

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING SKILLS THROUGH BLACKOUT POETRY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating students' perception of their improvement after the project of blackout poetry writing. 51 Students in the creative writing class took a part in the project for three months. Open-ended questionnaires were used to investigate their improvement both in reading and writing. Based on the data analyzed thematically, it is found that most of the students got the improvement in both skills. (1) By reading text continuously, they get the appropriate right words for writing blackout poetry, (2) for reading specifically, the student's scanning technique becomes easier to practice, and (3) better reading comprehension leads them to make better poetry.

Keywords: Writing, Reading, Blackout Poetry, Creative Writing

INTRODUCTION

As one of the important skills that should be mastered in English as a Foreign Language Classroom, reading becomes essentially thought. Furthermore, in higher-level education, especially in the English department, reading skill is taught exclusively. One of the objectives of reading courses is to accustom students

to reading habits. It is such an essential activity in establishing many benefits for students such as comprehension, vocabulary mastery, etc. (Iftani, 2012) Moreover, providing students with continual reading activity has a great impact on their motivation. In return, it is a sign of one important aspect of being a good reader. (Amin, 2019)

As important as reading, writing is taught exclusively in EFL classrooms. It is often seen as the last skill that is needed to be mastered by EFL students. Writing skill is beneficial in so many aspects, such as students' future career (Tuan, 2010), and students' communication skill (Putri and Aminatun, 2021). However, having competent writing skills is not easy. Students often struggle with some barriers such as a lack of vocabulary, coherency, content, and idea. Those problems lead to demotivating students to write. Therefore, one crucial thing before creating a competent writer is creating a motivating writer.

In relation to that problem, creative writing is often seen as an activity promoting students' creativity and motivation. (Sulastri, 2018) In addition, one of the activities of creative writing is poetry writing. According to Widodo, et al (2016), poetry is a self-expressive activity in a creative writing way. Furthermore, it is found that writing poetry is a beneficial way to motivate students to write. (Sulastri and Pujasari, 2019)

Based on the previous explanations, it can be seen that motivating students to read and write is essential. In the class of children's literature, students are required to explore their reading about the subject and write various kinds of children's literature such as poetry, short story, fable, and drama script. In facilitating the students to achieve the objectives of the study, they are required to read a children's story and write blackout poetry from the story they made once a week. In a nutshell, the activity mentioned is aimed at providing students with both reading and writing. First, the reading activity provides them to explore every genre of children's literature while writing blackout poetry motivating them to write.

Writing blackout poetry is illustrated as a wood carving where the excess wood is removed to reveal the object hidden inside. (Ladenheim: 2014 p. 46) This analogy can be interpreted that the text that has been read can be made into poetry by selecting the words and blacking the rest out. Shortly, in order to write poetry, the students need to read the text in advance. Therefore, writing poetry is the integration of reading and writing activities.

From the figures above, it can be stipulated there is an integration between reading and writing skills using this activity. The students wrote the poetry based on the text that they have read. Therefore, after they read, they create poetry called blackout poetry.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive case study since it captured the phenomenon in a particular context. (Yin, 2003) In addition, this study aims at drawing a picture of the improvement of both skills occurring during this activity. There are 51 students who joined the children's literature class and participated in this project. The process of blackout poetry writing started in February 2022 to April 2022. At the end of the activity, students were given an open-ended questionnaire asking about their perception of the improvement of both writing and reading. The analysis was done using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) consisting of the steps; (1) familiarizing the data by transcribing, reading, and rereading the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (6) defining and naming the themes, (7) producing the report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data thematically, there are four themes emerged in this research, generally related to vocabulary mastery, reading technique (scanning), and reading comprehension. It would be explained as follows.

1. The Improvement of Vocabulary Mastery

Writing blackout poetry requires the students to read. Because it is a requirement of the course, the students at least read a story a week. There is a need for comprehension of the text by knowing the vocabulary. In addition, in creating the poetries, it is found that they need to read, reread, and reread to create meaningful poetry. It is shown in the excerpt below:

#Excerpt 1

“We need to read and reread to understand the text” the appropriate words”
(Participant 12)

“We are required to read first, then choose the appropriate words to create a
blackout poetry” (Participant 30)

“I need to read more paragraphs, even two to three times so that we can find
the appropriate words for the poetry” (Participant 2)

Those statements proved that students got reading exposure before writing their blackout poetry. The need to make poetry with appropriate words makes the familiar to vocabulary available with the text. Unconsciously, it will be put on their long or short-term memory. It is in line with Aisyah (2017) finds that EFL students are highly recommended to be familiar with kinds of vocabulary learning strategies, both initially finding the meaning or storing it in long-term memory. In addition, Bahri (2018) clearly states that reading strategies help students to understand the text but vocabulary was more contributive in helping the students to comprehend the texts. (p. 77) Therefore, the process of continual reading as one of the strategies to write blackout poetry is believed to be the appropriate way to have vocabulary mastery and become a better reader.

2. Practicing Scanning Technique More

At the beginning of the project, students were introduced to reading strategies, specifically skimming and scanning. Introducing those strategies aims at helping the students to read effectively so that they can write good poetry. As a result of the data, it is found that most students practiced scanning to search for quick information. Besides, it also helps them to find the potential words of the poetry. It is shown in the excerpt below:

#Excerpt 2

While writing blackout poetry, we also practice reading skills because we need to read the text to find out the suitable words for the poetry. (Participant 23)

Writing blackout poetry made us (the students) apply scanning technique in reading the text to find the needed word for the poetry. (Participant 40)

In my opinion, blackout poetry writing made us practice reading skills, such as scanning to find appropriate words. Scanning technique becomes easier to do. (Participant 33)

From the previous data, it can be seen that students practice reading more by applying scanning techniques. It leads them to have better comprehension as Diaz and Laguado (2013) state that the use of skimming and scanning techniques can enhance reading comprehension and improve students' reading skills. In addition, Aritonang (2018) also affirms that Skimming and Scanning is the appropriate technique to find the main idea, keyword, and content of the text without reading the whole text. This indicates that scanning especially can help the students to find the keyword or specific words that they use for writing blackout poetry.

3. The Better Reading Comprehension, the Better Poetry the Students Have

One of the aims of the reading log is to accustom the students to children's literature. The data shows that the students need to comprehend the text to write poetry.

#Excerpt 3

Before we make blackout poetry, we need to read the text first. And it needs a lot of comprehension of the text to get good poetry. (Participant 21)

When I want to make good poetry, I have to understand the text. (Participant 35)

I think the skills to write poetry make as unconsciously read the blackout words to fully understand the text (Participant 45)

Based on the data, it is proved that the students need to understand the text before they write poetry. The aims of comprehension are to get meaningful poetry with appropriate words.

CONCLUSION

Writing blackout poetry is an activity that needs to involve reading and writing. By using the text that was read, the students can create another form of writing (poetry). Integrating reading and writing skills in this activity promotes students' vocabulary mastery, practice scanning technique, and promotes reading comprehension.

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