Psycholinguistics-Based Creative Writing to Optimize Literacy Skills in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Human beings, language, the psyche, and cognitive abilities form an inseparable unity intertwined through creativity. The product of this synthesis is poetry. Poetry represents the soul of human cognition and creativity expressed through language. It consists of themes, diction, metaphors, and layers of meaning. As a result of this cognitive process, poetry can be utilized to enhance literacy skills. This qualitative descriptive study with content analysis analyzed poems written by 61 fifth-grade students at SDN Klender 03, East Jakarta. The analysis employed the Miles and Huberman flow model, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and data verification. The students' poems were examined in terms of theme, diction, metaphor, and complexity of meaning. Based on the findings, the analysis applied a psycholinguistic approach. The study revealed that students' writing patterns tended to involve imitation, indicating the need for poetry writing instruction that concretizes students' thoughts one of which can be stimulated through visual imagery. Effective poetry writing instruction can stimulate students' creative thinking skills and, consequently, foster literacy skills more effectively.

Keywords: Creative Writing, Literacy Skills, Poetry, Psycholinguistics

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is experiencing an identity crisis. The nation's low literacy rate has become an alarming issue that threatens the vision of "Golden Indonesia 2045." Historically, Indonesia was unified through literacy. Various prehistoric findings and enduring cultural traditions indicate that Indonesia indeed emerged as a nation rooted in strong literacy practices within its society (Wijana & dkk, 2023) (Ratni, 2020). However, data from the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) in 2022 revealed a decline in Indonesia's reading performance (OECD, 2024). Therefore, if Indonesia fails to achieve its centennial goals, it cannot simply place the blame elsewhere.

The solution to this national issue lies in improving literacy skills (Chipili, Mwansa, & Mpolomoka, 2024). Literacy must be cultivated from the elementary level—not merely as a programmatic objective, but as a foundational educational essence. True literacy should embody the "4C's": creative thinking, critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, and collaboration (Ulfa, Oktaviany, & Anggita, 2022). A learning activity that integrates these 4Cs is *creative writing*, as it requires more than writing it demands deep reflection and originality in the

expression of ideas. Hence, individuals capable of creative writing represent the highest development of literacy skills within themselves.

Creative writing, as a reflection of literacy competence, can be realized through poetry writing (Habiba S. P., 2022). For many, writing—particularly poetry—resembles assembling a complex puzzle. Poetry writing, as a manifestation of creative composition, requires the wise selection of words, the creation of metaphors, and the application of distinctive linguistic styles, resulting in sophisticated literary works rich in meaning.

Producing poetry involves a mental process in language formation—how language is generated and understood within one's mind. Thus, literacy and psycholinguistics are closely related (Gibbs, 1990) (Pudjiati, Utami, & Fahrurrozi, 2023). Psycholinguistics governs the natural acquisition of language, which then evolves to encompass interpretation and figurative expressions that extend beyond literal meaning. Therefore, by analyzing creative writing—specifically poetry—through its elements of diction, metaphor, and complexity of meaning within a psycholinguistic framework, one can develop a model for optimizing elementary students' literacy abilities.

However, poetry writing instruction is often overlooked, as observed in SDN Klender 03 Pagi, East Jakarta, where it has lost its pedagogical value. The subject is taught only superficially. In the fifth grade, students are introduced to poetry writing through the *acrostic* technique, in which a poem is composed based on the initial letters of the writer's name. For instance, a student named "Dewi" must compose a poem beginning with the letters D-E-W-I, with each line describing aspects of the writer's character (Hervita & Arini, 2022).

While there is nothing inherently wrong with this method, the problem arises when students rely on external sources, such as Google, to complete their poems. According to the fifth-grade teacher, approximately 50% of students admitted that their poetry assignments were completed by parents who copied content from the internet. Consequently, no originality in diction emerged from the students' acrostic poems.

This phenomenon diminishes the inherently complex nature of poetry writing, reducing it to a mere mechanical activity devoid of cognitive engagement. The reliance on internet resources indicates that students are not effectively utilizing both hemispheres of the brain in the creative process. Teachers often fail to recognize that poetry writing can serve as a stimulus for optimizing students' literacy skills. Poetry writing is a cognitive activity that involves continuous interaction between the right and left hemispheres of the brain (Barton, Khosronejad, Ryan, Kervin, & Myhill, 2024). Writing serves as a form of mental therapy, as it produces positive effects on various aspects of physical and mental health (Gillam, Creative Writing, Literature, Storytelling and Mental Health Practice, 2018). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the poems written by fifth-grade students of SDN Klender 03 Pagi, East Jakarta, in terms of theme, diction, metaphor, and complexity of meaning through a psycholinguistic lens to optimize elementary students' literacy skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to analyze creative writing specifically poetry based on its thematic elements, diction, metaphors, and complexity of meaning, examined through the lens of psycholinguistics. A qualitative descriptive method with content analysis was employed. The qualitative descriptive approach was chosen to explore naturally occurring phenomena and to collect data in the form of qualitative descriptions (Sandelowski, 2000).

The study was conducted in Class VA and VD at SDN Klender 03 Pagi, East Jakarta, involving 61 students. The research was carried out from March to July 2025. Content analysis was designed to identify and interpret meaning from small segments of data that represent significant concepts, subsequently organizing these fragments into a framework useful for describing or explaining a phenomenon (Kleinheksel, Rockich-Winston, Tawfik, & Wyatt, 2020). In this study, the poems produced by fifth-grade students at SDN Klender 03 Pagi were analyzed using psycholinguistic theory.

Research data were obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation (including students' poems and photographs of research activities). Data were analyzed using the Interactive Model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Huberman & Milles, 2002). Data validity was ensured through triangulation techniques (Alharthi, Alassafi, Walters, & Wills, 2017), where the analyzed findings were compared with theoretical perspectives, expert opinions, and observational results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Writing is an essential skill for students' future success. Students with poor writing skills often struggle to express themselves effectively during the learning process. One way to stimulate writing skills is through *creative writing* activities. Creative writing is a form of art because it embodies the fundamental elements of artistic expression—meaningful form, emotional expression, originality, and creativity (Wang, 2019). One of the primary forms of creative writing is poetry.

The poetry writing activity conducted among fifth-grade students at SDN Klender 03 Pagi, East Jakarta, did not initially run effectively. The acrostic poems previously produced by the students could not be analyzed using a psycholinguistic approach since they were largely copied from online sources. Therefore, the researcher collected new data by teaching poetry writing using narrative techniques and specific themes to align the results with the focus of this study.

The research yielded 61 poems written by fifth-grade students on the theme of *teachers*. These poems were analyzed by focusing on four key elements: theme, diction, metaphor, and complexity of meaning. The analysis of each element is presented as follows:

Theme

In this study, students wrote poems on a single theme—*teachers*. However, the poems created by the fifth-grade students of SDN Klender 03 Pagi, East Jakarta, demonstrated an expansion of meaning, which can be interpreted as an expression of emotion. The theme in poetry represents the central idea or the main message the poet seeks to convey. Themes contribute to a deeper understanding of the poem's underlying message (Jr., 2024). Poems are written by depicting themes through the emotions that the poet wishes to communicate; thus, the theme and emotional tone of a poem form an integrated unity. The portrayal of emotion generates diction, metaphor, and meaning.

The students wrote poems about their teachers, predominantly expressing admiration and inspiration drawn from their educators. These emotions are evident in the following excerpt:

...**Guru yang baik dan seru yaitu pahlawanku**
Banyak **kenangan**
Banyak **jasa**
Sehatlah
Agar bisa **mengajarku lagi**
Dan **bisa membimbing** semua murid...

The poem excerpt above illustrates the writer's sense of admiration. The first line identifies the teacher as a *hero* for being kind and cheerful. The words *memories* and *good deeds* express feelings of joy and gratitude, signifying that the teacher has created lasting memories through instruction and service. This is followed by diction that conveys prayer and hope for the teacher's well-being, as seen in the line *Stay healthy so you can teach and guide us again*.

Diction

Poetry is a literary work that emphasizes the aesthetics of language. As an artistic form, poetry conveys meaning beyond mere strings of words. Each poem embodies a message carefully constructed for sound coherence and depth of meaning—this is what constitutes diction (Suhendi & Hartanto, 2025).

Diction represents a poet's linguistic skill. The appropriate choice of words allows the poet to express emotions effectively. Likewise, the fifth-grade students of SDN Klender 03 Pagi, East Jakarta, demonstrated an ability to select suitable diction in their poems. Diction in poetry relates both to meaning and to the emotional intent of the writer.

The students' poems featured a variety of word choices, including the use of repetition to emphasize particular ideas. For instance:

...Engkau **memakai seragam** dengan rapi
Hari ini engkau tampak cantik **memakai seragam** hari ini...

The repetition of the phrase **memakai seragam** serves to emphasize the student's visual observation of the teacher's daily appearance. The student perceived the teacher as beautiful on that particular day, suggesting admiration and attention directed toward the teacher's appearance.

Causal relationships were also evident in the students' diction, as shown in the following excerpt:.

*...Engkau selalu **ramah***
*Selalu **tersenyum***
Dalam hal apapun
*Kau **tak pernah marah***
*Engkau selalu **sabar***
Menghadapi kelakuan kami...

In this passage, the student first describes the teacher's character traits as effects, followed by their underlying causes. *Kindness* is depicted through the consistent act of *smiling*. Similarly, *patience* is portrayed as the result of the teacher's restraint—*never getting angry* despite the students' behavior. These expressions reflect the students' emotional and cognitive interpretation of their teacher's demeanor through word choice and sequencing.

Metaphor

Poetry possesses aesthetic value, and this aesthetic quality is expressed through diction. Diction in poetry is employed with depth and stylistic nuance. The use of figurative language provides poetry with its distinctive character. Among various forms of figurative expression, *metaphor* is one of the most prominent.

Metaphors in poetry function to emphasize meaning and to evoke impressions or emotions within the reader. A metaphor is defined as a comparison between two distinct things that share similar or corresponding attributes. Thus, metaphor is closely associated with the process of identifying similarities between one concept and another. The following excerpt illustrates the use of metaphor in a student's poem:

*...Engkau **menerangkan***
*Engkau **memberi ilmu**...*

The role of a teacher is not unfamiliar to students. Students clearly understand a teacher as an adult who educates them at school. However, in the diction **menerangkan**, the student moves beyond the literal meaning of teaching. Fifth-grade students had previously learned about poetry and had some prior experience composing poems. During lessons, teachers often described themselves metaphorically as *lights* or *beacons*—symbols of guidance and knowledge. The use of the word **menerangkan** in the poem therefore reflects the student's internalization of this concept: the teacher as a source of illumination, transforming ignorance into understanding. The choice of **menerangkan** rather than light serves to associate the teacher's role with the active process of imparting knowledge rather than merely representing a static object of brightness.

Metaphors in poetry break linguistic conventions in terms of vocabulary and grammar. Metaphors become codes for abstracting linguistic creativity (Semino, 2002). As in the following example of poetry:

*...Di malam yang **gelap tanpa cahaya terang***
*Kau datang dengan **cahaya lampu***
*Dan **menyinari masa depanku** yang indah...*

In the above poem excerpt, the author uses diction that refers to the same meaning, namely **guru sebagai pembawa kebenaran** and a positive influence on

students. This indicates that the diction becomes a code in the poem. The diction **gelap tanpa cahaya terang** is an abstraction of the students' ignorance. The diction **cahaya lampu** means that the teacher is a figure who will impart truth so that students will become knowledgeable. Meanwhile, the diction **menyinari masa depanku** is the result of the teacher as the figure who will impart truth to address the students' ignorance.

Complexity of Meaning

Poetry is composed of a system of signs. Each sign within a poem represents sounds that carry meaning, making poetry inherently rich in significance. This implies that every word in a poem conveys meaning—though interpretations may vary among readers. Because poetry is inherently multi-layered, its meaning differs with each reader's interpretation. Poetry can be viewed as *"the interpretive dramatization of experience in metrical language."* The meaning of a poem is thus intertwined with the theme and emotions conveyed by the poet through diction and metaphor. The *complexity of meaning* in poetry emerges from the subtle details within the text that shape the reader's interpretation (Bakuuro, 2017).

An example of meaning analysis from a student's poem is as follows:

*…Kau **awali pagi dengan bercerita***
Cerita *yang **selalu ku ingat***
*Kau seorang **pahlawan***
*Entah berapa **banyak ilmu yang kau berikan** …*

In this excerpt, the student portrays the teacher as a *hero*, a figure who imparts wisdom and inspiration. The repetition of *stories* symbolizes both the teacher's lessons and the moral narratives shared in class—memories that the student treasures. The teacher's actions are elevated from mere instruction to a noble deed, suggesting that the act of teaching is perceived as a heroic form of service.

Through this interpretation, the poem's complexity of meaning becomes evident: the text does not merely describe a teacher's behavior but also encapsulates the emotional and moral relationship between student and teacher. This multidimensional meaning exemplifies how poetic language serves as both a linguistic and psychological medium, reflecting the cognitive and affective dimensions of literacy development among students.

Based on the research findings presented above, one of the implications of creative writing is its expression through poetry. Writing poetry means conveying experiences, thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions, beliefs, and enthusiasm in a concrete and engaging form through the use of language. Poetry writing is a creative activity that integrates aesthetic creation. It represents both a creative and imaginative ability (Handayani & Usiono, 2025).

Poetry is constructed through language, which serves as the object of linguistic study. Poetry is thus included within linguistic activity—an activity performed by humans to produce and comprehend language. The linguistic process begins with semantic encoding, followed by grammatical encoding, and finally phonological encoding (Suzanne & O'Neil, 2012). This indicates that poetry is closely related to language. Poetry, therefore, reflects one's linguistic creativity and language acquisition ability.

Language acquisition is a process that occurs in the brain of children as they learn to use their first language, or mother tongue. Language acquisition differs from language learning; the latter occurs when children begin to learn a second language after mastering their first. Thus, language acquisition pertains to the first language, whereas language learning pertains to the second.

Language acquisition, or *acquisition*, takes place in the child's brain when acquiring their first language. Two disciplines contribute to this process—psychology and linguistics—collectively known as psycholinguistics. Based on cognitivist theory, language involves not only knowing its structure but also understanding how it functions. It is the study of language and the human capacity to learn and use it in concrete situations. It should be noted that elementary school–age children are at the stage of concrete operational development, during which learning primarily occurs through imitation (Mubarak, Rizkidawati, & Denafianti, 2025).

The poems produced by fifth-grade students of SDN Klender 03 Pagi, East Jakarta, can be categorized into two groups. The first includes students with limited cognitive maturity, who tend to use the same diction as exemplified by the teacher. The second includes students with more advanced cognitive development, who are capable of abstracting language to create new diction or modify existing expressions with similar meanings.

For instance, if students are asked to write poetry using the diction "teacher as an unsung hero," some may replace it or metaphorically reinterpret it in their poems. An alternative expression used by the students to describe a "teacher as an unsung hero" is:

...Kau selalu mengajari
Dengan semangat
Agar kami semangat untuk mengejar cita-cita...

Students with well-developed cognitive abilities, who can employ alternative diction or metaphors, are able to compose poetry effectively. Psychologically, these students reflect on what distinguishes one teacher from another. Such reflections, processed in the brain, evoke memories of their experiences in learning and are then expressed through the words of a poem.

Poetry is a reflection of mental processes, meaning that it is a product of thought and the mental conceptualization of language (Hamzah, 2019). Those who can create poetry rich in theme, diction, metaphor, and meaning complexity possess heightened sensitivity and the ability to critically reflect on the relationship between social and cultural contexts when creating and interpreting the meaning of life through text (Haryanti, 2019). Likewise, literacy requires cognitive ability, knowledge of written and spoken language, and an understanding of cultural contexts (Kern, 2000).

The poems created by the fifth-grade students of SDN Klender 03 East Jakarta are a manifestation of mental processes that both influence and are influenced by linguistic behavior (Marpaung, Manihuruk, Hutabarat, & Surip, 2025). The language used in students' poetry shapes their perceptions and emotions in depicting the figure of a teacher based on their lived experiences.

Although literacy is part of linguistics, it emphasizes cognitive ability and the understanding of life phenomena. Literacy is the perceptual processing of letter

sequences that activates the correspondence between orthographic forms and word representations (Perfetti, Dyke, & Hart, 2001). Writing skill represents the highest stage of literacy development.

Writing is a cognitively demanding activity that requires intellectual precision. To achieve optimal results, writing demands a deep understanding of grammar, vocabulary, rhetoric, and other linguistic elements. Moreover, the left hemisphere of the brain is associated with linguistic competence, analytical thinking, information processing, and logical reasoning, whereas the right hemisphere is more sensitive to holistic perception, abstract thinking, artistic talent, and appreciation (Wang, 2019).

Creative writing is a complex activity as it involves both hemispheres of the brain (Barton, Khosronejad, Ryan, Kervin, & Myhill, 2023). Creativity in writing entails the ability to produce something new and original by introducing innovative changes in a text. Creative writing is a form of expressive thought and imagination that can be developed and refined—one of its manifestations being poetry writing.

Writing, however, requires specific skills that must be learned and continually practiced. Creative writing can be nurtured and trained from elementary school. At this level, creative writing instruction is commonly integrated into literature lessons. The objectives of literature instruction in elementary schools include stimulating students' interest and skills in literary creation, developing intelligence, enhancing initiative and creativity, fostering confidence, and encouraging the ability and willingness to gather information (Permana & Indihadi, 2018).

It is undeniable that not all students are naturally gifted in writing poetry. As previously noted, poetry as a form of creative writing involves talent—but such talent must be discovered and cultivated.

Creative poetry writing can be effectively taught, one method being through visual stimuli such as images. Why use images? Because children aged six to twelve are in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development, during which their understanding is grounded in tangible experiences. Students grasp concepts best when they can see and relate to concrete objects. At this stage, children begin to think logically rather than intuitively. Thought during the concrete operational phase must therefore be supported by concrete or specific examples (Juwantara, 2019). One of the most effective visual strategies in teaching poetry writing is the *Picture and Picture* learning method.

CONCLUSION

Creative writing is a representation of literacy skills that can be manifested through the ability to compose poetry. The process of producing poetry involves a mental process of language—how language is formed and understood within an individual's mind. This demonstrates a close interrelation between literacy and psycholinguistic competence. The mental process involved in writing poetry gives rise to the creation of themes, diction, metaphors, and meaning complexity.

When the poetic works of fifth-grade students at SDN Klender 03 Pagi, East Jakarta, are analyzed in terms of theme, diction, metaphor, and meaning complexity using a psycholinguistic approach, they provide recommendations for optimizing literacy skills among elementary school students. One such recommendation is that elementary school students, being in the imitative developmental phase, benefit

from diverse diction exposure during poetry writing activities. The teacher's role in providing a variety of diction options stimulates students' creativity in composing poetry. Through these stimuli, students mentally process and learn diction by applying analogy or metaphor to construct poems that convey emotional depth and meaning complexity.

Creative writing thus represents a combination of mental, cognitive, and self-actualizing abilities. Consequently, students who can compose poetry rich in theme, diction, metaphor, and meaning complexity demonstrate the development of higher-order literacy and psycholinguistic competence.

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