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The Potential of Student-Authored Short Stories as Literary Readings in Schools: A Study on Creativity Levels

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Abstract: *This study aims to explore the potential of short stories by students as literary reading in schools using the perspective of creativity level. This research uses an exploratory qualitative approach. The data of this study are verbal units that show the power of creativity in short stories. The verbal unit is in the form of in-text excerpts that represent creative elements in aspects of the originality of ideas, character development, innovation in plot, language exploration, and depth of theme. The creative element is an indicator of the level of creativity. The source of data for this research is 30 short stories by students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program (PBSI) at FKIP UMS. Data collection is carried out through document analysis. Data analysis was carried out using Spiral Creswell. The results of this study show that students' short stories have considerable potential to be developed as literary reading in schools. Despite several weaknesses in the aspect of creativity, these works still show promising creativity. To improve the quality, students need to practice more in creating stories with more original ideas, building stronger plots, developing more complex characters, exploring themes more deeply, and enriching the use of language to make it more aesthetic and communicative. Thus, student short stories can serve not only as a medium of creative expression but also as a source of inspiring literary learning for students at school.*

Keywords: *Character development; literary reading; level of creativity; short stories; thematic exploration*

Abstrak: Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi potensi cerita pendek karya mahasiswa sebagai bacaan sastra di sekolah dengan menggunakan perspektif tingkat kreativitas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif eksploratif. Data dalam penelitian ini berupa satuan verbal yang menunjukkan kekuatan kreativitas dalam cerita pendek. Satuan verbal tersebut berbentuk kutipan dalam teks yang merepresentasikan unsur kreatif dalam aspek orisinalitas ide, pengembangan karakter, inovasi alur, eksplorasi bahasa, dan kedalaman tema. Unsur kreatif ini menjadi indikator tingkat kreativitas. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini adalah 30 cerita pendek karya mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia (PBSI) FKIP UMS. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui analisis

361



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dokumen. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan Spiral Creswell. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa cerita pendek karya mahasiswa memiliki potensi yang cukup besar untuk dikembangkan sebagai bacaan sastra di sekolah. Meskipun masih terdapat kelemahan dalam aspek kreativitas, karya-karya tersebut tetap menunjukkan kreativitas yang menjanjikan. Untuk meningkatkan kualitas, mahasiswa perlu lebih banyak berlatih dalam menciptakan cerita dengan ide yang lebih orisinal, membangun alur yang lebih kuat, mengembangkan karakter yang lebih kompleks, mengeksplorasi tema secara lebih mendalam, serta memperkaya penggunaan bahasa agar lebih estetik dan komunikatif. Dengan demikian, cerita pendek mahasiswa tidak hanya dapat menjadi media ekspresi kreatif, tetapi juga dapat menjadi bagian dari pembelajaran sastra yang inspiratif bagi siswa di sekolah.

Kata kunci: *Cerita pendek; eksplorasi tema; pembacaan sastra; pengembangan karakter; tingkat kreativitas*

Introduction

Literature has a fundamental role in the world of education, especially in character building, literacy development, and increasing students' critical thinking. As part of the curriculum, literary reading in schools not only serves as a source of entertainment, but also as a means of social reflection and the formation of moral values (Sufanti et al., 2021). Therefore, the selection of literary texts for learning should take into account various aspects, including their relevance to the modern era, their connection to students' daily experiences, and their potential to foster creative thinking (Kenett, 2024). The phenomenon that occurs in schools today shows that the literary reading available in the curriculum is still dominated by classic works or selected short stories that have been packaged in textbooks (Prayitno et al., 2021). Although these works have high literary value, the limitation of reading variations often leads to low interest in students' reading.

On the other hand, the development of the literary writing skills at the university level shows that students have great potential in producing literary works that

are innovative and relevant to current social dynamics (Sanubari et al., 2023). Short stories written by students often reflect experiences, worldviews, and contemporary issues relevant to the lives of the younger generation. Thus, the short story can be an interesting alternative reading for school students. Unfortunately, the use of student-written short stories as literary texts in schools has yet to receive adequate attention. One of the contributing factors is the lack of systematic studies on the quality and creativity of students' short stories, so there are no clear parameters to assess the feasibility of these works as literary teaching materials in schools (Sariana & Talib, 2022).

In this context, it is important to conduct a more in-depth study of the creative power of students' short stories in order to determine the potential of the work as a literary reading in schools (Ali Mansoor et al., 2023). The power of creativity in literature includes various aspects, such as the originality of ideas, the depth of theme exploration, the diversity of language styles, and the strength in building characters and storylines (Windari & Hayati, 2024). Therefore, the ranking of

creative power is a relevant approach to identify students' short stories that not only have high aesthetic value, but also correspond to the needs of literary learning in schools (Bleecker, 2022). This level of creativity is expected to help students produce high-quality short stories and contribute to fostering greater reading interest and literary appreciation.

Furthermore, viewed from a curriculum perspective, the integration of short stories by students in literary learning in schools can provide significant benefits (Kanina & Hind, 2024). Student short stories can serve as a bridge between the academic sphere of higher education and the educational practices in schools, thus creating continuity in the development of literary literacy (Zainal et al., 2022). The diversity of themes and language styles in students' short stories can also provide a richer reading experience for students, so that students are not only fixated on one type of reading. Student short stories have the potential to enhance students' imagination, as they often explore themes closely related to students' social, cultural, and psychological experiences (Rodríguez, 2017). However, there have not been many studies that have specifically examined the level of creativity in students' short stories and its implications for the use of short stories as literary reading in schools.

Most research on literature in schools focuses more on the analysis of literary works that are already established or that have become part of the curriculum textbooks (Astudillo Tapia & Argudo-Serrano, 2024). Meanwhile, exploration of the possibility of using student short stories is still rare. In other words, there is a gap in

research that discusses the relationship between short stories written by students and the need for literary reading in schools (Fatimah Yunus, et al., 2024). Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by presenting a systematic analysis of the creative power in students' short stories and assessing its potential as a literature teaching material in schools.

The novelty of this study lies in the approach of ranking creativity as an objective measurement tool in assessing the feasibility of students' short stories to be used as literary reading in schools. With this ranking system, it is hoped that a clearer picture can be obtained of the characteristics of students' short stories that have high aesthetic and educational value (O'Halloran, 2024). In addition, this research is also expected to open up a wider discussion space regarding the importance of diversifying literary reading in schools to be more in line with the times and the needs of students.

Apart from the academic aspect, this research also has significant practical implications. By ranking the creativity in students' short stories, the results of this research can be used as a recommendation for educators in choosing more varied and contextual literary teaching materials. Teachers can use students' short stories as learning materials that are able to stimulate students' creativity and increase students' understanding of the cultural and social values contained in literary texts (Ahmed et al., 2024). Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of literary studies, but also provides concrete solutions for the world of education in improving the quality of literary learning in schools.

Furthermore, this research can also provide benefits for students as prospective writers and educators. Through a creative power ranking study, students can gain a broader insight into the quality of student work and aspects that need to be improved so that short stories written by students can have more value in the educational context. In other words, this research can be a means for students to develop students' writing skills while understanding how literary works can be used as an effective learning medium.

In its development, the literary world continues to change along with social and cultural dynamics. Therefore, it is important for the world of education to continue to adapt to these changes by presenting readings that are more contextual and relevant to students' lives. Short stories by students, which generally reflect the social realities and life experiences of the younger generation, have great potential to be used as alternative reading in schools (Hastuti et al., 2023). However, its use as teaching materials requires a more systematic study so that works that really have superior quality can be selected. Therefore, this research is expected to be the first step in exploring the potential of students' short stories as part of literary learning in schools.

This study aims to examine the potential of short stories by students as literary reading in schools through a creative power ranking approach. This study is expected not only to contribute to the development of more diverse and contextual literary teaching materials, but also to open opportunities for students as

prospective writers to see the extent to which students' works can be adapted in the education contexts. Thus, this research is expected to provide significant contribution in an effort to improve the quality of literary learning in schools and encourage the development of literary works that are more innovative and relevant to the needs of the current young generation.

Research Methods

This study uses an exploratory qualitative approach that aims to explore and identify the creative power in students' short stories and their potential as literary reading in schools. This approach was chosen because the phenomenon of creativity in student works has not been widely mapped in the context of its use in schools, so this research can produce new categories and patterns that are more specific. The strategy used is document analysis, which is to study and analyze the content of short stories based on predetermined indicators. This analysis focuses on the element of creativity in short stories and the suitability of stories as literary reading in schools.

The data in this study consist of verbal units that reflect the power of creativity in short stories. These verbal units take the form of in-text excerpts that represent creative elements, including originality of ideas, character development, plot innovation, language exploration, and thematic depth. The data source comprises 30 short stories written by students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program (PBSI) at FKIP UMS.

Data were collected using document analysis with the following steps: (1) reading all short stories thoroughly to identify verbal units that demonstrate creativity; (2) marking and grouping verbal units according to indicators of creative power, such as originality of ideas, plot innovation, character development, language exploration, and thematic depth; (3) determining the relevance of each verbal unit to the potential of the story as literary reading material in schools, based on established criteria; and (4) recording, organizing, and coding the verbal units for further analysis.

The data were analyzed using Creswell's Spiral method, an iterative, gradual, and in-depth analytical technique. The steps of data analysis include: (1) organizing the data by collecting all identified verbal units from the 30 short stories and categorizing them based on the predetermined creativity indicators; (2) reading and exploring the data in depth to understand emerging creativity patterns and examining the relationships among verbal units within and across stories; (3) identifying and grouping the data, classifying the verbal units into creativity rating categories; (4) Analyzing data patterns and relationships, identifying recurring patterns of creativity and linking them to the stories' potential as literary reading in schools; (5) compiling interpretation and ranking, categorizing the verbal units based on the level of creative power (high, moderate, low); and (6) drawing conclusions by connecting the analysis results to literary theory and their implications for literary learning in schools.

Table 1 Aspects and Indicators of Creativity
(Adapted from Torrance (1966); Runco (2007); and further developed by the researcher)

Aspects	Indicator
Originality	The uniqueness of ideas, innovations in the story, and the way of presentation.
Flow Strength	Consistency, creativity in the development of conflicts, and surprises in the story.
Depth of Character	The psychological complexity and character integrity in the story.
Theme Exploration	Diversity, depth, and courage in raising the theme.
The Beauty of Language	The power of expression, the use of diction, and the style of language.

The aspects used to see the creative power in short stories by students are originality, strength of plot, depth of character, exploration of themes, and the beauty of language. Each aspect has an indicator of achievement. Aspects and each indicator are used in stage 3 data analysis, which is to identify and group data.

Results and Discussion

Originality in Student Short Stories

Originality is an important element in literary works that indicates the extent to which a story is unique in ideas, points of view, or narrative development. An original literary work does more than present new content; it also offers readers a fresh and enriching aesthetic experience (Koşar, 2023). In the context of a short story, originality can be manifested through unique characters, unexpected plots, or themes that are rarely explored.

The students' works in this study show varying levels of originality, with some stories standing out for their boldness in the exploration of ideas, while others are still tied to conventional story patterns.

One example of a story that shows high originality is a short story titled "Footprints on Water". The following is an excerpt that represents the element of originality in the story:

No one believed that footprints could be seen above the surface of the water. However, in that small village, every morning as the dew evaporates, the shadows of those steps appear on the lake, leading people to a truth that has been hidden.

In this excerpt, the author develops a unique concept that is rarely found in conventional stories. The image of "footprints on water" is not only metaphorical, but also creates an element of mystery that arouses the reader's curiosity. The uniqueness of this idea reflects the creativity of students in creating a fresh and different fictional world. On the other hand, there are some stories that still follow a very common pattern, such as the short story titled "Rain at the End of the Sunset". The following quotes show a more conventional narrative tendency:

He sat under the shade of the acacia trees, looking at the rain that fell slowly. His memories drifted to the painful past, to someone he could no longer reach.

The depiction of the atmosphere in this quote is quite good, the theme of loss and rain as a symbol of sadness has often been used in Indonesian literature. This shows that although this story has good

emotional quality, it is still less innovative in originality than other stories.

The phenomenon of a lack of originality in some stories can be attributed to the theory of intertextuality, stating that each literary text is essentially the result of dialogue with other texts (Kawashima et al., 2024). Students tend to be influenced by their previous readings, which causes some stories to have a similar pattern to previous works (Noor et al., 2023). However, creative intertextuality can lead to innovation, as shown in the story "Footprints Over Water". In addition, creativity theory is also relevant in analyzing the level of originality in students' short stories. This theory divides creativity into several aspects, one of which is divergent thinking, which is the ability to come up with unusual ideas or explore new perspectives. In this context, stories like "Trail on Water" show strong divergent thinking, while "Rain at the End of Twilight" is more convergent because it follows a commonly used narrative pattern.

The results of this analysis show that students who dare to explore new ideas and take risks in writing have a greater chance of producing original works. Therefore, in learning literature, it is important to encourage students to not only understand writing techniques, but also develop students' imagination through creative thinking exercises.

The use of freewriting techniques, exploration of unconventional viewpoints, and writing exercises from unique premises can help increase originality in students' work (Çiftçi & Karaman, 2019). In addition, lecturers can integrate the creative constraints approach, which is to provide

limits that actually encourage students to think more creatively. For example, asking students to write a story with a non-human main character, or developing a plot with an unpredictable ending.

The Power of Plot in Student Short Stories

The plot is the narrative structure that shapes how a story unfolds from beginning to end. A strong plot typically consists of five main stages: exposition, conflict trigger, climax, falling action, and resolution (Prinsloo, 2018). The strength of the plot depends not only on the regularity of these stages, but also on how the story builds suspense, keeps the reader's interest, and presents logical yet memorable surprises.

In short stories, a strong plot is often characterized by efficiency in presenting information and skills in building meaningful conflicts and resolutions. In this study, the strength of the plot in students' short stories was analyzed based on the logic of structure, the sustainability of the conflict, and the attractiveness in the resolution of the story.

One of the stories that shows the power of a good plot is a short story titled "Footprints on Water". Here's an excerpt that reflects how this storyline is well constructed:

That morning, the dew had not completely disappeared when Raka saw footprints on the water. The trail is circular, turning towards the edge of the lake, disappearing among the bushes. No one dared to approach, except Raka. He followed in that footsteps, even though his heart was shaking.

This section shows the strong exposition and trigger of conflict. From the beginning, readers have been invited to enter into mysteries that invite curiosity. The main character's decision to follow in the footsteps creates a plot boost that leads to the climax. In the climax, the tension increases:

Behind the bushes, he found an old house. Inside, an old man sat pensively in front of a cracked mirror. 'That trail has always brought me here,' he said in a hoarse voice. Raka sees her reflection in the mirror—but there is something different. It wasn't him.

The climax in this story is strong because it presents surprises that remain within the logical limits of the story. The events arranged in sequence form an ever-increasing tension, so that the reader remains bound until the end of the story. On the other hand, there are some stories whose plot is less well structured. For example, in the short story "Rain at the End of Dusk", the movement of the plot feels too flat and lacks a strong escalation of the conflict.

Rania sat on the veranda of her house, staring at the heavy rain. He recalled all the memories with Seno. There was nothing else he could do, but to lament his wretched fate.

This section shows the tendency of narratives to be too static. There is no significant development of conflict, so the story feels monotonous and less arousing the reader's curiosity. The phenomenon of differences in plot strength in student stories can be attributed to narrative theory that discusses balance and disturbance in the storyline. Stories with a strong plot

usually follow a pattern: (1) A stable initial state, (2) A disturbance that changes the balance, (3) An attempt to overcome the disturbance, (4) A resolution that brings a new balance.

The short story “Trail on Water” follows this pattern well, while “Rain at the End of the Twilight” does not present significant distractions so the plot is less dynamic. In addition, tension theory is also relevant in analyzing the strength of grooves. In this theory, an effective story has a clear climax, which is the climax of the conflict before it is finally resolved. If a story doesn't have a clear escalation, readers tend to lose interest because there isn't a strong enough emotional drive.

The results of this analysis show that the strength of the plot is one of the main challenges for students in writing short stories. Some stories have strong and evocative plot constructions, while others are flat and less interesting (Ramachers & Willems, 2024). To improve skills in building plots, students can be trained with the following techniques: (1) Practice designing plot maps, (2) Exploration of plot twist techniques, (3) Analyzing stories with strong plots, (4) Rewriting stories with plot variations.

Depth of Character in Student Short Stories

Deep characters in a story not only have a clear background, but also show realistic psychological development and complexity in the way they think, speak, and act (Rahmawati, 2020). A good character has three main dimensions: (1) physiological dimension, which includes physical aspects such as age, gender, and

appearance; (2) psychological dimension, which encompasses the motivations, ways of thinking, and inner conflicts experienced by the character; and (3) sociological dimension, which involves the social, cultural, and relationship backgrounds between characters.

In quality short stories, the characters must have depth so that the reader can understand and connect emotionally with them (Rumyantseva, 2024). Some student short stories show a strong depth of character. One example is a short story entitled “Twilight Painting in Window Glass”. In the early part of the story, the main character is immediately introduced to a deep inner atmosphere:

Behind the window, Bayu was still staring at the fading twilight. Each orange light that slowly disappeared as if reminding him of the pieces of memories he had stored for a long time. 'When will I be able to paint a twilight like this on the canvas of my life?' he thought.

This quote shows that Bayu's character has psychological complexity. He is not only described as a figure who sees the twilight, but also has a deep inner reflection on his life. It shows a good depth of character, where the reader can understand the feelings and emotional upheavals of the characters. Bayu's character development is increasingly seen in the following sections:

Bayu stared at the brush in his hand. Since his mother left, he has never finished a single painting. 'Will painting help me remember or forget it?' she asked herself.

This section shows the inner conflicts of the characters, which are characteristic of deep characters. The reader not only understands the actions of the characters, but also the emotions and psychological dilemmas they face. For comparison, there are also student short stories that are less in-depth in character depiction. For example, in the story “A Letter at the Study Table”, the main character is less psychologically explored:

Sinta sat at her study desk, reading the letter with mixed feelings. He didn't know what to do.

In this section, the character's emotions are only explicitly mentioned as “mixed feelings”, but are not further described in the form of reactions or actions. As a result, the characters may appear shallow and less memorable to the reader. The phenomenon of differences in character depth in student stories can be attributed to the theory of structuralism, showing that characters in stories can be categorized into characters that are static (not experiencing psychological changes) and dynamic (undergoing development or transformation) (Podosynnikova & Priadka, 2024).

In the short story “The Painting of Twilight in the Window Glass”, Bayu is a dynamic character as he experiences inner conflicts and psychological changes throughout the story. On the other hand, in the short story “A Letter at the Learning Table”, Sinta's character is more static because there is no clear development in the way of thinking or acting. Another theory that is relevant in character depth analysis is personality theory that divides characters

into various archetypes such as heroes, seekers, caregivers, and wise men. More complex characters often have a combination of some of these archetypes, which makes them more interesting and realistic for the reader. For example, the character of Bayu in “Painting of Twilight in the Window Glass” can be categorized as a seeker (because he is looking for meaning in his life) as well as having a melancholy aspect of an artist. This provides a richer characterization than the character of Sinta who lacks psychological clarity.

The results of this analysis show that some students already have the ability to build deep character, but some still have difficulty in exploring the psychological and social dimensions of the characters. To improve skills in creating more complex characters, students can be trained with the following methods: (1) practicing the writing of inner monologues, (2) exploring character motivations, (3) analyzing characters from well-known literary works, and (4) rewriting stories from alternative perspectives.

Exploration of Themes in Student Short Stories

A theme is the main idea or message that the writer wants to convey in a story. Themes in literary works can be categorized into several types, such as love, social, cultural, religious, existential, and philosophical themes (Nguyen et al., 2024). In a quality short story, the exploration of themes must be done in depth and not only serving as the setting of the story, but also integrated with the plot, characters, and conflicts. A strong theme typically possesses several key characteristics: (1)

relevance to real life, reflecting experiences or dilemmas that are universally human; (2) depth of exploration, where the theme is not stated directly but is developed through the storyline, character actions, and symbolic elements; and (3) originality, presenting the theme from a fresh perspective or through a unique mode of expression.

Based on student short stories investigated here, the themes raised are quite diverse. Some stories manage to explore themes in depth, while others are still superficial. One of the interesting stories in terms of theme exploration is the short story “Traces in the Dry Land”. This story raises a social theme about economic inequality and the difficulties of living in rural areas that are experiencing drought.

In the village, the ground cracked like a mother's chapped lips due to dehydration. It hasn't rained for two years. Grandfather said that in the past, rice fields could be harvested twice a year. Now, let alone harvesting, this land cannot even be planted with corn.

This quote shows the exploration of social themes in a poetic and profound way. The image of cracked soil and cracked lips is a symbol of the suffering of the people in the village. The theme of social inequality is reinforced by the following scenes:

Meanwhile, in the city, people enjoy sweet iced tea under the umbrella of a café. Mother could only stare at them from across the street, her rough hands grasping the bottle of mineral water that was only half full.

From this excerpt, it can be seen that the story not only depicts social conditions descriptively, but also shows inequality in a

contrasting way between village and urban life. For comparison, there are short stories that raise social themes but lack depth in their exploration, such as in the story “Hope at the End of the Lore”:

Budi wanted to help his poor family, but he didn't know how. Every day he thinks about how to make money.

In this excerpt, the theme of poverty is indeed mentioned, but the exploration is still superficial because it only states the problem without describing the characters' feelings or more complex social dynamics. The theme of love and loss is also one of the dominant ones in the students' stories. In the short story “A Piece of Twilight for Rina”, the exploration of the theme is carried out in a symbolic and emotional way:

The sky was orange, like Rina's eyes when she cried last time. I can't forget it, even though time goes on. Between the drops of rain, I could still feel his hand getting weaker.

This section shows the exploration of the theme of loss in a poetic way. The color of twilight is used as a metaphor to remember someone who has left. This shows how the theme of loss is not only told explicitly, but also presented through the symbols and atmosphere of the story (Lin, 2024). In comparison, there are also stories that raise the theme of love but the exploration is still superficial, as in the short story “Love in the City Park”:

Diana met Reza at the park. They exchanged smiles. Diana's heart was pounding. Maybe this is what love is.

In this quote, the theme of love is only conveyed explicitly without deep exploration. There is no conflict,

symbolism, or emotion explored further, so the story feels less memorable. Some students also try to explore existential themes, such as in the short story “Shadows in the Mirror”, which tells the struggle of a character with his identity and identity.

I stared at my reflection in the mirror. Who am I really? Am I just a reflection of the expectations of those around me.

This existential theme is well-explored, because it shows the internal conflicts of the characters that are philosophical in nature. In the following excerpt, the exploration of the theme becomes stronger: “Every time I try to be myself, a voice in my head says: ‘That is not you. You have to be what they want you to be.’ Then, who am I, really?”

This section shows how existential themes are not only mentioned, but also manifested in the psychological conflicts experienced by the characters. In comparison, there are also stories that raise the theme of the search for identity but are still shallow in exploration, such as in the short story “Journey in Search of Meaning”: “I want to know who I really am. I started asking people around me.”

This quote suggests that the theme of the search for identity is mentioned, but without deep conflict or strong reflection of the main character. The phenomenon of different exploration of themes in student stories can be attributed to the literary theory of structuralism (Dzhalilova, 2024). In this approach, the themes in a story do not stand alone, but are closely related to other story structures such as plots, characters, and symbols. In stories with in-depth exploration of themes, themes are not

only explicitly mentioned but also intertwined with other narrative elements. For example, in “Traces in the Arid Land”, the social theme of economic inequality is reinforced by contrasting background descriptions between villages and cities. Whereas in stories where the theme exploration is less deep, the theme is only mentioned without being supported by conflict, symbolism, or strong atmospheric depictions.

The results of this analysis show that the exploration of themes in student stories is still varied. To enhance the exploration of themes in short stories, students can apply the following strategies: (1) use symbols and metaphors – to deepen the theme, students can incorporate symbols or metaphors related to the central idea; (2) connect themes to character conflicts – a strong theme should be reflected in the conflicts experienced by the main character; (3) show, don’t tell – rather than stating the theme explicitly, students can convey it through actions and events in the story; and (4) read quality short stories – students can analyze how professional writers explore themes in their works.

The Beauty of Language in Student Short Stories

The beauty of language in short stories is an important element that determines the attractiveness and power of expression of literary works. From a stylistic perspective, the beauty of language can be realized through several aspects, including: (1) evocative diction choices (having emotional evocative); (2) creative use of language style; (3) varied and

harmonious sentence structure; and (4) rhythm and musicality in wording.

The beauty of language in literature plays a role in creating atmosphere, strengthening meaning, and improving the aesthetic values of the text. Thus, a good short story not only conveys content, but also captivates the reader through the use of distinctive and artistic language (Liu, 2024). In the students' short stories, variations were found in the use of language. Some stories show a beautiful and expressive exploration of language, while others are still mundane or overly descriptive without paying attention to the aesthetics of language (Rakhmasari, 2024).

One example of the evocative use of diction is found in the short story “*Senja yang Berbisik*” (The Whispering Twilight) which describes the atmosphere of loss with strong and emotional diction:

The twilight glowed on the horizon, as if painting an invisible trail of wounds. The cold air pierced my bones, but it wasn't the air that made me shiver—it was the void it left behind.

In this quote, the use of the words “fluorescent”, “draws a trail of wounds”, and “the void it leaves behind” reinforces the effect of loss in a more poetic way, not only expressing the characters' feelings, but also depicting them with powerful metaphor. On the other hand, in the short story “Rain in the Morning”, the use of diction tends to be flat and less evocative:

I woke up early in the morning and saw the rain falling. I felt sad because the rain reminded me of someone who had left.

This quote expresses the character's feelings explicitly without arousing the reader's imagination. The absence of emotionally strong diction makes the intended sadness less impactful. Language style or *majas* plays a very important role in beautifying literary texts. One of the short stories rich in the use of *majas* is “*Luka di Ujung Senyuman*”, which uses personification and hyperbole to describe the character's mood:

The wind whispered in my ear, telling me a story I was reluctant to hear. The moonlight was dim, as if I was saddened by my loneliness.”

The personification in this quote: “the wind whispers”, “the moonlight is dim”, gives the impression that nature also feels the emotions of the characters, thus creating a more lively and poetic atmosphere. On the other hand, there are stories that are less exploratory in the use of *majas*. In the short story “Memories in the Yard”, the description feels all too ordinary:

I sat in the yard and thought about the past. It feels sad because I remember everything that has happened in this place

This sentence does not have stylistic elements that embellish the narrative. As a result, emotional experiences that are supposed to be strong become less memorable for the reader. Stories that have the beauty of language often use variations in sentence structure that create a rhythm that is easy to read (Eragamreddy, 2024). In the short story “A Pair of Eyes Behind a Window”, there are examples of varied sentence structures:

“It was quiet that morning. The birds were still reluctant to chirp, as if waiting for something. I stared out the window, hoping to see the face I missed. However, only an empty shadow came back to look at me.”

The varied sentence structure, including the use of short sentences at the beginning (“Morning is quiet.”) and longer sentences afterwards, create a well-flowing rhythm. In contrast, in the story “Days With You”, the sentences tend to be monotonous and less dynamic:

“Today I feel sad. I walked in the park. I saw beautiful flowers. I sat on a bench and thought about you.”

The sentences in this quote are too repetitive and lack dynamics, so they don't create a deep impression on the reader. Rhythm in prose is often formed through patterns of repetition, alliteration, or assonance that create the beauty of sound. In the short story “Whispering Waves”, elements of language musicality are seen in the harmonious repetition of sounds:

The waves rushed over, whispering a secret that was never revealed. I heard the singing of the sea, as if repeating a story that had passed.

The combination of repetition (e.g., “whispering secrets”, “repeating stories”) and alliteration (e.g., “shear waves chasing”) creates a musical effect that enhances the overall reading experience. On the other hand, there are stories that do not have a strong element of musicality, as in the short story “Night in the City”:

I walked in the city. The lights are on. Lots of people on the street. I saw the shops open.

The sentence structure that is too straightforward without sound play makes the narrative feel flat and less aesthetic. The beauty of language in students' stories can be analyzed using stylistic theory. Stylistics focuses on how language elements are used to create meaning and aesthetics in literary texts (Budiawan, et al., 2024). In stories with high language beauty, the following characteristics are found: (1) evocative diction strengthens the atmosphere of the story and the emotions of the characters; (2) the use of language styles (*majas*) enriches the narrative and creates a poetic effect; (3) the varied sentence structure creates a more interesting rhythm; (4) the element of musicality in prose embellishes the reading and enhances the reader's imaginative power.

On the other hand, in stories that do not pay attention to the beauty of language, the following tendencies are found: (1) diction that is too straightforward and descriptive without aesthetic elements; (2) minimal use of *majas* or the use of cliché *majas*; (3) monotonous sentence structure without rhythmic variation.

This stylistic approach shows that the beauty of language is not just a matter of word choice, but also how the words are arranged to create a strong aesthetic effect. To enhance the beauty of language in short stories, students can apply the following techniques: (1) enriching vocabulary by reading quality literary works; (2) using the “show, don't tell” technique to create more imaginative descriptions; (3) exploring the use of language styles such as metaphors, personification, and symbolism; (4) practicing variations in sentence structure to make the narrative more dynamic. (5)

reading the story aloud to hear the rhythm and musicality of the language.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the students' short stories, it can be concluded that the creativity in their stories shows variations across five main indicators: originality, strength of plot, depth of character, exploration of themes, and beauty of language. In general, there is great potential in these works as literary reading in schools, despite the need for further improvement on some aspects to optimize their creative quality.

From the aspect of originality, most of the short stories have demonstrated an effort to present fresh ideas, particularly in the creation of settings, characters, and conflicts that differ from conventional narratives. Some works offer unique perspectives or unexpected twists, providing an engaging reading experience. Nevertheless, a number of stories still adhere to common patterns in popular literature, with predictable conflicts or familiar character types. This indicates that students should be further encouraged to explore new ideas and move beyond merely adapting existing story structures.

Regarding plot strength, the stories vary considerably. Some display well-structured narratives with logical conflict development, compelling tension, and satisfying resolutions. However, others fall into overly simple storytelling, with underdeveloped conflicts and forced or unsatisfying endings. In some cases, students struggle to maintain the coherence of events, resulting in fragmented

narratives that are difficult for readers to follow.

In terms of character depth, a portion of the stories showcases psychologically complex characters with realistic emotional development, making them relatable to readers. Still, many others feature flat characters with minimal development or psychological nuance. These characters often function solely as devices to move the plot, without being brought to life through detailed characterization. This highlights a need for students to enhance their skills in developing multidimensional characters.

Concerning theme exploration, students have attempted to address a variety of themes, including social issues, cultural matters, and psychological reflection. Some succeed in presenting these themes through original and insightful perspectives. However, others convey their messages too explicitly, leaving little room for reader interpretation, or rely on frequently used themes without offering fresh viewpoints. To overcome this, students should engage more deeply with a range of literary texts to enrich their thematic expression and avoid overly didactic storytelling.

The beauty of language also varies among the stories. Some students effectively use poetic diction, stylistic devices, and rich descriptions to create a vivid literary atmosphere. Others, however, rely on straightforward language that lacks aesthetic appeal. Some narratives also exhibit limited sentence variety, minimal use of figurative language, or overly long and convoluted sentences, all of which detract from the effectiveness of the narrative. Continued practice in crafting

language that is both aesthetic and expressive is needed to enhance the literary quality of student work.

Overall, students' short stories possess considerable potential to be developed as literary materials in school settings. Although the creative elements in some stories still require improvement, the overall body of work reflects a promising level of creativity. To further enhance the quality of these stories, students should be encouraged to practice more intensively in generating original ideas, strengthening plot development, crafting complex characters, exploring themes with depth, and refining their use of expressive and aesthetic language. In this way, student-written short stories can serve not only as a medium for creative self-expression but also as meaningful and inspiring literary texts for educational use.

However, this study is not without limitations. First, the analysis is based solely on verbal units found in written short stories, without considering the socio-cultural background of the authors or the contexts in which the stories were produced. Second, the assessment of creativity is based on qualitative interpretation and might be influenced by the researcher's subjectivity, despite efforts to apply systematic criteria. Third, the study focuses on a specific group of students from a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

For future research, it is recommended to include triangulation with peer or expert assessments to validate the creativity indicators more robustly. Studies could also examine the reception of these short stories by secondary school students

or teachers to assess their actual impact as literary reading materials. Furthermore, incorporating interviews or reflective journals from student authors could provide deeper insights into their creative processes and intentions.

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