Students' Feelings of Using Figurative Language in Creating Poems at Creative Writing Class: A Narrative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Figurative language is a vital element in poetry that allows writers to express emotions, ideas, and imagery in creative and impactful ways. In the context of creative writing classes, especially poetry writing, students are encouraged to explore and utilize various figurative expressions to enhance the depth and beauty of their compositions. However, considering its complexity, the use of figurative language in writing a poem can create a range of emotions. This study aims to identify and understand students' emotional experiences in a creative writing class using figurative language at a university in Pekalongan. A qualitative method was employed through narrative inquiry to explore how students in a creative writing class experienced the use of figurative language while composing poems. The researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect data. The data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman & Saldana analysis method. The participants of this study were students majoring in English department who had created poems using figurative language in creative writing class. The results of this study revealed some positive feelings felt by the students, such as excitement, happiness, interest, pride, and satisfaction. On the other hand, negative feelings felt by students include anxiety, frustration, and boredom. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of students' emotional experiences so that it can offer valuable insights for choosing appropriate teaching methods and media in teaching poems using figurative language in creative writing class.

Keywords: creative writing, emotional experiences, figurative language, narrative inquiry, poetry writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a core component of English language education, particularly for students in the English Department. Among the various genres, creative writing demands not only linguistic competence but also the ability to convey emotions and abstract ideas. Figurative language, as an essential stylistic device, plays a pivotal role in enhancing poetic expression and creativity in this context (Harper, 2022). In creative writing classes, especially those focusing on poetry, students are encouraged to explore various linguistic devices to enrich their writing. They range from exciting fantasy stories and engaging science fiction to heartfelt poems and inspiring memoirs (Anderson, 2023). Therefore, exploring students' emotional experiences in using figurative language offers valuable insights into their learning journey and can help educators better support their development in creative writing (Reed Danahay & Wulff, 2023).

One of the elements of creative writing is creating poems (Kristiantari et al., 2023). In the context of creative writing class, students are prepared to explore various literary genres, including a poem, which expands their knowledge of the art of writing (Peach et al, 2015). Creating poems is a creative process that allows one to express oneself deeply through the use of words and language (Mardiningrum & Adriyanthi, 2023). Writing poems is a creative form of expression that combines elements of literature and imagination (Perkins, 1976). In other words, it can be said that writing a poem is a creative form of expression that combines elements of literature and imagination (Perkins, 1976). It is not simply a random arrangement of words but also a process that blends literary elements with creative imagination.

Poems are not just a way for a person to express their thoughts and feelings, they also create images and experiences that appeal to the reader (Irmawati, 2014). Lidow (2022) also stated that a poem is an instance of verbal art, a text set in verse, bound speech. More generally, a poem conveys heightened forms of perception, experience, meaning, or consciousness in heightened language, i.e. a heightened mode of discourse. In expressing the ideas and feelings, poem authors usually do not use common language. They prefer to use figurative language as the essential feature of a poem.

Figurative language, including metaphor, simile, and personification, enriches literary texts by conveying complex emotions and creating vivid imagery (Aubakir et al., 2024; Perrine, 1974; Sari, 2021). It provides beauty and rhythm to writing, enhances emotional depth, and increases expressiveness (Glucksberg, Sam; McGlone, 2001; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). However, it also requires a higher level of comprehension and contextual understanding (Crystal, 2003; Cuddon, 2012).

As a result, students may experience a wide range of feelings when creating poems, an activity that is directly linked to the usage of figurative language, from

pride and joy to worry and anxiety. The creative demands of articulating abstract concepts, choosing suitable figurative devices, and satisfying aesthetic standards may give birth to these emotional reactions. Some students find that using poetic language is a fun way to express themselves, while others might find the intricacy and ambiguity of the task daunting. It is essential to comprehend these emotional dynamics since they might affect students' confidence, level of involvement, and general performance on creative writing assignments.

Therea are some previous studies related to figurative language in students' writing that have been conducted. Gultom et al., (2023) analyzed the use of figurative language in personal letters written by high school students and found simile, metaphor, and personification commonly used to express emotions. Saud & Harja (2023) explored figurative language in EFL students' creative writing projects, emphasizing its prevalence and importance in developing creative skills. Similarly, Soraya (2020) examined students' poems and identified ten categories of figurative language, showcasing the rhetorical diversity in student writing. Kuswardani et al., (2022) discussed instructional methods in teaching poetry, highlighting the gradual introduction of vocabulary, structure, and figurative devices to enhance comprehension.

It fills an important gap in the literature by shedding light on the affective dimensions of learning poetic expression in EFL contexts. Those studies have examined the usage, types, and teaching of figurative language in EFL contexts. They mainly focus on technical and outcome-based aspects. There is few studies focusing on subjective experiences and emotional responses to the use of figurative language in creating a poem. This research addresses that gap by exploring students' feelings such as confusion, stress, or excitemen when engaging with figurative language in writing a poem within a Creative Writing class.

Based on the information from several students who have taken creative writing class in the pre research step, they felt some feelings of confusion, pressure, and excitement of using figurative language in creating a poem for their assignments. Therefore, the researchers want to have deep exploration of how students' feelings play a role in the development of their creative identity and poem writing skills.

By using narrative inquiry as the research deisgn, the researchers want to capture the personal stories and emotional experiences of university students in Pekalongan in the use of figurative language in creating a poem. Therefore, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of students' emotional experiences so that it can offer valuable insights for choosing appropriate teaching methods and media in teaching poems using figurative language in creative writing class.

METHOD
Research Design

This research used a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry method. According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative approach is an approach to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups consider to be a social or human problem, while narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology that focuses on understanding human experience through stories and narratives (Clandinin, 2006). This approach makes it possible to explore how individuals shape identity and meaning through the experiences they narrate. Shape identity and meaning through the experiences they tell.

This research was conducted at one of the Universities in Pekalongan. The reason because this university has a creative writing program that has produced creative writing projects from students, including poem. The criteria for the participants included that the participants must have passed the Creative Writing course in the English Education Study Program at the University and the participants must have experience in writing poem used figurative language as part of the assignment in the course.

Participants

The research involved six participants. The participants were Indonesian EFL students (pseudonyms Carmen, Stella, Haechan, Irene, and Jake). All participants were fourth-semester students who have studied Creative Writing at a private language institute in Pekalongan, Indonesia. They were chosen based on the information gained in the pre-research step. Three of them were those who stated that they needed lots of struggle in using figurative language to write a poem, and the rest were those who enjoyed its process.

To provide a clearer overview, the demographic information of the participants is presented in the table below:

Table 1.1 Demographic data of the participants

No.	Name of Participants	Gender/ Semester	The information based on pre-research step
1.	Carmen	Female/4th	Enjoyed
2.	Irene	Female/4th	Enjoyed
3.	Tzuyu	Female/4th	Enjoyed
4.	Stella	Female/4th	Struggled
5.	Haechan	Male/4th	Struggled
6.	Jake	Male/4th	Struggled

Data Collecting Technique

By using semi-structured interviews, the researchers collected the data of this study. The researchers interviewed the participants to explore students' personal stories and experiences regarding the use of figurative language in poem creation. Semi-structured interviews are particularly well-suited to studies aiming to understand participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they ascribe to those experiences (Rubin et al, 2011). This method provides

flexibility to explore the topic more deeply based on the participants' responses, while still having guidelines that ensure all important aspects are covered.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the data that has been collected using data collection through semi-structured interviews about students' feeling of using figurative language at creating poem in a creative writing class. Furthermore, the interview data was analyzed as stated by Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2014) model, which consists of three interconnected processes: Data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification.

In the data condensation stage, the researchers organized and reduced the raw interview transcripts by selecting relevant excerpts that directly reflected students' feelings experiences, both positive and negative, in relation to figurative language use. This involved coding the data based on recurring emotional responses such as excitement, anxiety, frustration, and pride.

During the data display phase, the researchers arranged the condensed data into organized formats such as grouped categories. This made it easier to see patterns in how students described their feelings. By comparing responses, the researchers could observe common emotional experiences like how several students felt anxious when using unfamiliar figurative language, or excited when they mastered a certain figure of speech.

Last the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researchers interpreted the meaning of the emerging themes by connecting the students' emotional expressions to relevant theoretical frameworks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Students' Positive Feelings of Using Figurative Language in Creating Poem at Creative Writing Class

This section addresses the research question regarding the students' feelings when using figurative language by describing the various positive feelings that students' experienced when using figurative language in creating poem at creative writing class. Based on the interview data, students reported feeling excitement, happiness, interest, calm, satisfied, and pride when creating poems that used figurative expressions. It can be seen in the data:

> *"Yeah excited. Because in my opinion, it's just fun to write a poem, like trying to find out what vocabulary to use so that the poem isn't just ordinary. At that time the theme was Ramadan so it was more about personification. Because it's cool, it's just fun, so our vocabulary seems to be expanding and becoming more expressive"* (Carmen, Interview. February 4, 2025).
>
> *"Yes, I'm happy, because we can express our ideas in the poem. Of course, there was a time when the theme was Ramadan, so I wrote it about the night of Lailatul Qadar. Well, there is a metaphor, like the*

light that shines at night." (Irene, 5 February 2025).

"*Talk about curious, I'm interested in the simile because it's more conceivable, simile, like personification. For example, "he's as tall as an electric pole," so I can imagine that. Then I became more interested because it's a comparison, so I think it's like, it's good, it's fun to look for the right words to describe it, what's it like*". (Stella interview, 4 February 2025).

"*Yes, some of the parts I felt interested and curious because like wow, I have to know what the equivalent of this word is, right? So, whether you want it or not, searching continues to give rise to a feeling of interest and curiosity*" (Tzuyu. interview, 4 February 2025).

"*Yes, it's like I already understand personification, so I just enjoy it more because I already really understand what personification is, so I don't have to learn it all over again, right? If I don't understand it, it's like I'm more focused on searching, what's the point of continuing to focus, but I don't think I'll enjoy it*". (Carmen, interview. 4 February 2025).

"*I'm satisfied, it turns out I can make it too, but there are a few words that I made but the final result is so cringe, but I'm still satisfied. It's good for me. I don't know what others think.*" (Haechan, interview 5 February 2025).

Some students expressed excitement when using figurative language in their poetry. They felt that the writing process became more enjoyable and less monotonous, especially when they were able to find expressive and unusual words. As Carmen said, she enjoyed using personification because it made her poetry more interesting and expressive. This feeling of excitement arises because the creative process of writing with figurative language allows students to explore deeper meanings and richer vocabulary. According to Russell (1980), excitement is a positive emotion that arises when someone feels very enthusiastic about an activity. Lakoff and Johnson (2008), stated that figurative language makes abstract concepts more concrete, making the writing process more lively and enjoyable. By experiencing excitement when writing poetry, students will be more motivated to continue developing their creativity. Therefore, teachers can design creative writing lessons that encourage the exploration of figurative language so that students remain enthusiastic and do not quickly become bored with the writing process.

Some students stated that they felt happy when writing poetry using figurative language. They felt that writing in a figurative style allowed them to express their ideas in a more personal and enjoyable way. Irene, for example, enjoyed writing poetry on the theme of Lailatul Qadar using metaphors. Happiness arises because writing poetry is a meaningful and enjoyable activity. According to Russell (1980), happiness is a positive emotional response to pleasant experiences.

Figurative language embellishes poetry, enhances its aesthetic quality, and provides emotional satisfaction for both writers and readers (Fowler, 1927). This sense of happiness shows that creative writing instruction that facilitates the use of figurative language can improve students' emotional well-being. This is important for creating a positive learning environment and supporting the development of meaningful writing skills.

Students expressed interest when using figurative language, such as similes and personification. For example, Stella stated that she was interested because similes were more imaginative and fun to explore. Interest arise because figurative language triggers exploration of meaning and the search for appropriate equivalents. According to Russell (1980), interest arises when someone feels compelled to deeper into something. Lakoff and Johnson (2008) also stated that figurative language encourages creativity because it helps convey abstract ideas in an interesting and different way. This interest shows that the use of figurative language can be a pedagogical tool to build students' interest in writing. Teachers can design writing assignments that are challenging yet enjoyable, so that students remain eager to explore literary styles in greater depth.

Some students feel calm when writing poetry using figurative language because they already understand the types of figurative language, such as personification, and feel more confident in using it. This sense of calmness arises when students feel familiar and unpressured in using figurative language. Russell (1980) stated that calmness occurs when a person feels free from pressure or stress. When students feel they have mastered the material, they can write comfortably without being burdened by academic anxiety. This calmness shows the importance of gradually introducing figurative language so that students feel confident. Teachers should provide structured exercises before free writing assignments so that students feel emotionally stable during the creative process.

Students also felt satisfied and pride when they successfully completed their poems using figurative language, even though they felt that the results were not perfect. Satisfaction and pride arise when students successfully complete something challenging and meaningful. According to Russell (1980), pride and satisfaction arise after achieving important goals, even without euphoria. Glucksberg (2001) stated that figurative language allows for deeper emotional expression, which creates a sense of artistic achievement. A sense of pride and satisfaction shows that writing poetry using figurative language can strengthen students' self-confidence. Teachers can celebrate students' small successes as a form of emotional validation, to strengthen their engagement in writing.

The presence of these positive feelings indicates that figurative language plays an important role in enriching students' emotional engagement during the poetry

writing process. When students feel some of positive feelings they are more likely to maintain their motivation and creativity. This suggests that integrating figurative language into creative writing classes can enhance students' expressive abilities, encourage emotional engagement, and foster a positive attitude toward writing. Teachers in creative writing courses can take advantage of this by designing assignments that encourage the exploration of figurative language to help students express themselves more freely and meaningfully. As a result, this can lead to higher-quality poetry and a more enjoyable learning experience in the classroom.

Students' Negative Feelings of Using Figurative Language in Creating Poems at Creative Writing Class

In the process of learning creative writing, the use of figurative language in poems often creates challenges for students. This section explores the negative feelings students encountered when using figurative language in poetry writing. The findings show that some students experienced anxiety, frustration, and boredom when they attempted to create poetry with figurative language elements. It can be seen from the data:

"Yes, I'm anxious that if I make a mistake it won't connect. In Indonesian, figurative language is also difficult, especially since this is the first time I've done that in English. Even though we've shared material about types of figurative language, I'm still afraid that if something goes wrong it will make a mistake. Then there are so many types of figurative language, so it's like I'm afraid of making a mistake, for example, if I make a personification, it turns out that the one I used can't make it into personification." (Stella, interviews. 4 February 2025).

"I'm confused, but the frustration is because there's no basics for writing poems and there's a deadline. Meanwhile, I couldn't find an idea, let alone I searched for the words. For example, the personification of the poems makes me confused because I have to find the right metaphor. Actually, that's good and cool, but I don't think all living creatures can be compared to humans" (Haechan, interview 5 February 2025).

"Yes I'm confused, it's definitely because finding the words is difficult. It's difficult to use foreign language to figurative and fitting them into poem" (Jake, interview 5 February 2025).

"Yes, sometimes I run out of ideas and I'm confused about how to put sentence one and sentence two together so that they connect like that. Stuck at the choice of words, that's how it is. Then the strategy is that I stop first, don't work on it, then leave it to other things, then suddenly I get inspiration, otherwise I listen to music and then find certain words through the lyrics of the music." (Irene, interview. 5 February 2025).

During the process of writing poetry using figurative language, several students said that feelings of anxiety. Based on interview data, students shared that they

felt anxious because they worried about making mistakes when choosing a figurative language, which could disrupt the meaning and flow of their poems. This aligns with Russell (1980), who stated that anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear that often brings high energy or tension.

Students' anxiety can be linked to the disadvantages of figurative language. Lakoff & Johnson (2008) highlight that figurative language requires higher cognitive processing, making it difficult for individuals with less experience or lower literacy levels to grasp. This anxiety highlights the importance of more intensive guidance in creative writing. Teachers need to provide explicit guidance and concrete examples so that students do not feel confused or afraid of making mistakes when using figurative language.

Apart from anxiety, students also experienced feelings of frustration during the writing process. Students mentioned several causes of frustration, such as limited vocabulary, difficulty adjusting figurative language to the content of the poem, and challenges in maintaining rhyme and meaning when translating from Indonesian to English. This feeling of frustration fits with Russell's (1980) view that frustration arises when someone feels blocked from achieving their goals or faces obstacles that are hard to overcome.

Cuddon (2013) emphasizes that figurative language must be used within the right context to be effective. Without a clear contextual foundation, the intended meaning may not be conveyed properly,

contributing to the confusion students felt when adapting their poems from Indonesian to English. Leech (2014) also notes that figurative language often has multiple meanings, which can confuse students, especially those who are still learning how to express ideas creatively in a second language. This frustration shows that learning figurative language must be linked to contexts that are clear and familiar to students. Teachers can provide poetry templates or thematic guidelines to help students develop relevant and appropriate figurative language.

In addition to anxiety and frustration, students also experienced feelings of boredom, especially when they had difficulty generating new ideas or structuring their poems. Based on the interview results, all participants mentioned that boredom appeared after they initially made progress but later ran out of ideas, causing them to feel their work became meaningless. This matches Russell's (1980) explanation that boredom is a negative emotion that happens when someone is no longer interested or engaged in an activity, leading to feelings of emptiness.

Students' boredom can also be connected to the challenges of using figurative language. According to Crystal (2003), figurative language is often ambiguous, leading to misunderstandings, especially when the audience is unfamiliar with its context. The ambiguous nature of figurative language can cause confusion

and overload students' thinking, making it harder for them to continue writing.

The existence of these negative feelings indicates that the process of learning and applying figurative language needs to be supported more effectively in creative writing instruction. Teachers should be aware that for some students, figurative language can cause emotional discomfort or indifference, especially when tasks are unclear, cognitively demanding, or rushed. Therefore, it is important to provide gradual exposure, practical examples, and emotional support so that students can transition from anxiety to confidence. By acknowledging and addressing these negative feelings, creative writing classes can create a more inclusive and emotionally balanced learning environment that supports student well-being and the development of literary skills.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that students experience both positive and negative feelings. Positive feelings include excitement, happiness, calm, interest, satisfaction, and pride. These feelings are largely related to students' enjoyment of the writing process, opportunities to explore expressive language, and increased familiarity with figurative language, which contribute to their confidence and engagement. On the other hand, some students reported negative feelings, such as anxiety, frustration, and boredom. These emotions are generally related to

difficulties in understanding and applying figurative language, fear of making mistakes, and challenges in generating ideas and maintaining inspiration.

However, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single classrooms and involved a limited number of participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, it is also still limited in the case of data collection technique. It used only one technique, namely semi-structured interview. This condition makes the data seemed weak although in fact the data have been validated through member checking. Therefore, it is recommended that future research involve a more varied and larger sample of students. Additionally, incorporating multiple data collection methods such as classroom observations, or reflective journals may provide a more comprehensive picture of students' feelings responses. Then from a pedagogical perspective, educators are encouraged to design creative writing activities that gradually introduce figurative language, accompanied by clear examples and structured exercises. Emotional support and constructive feedback should also be integrated into teaching to help reduce students' anxiety and frustration, thereby creating a more positive and inclusive environment for creative expression.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

AF and CM significantly contributed in doing this research and preparing for this article. AF designed the concept of this study, collecting the literature review, designing the interview guidelines and the research methodololgy, as well as collecting and analyzing the data. CM assisted in accompanying the entire process, providing valuable guidance and input for the background of the study, literature review, interview guidelines, research methodology, data presentation, data analysis, as well as article preparation. All authors reviewed and revised the final manuscript.

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