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## POETRY: FOSTERING SELF IDENTITY AND CREATIVE THINKING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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### **Abstract**

*This article describes how poems can effectively be used to foster EFL/ESL students' self-identity and creative thinking. This study is based on the data gathered from graduate students in English Language Teaching Program of one of state universities in Malang. Twelve students are involved as samples of this study. The participants expressed their perceptions and told their stories after they took English Literature course for a semester. Open-ended questions have used to get the data that allow participants to express their opinion on how their culture identity and culture experience influence them in analyzing the poetry and how poetry could establish their creative thinking, as well as help them find their identity. The results of the written experiences and opinions indicate that some students believe that they have been given an opportunity to work independently through analyzing poems and creating ones. They admitted that their culture experience give an influence in how they analyzing the poetry and this activity was so amusing since they could get new cultural understanding. The participants finally could produce nice and creative poems at the end of the semester based on their own styles.*

**Keywords:** *poetry, creativity, creative thinking, culture identity, self-identity*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

English poetry has been taught in many EFL countries as well as in Indonesia for many years, but the problem is many of teachers and students think that the teaching of poetry to EFL students has always been a very demanding task. They commonly assumed that English poetry is too difficult for foreign students to cope with. Students are intimidated to writing and analyzing about literature works because they think that they do not know how to write it or the author is surely conceal some meaning in the text that they just can't find (McGee, 2001). Even though EFL students show reluctance to learn how to analyze and create poetry in the classroom, the benefits of using poetry in language classes have been highlighted by many ESL/EFL practitioners.

A broader perspective on the use of poetry in the language classroom not only can lead to a meaningful and fruitful language learning experience (Cubukcu, 2010) but also as a great source of authentic material that could help foreign language acquisition as any other source (Maley and Duff, 1989). Learning poetry can provide students with an opportunity to enrich their vocabulary in a new way by offering meaningful context, in which they could be used and hence be remembered more effectively (Norstrom, 2000). As long as students' motivation, interest, and cultural background are taken into consideration while selecting a poem for the classroom teaching a meaningful teaching and learning process could be happened, as Hess (2003) notes, "Entering a literary text, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation almost no other text can produce. When we read, understand, and interpret a poem, we learn language through the expansion of our experience with a larger human reality". Heath (1996) also states that poems could offer opportunities for students to project their feelings and emotions, thus fostering personal involvement in learners since it deals with universal themes and human concerns.

The interpretation of the poem not only be analyzed or define the meaning from the language aspect but also needed to analyze the background of the writer. Therefore, the process of learning the poem can happen when there is an interaction between readers, the poems, the author's purpose and the context in which the poems are produced.

In addition to that, when encountering the understanding stage, the students' "self-identity" is believed to discover. What a poem can do to help students discover their identity is to show them that even the students analyze the same poem, there might never be one exact interpretation of a poem since it was written and analyze by different person who has different identity that is influenced by culture. Researchers mostly believe that self-identity could represent someone's cultural identity which has impacted their way of thinking, communicating and behaving (Yihong, et.al, 2005; Boonchum, 2009).

The last but not least, the benefit of teaching poem is to stimulate students' creative thinking. through creativity, the students can make inferences, think intuitively and spontaneously, and make educated guesses that based on the evidence, data and information they have available, to follow hunches, to make leaps in thinking rather than think in a straightforward manner.

The effect of teaching poetry in EFL classroom was done by many researchers. It is proved that teaching poetry give a positive learning experience and help the learners improve their English language and use English flawlessly (Panavelil, 2011; Khansir, 2012).The present study, however, aims at revealing and the facts how learners perceive a learning poetry as a way to discovering their self-identity and fostering their creative thinking in the EFL classroom. The focus of this study is not to investigating the degree of the effect statistically, but more on gathering students' opinion and perspectives and describing them comprehensively.

## 2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

### ***SELF IDENTITY***

Self-identity has been conceptualized from a range of perspectives, but there are several characteristics that emerge repeatedly in the some literature. First, Robinson (1999) defines self-identity as "both visible and invisible domains of the self that influence self-construction. They include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and physical and intellectual ability". Second, self-identity concerns both who am I (knowledge component) that is pertains to the total set of perceptions one has of oneself, and what I think of who I am (evaluative component) that is how good a person thinks he or she is (Purdie, 2000). Third, self-identity is conceptualized as the salient and enduring aspects of one's self-perception, the more salient the self-identity is, the greater the probability that the person will consequently behave with that identity (Sparks, 2000). It can be said that self- identity is influence by personal factors (appearance, sense, style, background knowledge and self-perception) that can evolve or change over the development of individual itself.

The last characteristic is, self-identity is formed and change through interactions with the environment and interpretations of those interactions. The experiences that occur within the context of a variety of socio-cultural venues in the past and present have the significant potential of shaping one's identities (Purdie, 2000). Therefore, there are multiple factors to shape self-identity. It depends upon both personal factors and the contexts within which individuals operate. In context factors, Individuals possess a cultural identity, in which a person is connected to culture such as customary beliefs, traditions, practices, values and language.

### **SELF IDENTITY AND POETRY**

One's self-identity can assist the students in analyze and creating a poem. Students' personal factors and cultural identity can influence them in identify and understand connotation, tone, theme, different poetic structures and devices, and then interpret the poem based their own understanding. Not only to discover their self-identity, teaching poems can also help students learn others culture and give the same respect to their own culture.

Otherwise, in discovering their self-identity in creating original poem, they can choose their own theme, poetic language and device and also they might use the forms and structures that most fit with their unique voices and sense of identity.

### **CREATIVE THINKING AND CREATIVITY**

Creativity has growing significance in global world, and received increased attention in recent educational reforms around the world because creativity becomes a great element in encouraging competitiveness. Creativity is considered an essential element necessary for learning in the scope of education, because learning itself is a creative process that involves students making information relevant. According to Starko (1995), students' creativity could be enhanced by linking prior knowledge and new knowledge in an individually meaningful format and this process is different to each students. According to Sternberg (1986), there are several attributes that are associated with creativity. They are include: a) lack of conventionality, b) intellectuality, c) aesthetic taste and imagination, d) decision-making skills and flexibility, e) perspicacity (in questioning social norms), and f) drive for accomplishment and recognition. Therefore, the level of one's creativity is different from one to another.

In educational field, creativity is related to one's self concept in which touches on how a person sees and perceives oneself and how that could influence one's reaction (Farmer et al., 2003). It is also believed that creativity is a combination of abilities, skills, motivation, attitudes, and other factors that reflects how people's minds have gone far (Ripple, 1999). According to Tezak (2015) creativity is a complex cognitive process that involve the process of trying to identify as well as solve a problem through a myriad of intertwined thought processes that occur and reoccur at different stages of the creative process, aiding and changing each other, while interacting within the bigger scope. In other words, it can be concluded that creativity is a product of creative thinking process.

Creative thinking fosters the students to thinking critical and creative. Rather than expect students to react to questions, exercises or test items and to give a preferred exact "correct" answer, creative thinking requires the students to encourage "proactive" thinking, such as generating new questions and answers. They have to find alternative ways of thinking and answering (Iakovos, 2011). Therefore, the students' active involvement and higher order thinking skills are needed to promote creative thinking.

### **CREATIVITY AND POETRY WRITING**

Poems as a creative text require students to perform creative tasks such as writing a poem, which is personally imaginative and unique. Morgan (2006) in her research discuss about her experience of writing a sustained narrative poem, and then as a teacher-educator discusses about understanding of the creative processes in writing a poem and classroom practice. The paper traces how not only personal but also social, cultural and disciplinary factors are at play in the development of students' creativity in creating poems. She tells that her students found that activity in creating poems as a pleasure activity that help them open

the door to their creativity, and how surprised and delighted they were at what they have created.

Writing a poem can bring a creative teaching and learning process, because students capitalize on their imaginative capability of thinking and doing things creatively. This imaginative capability enables students to communicate or articulate what they are experiencing or what they have experienced. Unique language and experience resources enable students to exploit and communicate their own personal feelings (emotions), thoughts, and social actions. Thus, expressiveness, one of the characteristics of poetry, gives students self-dialogic space for gaining a greater awareness of the writing process while affording them opportunities to develop their creativity of bringing their feelings, ideas, and stories to life (Widodo, et.al 2016).

### **SELF IDENTITY AND CREATIVITY**

It is assumed that creativity is related to one's self concept, for example role identity in which touches on how a person sees and perceives oneself and how that could influence one's reaction. Such strong self-concept is important on creative individual in order for them to have the self-image of being creative. A good development of role identity creative gives impact on current creativity when an individual is carrying a task. According to Burke (1991), if job that is at hand is not consistent with one's creative identity, the person's identity will be threaten and he/she will avoid from doing related creativity action in the meanwhile someone will perform creative work if he/she is suitable to his/her creativity characteristics. Therefore it can be said that, creativity is not a natural act and thus self-identity as creative identity needs to be nurtured and motivated.

### **3. METHOD**

Twelve students are involved as samples of this study. They were taken randomly from 85 graduate students in English Language Teaching Program of one of state universities in Malang. Open-ended question has used to get the data. In this instrument, the participants are allowed to express their opinion on how self-identity and creative thinking are fostered while they were learning poems. They were asked to explain as much as possible in their answers. The participants were labeled from B1 to B12. Their names would remain as anonymous in order to minimize the possibility of bias. Three days were given to the participants to fill the questionnaire. The data were analyzed qualitatively. The qualitative analysis was used to find consistent pattern in the various perspectives revealed in the data. The data were sorted, labeled and analyzed to fully see understanding and interpretation of participant along with their experiences and situations. Here, common themes and perceptions were highlighted.

### **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Students' Self-identity**

Giving questions to the participants "According to you what is the definition of self-identity?" it was found that the majority of the participants thought that self-identity was associated with someone's innate characteristics which influenced by surround him/her that determine the successful of someone's learning process. The results were confirmed by those obtained from the data. B7 mentioned that, "*self-identity is determine the way of someone think, behave and achieve goal in learning*", B3 also explained that, "*self-identity means not only how I but also others see myself physically and mentally*". B4 stated that, self-identity means "*one's self-image that labeled by others as the results of the way he/she spend life*".

Furthermore, according to some participants, someone's prior knowledge becomes the base form of someone's identity. B6 mentioned that, *"the moral lesson, attitude, hereditary culture and knowledge that taught by my parents has an important role to form my self-identity"*. B10 told that, *"self-identity is naturally shaped while interact with environment"*. Meanwhile, other participants thought self-identity as uniqueness. B2 explained that, *"it is owned by human which makes them unique and special since they are separate from others with their own needs, interests and abilities"*. The last, one participant thinks that self-identity is a freedom. *"We are free to construct our identity, we can choose what we like, hate, what we wannabe"* (B12).

### **Students' Self-identity in Analyzing a Poem**

According to a question, "Do you think learning poems help you discover your identity?" the most participant agree that poem give them an opportunity to discover their self-identity while analyze it. Some of the participant told that poem gives them a change to explore another side of themselves, especially their human side. Here are the examples of their view:

- *From a poem I can learn life values and it intrigues me to explore other literature works.* (B5)
- *Learning poem or other art works makes me more sensitive towards feelings.* (B2)
- *To me learning a poem is interesting. In every poem there will be a message or a moral value that the writer want to deliver to the readers. Regarding the moral value or message, I am encouraged to learn other literature works such as short story, novel, and also song lyric because there will be something valuable we can get from their messages. It is line with the idea that studying literature, it helps us to understand human sentiments, interest, and problems. It also brings us closer to other culture, ethnicities, and nationalities. It makes human be human.* (B6)
- *At that time, I got poem analysis task. I never did it before. There are several aspects needed to be analyzed in poem analysis. The main thing is we have to understand the poem by of course carefully reading it and finding the meaning of each figure of speech. The process of analyzing a poem gave me more knowledge, why, because I read the poem many times to understand the meaning and relate every word. A poem could show us very difficult words to understand. The way we think could different from the meaning presented by the author. It is such an interesting part of understanding a poem.* (B7)

Analyzing poems can also help students learn others culture and give the same respect to their own culture. Here are some of their views:

- *Sometimes we learned historical facts or events from poems. It makes us understand the world deeper.* (B3)
- *Whenever I learn about a poem, analyze it, interpret it, I will always use my very own experience in life to build the meaning of the poem. I try guessing what the content of the poem is. I keep questioning myself why the poet uses certain words in his or her poem. For example, the poet prefers to use "red" instead of other colors because red represents more passion, conveys the anger the poet wants to expose, and so on.* (B9)

The last is analyzing poems give students a freedom.

- *Nobody can complain my interpretation because my experience might be different from theirs.* (B8)
- *And this one is what I like it. The lecturer never told a student that his/her answer is wrong. All interpretations were appreciated. By so doing it made us unleash the hidden potential and cast away all latent reluctance and uneasiness.* (B1)

Even though, most of the participants found that analyzing a poem give a change of them to discover their identity, on the other hand, still there are some of them disagree with it.

- *Well, I like poems. But I cannot really say that they are my calling. Like they have been immersed in my flesh and bones. I am quite motivated to read or learn other Eng. lit works since it's always been my passion even before I started learning poems. So I guess it is safe to say that I don't think poem has something to do with me. In my case. (B12)*
- *Perhaps, I can't find the joy in learning poetry. I came to my English literature class with low or even no motivation. I just sit still and listened to my lecturer's explanation. I also did not follow my friends' presentation. I was just daydreaming and hoping that the class would be over very soon. I just feel perplexed in reading poem especially old poems with old English words. (B4)*

### **Students' Self-identity in Creating a Poem**

According to their answers, it can be found that self-identity influence them while they create a poem. There are participants that told about how their culture-identity and culture experience influence them in create a poem. Here are the examples of their answers:

- *However, I am more comfortable when writing a poem in my native language than in English. I can get feeling and create beautiful poem in Bahasa Indonesia. When I have free time and get the mood, I write poems. When I create a poem in English, I cannot catch beautiful words that the beautiful form not created. (B6)*
- *I took my undergraduate degree in English Language and I chose English Literature as my concentration. When talking about English Literature Courses, I will never forget about my experience taking poetry class because the lecturer and also the lesson remains deeply in my memory. Since I was a child I like to write poem or short stories in Indonesian language. After I got poetry and prose class, I became to like writing poems in English. (B9)*
- *I like to write in certain topics such as love, marriage and so forth or I like to write everything in this world about life. (B2)*

### **Students' Creative Thinking and Their Creativity in Writing a Poem**

Lin (1998) pointed out that among the elements of language teaching, writing and creativity have a very close and mutual relationship. Stimulating creativity and idea generation is the most effective way of teaching writing. Therefore it is believed that writing a poem also stimulating students' creativity. The students' active involvement and higher order thinking skills are also involve in order promoting thinking creatively. Their creative capability enables students to produce idea, to exploit and communicate their own personal feelings (emotions) and thoughts, and also to involve different uses of expressive and creative linguistic and other semiotic resources. These were expressed in the participants' answers. Here are their views:

1. Creative thinking is emerge in the process of poem writing.

- *You bet! You have to be a genius to write a good poem. A poem which makes readers' heart clenched or make them have "whoooooa" moments because it strikes them so hard. A good poem is not merely a collection of well-established words. It is also a piece of art that makes the readers are totally involved in the setting just by reading it. To make one, you'll need physical work. For the brain. (B9)*
- *By learning a poem, you train your mind to see what is laid beyond the poem, what is hidden beyond the poets sentences, and what is concealed among the words. Through this, you will know many styles that the poets employ in writing their poems. And someday, you will find your own style in writing your poem. (B8)*

## 2. Creativity in language diction, figurative language and theory of poetry.

- *Probably, I was more creative when my lecturer taught me the types of poetry such as Cinquain, Haiku, Acrostic, etc in my graduate study. Then, every student has to create those types of poetry by our own words. Though, just created simple poetry but I am so proud of myself.*(B7)
- *My creativity was involves in picking up the dictions, using the symbols, and making the words rhyme. (B3)*
- *The one of ways to construct the frame of creative is in form of poem, I could definitely express their feeling within their vocabulary mastery without such strict rules or terms or systems or whatever of grammatical in English language proficiency.*(B2)

## 3. Creativity in choosing idea, theme and also students' imagination.

- *A poem can make us to be a creative because we made it based on our imagination. Everything can be poured into lots of words based on our creative creation.*(B5)
- *In creating a good poem we also need to be creative whether in selecting words, theme and arranging the structure of the poem, thus when we are accustomed to make poem, our creativity will be improved. (B11)*
- *Learning poems lets us know about good, strong, famous, and legendary poems written by some poets. That will inspire us to write our own poems and to be creative in choosing the theme, the figure of speech, the rhyme, etc. Once we find a good, beautiful and inspiring poem, it will make us want to find and know more about other English literature works.*(B6)
- *It also makes me more creative, even though it is not easy but at least it "forces" me to create one.*(B4)

### **Writing a Poem Influence Students' Self-identity**

As explained above, self-identity is formed and change through interactions with the environment and interpretations of those interactions. It is happened while the participants took the class. Their answers can show how their interest in learning poetry and creating a poem is increase.

- *I do believe that when or after I learnt a poem, there is any desire to make a poem by my own based on my feeling or expression.*(B2)
- *Poem is a good trigger to motivate me to learn more about English literature work because poem is mostly simple and short but full of meaning. As for writing, basically I like writing even though I do not do it regularly and I have not produced much work, and I feel that learning a poem increases my interest in writing and inclines my motivation to produce more writings.*(B7)
- *Since I was a child I like to write poem or short stories in Indonesian language. After I got poetry and prose class, I became to like writing poems in English. (B9)*
- *Through a poem, I can discover my identity as a writer. I can use somebody's point of view as the character of my poem although the story behind the poem is mine. This is a joy to learn a poem or become a poet.*(B6)

## **7. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

The results of this research show that almost all of the graduate students agree that learning and creating poems can help them discovering their self-identity toward poetry, and can help them improve their creativity. It is also found that there is a relationship between self-identity and creativity. It is like a chain which is related to one another and cannot be disconnected. If they can explore the two things, hopefully, they can get involved actively in the activities hold by the teacher in the classroom.

It is recommended to have further research on this topic which can explore more about the relationship between the three things: teaching and learning in EFL classroom, self-identity and creativity related to literature in general, poetry in particular. It is advisable for the future researcher to have more than only open-ended questionnaire to gather the students' perceptions. An interview is worth conducting. Besides, statistical analysis should also be included.

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