EKOLOGI

dalam Perspektif Sastra, Bahasa, dan Budaya

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Daftar Isi

Developing Students' Ecological Awareness Through English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Creative Writing Practices

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A. Introduction

Creative writing is one of the classroom practices that supports language learning. In Indonesia, creative writing has flourished. Studies on creative writing practices in Indonesia explored the application of creative writing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Andania et al., 2024) and poetry writing training (Sari et al., 2020). Studies on creative writing practices in Indonesia also focus on observing students' writing. These studies discussed students' creativity (Herawati, 2021), students' identities (Widyastuti et al., 2020), and students' identities as resources (Widyastuti, 2023).

Creative writing can take various resources, such as the writer's background, experiences, and thoughts. Therefore, creative writing also has the potential to develop students' awareness of their surroundings, such as ecological issues. Despite its potential to develop students' ecological awareness, little is known about its practice regarding ecological issues.

Dewi (2018) conducted a study among university students in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In her research, students were involved in class activities to "read and write ecological poems on regular basis" (Dewi, 2018, p. 177). The creative writing practice in Dewi's (2018) study only took a small portion of the classroom instructions on poetry analysis. However, the practice implied that classroom exercises can promote environmental awareness. When encouraged, students can describe their environmental concerns through classroom instructions.

This study explored activities to develop students' ecological awareness through EFL creative writing practices. Students' writing provided unique interpretations of their observations of environmental conditions. They voiced different environmental issues through creative writing exercises.

B. Creative Writing

Creative writing is written to express the writer's thoughts subjectively and aesthetically. As subjective expressions, creative writing can be influenced by the writer's background (Harper, 2016). Its creation is affected by the surroundings because creative writing is not produced in a "cultural vacuum" (Tay, 2014, p. 103). Creative writers can produce writing based on the writer's "reservoir of lived experiences and knowledge" (Chin, 2014, p. 120). This implies that everything that happens around the writers could become inspiration for their writing.

Mansoor (2015, p. 206) defines creative writing as

> Writing that expresses the writer's thoughts and feelings in an imaginative, often unique, and poetic way. Creative writing is guided more by the writer's need to express feelings and ideas than by restrictive demands of factual and logical progression of expository writing.

To complement Mansoor's (2015) descriptions above, Kumar (2020) and Maley (2012) also highlight that creative writing expresses the writer's feelings. By producing creative writing, writers can create a new meaning for the facts they write about.

Creative writers can add *spices* to their writing. Creative writing is a form of "art of making things up" (Kumar, 2020, p. 78). This implies that facts can inspire writers but are not necessarily written as facts. Regarding ecological issues, for example, student writers can use the voice of a tree to tell facts about forest desctruction. Students can also explore the feelings of trees and animals.

Kumar (2020) emphasized that as a form of art, creative writing is produced differently from academic and technical writing. Thus, students can express their ideas and feelings more freely because it is "non-judgmental" (Maley, 2012, p. 5). In addition, "intuition, observation, imagination, and personal memories" can incite creative writing (Maley as cited in Herawati, 2021, p. 77). Therefore, personal resources, for example, can lead to a more relaxed form of writing.

In the context of EFL learning, the practice has a positive impact. Students can raise their writing confidence because grammar correctness is not the primary focus. Their concerns about what is important in their society also matter (Chin, 2014). Regarding ecological issues, their worries about destruction in the environment, for example, can be expressed through the personification of a tree, expressing its thoughts and feelings.

As a personal expression, creative writing does not focus solely on sentence constructions. Even when creative writing is used in the EFL learning context, it allows learners to voice their aspirations. This practice supports EFL learning because students can engage in "playful" language practices (Maley, 2012, p. 3). Through the playful and fun writing activities, students learn "sentence structures and exploring innovative ways of self-expressions and semantic use" (Kumar, 2020, p. 86). Thus, creative writing also improves students' EFL proficiency. The practice supports language learning.

Through classroom instructions, students can be encouraged to write based on certain conditions in their surroundings. For instance, students can be asked to observe some ecological issues and write about them. Therefore, creative writing provides a space for teachers to promote certain behaviour, such as awareness of environmental conservation. Classroom instructions "may constrain or liberate learners' formation of identity as well as offering various positions that learners could take" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 425). Thus, with the lessons,

teachers can create activities to develop students' ecological awareness through EFL creative writing practices.

A study conducted among twenty-seven students in Yogyakarta, Indonesia reported that students' writing reflected their awareness of environmental conservation (Dewi, 2018). However, the awareness should be encouraged regularly (Dewi, 2018). This study implied that the selected materials can be directed to promote students' awareness of environmental issues. Students can write their personal and subjective interpretations of the environmental conditions and what should be done about them.

C. Methodology

At the time of the data collection process, there were five creative writing classes taught by three different teachers. For this current study, only class C and D were involved as the researcher taught only the two classes.

This qualitative study involved seventy-two students from an English Letters Department in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They wrote their creative writing as a compulsory subject. They were in their semester six or third year when the data were collected.

During the creative writing class, students were required to write three projects, namely flash fiction, a drama script, and poetry. The data for this research were taken from one of the flash fiction writing assignments. In one of the discussions, the teacher asked students to imagine and write based on the following assignment.

Use your imagination. Read the sentences beginning with "if" in the following. Choose one of them and write about it.

1. If a crocodile comes to this class and learn English with you.
2. If one day you find the streets are covered with grass.
3. If you are a tree in the university construction site.
4. If you can do anything with ecological issues.

Topics 1 and 2 were adapted from Rebegea's (2013) creative writing exercises. Topic 3 was offered because the university was currently building a new office next to the building where the students studied. Therefore, students could observe the progress happening on the construction site. Topic 4 was given because this study intended to see how students interpreted ecological issues.

Students were asked to write the reason(s) for the choice of topic. After that, they were asked to write the story. The teacher encouraged students to explore the topic and look inward to write the story. For example, the teacher told students they could write about their hopes for the environment. They could also write what they would do to conserve the environment.

During the data collection process, forty-three students were registered in Class C and forty-one in Class D. However, only thirty-six students in each class submitted the assignment. Therefore, the number of research participants was seventy-two in total.

D. Students' Ecological Awareness

The findings and discussions in this paper will be divided into two parts. The first will present the students' choices of topics and their reasons. The second part will discuss the short stories describing students' ideas using the topics.

1. Students' choices and reasons

Students were given complete freedom to write based on one of the four topics. Students' choices are summarized as follows.

Table 1. The Frequency of students' topics choices

No.	Topics	Class C	Class D
1.	If a crocodile comes to this class and learn English with you.	11	10
2.	If one day you find the streets are covered with grass.	12	8
3.	If you are a tree in the university construction site.	9	16

No.	Topics	Class C	Class D
4.	If you can do anything with the ecological issues.	4	2

As shown in the table, Topic 1 was not directly related to ecological issues or the environment. However, Topic 1 inspired students to use their imagination of having a crocodile as their classmate. Students who chose this topic felt challenged to use their imagination.

Even though Topic 1 did not directly relate to ecological issues, it utilized animal characters. Moreover, the assignment was still connected to creative writing practices. Maley as cited in Herawati (2021) states that imagination can be the source of creative writing. The following confirms the reasons why students chose Topic 1.

> I chose it because I wanted to present a strange, funny and unusual storyline. And include the atmosphere of an ordinary classroom where students learn with the added presence of an unexpected crocodile and encourage the exploration of imagination.
> (Student 22, Class D)
>
> I choose this topic because I want to explore my imagination between human and crocodile. That is what I think, this is fiction, enjoy it!
> (Student 36, Class D)

Mansoor (2015, p. 206) states that "creative writing is guided more by the writer's need to express feelings." The choice on Topic 1 also confirmed that creative writing allowed students to express their thoughts and feelings. As agreed by most students, a crocodile was a predator who could attack them. Therefore, students described feelings about having the crocodile in the classroom, such as fear and curiosity. Several students described this, as shown below.

Crocodiles are one of many reptiles that I am afraid of. That is a simple reason why I want to try, at least once in my life, to coordinate and spend time together with the animals I avoid interacting with.
(Student 28, Class C)

If a crocodile were to enter this class, its presence would definitely cause a stir. Imagine the sudden silence that falls over the room as students and teachers alike gape in disbelief at the unexpected visitor.
(Student 35, Class C)

Topic 2 also led students to use their imagination. However, in Topic 2, students imagined how it felt to have streets covered with grass instead of cement or asphalts. Writing based on this topic could be linked to students' self-expressions. As confirmed by Kumar (2020), because creative writing is "non-judmental" students feel the freedom for self-expression as shown below (Maley, 2012, p. 5).

I chose this topic because it felt like childhood. From a young age to this day, I love to be in open spaces, especially nature. Therefore, the streets covered with grass felt like a dream that I would have as a child and even now.
(Student 27, Class D)

Student 27 recalled her experiences and memories to complete the assignment. Describing her feelings about the topic using her imagination and experiences was an example of self-expression. She not only wrote her stories based on the prompt but also made self-reflections. By doing so, she could utilize her resources without fear of judgment on the story's logic.

Other than allowing students to describe their thoughts and feelings, Topics 2, 3, and 4 encouraged students to think about environmental issues. More students were challenged to write based on these topics than Topic 1. This fact indicated their

awareness of the environment. This is shown by their explanations of the reasons for choosing the topics.

> This imagination touches my heart how the earth is getting more sick over time and the world believes there is no cure to global warming. No more global warming, it is global boiling now for the next many years.
> (Student 1, Class C)

Student 1's statement above not only showed her self-expression. She also described her imagination and concerns about environmental issues, such as global warming.

Students' observations could trigger their awareness of issues in their environment, as in Topics 3 and 4. Maley (2012) states that observation is one of the powerful sources of creative writing. During the semester when the creative writing classes were conducted, students witnessed the construction of the new building in the university. Students noticed that trees were cut down during construction, as shown in Topic 3. This raised their consciousness of the destructions caused by the need for space for the new building.

> I chose this topic because the amount of trees that had been reduced cause the area around the construction site to become hotter than the usual.
> (Student 8, Class C)

> To say that our environment is not okay is an understatement. The average temperature of earth is growing higher every year. Yet, we are still searching for justification for our actions toward nature.
> (Student 28, Class D)

Topic 4 not only triggered students to use their observation as an inspiration, but also their perspective of what they could do to save the environment. For example, using Topic 4, Student 2 from Class D also criticized human actions of

deforestation. The action forced animals living in the habitat to move to other places and face extinction. In her short story, Student 2 also described what people could do to save endangered animals, such as the red panda. Thus, in her short story, she not only pictured the serious issue but also how to overcome the problem.

> The climax of the story is what intrigued me the most and motivated me to write this short story about, which is when the animals living in the forest was forced to find another habitat to live in because they were on the edge of extinction due to the forest being uninhabitable.
> (Student 2, Class C)

Creative writing was affected by the writers' background (Harper, 2016). Students had various interpretations about the topics they wrote about because of their different backgrounds. As a result, they showed different awareness and concerns about the environment.

> At first, I wanted to focus on the issue of deforestation that was considered as the major problem in the story, but then my attention diverted to look more on the result caused by the cutting of the trees itself.
> (Student 2, Class C)

> If you are a tree on the university construction site, I chose this topic because my concern about reforestation is needed nowadays.
> (Student 23, Class D)

By describing the topics they had chosen, students became aware of the need for environmental conservation. They not only became aware of the sad condition of the earth but also had the desire to participate to save the earth.

2. Students' short stories based on the topics

As described in the previous section, students in Classes C and D displayed different interests in their creative writing. For

instance, students in Class C were more interested in writing using their imagination, as seen in the highest number of students writing based on Topics 1 and 2. In class D, on the other hand, the majority of students wrote based on their observation of the tree at the university construction site.

Creative writing allows students to write based on their personal and subjective feelings. This allowed students to make choices on what to express in their writing. In addition, their concerns about important issues in their society might affect their choice.

Chin (2014) confirms that students can express their thoughts on important situations in their society through creative writing. Students could select issues to inspire their writing based on their observations of situations. When the focus of the lesson was not on the sentence construction, students could explore a wider variety of ideas.

> The roar of the bulldozer woke me before the sun. It vibrated through my ancient roots, a tremor unlike the familiar whispers of wind and rain. Dust motes danced in the bruised pre-dawn light, settling on my gnarled bark like unwelcome memories. The air, once alive with the calls of robins and the chatter of squirrels, was thick with the acrid tang of diesel and the grinding of metal. They had come, finally, for the campus.
> …
> Now, the verdant oasis that was my home was a wasteland. My brothers and sisters, their leafy arms outstretched in silent supplication, lay felled in heaps, their vibrant greens replaced by the sterile monotony of yellow construction tape. Panic, a foreign sensation, clawed at my roots. Had they forgotten me? Would I, too, be consigned to the oblivion of splintered wood and sawdust?
> (Student 8, Class C)

Student 8 described his concerns about an important tree at the university construction site. The situation was based on his observation of the destruction during construction. The

descriptions of the sorrows of the tree and seeing his brothers and sisters gone reflected his concerns about an important issue in his surroundings during the construction. His concerns were also shown by the tree's question about its usefulness to the earth. The question represented his awareness of the need to protect the trees in his surroundings even though the construction of the new building must continue.

The fact that students were concerned about different things indicated that their background influenced their choices of the topics. As Harper (2016) stated, the writers' background could affect their creative writing. As a result, writers could interpret similar problems from different angles. For example, students described the sadness of trees being "killed" because of the construction. However, the focus could be on how the trees struggled to fight against humans, how another person fought to save trees and human suffering because trees were gone.

Writing based on observation of surroundings reflected students' understanding of the issues in their society. This is especially true because creative writing is attached to the culture of the society that produce it (Tay, 2014). For example, even though students wrote from the tree's perspective based on Topic 3, they described the situations differently. This indicated that writers with different backgrounds considered similar situations differently.

> Me, as a tree, will be a silent witness to how they make these buildings well and sturdy so that everyone feels comfortable. I will feel very comfortable when they take shelter under the shade of a tree to rest for a while. But there will be a day when they no longer need me and choose to cut me down. I will cry by shedding many of the leaves I have.
> (Student 20, Class C)

> Day by day, I am questioning myself why I am not cut down yet. Should I be happy? I am not sure. But, I many people brought signs that said "Our memory tree will always be there," I didn't

really understand what that meant, I am just a tree. Then, someone approaches me and said "You will be okay, don't worry".
(Student 31, Class D)

The two students above produce creative writing based on Topic 3. However, they used different focuses in their writing. Both students described the position of the tree as being submissive. Student 20 pictured the helplessness of the tree, while Student 31 depicted the tree's good relation with humans, which ensured the safety of the tree. These showed that students' background could influence their perspectives in writing using the tree's voice.

Students' choices of the topics reflected that they were aware of what happened in their surroundings. For example, Student 2 in Class C was concerned about the fact of the endangered red panda. She learned about the fact but then added her personal opinions.

Students choosing Topic 1 were also aware that crocodiles could not speak human language. They were also predators that could attack human prey. However, their imagination about having a crocodile classmate was that students made up the story. Therefore, this practice confirmed Kumar's (2020, p. 78) idea that creative writing is an "art of making things up."

The crocodile lecturer who saw the incident became panicked because he smelled blood and his predatory instincts reappeared. He immediately left the classroom because he was eager to eat Nessie who at that time was covered in blood. Not long after that, the ambulance came and took her to the hospital. Besides that, the crocodile lecturer was still dealing with his hunger to prey on Nessie. In his mind, Nessie was his student, but she is also a perfect pack for his dinner menu.
(Student 22, Class C)

Students also explored different focuses when writing about the tree on a construction site. Even though Topic 3 did not demand students to think of actions to save the environment, some

stories indicated students' wishes to act. The trees were personified like humans who could pray and ask for help to save themselves. The trees also witnessed how humans tried to destroy or save them. This indicated their awareness that something must be done to mitigate the environmental problems. Students' creative writing also confirmed Dewi's (2018) arguments that awareness of ecological issues can be encouraged through classroom practices.

> To make my plan a success, I need to pray to the Goddess of weather. I prayed and I prayed for the whole two days to the Goddess of Weather to save me and the others. I knew that it might be a dirty plan, but what could I do? This was the only way to save us from those cruel humans. I hoped that the weather Goddess heard and helped us, please….please….please….
> (Student 23, Class C)

> When it's time for me to be cut down, a little girl showed up and climbed the tree. She did not give any permission of the constructors to cut the tree with her kind of words that tried convincing the constructors until the constructors called the firefighter to get the little girl down from the tree. In the end, the constructors didn't cut me down because the owner wants the building to look authentic with an old tree, which I will be in the next 10 years from now if there are any renovations behind.
> (Student 25, Class D)

These two students described the cruelty of humans to destroy the tree as seen in Student 23's story. However, at the same time, Student 25 proposed the idea of saving the tree at whatever cost. The presentation of different human characters in the two stories also implied their different concerns about the environment.

In the creative writing practice, the teacher encouraged students to think of solutions to ecological problems through Topic 4. Therefore, students' writing based on Topic 4 indicated their awareness of some environmental issues.

Jumping back into the current world, an idea that is hopeful appeared in my mind. I know that I couldn't fight with the hunters and deforestation directly, but I realized that I could create a shield for the red pandas. Planting. That was my action as well as solution to face the villains. I had come up with a plan to plant bamboo seeds, known to be the red panda's lifeline, in my local zoo. It was a small step to help the species, but progress is progress no matter how small the action may be.

(Student 2, Class C)

Student 2 described that the red pandas were endangered animals. At the same time, she encouraged readers to act. She gave examples of how to save animals through the story's character. This implied that the freedom given to students regarding the assignment completion could lead to various perspectives toward the assignment. However, whether students wished to participate in environmental conservation depended on the teacher's encouragement. This research agreed with Norton and Toohey's (2011, p. 425) arguments that classroom practices "may constrain or liberate learners' formation of identity as well as offering various positions that learners could take." How students positioned themselves towards the ecological issues would depend on the assignment.

D. Conclusion

This research described the creative writing practices regarding ecology. It showed that creative writing provided a space for teachers to encourage students to develop their awareness of ecological issues. The assignments allowed students to use their imagination, express their feelings and thoughts and develop their position towards environmental issues. Students' use of facts in their surroundings resulting from their observation of the environment encouraged their awareness of ecology. The descriptions of what they could do to mitigate the ecological problems indicated students' desire to participate in

environmental conservation. Therefore, students' awareness of ecological issues could be encouraged through EFL creative writing practices. Even though language correctness in the creative writing exercises was not the focus, students' English proficiency would improve through the writing practices. To conclude, creative writing practices could be used to develop students' ecological awareness.

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