



Fostering Creative Writing through Poetry in EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how the ELT teacher implements creative writing through poetry in the ELT classroom during a COVID-19 pandemic and to describe how the students express their emotions through the tone of poetry in their creative writing. Creative writing in language teaching and learning practice is significant to gaining students' creativity and thinking. One of them is writing poetry. However, few works of literature discuss the methods used by ELT teachers in writing poems and the concern for emotion and tone embedded in students' writing products. This study used a qualitative descriptive approach with one ELT teacher and twenty-two Indonesian EFL university students of the non-English department at an Islamic University in Indonesia as participants. The instruments for data collection included classroom documentation with Zoom Meeting recordings and an Instagram account for posting students' works. The results showed that the teacher implemented student-centered methods/strategies to teach creative writing through poetry in the English Intensive Program classroom during the pandemic. The meeting was organized using *Zoom Meeting* with performing Warm-Up, Lead-In (Creation of Poem and Reading the Poem), and Follow-up. In addition, the student's creative works posted on *Instagram* showed the negative variations of poetry tone including threatening, painful, and discouraged. The study underscores the pedagogical efficacy of student-centered creative writing in ELT, highlighting its role in enhancing emotional intelligence and validating the integration of digital platforms for remote learning. It advocates for culturally responsive curricula that leverage creative expression as a conduit for emotional articulation and critical thinking.

Keywords: Creative writing, poetry, ELT, EFL, teaching strategies.



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Creative writing presence in language teaching and learning practice is considered reasonable due to some positive benefits students may gain. It is indicated that creative writing can help students develop their language level in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse (Maley, 2012). In addition, it can motivate students to employ the language through interesting techniques in expressing unique meanings since they need to engage with the language proficiency at a greater level of processing. Creative writing is a type of writing that innovatively presents ideas and thoughts. Harmer (2021) states that creative writing refers to imaginative undertakings such as producing poetry, tales, and plays. Therefore, practice writing can help teachers engage students in the writing process since the students, in this case, will produce the writing using appropriate language when the teachers can create imaginative tasks (Wale & Bogale, 2021).

Having strong abilities in creative writing is important since it can emphasize personal imaginative writing to be maintained and expanded (Lee, 2019). According to (Naji et al., 2019), creative writing can be a kind of self-discovery that encourages successful learning. Having plenty of writing products, individuals could entertain themselves with creative writing based on their interests. The realm of practice of the writing process since kids will generate writing using suitable language when the teachers can offer inventive challenges (Dewi & Tlonanen, 2017); (Ibán et al., 2020). Moreover, while students are producing a simple writing poem about someone else they care about or while they are attempting to concept a narrative (Rajendra & Kaur, 2022) or tell stories (Haraway, 2019) from their childhood. These activities are regarded as creative writing processes that can powerfully provide students with a strong motivation to find and create the right words to express their experiences (Lassig, 2020).

Furthermore, teachers' roles in helping students with creative writing are desperately required. Teachers may encounter students who find it challenging to generate creative writing when teaching and learning, and it is the teacher's role to inspire them to be more motivated in generating innovative writing (Kumar, 2020). It is confirmed by (Zanden et al., 2020) that teachers should be able to develop their students' creative writing skills gradually. Consequently, it can be observed that when teaching creative writing to primary school students, they learn about words,

phrases, and sentences before being led to develop entire sentences and then full paragraphs (Gannon & Dove, 2021).

The purpose of writing refers to sharing human experiences to entertain. Therefore, some types of creative writing include poetry, plays, movie and television scripts, songs, fiction, speeches, memoirs, and personal essays. It is determined that the foremost characteristics of creative students are regarded as those who can lay things jointly in new techniques, can construct more novel products, can use more alternative imagery to make points, can observe common things, and find them to be something wonderful (Brookhart, 2010). Maher cited in (Kirkgoz, 2014) states that the activity of writing poetry is regarded as the first and foremost of creative writing since it presents playful activity. Students can gain useful ideas for creative writing when exploring practical language. Hence, writing poetry can be considered a crucial stimulation to create students' creativity (Rosenhan & Galloway, 2019). Some various findings from researchers suggest that one of the ways to perform students' creativity demonstrated in writing is through writing poems (Rosenhan & Galloway, 2019); (Cronin & Hawthorne, 2019); (Ismuwardani et al., 2019); (Bakri et al., 2019); (Kumar, 2020); (Fithriani, 2021). In writing poems, the writer presents interesting themes and meaningful languages that can increase the learners' emotional awareness and motivate them emotionally and cognitively to communicate in a second language (Xue et al., 2023); (Mahani, 2023). However, few studies focus on the teachers' methods in writing poems and the concern for emotion and tone embedded in students' writing products. Thus, this current study fills those gaps.

Poetry can encourage students' creativity and provide a more positive learning environment. Poetry is a manifestation of language full of allure, so it can incite certain meanings in the reader or listener. Poetry is a literary work whose subjects comprise words of figurative meaning, and their provision is conveyed by rhymes, rhythms, lines, and stanzas in a condensed style of languages (Ramsaran, 1983). Additionally, poetry is a literary work that has its uniqueness both from its intrinsic structure and extrinsic structure, where each word has its meaning that describes an idea or emotion and conveys an expression for the writer (Ollila & Jantas, 2006). Therefore, students can build on their insights, provide new knowledge, and express

their creative ideas through learning poetry. Poetry can promote creativity and a more positive learning environment. Unlike typical classroom topics, poems encourage students to develop their creativity. In this sense, poetry serves as a good model for creative writing and can stimulate interesting ideas for creative writing.

1.2 Research questions

Therefore, this present study proposes to answer two research questions: (1) How do EFL teacher implement creative writing through poetry in their EFL classrooms during the global pandemic? (2) how do EFL students express their emotions through the tone of poetry in their creative writing?

1.3 Significance of the study

This study significantly contributes to language pedagogy by offering empirical insights into the integration of creative writing within ELT, particularly through poetry, highlighting its potential to enhance students' emotional and creative communication. It provides evidence of the efficacy of student-centered teaching methodologies in digital learning environments, which is especially appropriate in the global and technological era. The research also emphasizes the necessity for culturally responsive teaching approaches, considering the unique cultural context of an Indonesian Islamic university. Furthermore, it underscores the role of creative writing in increasing student engagement, suggesting that personalizing the learning process through poetry can deepen students' linguistic experiences. Additionally, the study's findings on the methods used by teachers to facilitate poetry writing have implications for teacher training, advocating for the development of specialized training programs that equip educators with skills to foster creativity in language instruction. The incorporation of emotional and creative expression in language assessment, analyzing students' tones in poetry, calls for innovative assessment frameworks that go beyond traditional linguistic accuracy. Lastly, the use of social media as a pedagogical tool reflects an innovative approach to education, extending the classroom into the digital realm and providing students with contemporary platforms for expression and critique.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach, which is naturally occurring in classroom discourse. It is also interpretive, as the findings were based on the researchers' interpretation and point of view (Ary et al., 2010).

2.2 Participants

The participants of the study were one female teacher who was assigned to an English Intensive Program / *Intensif Bahasa Inggris* (IBI) and twenty-two Indonesian EFL university students. The students included sixteen females and six males from the non-English department at an Islamic University in Indonesia. All students were freshmen who were required to enroll in the IBI program. IBI is one of the university extra programs that should be taken by all freshmen during the first and second semesters. When taking this data, the students were taking the first-semester program in which they were focusing on general English. Based on the results of the placement test developed by the university at the beginning of the first semester, the students were assigned the same level of English proficiency; Basic 1. The participants were chosen since they received creative writing as one of the materials during the program. Therefore, it was reasonable to focus on that class since this study needs deep analysis to answer the two research questions.

2.3 Instruments

The data collection was carried out through three main stages. Firstly, the participants were given creative writing material, particularly poetry. Secondly, the students were instructed to write a poem based on the topic discussed in the classroom. Thirdly, they were commanded to submit their works to *Google Classroom* as one of the media used during the classroom process. Lastly, the teacher created an account of social media using the *Instagram account* and published the students' works on that social media. Therefore, the instruments used to get the data were classroom documentation with Zoom Meeting recordings and an Instagram account for posting students' works.

2.4 Data analysis

The data for answering the first research question was classroom documentation. While the classroom design of this current study was taken via the *Zoom Meeting*

platform, the classroom documentation was recorded using *Zoom Cloud* and then evaluated based on the methods and techniques of teaching poetry in ELT classrooms. The data for answering the second research question was participants' creative writing works manifested in poetry. The researcher selected six poems of students' creative works posted on *Instagram* accounts based on the negative variations of poetry tone; threatening, painful, and discouraged. These tones were decided to be the aspects that were analyzed as the participants were instructed to express their feelings during the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic that they were facing at that time.

To do so, the tone can be interpreted using three aspects. First, mood is used to identify the writer's attitude and atmosphere in poetry. Second, diction is used to examine the right choice of words chosen by the writer that contributes to the emotional meaning of a poem. The last is note shift, which particularly shows how the writer shifts its tone in a good arrangement of end sounds in the poems.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

The teacher implemented creative poetry through poetry using the students-centered method. In this method, the superpower of teaching poetry depended on how the students were actively involved and participating in the activity of the classroom. Here are some techniques that teachers implement in the classroom.

Warm-Up

In this step, the teacher asked the students to recall any poems that they had ever read before. After all the students shared their previous knowledge of poems, the teacher asked some students to read the poems mentioned as they never read. Then, the teacher offered other students to analyze the poems that had been shared by some students dealing with the characteristics of those poems, the author, and the language used. In addition, the teacher asked some students to interpret the poems shared in the classroom freely. In this case, students are encouraged to recite their language which can encourage students to increase their critical thinking.

Lead-In

The teacher encouraged students to write a type of poem under the topic "Corona

Virus” and post it into *Google Classroom*, a medium used to share materials or assignments during the class. This topic would be familiar to the students since people in this world, including them, had been placed in a condition where coronavirus outbreaks limited and changed our lives for a couple of months. It was argued that this activity, fostering students to write a poem, was an effective way to involve students in the learning process. It was believed that students who write poetry would understand more about what poetry and literature were than others who do not write, whatever the students’ performance presented. When they were writing poetry, this process would be memorable for the students. From this point of view, writing poetry could be regarded as an important way to stimulate students to foster their creativity.

After students had created the poem and posted it on Instagram, the teacher selected some of the poems randomly and read them to the class. On this occasion, the teacher asked students to read and compare the poems selected and to find the similarities and differences. Furthermore, the teacher also supported students to give some questions dealing with the poem that had been compared. Lastly, students are allowed to give comments, corrections, and responses to other friends’ work. Therefore, reading poetry aloud would assist students to cover understanding in pronunciation, intonation, expression, gesture, and rhythm. Finally, it would be useful to improve our speaking ability. Reading various literary works in the form of poetry extended our comprehension of many topics. Also, moral messages could be learned or gotten when reading poems.

Follow-up

As the last activity, the teacher asked students to answer some questions about what had been discussed to ensure that the students understood the materials given. The teacher also allowed students to ask some questions and write short notes about the learning process achieved before the class ended. By prompting those activities, the class would be more active and alive.

Based on the analyzed data, the writers found that most of the students’ tones used in writing poetry were negative tones, including threatening, painful, and discouraged tones. As presented in the pie diagram, threatening was the most used tone by the students, about 27%. Then, both topics on pain and discouragement had

the same percentage, 23%. The least of 27% consisted of various tones. Let's see how each tone was reflected through students' creative poetry.

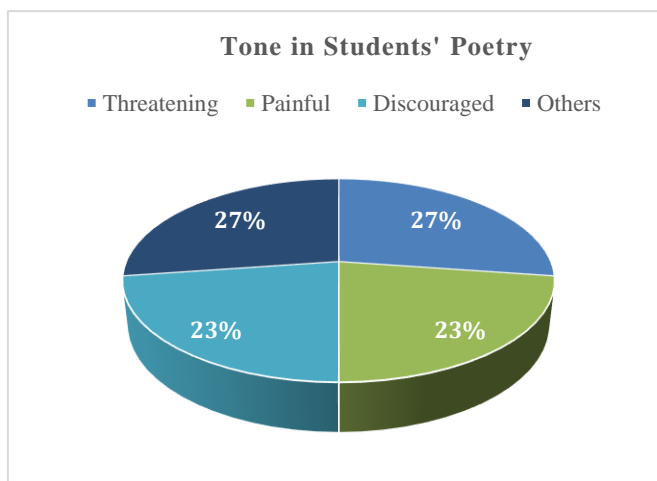


Figure. 1 Tone in Students' Poetry

Tone of threatening

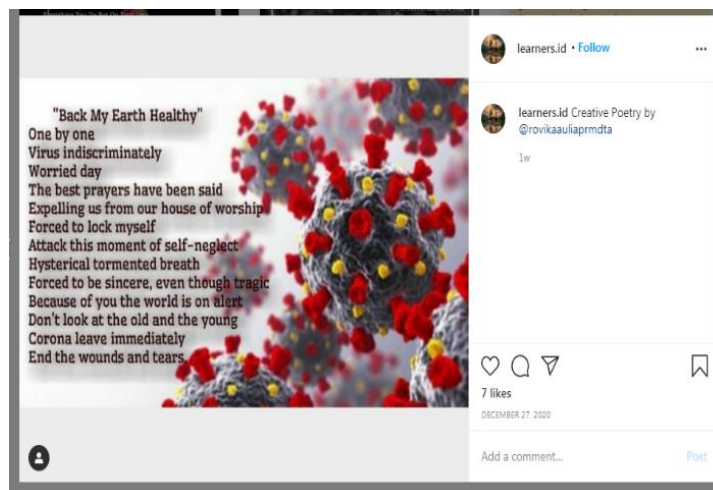
Threatening is a feeling of being hostile, in which the person with such a feeling thinks something is attempting to harm him/her. This tone was quite familiar to the students when depicting the appropriate situation during the first wave of the pandemic. In the following table, six poems applied the variation tones, including the categories of nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

Table 2. Variation of Threatening Tones

Poem	Tones
1	Parasites (n), corona bitch (n), corruption (n), cunning (n), mass destruction (n)
2	Fear (n), haunts (v), scared (adj), vain (n)
3	Restless (n), afraid (adj), worrying (adj), distance (n)
4	Resilience (n), displacement (n), dying earth (n)
5	Indiscriminately (adv), worried (adj), lock (v), attack (v), self-neglect (n), hysterical (adj), tormented (adj), tragic (adj), wounds (n), tears (n)

In this part, the writers only take two poems that represent a tone of threatening entitled 'Back my earth healthy' and 'Stay home' as follows:

First poem



The first poem describes the situation of what is going on during the pandemic and how she tried to keep herself from being safe in undergoing life. The poem also expresses her wishes about the leaving of the coronavirus by having many prayers. To create the atmosphere of tone, 'hyperbole' language was used to emphasize the writer's tone toward the situation of the pandemic, for example:

Forced to lock myself

Attack this moment of self-neglect

Hysterical tormented breath

The word choices such as 'forced', 'attack', 'hysterical', and 'tormented' indicated a sense of being threatening and have a deep meaning on it. Besides, the use of 'self' in the 'myself' and 'self-neglect' also reflects that we bring more awareness in facing the pandemic.

Second Poem



The second poem reflected on what happened during the pandemic, how people's freedom was being locked into sadness and darkness feeling, but there was still hope for a better life afterward. Some tones of threatening were expressed by using the phrases as follows:

*While displaying the beauty of the world **behind the darkness***
*Locked in the chains that **bind our freedom***
*Freedom is **taken away by fear***
*That took away **a small percentage of our happiness***
***A fear of death** is yet to come*
*And hope that **this blackness** will be done in the next day*

The writer preferred to use a combination of phrases to portray her feelings, such as 'behind the darkness', 'bind our freedom', 'take away by fear', 'a small percentage of our happiness', 'fear of death', and 'this blackness'. It was interesting how the writer could modify the sentence using the varied phrases.

Tone of Painful

Pain is considered the hardest feeling to accept. Somehow, our feelings of pain can be poured into a meaningful poem. Here is a summary of five poems that use painful tones.

Table 3. Variation of Painful Tone

Poem	Tones
1	Unstintingly (adv), miss (n), stink (v), constraint (n)
2	Darkness (n), alone (adj.), lonely (n), stuffy (adj), boring (adj), nothing (adj)
3	Shut (v), lock (v), afraid (adj), silent (adj), shoot (v), anxiety (adj), war (n)
4	Trampled (adj), crushed (adj), descend (v)
5	Worry (adj), anxiety (adj), hopeful (adj), suffering (n), fraught (v), risks (n)

Third Poem



The poem consists of four stanzas that have the same introduction sentence in each stanza as below:

Day after day filled with worry and anxiety (1st stanza)

Day after day filled with worry (2nd stanza)

Day after day filled with worry (3rd stanza)

Day after day filled with suffering (4th stanza)

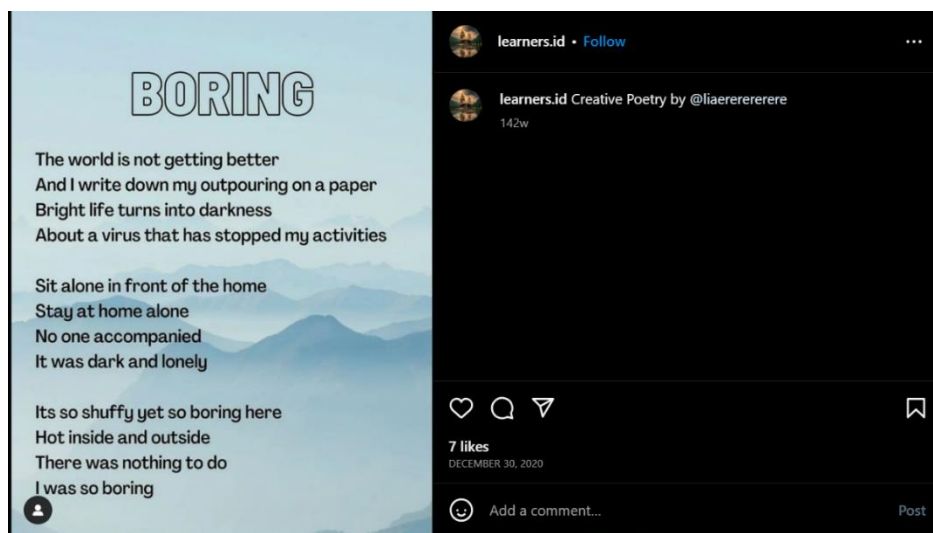
Based on the sentences, the writer attempted to create a consistent sentence in writing the poem to emphasize the sense of being ‘worried’, ‘anxiety’, and ‘suffering’ as the prior introduction to describe her detailed feeling of her in the next sentences.

The poem also reflected the shifting of our habitual action by using human senses' expression, for instance:

Smiles are no longer the same
Eyes are not sparkling anymore like before
No more laughter, no more jokes,
No more parting, no hug,
No bordered with a chest

Due to the pandemic, people had to maintain physical distance, which was expressed by comparing to human senses such as 'smiles', 'eyes', 'laughter', 'jokes', 'hugs', and 'a chest'. The selection of those words represented the boundaries of being far away from people, so she felt it as a painful feeling.

Fourth Poem



One word that best describes the pandemic situation is boring. As described above, the student stressed the idea of being bored belongs to poetry, such as “darkness”, “alone”, “lonely”, “stuffy”, “boring”, and “nothing”. Due to being restricted from doing many outdoor activities, people were also limited to interacting with common people, especially in public areas. They had to be aware of their self-protection and do anything at home, privately. This perception was of tone description, was also very hard for most people, and met obstacles. The feeling was somehow in line with the writer’s point of view.

Tone of Discouraged

The other negative tone identified is discouraged. This feeling is about someone who is disheartened and disapproved of something. It was found that only five poems used the tone of discouraged.

Fifth Poem



The poem consisted of two stanzas that had a different tone for each stanza. To interpret tone, a shift in tone was needed to be considered. In the first stanza was

Poem	Tones
1	Quiet (adj), silence (n), underestimate (v), drown (v), die (v), ferocity (n)
2	Wounds (n), tears (n), shatter (v), crush (v), destroy (v), distress (n), rebuke (n)
3	Bored (adj), saturated (adj), sarcastic (adj)
4	Suspend (v), disappear (adj)
5	Mourning (n), disaster (n), plague (n)

the tone of shock. The writer began his writing by stating the phrase:

*it's quiet you think of **nothing***

*the shock of your sleep by **the blast***

Table 4. Variation of Discouraged Tone

The words ‘nothing’ and ‘the blast’ were indications of being shocked due to the emergence of coronavirus spreading. Meanwhile, the next phase of ‘silence you underestimate’ was the way to calm that current situation. In the second stanza, the tone is discouraged. He described his feelings by using the phrases ‘drown in the flood’, and ‘your glance you may perform’ to indicate the human condition regarding the effect of the coronavirus. Here are the sentences:

*You don't **drown in the flood.***

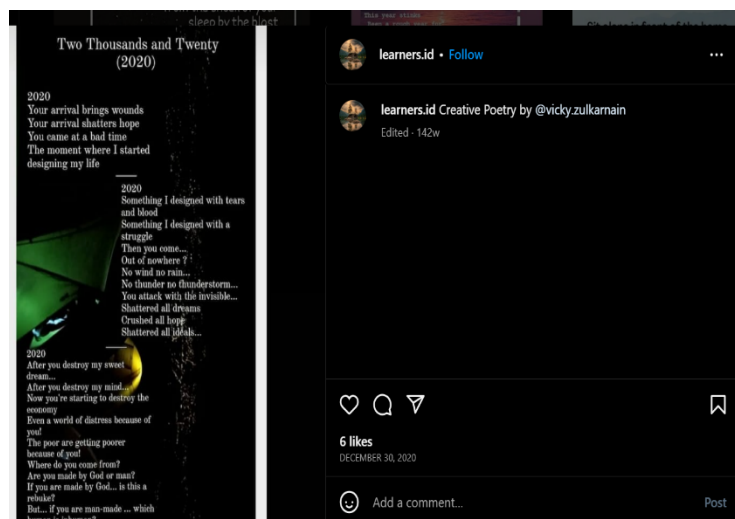
*If not seen by **your glance, you may perform.***

Additionally, she felt that she had prepared to die if he underestimated the presence of the coronavirus. Due to the unfriendly virus, the poem tells how people had the feeling of being discouraged. It was proven through this sentence below.

*And if you act small, **you underestimate***

*Then be **prepared to die for his ferocity***

Sixth Poem



Through this poetry, the indication of the writing's discouraged feeling could be felt by looking at how the specific words were chosen, such as ‘wounds’, ‘tears’, ‘shatter’, ‘crush’, ‘destroy’, ‘distress’, and ‘rebuke’. By the arrival of 2020, the writer's dream, hope, and success had been eliminated as well which did not enable her to survive and undergo the better activities and resilience process of life.

3.2 Discussion

The purpose of the study was to investigate how ELT teachers applied creative writing in creating poetry and view how the students expressed their emotions via the tone of poetry to develop creative writing about how to face the global pandemic. The results shown above are derived from teacher's practices and, thus, be confirmed by qualitative methods to gain the validity of the research. Moreover, concern with the literary genre as the material for teaching made the teacher develop suitable techniques to fit their teaching practices in a particular classroom discourse. The first technique, *warm-up*, suggests that the teacher was concerned about introducing poetry and explicitly discusses with students how to analyze the characteristics of poems based on the schemata shared by the teacher. In engaging the students with poetry, it was assumed that they could increase their knowledge and critical thinking through more literature skills. It was in line with (Cronin & Hawthorne, 2019) that poetry can encourage students' crafting.

The second technique, *lead-in*, suggested that the teacher needed to help the students in forming good poetry by leading the creation of poems throughout the process of choosing a specific theme, and the provision of media to post their poetry. On this occasion, students were allowed to create the natural language used in their poetry. From this point of view, writing poetry could be regarded as an important way to stimulate students to foster their creativity and also strengthen their statements by stating that teaching poetry in the classroom could give natural creative written expression (Sigvardsson, 2019). As a literary general, poems potentially offer a valuable source to present authentic language structures in EFL or ESL classrooms (Aladini, F. & Farahbod, 2020). After leading the students, the teacher implemented reading a poem by specifically asking the students to do that during the online class. The activity was beneficial for them in developing English skills through learning poetry. It was supported by (Cronin & Hawthorne, 2019) that learning poetry in ELT could develop students' four language skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening).

In addition, when teaching poems in the classroom, students had the opportunity to interact with other students to discuss the interpretation of the poems themselves.

This activity could develop both students' ability in literacy and thought to see the existing situations in new approaches and express their ideas. According to Morrow (Stange & Wyant, 2008), poetry was one of the applicable approaches for improving literacy. Poetry also stimulated thought and reinforced the early success of literacy (Parr & Campbell on Stange & Wyant, 2008). Not only focusing on how the techniques were implemented but also on the negative tone of students' poetry. They included tones of threatening, pain, and discouragement that were captured by the students due to the topic of individuals' feelings and being restricted during a pandemic. The finding was relevant to a study by (Fithriani, 2021), who said that one of the strategies in writing poetry was building emotion through a personal story. In this sense, it depicted students' feelings in a particular tone they shared.

The findings are also in line with the study conducted by Iida and Chamcharatsri (2020). They explored the English language learning experiences of students through poetry writing. Their analysis identified fourteen thematic issues, encompassing various aspects of the learners' experiences, such as challenges, desires, hardship, and failure in their language learning journey. The study also identified twenty-two different emotional responses expressed by the students in their poetry. These emotional responses highlighted positive and negative feelings associated with the language learning process.

The use of poetry writing as a form of 'meaningful literacy' (Hanauer, 2012) proved to be a transformative tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. It allowed students to express their thoughts and emotions in a creative and personal way, fostering a deeper connection to the language and enhancing their learning experience. In addition, Malikow (2006) believed that poetry allows people to express their deepest emotions through words. Therefore, this pedagogical approach has significant implications for L2 (second language) poetry writing in the EFL context to expand the insight of developing linguistic knowledge (Mora & Coyle, 2020). It suggests that incorporating poetry writing activities into the language learning curriculum can provide students with a unique and engaging way to develop their language skills while also exploring their personal experiences and emotions. Moreover, it highlights the importance of providing opportunities for students to engage in creative and reflective writing tasks that go beyond the traditional focus on grammar and vocabulary. Overall, this study sheds light on the

potential of poetry writing as a valuable tool for language learning and offers insights for educators seeking to enhance their EFL classrooms.

3. CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

The result indicates that teachers implemented creative writing through poetry in the classroom during the global COVID-19 pandemic using the students-centered method. The meeting was organized using Zoom meetings with performing Warm-Up, Lead-In (Creation of Poem and Reading the Poem), and Follow-up. In addition, to answer RQ 2, this study used students' poems, and it is analyzed by using tone as one of the elements of poetry. In addition, it was also found that the student's creative works posted on *Instagram accounts* were based on the negative variations of poetry tone including threatening, painful, and discouraged.

4.2 Suggestions

Further research based on this study could explore the extended impact of creative writing on language proficiency, comparing it to traditional language instruction methods. Investigating the role of teachers' linguistic and cultural backgrounds in facilitating creative writing could generate deeper insights into pedagogical efficacy. Additionally, examining the psychological benefits of expressive writing for language learners during the pandemic might provide a nuanced understanding of its beneficial potential. Expanding the research to include a larger, more diverse context could validate the findings. Finally, future studies could analyze the role of different digital platforms in ELT and their comparative effectiveness in fostering student engagement and creative expression.

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