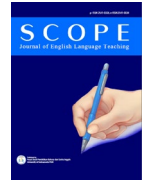




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Research Article

Concrete Poetry Inclusion in EFL Classrooms to Enhance Students' Creative and Language Skills

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KEYWORDS

Concrete poetry;
 Genre-based approach;
 Creative skills;
 Language skills.

A B S T R A C T

Previous studies revealed that poetry inclusion in ESL/EFL classrooms has effectively developed learners' language and creative skills. Concrete poetry was rarely used among various implemented poetic forms despite being well-suited for the beginner level and challenged students. Concrete poetry with a physical arrangement of words or letters on the page helps students grasp the meaning. Unfortunately, in Indonesian schools, English poetry is generally assumed to be too difficult for students to understand and write. As a result, concrete poetry and its merits are not known in the educational setting. This qualitative case study aimed to demonstrate how concrete poetry implementation with the Genre-Based Approach significantly enhanced students' language and creative skills and how the experience with concrete poetry transformed their perceptions of poetry inclusion in language learning. The participants were three students from SMP Hikmah Teladan, Bandung. The data from structured interviews and the students' works were analyzed thematically. The findings show that students gained new positive perceptions of poetry inclusion in EFL classrooms. The assessment of students' work shows enhancement in language and creative skills.

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INTRODUCTION

As a literary genre, poetry has been proven effective and reliable material for developing literacy, language, and creative skills. Educators and parents are encouraged to incorporate poetry into their teaching and reading practices (Styles et al., 2010). Poetry writing as a classroom methodology extends the concept of Meaningful Literacy and manifests this approach in Second or Foreign Language literacy instruction (Hanauer, 2012). In the following years, research on the inclusion of poetry in ESL

and EFL contexts has been conducted in many countries, such as Japan (Iida, 2017), Bangladesh (Liao & Roy, 2017), Nigeria (Timothy & Obiekezie, 2019), Saudi Arabia (Jabsheh, 2019), Finland (Powell, 2021), Spain (Robles-Lorite & Sánchez-Calle, 2021), Pakistan (Ali & Hussain, 2022), and Sri Lanka (Gardihewa, 2022). The participants of the research varied from young children to university students. Researchers used various methodologies with different kinds of poetry, such as haiku, found poetry, and free verse. As students progress, they enhance their

reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities while tapping into their emotions and creativity. Poetry-based teaching also improves students' critical thinking skills (Azizi et al., 2022).

However, there is a growing concern about the practical aspects of poetry in English classrooms. It is still a common assumption that English poetry is too tricky for ESL/EFL students (Khatib, 2011). Viana and Zyngier (2020) found a similar phenomenon when investigating students' perspectives on language-literature integration in EFL education. They quoted a survey result (Xerri, 2016) to state, "The decline in poetry teaching in high schools in Malta could be attributed to the fact that the participants did not read poetry for pleasure."

In the contradictive presence of benefits and challenges of poetry teaching, the question arises about poetry inclusion in the Indonesian EFL setting. Some studies have shown that the local situation is almost identical to the global response in that positive findings hardly uplift the dread of poetry. Widodo et al. (2016) attributed the difficulty in poetry implementation to teachers' misperceptions and the national curriculum. However, Fithriani (2021) debunked the assumption that writing English poetry was too tricky for EFL students. She reported a positive perception of her participants in poetry writing; instead of complaining that poetry was dull, the students used specific strategies to publish their poetry anthology successfully.

These previous studies gave mixed results and revealed more gaps. Many of these studies have not used concrete poetry as a model text. Moreover, hardly any research has specifically focused on concrete poetry inclusion at the junior high school level in Indonesia. Therefore, it is natural and strategic to research this specific poetic form and its role in Indonesian EFL classrooms at the Junior High School level.

Concrete Poetry

As a significant art and literature movement of the 20th century, concrete poetry focuses on the visual appearance of words and letters rather than just their meanings (Solt, 1970). This distinctive poetic form is meant to be visually appreciated rather than being read aloud. It is like combining poetry and painting that requires both a reader and a viewer. The appearance of the composition is just as important as its content. Words are no longer just simple notations but instead serve as building blocks in a visual structure (Bohn, 2011). However, concrete poetry is also believed to be the gate to beginner-level literacy (Rollinson, 1972).

BNBNNs shown by Figure 1, concrete poetry examples can vary from simple to sophisticated.

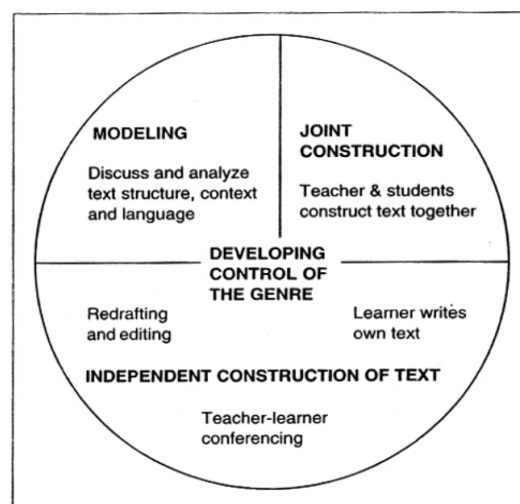


Figure 1 Concrete Poetry Samples

Examining poetic expressions and the connections between poetry, visual art, and typography positively impacts language and creative skills (Beloufa, 2021). Language and creative skills are often viewed as separate skills within the broader domains of language and creativity, yet many studies have shown that they are always related (Cosgun & Atay, 2021; Dulknsiene & Macianskiene, 2020; Habiba, 2022)

From a genre-based perspective, concrete poetry is a unique text model that challenges traditional notions of poetry and how it should be read. It is a subgenre that bridges visual art and verbal typography. Students can analyze it using literary genres, conventions, visual art, and design (Joshi, 2009). The modeling text of concrete poetry offers more significant opportunities for interpretation (Rajendra & Kaur, 2021), hence the first stage of the Genre-Based Approach in poetry inclusion in the EFL classroom. After modeling the text, students moved on to Joint Construction, where they worked with teachers to create concrete poetry. Students used step-by-step demonstrations, templates, and prompts to express their ideas and experiences. Then, in the final stage, Independent Construction, students independently created their concrete poetry, allowing them to explore and experiment. They could also participate in peer review and reflection by presenting their poetry to the class and receiving constructive feedback. This helps students reflect on their learning journey, the challenges they faced, and the insights they gained. This cyclic teaching and learning through Genre-Based Approaches follows Hyland's Model, as quoted in Dirgeyasa (2016).

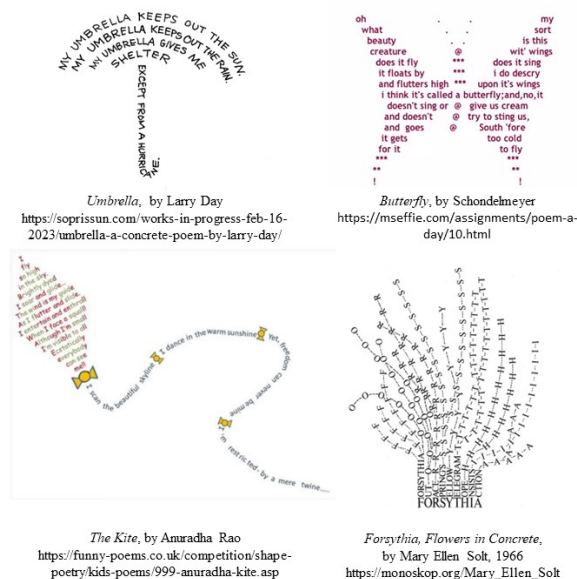


Figure 2. Hyland's Model of Genre Teaching and Learning Cycle (Hyland, 2003)

Students can develop a deeper understanding of the art form as they explore the creative use of language in reading and writing concrete poetry. This process can be transformative, enabling students to perceive things in new ways and changing their perception of the roles of poetry in EFL classrooms. Thus, the research questions guiding this study were:

- How does concrete poetry help reshape students' perceptions of poetry inclusion in EFL classrooms?
- To what extent does concrete poetry contribute to developing students' language and creative skills?

METHOD

1. Design

Poetry, mainly concrete poetry, in EFL classrooms is a complex phenomenon influenced by various contextual factors, such as teaching methodologies, cultural backgrounds, language proficiency levels, and the broader educational environment. This complexity makes it suitable for a case study approach to understand how poetry is integrated and its outcomes. Therefore, this research adopted a case study research design defined by Yin (1994) and Creswell (2014, p. 241), a method of empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not evident. This method utilizes multiple sources of evidence and enables the researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context (Zainal, 2007).

2. Research Site and Participants

SMP Hikmah Teladan, Bandung, was selected as this research site due to its reputation for inclusivity and innovation. The school provides factors conducive to successful implementation: professional development for teachers, a collaborative culture, necessary resources, community engagement, an ongoing improvement mindset, and a celebration of achievements. As for the participants, three students were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research questions, such as their level of English proficiency, interest and engagement in poetry, and willingness to participate in the study.

3. Data Collection Methods

The research used structured interviews to gather data. Before the implementation program, students were interviewed to understand their perceptions of poetry inclusion. Then, using a Genre-Based Approach, students followed through the stages to create their concrete poetry. Specially designed rubrics were used to assess their concrete poetry in terms of language and creative skills. Another structured interview was conducted to confirm their change of perceptions.

4. Ethical Considerations

In selecting participants for this study, the privacy and confidentiality of all individuals were protected. The researcher obtained informed consent from each participant. The students were given pseudonyms: Bayu, Emma, and Harry.

5. Data Analysis Procedure

This study implemented a qualitative analysis of the interviews and students' works to comprehensively understand the participants' perception of poetry inclusion, their experiences with concrete poetry, and its role in their language and creative skills development. Thematic analysis (TA) was used to classify data themes systematically. The stages of coding and analysis, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013), include

- data familiarization,
- initial coding,
- establishing themes,
- reviewing themes,
- defining themes,
- writing the thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained from structured interviews and the evaluation of students' works were analyzed and discussed in relation to this study's research questions.

1. How does concrete poetry help reshape students' perceptions of poetry inclusion in EFL classrooms?

Qualitative data analysis shows students' perceptions of poetry inclusion in EFL classrooms. It explores students' attitudes, beliefs, and understanding regarding the value and relevance of poetry in language instruction.

The thematical framework in Figure 3 shows the students perceived poetry inclusion in EFL classrooms regarding their experience with poetry in general, the benefits of learning and using poetry in language learning, their development of language and creative skills through poetry, and their awareness and experience with concrete poetry.

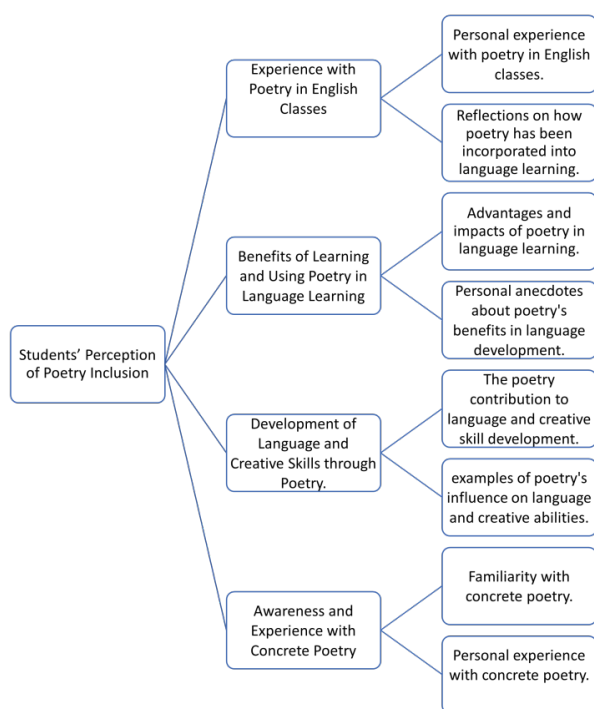


Figure 3. Thematic framework of students' perceptions of poetry inclusion in EFL classrooms

In the interviews, the three students shared their experiences with poetry in general. Bayu mentioned that poetry has not been taught in his English class. He compared song interpretation to poetry, suggesting similarities between the two forms of expression. Emma positively perceived poetry and even surprisingly thought writing English poetry was easier than in Bahasa Indonesia.

"...I learned English poetry in ninth grade. I would love to learn it by myself, too. Writing poetry in

English is easier than in Bahasa Indonesia...."
(INT/Emma/EXP_POETRY)

Harry mentioned being aware of famous poetry from his parents but did not like reading or writing poetry. His response indicated a disinterested attitude towards poetry.

When asked about the benefits of learning and using poetry in language learning, Bayu answered:

"...I think poetry teaches me to say something indirectly...." (INT/Bayu/POETRY_BENEFITS)

Emma admitted that she often searches for figurative words with Google and uses them in her poetry. Meanwhile, Harry said that poetry helps him learn and understand the meaning of words, although sometimes he encounters strange words that are not found in the dictionary.

"...Some poets use strange words I cannot find in the dictionary, making it difficult to like them...."
(INT/Harry/EXP_POETRY)

Regarding their development of language and creative skills through poetry, Emma stated that poetry had helped her develop her language and creative skills.

"... For example, from metaphors, I found on the internet, I can learn to create my own...."
(INT/Emma/DEV_LANGUAGE_CREATIVE)

On the other hand, Harry admitted that it did not help him much in creativity development because writing poetry depends on inspiration.

The three students generally lacked awareness of concrete poetry. However, when concrete poetry examples were shown, Bayu said that the visuals of concrete poetry were eye-catching. Similarly, Emma said:

"...I am a visual learner and love to draw. I think concrete poetry is a tool for my advancement...."
(INT/Emma/CONCRETE_AWARENESS)

The interview results showed that students have differing perceptions about poetry's inclusion in EFL classrooms. Students like Bayu and Harry, who have neutral or negative perceptions due to misconceptions, would avoid poetry if they could. It was evident they did not read poetry for pleasure (Xerry, 2016), although it has not come to poetry phobia, as Timothy and Obiekezie (2019) revealed in their research.

The students' perceptions of poetry inclusion in EFL classrooms are in line with Hanauer's (2004) theory that common reasons for a negative perception or experience

with poetry include: inaccessibility due to poetry's complex language, unconventional structures, and dense imagery, negative educational experiences with poetry may sometimes result from how it is taught. Suppose poetry is taught in a rigid or prescriptive manner, only focusing on memorization, analysis, or technical aspects. This approach may hinder one's appreciation and enjoyment of art.

In contrast, students like Emma, who were already interested in poetry, tend to like it even more. This phenomenon is related to personal relevance, which Hanauer explained through Meaningful Literacy (Hanauer, 2012). Students will actively engage with poetry when they find elements that resonate with their experiences and interests. In Emma's case, this is her love of the English language.

2. To what extent does concrete poetry contribute to developing students' language and creative skills?

The students' works are displayed, followed by the assessment and analysis. To assess participants' understanding and ability to create concrete poetry, the researchers used four rubrics, which a prominent scholar validated:

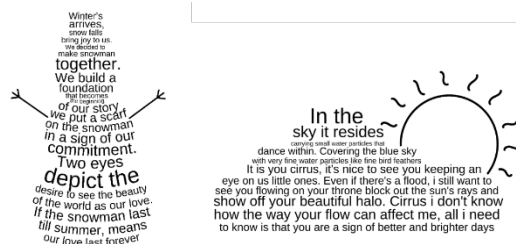
- The Reading Comprehension Rubric: It evaluates the learners' comprehension of concrete poetry, covering literal understanding, inference and interpretation, visual elements analysis, form and content integration, and overall awareness and analysis.
- The Creative Writing Rubric: It evaluates concrete poetry based on its creative and visual elements, language proficiency, integration of form and content, technical skills, craftsmanship, and overall impact.
- The Vocabulary Acquisition Rubric: It provides feedback on learners' ability to choose impactful words, integrate them effectively into visual elements, and enhance the overall quality of concrete poetry.
- The Critical Thinking Rubric: It assesses higher-order thinking skills while creating concrete poetry, promoting originality, conceptual thinking, evidence-based support, critical analysis, and reflection.

These four rubrics help the researcher answer the second research question: To what extent does concrete poetry contribute to developing students' language and creative skills?

Bayu's *Snowman* and *Cirrus Cloud*

Figure 4. Bayu's Concrete Poetry

Using the rubrics, Bayu was assessed as advanced in



reading comprehension, proficient in creative writing, advanced in vocabulary acquisition, and proficient in critical thinking. His writing effectively conveys emotions, employs imagery, and explores deeper meanings. In *Snowman*, he captures the joy and symbolism of building a snowman together, representing a shared commitment and lasting love. In *Cirrus Cloud*, he personifies the cloud and admires its appearance and potential impact on his emotions. He uses words such as "Winter," "foundation," "scarf," "commitment," "desire," "water particles," "dance," "blue sky," "feathers," "throne," and "halo". His choice of words effectively conveys his intended imagery and emotions. Bayu explores the symbolism of the snowman lasting until summer as a representation of enduring love. This demonstrates critical thinking and thoughtful consideration of the relationship between the physical world and abstract concepts, such as love.

Emma's *Color Palette* and *Heart*

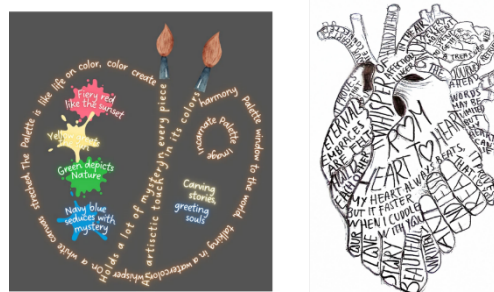


Figure 5. Emma's Concrete Poetry

Emma was assessed as advanced in reading comprehension, creative writing, and vocabulary acquisition and proficient in critical thinking. Based on the analysis of her works, Emma understands and interprets texts with similar levels of complexity and can engage with underlying messages and themes. Emma's creative writing skills are evident in her pieces. In "*Color Palette*," she uses vivid imagery and metaphors to depict the power of colors in creating harmony and telling stories. She paints a picture of the artistic process and its connection to the world through the palette. In "*From Heart to Heart*," she conveys deep emotions associated with love and affection. Using imagery, repetition, and concise phrasing adds to the

piece's impact, creating a heartfelt expression. Emma's pieces demonstrate a solid vocabulary acquisition. She utilizes descriptive language and employs words such as "palette," "harmony," "fiery," "seduces," "mystery," "incarnate," "carving," "whisper," "eternal," "embrace," "linger," and "endless." Her choice of words effectively conveys her intended emotions and ideas, showcasing a diverse vocabulary. In *"Color Palette,"* she reflects on the power of colors to create harmony and convey emotions, suggesting a thoughtful consideration of the artistic process and its impact on the viewer. In *"From Heart to Heart,"* she explores the connection between love and communication, highlighting the limitations of words and emphasizing the sincerity of the heart. Her ability to delve into these themes showcases critical thinking and introspection.

Harry's Rose and Wine



Figure 6. Harry's Concrete Poetry

Based on the analysis of Harry's work, he demonstrated proficiency in reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking. However, his creative writing skills were still developing. In *"Rose,"* he employs imagery to compare the red hue of a rose to the pain caused by hurtful words. In *"Wine,"* he uses metaphors to liken the taste and qualities of wine to someone's actions and personality. Both pieces evoke a sense of emotion and create connections between tangible objects and human experiences. He uses words such as "rose," "bright," "red," "thorns," "stinging," "pain," "value," "wine," "dry," "actions," "veiled," and "enjoyed." While his vocabulary is not highly extensive or sophisticated, he effectively chooses words that convey his intended meaning and create imagery. In his poetry, he reflects on the symbolic qualities of the rose and wine, drawing parallels between their characteristics and human experiences. He explores the emotional impact of words and actions, suggesting a thoughtful consideration of relationships and their complexities. These elements indicate a level of critical thinking and introspection.

Discussion on Students' Works

As students created concrete poetry, this poetic form taught them about the possibilities of expression beyond traditional forms (Brod, 1983). They realized the rich and complex text model that challenges traditional notions of poetry and offers new possibilities for meaning-making and interpretation. Examining the student's poetic expression and the connections between their poetry, visual art, and typography, concrete poetry positively impacted their language and creative skills. (Beloufa, 2021), in terms of:

- Engaging Language Learning:** Concrete poetry engages students in language learning as they read and write it themselves (Bidari, 2021).
- Creative Writing Skills:** As students created concrete poetry, experimenting with language, structure, and visual design, they showed their imagination, played with words, and explored new ways of expressing ideas. This nurtured their creative writing skills, promoted self-expression, and allowed them to develop a unique artistic voice (De Lima, 2013).
- Vocabulary Expansion:** Concrete poetry has prompted students to employ wordplay, imagery, and unconventional language. By studying and creating concrete poetry, they expanded their vocabulary, learned new words, and explored different meanings and associations. This enhanced their language skills and allowed more creative expression (Brod, 1983).
- Interpretation and Analysis:** Students discovered the close relationship between shape and content by analyzing concrete poetry. This process cultivated critical thinking skills as they interpreted and analyzed the visual and linguistic elements of the poetry. As Bohn (2011) stated, concrete poetry encouraged students to think creatively and critically about language use and artistic expression.

The concrete poetry written by the students for this research also becomes evidence of the effectiveness of the Genre-Based Approach, which uses concrete poetry as a model text. The genre provides multiple perspectives and viewpoints for analyzing text. (Dirgeyasa, 2016).

The Changes in Students' Perception of Poetry Inclusion Due to Concrete Poetry

After creating concrete poetry, students were interviewed to determine whether their perception of poetry inclusion had changed. As seen in the thematic framework in Figure 7, students perceived the changes in their perception of poetry regarding the impact of concrete poetry on their language and creative skills, personal reflections, and the challenges and obstacles they faced.

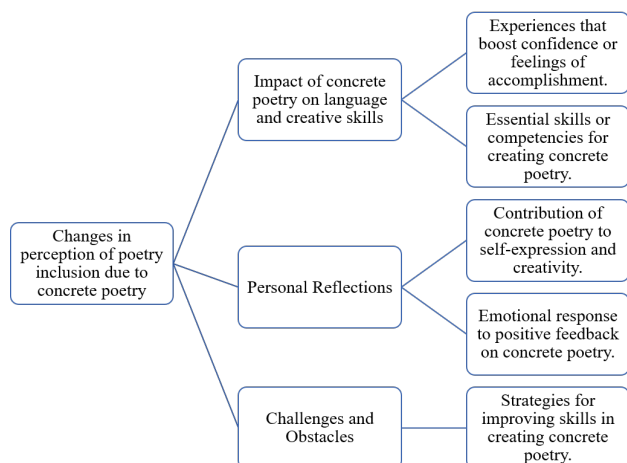


Figure 7. Thematical framework of changes in perceptions of poetry inclusion due to concrete poetry

Concerning the impact of concrete poetry on their language and creative skills, Bayu narrated how he found confidence and feelings of accomplishment:

“...I put words in a circle and was afraid readers would not know where to start reading, but I found a solution; it does not matter to start wherever.... Converting words into visuals is not as easy as I thought, but I feel more confident when creating more....” (INT/Bayu/CONCRETE_IMPACT)

Emma was fascinated by her works, stating:

“This is what being creative means. Concrete poetry gives me ideas for new themes. I want to create more....” (INT/Emma/CONCRETE_IMPACT)

Meanwhile, Harry said he could not think of any impact in only one or two trials.

When the students were asked to reflect on their personal experience, how concrete poetry contributed to self-expression and creativity, and how they received feedback, Bayu explained:

“...I found a connection between language and art.... When the idea of various things strikes me, it boosts my confidence in writing. One object inspires me to write multiple themes. As for the positive feedback, I love receiving them in detail because it helps me to improve....” (INT/Bayu/PERSONAL_EXP)

Emma had her own opinion:

“...It was awesome. I could express myself in words and art. Writing concrete poetry can be an excellent activity to pass the time. I know I can use some input,

but sometimes I must explain why I do what I do....” (INT/Emma/PERSONAL_EXP)

Harry, on the other hand, reflected:

“...I have moderate confidence and satisfaction after trying to create only one piece of concrete poetry. The feedback was okay, as it made sense. On the other hand, I could only give back minimal reviews to others. I do not know much about topics other than music....” (INT/Harry/PERSONAL_EXP)

Regarding the challenges and obstacles that they faced when creating concrete poetry, Bayu recalled:

“...If I focus only on getting the shape right, it will be difficult for me or anyone who cannot draw....” (INT/Bayu/CHALLENGE_OBSTACLE)

Emma mentioned:

“...I saw others also had jumbled words as we formed them. So, I am not alone....” (INT/Emma/CHALLENGE_OBSTACLE)

Harry said bluntly:

“...First, I need a will to create and the skill to choose the right words. Unfortunately, both are rare....” (INT/Harry/CHALLENGE_OBSTACLE)

The three of them agreed that they needed a strategy for improving their skills in creating concrete poetry:

- Find themes and shapes they like;
- Start with a simple object;
- Ask teachers to provide prompts and lessons on how to structure sentences;
- Try to love art to make writing concrete poetry more exciting and less tedious.

The qualitative data showed changes in perception from negative to positive, as in the study by Fithriani (2021). The students admitted that concrete poetry has given them a new insight into poetry inclusion and what they can do, as suggested by Beloufa (2021). By successfully navigating the challenges of composing and interpreting concrete poetry, the students demonstrated confidence, motivation, and a proactive approach, as evident in the research of De Lima (2013). At the same time, they were motivated to grow and sought external support. They reported a sense of accomplishment and pride in producing meaningful and visually striking poetry. They experienced a surge of confidence in their abilities. Concrete poetry also has improved students' critical thinking (Azizi et al., 2022; Bohn, 2011). This powerful motivator inspired the students to explore and engage with poetry further.

CONCLUSION

The initial interviews with students revealed a prevailing assumption that poetry, particularly in English, is too challenging for learners to comprehend and compose. However, the inclusion of concrete poetry challenged this perception and significantly shifted it. Participants reported a newfound appreciation for the accessibility and immediacy of concrete poetry, which allowed them to engage with the foreign language more meaningfully and creatively. This positive change in perception should encourage the further exploration and implementation of innovative teaching methods.

The study also found that engaging with concrete poetry helped students develop a renewed appreciation and understanding of the power of language. By manipulating concrete poetry's visual and textual elements, students gained fresh perspectives on the expressive capabilities of words, fonts, and layout. This transformative experience enabled them to expand their linguistic horizons and unleash their creative potential.

In summary, the concrete poetry implementation program has a profound and lasting impact on the participants, reshaping their perceptions of poetry inclusion in EFL classrooms and enhancing the learners' language and creative skills.

Although this study provides valuable insights into the role of concrete poetry inclusion in English Foreign Learners setting, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study only investigated some aspects of language and creative skills development. Additionally, it used a small sample size and included only one age group, so the results may not apply to other age groups or populations. Moreover, the data collected was self-reported, which could sometimes be biased or inaccurate. Finally, the study only examined the use of concrete poetry in educational settings; it did not investigate how it could be used in other contexts, such as therapy or community arts programs.

Despite the limitations, the findings provide insight for future research and practical applications. Future studies may include more extensive and diverse samples to increase the generalizability of the results. Future studies may explore the use of concrete poetry in a broader range of contexts to better understand its potential benefits and limitations. Future studies may investigate the impact of concrete poetry on other areas of development, such as social-emotional learning or cultural competence.

Educators should be aware of the potential benefits of concrete poetry inclusion and be mindful of the limitations. They should also consider their students' or participants' unique needs and interests when designing concrete poetry

activities. Further research is needed to explore the potential benefits in different settings.

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