Proficiency in vocabulary, coupled with the aptitude to employ words accurately and effectively, facilitates students in simplifying and enriching their academic tasks. Furthermore, as cited in Setiawandi (2006), Norbert Schmitt emphasized that vocabulary forms the foundation of language, necessitating its mastery as a prerequisite. Effective communication and comprehension of written materials are contingent upon a solid grasp of vocabulary.

The research conducted thus far demonstrates that a student's extensive vocabulary significantly influences their motivation and ideation. It poses a pertinent question: How can a student excel in creative writing skills with a limited English vocabulary? This challenge is not exclusive to students in Indonesia but extends to those studying English in Pakistan as well. Fareed, et al. (2016) conducted a study which revealed that the primary difficulties faced by Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners in writing include inadequate linguistic proficiency, encompassing grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, alongside writing anxiety, a dearth of ideas, dependence on their first language, and poor organizational structure in their writing.

In addressing the challenges students face in enhancing their creative writing capabilities, a range of teachers, particularly those involved in this research, have implemented diverse strategies. These methodologies encompass extending learning opportunities beyond conventional classroom hours, employing visual aids, and conducting exercises focused on constructing simple sentences. These approaches aim to incrementally build the students' creative writing proficiency and confidence. Additional hours facilitate extended practice and individualized feedback, potentially elevating student motivation by demonstrating discernible progress outside the standard curriculum. The use of visual stimuli aids in activating imaginative thinking, enabling students to create more vividly depicted scenarios and narratives, directly influencing their creative aptitude.

In contrast, the study by Wong and Yunus (2020) proposes an alternative tactic, advocating for the utilization of Mentimeter, an online interactive platform, to expand students' writing vocabulary. This digital tool diverges from conventional methods by offering an interactive and collaborative online environment. It allows students to engage dynamically with peers and teachers in a setting transcending traditional time and geographical limitations. Such a collaborative domain can significantly enhance

student motivation, as it involves instruction from educators and facilitates immediate peer feedback and idea exchange, fostering a more engaging and inclusive educational experience. Moreover, the adoption of innovative digital tools like Mentimeter inherently nurtures creativity. By removing common constraints and providing a platform that mitigates self-consciousness, students are encouraged to experiment with novel linguistic expressions, share and develop creative ideas, and draw inspiration from one another, all of which are essential for the refinement of their creative writing skills.

Conclusion

Creative writing skills constitute a fundamental aspect of English language acquisition, necessitating the encouragement of students to enhance their proficiency in this area. This research delineates the challenges students encounter in creative writing endeavors. Additionally, it elucidates the solutions teachers have implemented to foster improvements in creative writing skills. Considering the nature of these solutions, it is apparent that they might not sufficiently engage students. Therefore, teachers require strategies that align with technological advancements and contemporary global conditions to captivate and educate their students effectively.

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