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The Influence of Haiku Composition Tasks on the Development of Academic Writing Skills: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract. The inclusion of literary texts, particularly poetry, is not a common practice in the language classroom. However, the available empirical evidence, albeit relatively scarce, does suggest that poetry, when correctly employed, is likely to be beneficial for second and foreign language learners. This teaching material has been used to teach and develop areas such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, and even motivation as well as the four macro-skills in language, namely

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listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The use of poetry in language instruction emphasizes the predominant role of learners in authentic literary production. As such, this research paper focuses on the qualitative aspect of a mixed-methods study about the effects of haiku composition tasks on the development of academic writing skills. The participants of the study were 30 English as a foreign language (EFL) pre-service teachers. As part of the data collection process, the participating students were asked to write short argumentative essays at the beginning and at the end of a six-week intervention that promoted the composition of haiku. After the intervention, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to identify and describe the participants' perceptions regarding how haiku composition influenced their academic writing skills. The results of the study show that the great majority of the participants agreed that haiku composition furthered the development of their academic writing skills and vocabulary acquisition. The findings of the study corroborate the existing experimental findings as to the value of poetry-based tasks for second and foreign language learning. Thus, we conclude that the inclusion of poetry in the language classroom ought to be promoted through activities that, while being personal and meaningful to the students, allow for the development of language proficiency.

Keywords: academic writing skills; composition; haiku; language learners; poetry

1. Introduction

The inclusion of literature in English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) instruction has been a topic of debate among educators for many years. While some educators argue that literature is not essential to the language-learning process, others believe that it can play an important role in enhancing language skills (Daskalovska & Dimova, 2012; Lazar, 1993) and cultural understanding (Koutsompou, 2015). Literature can provide learners with authentic examples of the language in use (Lazar, 1993) and engage them in critical thinking and analysis (Di Martino & Di Sabato, 2014).

Concerning the use of poetry in the language classroom, there seems to be a somewhat generalized reluctance to include poetry-based activities in ESL/EFL contexts (Khatib, 2011; Panavelil, 2011; Scrivener, 2011). In spite of the recent resurgence of interest in literature in language classrooms (Aladini & Farahbod, 2020; Gómez-Rodríguez, 2018; Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Iida & Chamcharatsri, 2020; Khatib, 2011; Paran, 2008; Spack, 1985), poetry has remained absent from these learning environments, as remarked by Khatib (2011), Panavelil (2011), and Scrivener (2011). It is possible that this exclusion of poetry from EFL and ESL learning activities results from the negative attitudes that both instructors and learners have towards this literary genre (Fithriani, 2021; Panavelil, 2011). Furthermore, the value of poetry-based tasks for language learning has not been thoroughly studied, especially when compared to other aspects of the discipline (Hall, 2005; Hanauer, 2012; Iida, 2017).

Additionally, language productive skills intrinsically have a greater complexity for learners (Fareed et al., 2016; Golkova & Hubackovab, 2014). This fact is particularly relevant when academic activities are taken into account (Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015). Nevertheless, it has been claimed that the emphasis on grammar and linguistic skills may put language learners “*at a disadvantage when they have to utilize English in real-world settings*” (Iida, 2011, p. 1). This situation, along with the previously mentioned dearth of empirical studies on poetry and language teaching, has created a research gap that this study has attempted to address. The present research paper describes the perceptions of 30 EFL pre-service teachers about the use of haiku composition tasks for the development of their academic writing skills. Thus, the following research question guided this investigation: What are the perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers towards the use of haiku as a tool to improve their academic writing skills?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Inclusion of Literary Texts in the Language Classroom

Literature has been used as teaching material to improve English language learning since the 19th century. During this time, the Grammar Translation Method made extensive use of literary forms, as students had to translate literary works into their native languages (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Nkwetisama, 2013). The use of literature in ESL/EFL classrooms has evolved over time. Nkwetisama (2013) explained that from the 15th to 19th centuries, literature was employed in teaching classical rhetoric, with the aim of improving communication skills. The same author asserted that during the latter half of the 1800s, language instruction was primarily concerned with ensuring linguistic precision; thus, literature was not included in the learning and teaching of second and foreign languages. This trend continued and was further emphasized in the subsequent decades, whereby the emphasis shifted towards accomplishing academic and professional goals in second and foreign language teaching (Mackay, 1982). However, as Paran (2008) and Spack (1985) remarked, a renewed interest in the use of poetry in ESL/EFL contexts emerged in the 1980s. Nevertheless, this resurgence has been marked by an outlook that views literature as no more than supporting material (Hall, 2005); therefore, attempts to fully integrate literature in the ESL/EFL curricula have failed (Bloemert et al., 2019).

Despite these assertions, the inclusion of literary texts in ESL/EFL curricula has been a subject of interest to many teachers and researchers, who have provided empirical evidence for the beneficial effect of literature in language learning (Barzani, 2020). In fact, as literary texts are being employed in ESL/EFL contexts, researchers, international organizations, and education ministries have come to a growing understanding of the necessity of blending the teaching of language and literature. This helps EFL students fully develop their capacity to interact with a language and its culture and speakers, while also enhancing their second language macro-skills, vocabulary, and grammar (Paran et al., 2020). Furthermore, as some authors have noted, the recently updated Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) descriptors “*enable educators to measure aspects of literary competence and language competence at the same time, viewing them as inter-twined instead of as discrete entities*” (Paran et al., 2020,

p. 332). This fact debunks the myth that literary texts can only be dealt with by advanced learners; research has demonstrated that language learners of all levels can work with well-chosen literary texts and solve related language tasks (Di Martino & Di Sabato, 2014; Lazar, 1993; Panavelil, 2011).

2.2 The Use of Poetry in the Language Classroom

Aladini and Farahbod (2020) depicted poetry as a highly original and authentic form of literature that can enhance students' language acquisition by providing them with a rich and immersive linguistic experience. In addition, the authors argued that the use of poetry captures the attention of students not just intellectually; it also appeals to their emotions, senses, and imagination. This, according to Proitsaki (2019), can serve as an excellent foundation for creative writing.

Several scholars have explored the potential advantages of incorporating poetry into language instruction, with reported benefits extending across diverse dimensions of language teaching and learning. Lazar (1993) noted that poetry provides authentic language models. According to this author, this provision can potentially benefit all areas of target language development. Research has also found that poetry-based activities positively influence vocabulary acquisition (Kırkgöz, 2008; Nation, 2005; Panavelil, 2011; Scrivener, 2011). As regards the four language macro-skills, the specialized literature evinced that using poetry in the language classroom benefits both receptive (Harmer, 2010; Kong, 2010; Lazar, 1993) and productive (Deepa & Ilankumaran, 2018; Di Martino & Di Sabato, 2014; Hişmanoğlu, 2005) skills. Moreover, the inclusion of poetry in the language classroom also enhances grammar acquisition and learning (Akbar & Yazid, 2020; Khatib, 2011; Lazar, 1993; Panavelil, 2011). These assertions and findings highlight the multifaceted gains of the inclusion of poetry in ESL/EFL contexts. These benefits span across various language skills and aspects of language learning. This includes the development of the four macro-skills through tasks that are likely to provide meaningful practice that attends to the students' individual needs, emotions, and expectations.

Regarding the specific research background of this study, it is crucial to remark that the inclusion of literary texts, particularly poetry, has received relatively little attention (Hall, 2005; Hanauer, 2012; Iida, 2012). One can connect this fact with the abovementioned emphasis on the development of linguistic skills in the language classroom.

Table 1 summarizes the research background of the inclusion of poetry in ESL/EFL environments. Moreover, the subsequent paragraphs provide more details about specific studies of special interest for this research.

Table 1: Research background on the effects of poetry-based activities in language learning

Study	Inquiry	Participants	Instruments	Findings
Kırkgöz (2008)	Benefits of poetry reading and writing	28 Turkish university students	Students' journal entries and informal feedback	Grammar practice. Vocabulary development. Incorporation of personal experiences. Benefits retention.
Hanauer (2010a)	Development of poetic identity in EFL learners	One Japanese EFL university student	Content analysis of ten poems	Poetic texts as data for self-understanding
Hanauer (2010b)	Difficulty of poetry composition for second language learners	Sample of 844 poems written by ESL learners ????	Content analysis of 844 poems	Poetry composition tasks are not too difficult for well-stimulated students
Khatib (2011)	Advantages of reader-centered approaches to poetry use	200 Iranian EFL university students	Control and experimental groups / pre- and post-test	Significant improvement in the performance of the experimental group
Iida (2011)	Influence of haiku on academic writing	20 Japanese EFL university students	Essay-based pre- and post-tests. Content analysis of interview responses, journal entries, and students' compositions.	Positive influence on academic literacy development. Vocabulary enrichment. Most participants considered haiku as valuable. Writing tasks are beneficial for self-expression. Skills can be extrapolated across writing genres.
Iida (2012)	The effect of haiku composition on EFL learning	20 Japanese EFL university students	Analysis of original poems and responses to interviews	Positive attitudes. Improvement of linguistic awareness. Vocabulary acquisition.

Study	Inquiry	Participants	Instruments	Findings
Liao (2012)	The connection between self-reported experiences of writing and the perceived significance of engaging in poetry composition	18 TESOL graduate students in the United States	Responses to interviews and to a rating scale	Favorable disposition towards poetry writing. Opportunities for emotional release and self-discovery and expression. Vocabulary acquisition. Appropriation of the target language.
Chamcharatsri (2013)	Experiences when writing poems to express love	Four Thai ESL students	Writing prompts. Responses to interviews.	Prevail over initial obstacles. Shifting attention from form to meaning.
Pushpa and Savaedi (2014)	Effect of including poetry in the performance and attitudes of students in autonomous EFL courses	60 Iranian EFL university students	Pre- and post-tests administered to a control and an experimental group	Beneficial effect on performance. Enhancement of motivation.
Bjelland (2016)	Experience towards Frost's <i>The Road Not Taken</i>	39 Tenth Grade Norwegian EFL students	Qualitative analysis of responses	Successful interpretation of figurative language and poetic devices. Departure from personal experience.
Iida (2016a)	Content of poetical descriptions of traumatic events in EFL students' lives (2021 earthquake in Japan)	78 Japanese EFL university students	Statistical and thematic analysis of 773 poems	Second language learners' ability to understand and express (illustrate) deep and extreme personal emotions through poetry
Iida (2016b)	Identity expression through poetry writing	One Myanmar EFL learner living in Japan	Content analysis of poems and responses to an interview	Personalization of the learning process. Opportunities for self-discovery.
Iida (2017)	Development of voice through haiku multi-writing tasks	Three Japanese EFL university students	Content analysis of students' compositions	Once students familiarize themselves with the tasks, they are

Study	Inquiry	Participants	Instruments	Findings
				able to carry them out, making the language learning more personal
Gómez-Rodríguez (2018)	Experiences and impact of poetry reading	18 Colombian EFL university students	Content analysis of field notes, students' essays, and the responses to one questionnaire	Initial focus on vocabulary and language structure. Poetry reading as a means to promote communicative competence and critical thinking.
Iida and Chamcharatsri (2020)	Language-learning experiences. Role of emotions in language learning.	21 Japanese EFL university students	Content analysis of 209 poems	14 thematic issues and 21 different emotional responses. Pedagogical value of poetry in ESL/EFL contexts as a means for the development of self-awareness.
Férez-Mora et al. (2020)	EFL teacher trainees' perceptions about the use of poetry-based tasks in the language classroom as compared with the existing theoretical principles	270 Spanish EFL teacher trainees	Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the responses to an 18-item questionnaire	Participants' confirmed the 18 theoretically established benefits of the use of poetry in EFL contexts. Participants perceived poetry tasks as more useful for the development of linguistic skills than motivation and interculturality.
Fithriani (2021)	EFL strategies for poetry writing and their perceptions about this type of task	171 Indonesian EFL university students	Qualitative analysis of field observation, students' poems, and their answers to a survey	Students' strategies: a) use of templates, b) development of vocabulary banks, and c) sharing of personal stories to build the emotions that are later used in the poems. Poetry writing as a feasible

Study	Inquiry	Participants	Instruments	Findings
				beneficial task for language learners.

Note: The information in the table has been compiled by the authors of this paper

Hanauer (2010b) carried out a content analysis of 844 poems composed by ESL students. The results evinced three common features among the poems: shortness, use of simple vocabulary, and strong reliance on imagery. These findings led this author to conclude that, as opposed to common beliefs, poetry composition is not an insurmountable task for committed and motivated language learners, particularly at advanced levels.

Gómez-Rodríguez (2018) studied how a cohort of EFL students in a Colombian university was motivated to read and discuss multiple American poems that they had never seen before, utilizing the reading transactional method. The author concluded that employing poems as content in EFL instruction is likely to promote the development of communicative competence and critical reading skills.

Moreover, Chamcharatsri (2013) explored the experiences of four Thai ESL students regarding poetry composition in both their native language and English. Despite the acknowledged challenges, the participants were able to effectively convey their thoughts and emotions through their original compositions. Chamcharatsri (2013) suggested that writing poetry highlights the importance of self-expression potentialities of the target language by shifting the learners' focus from form to content.

Furthermore, Iida and Chamcharatsri (2020) emphasized that composing poetry can be a valuable pedagogical EFL tool since it fosters creativity, linguistic experimentation, and emotional expression. The results of the study highlight the importance of authentic self-expression over an emphasis on linguistic correctness. This is aligned with the results of Hanauer (2010a) and Iida's (2016b) case studies with Japanese EFL students. The results of these studies demonstrate that poetry is a viable medium for learners' self-expression, which in turn promotes literacy development in the target language.

As regards students' perceptions of poetry-based tasks, Fithriani (2021) carried out a qualitative study with 171 EFL students in an Indonesian university to determine their perceptions regarding poetry writing. The author concluded that contrary to what might have been assumed, the participants of the study demonstrated high interest in writing poetry and in the strategies used in the intervention. Given that poetry writing is an effective technique for connecting with EFL students on a personal level, Fithriani (2021) advised implementing it as a teaching strategy for meaningful literacy (Hanauer, 2012).

Férez-Mora et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study with 270 EFL teacher trainees at a university in Spain. Their aim was to analyze the future teachers' opinions about the potential benefits of poetry-based activities for enhancing the English learning process. The authors concluded that the participants viewed poetry as having more value for grammar and vocabulary acquisition and for the development of receptive and productive skills than for intercultural awareness and motivation.

Research regarding the use of poetry in language learning is relatively scarce, and it has mainly been carried out in Asian EFL contexts with third-level students. The qualitative method has been preferred, although there are studies that have adopted a mixed-methods approach. Despite the scarcity of studies, findings agree in suggesting that poetry-based activities have a positive impact on both linguistic and extra-linguistic aspects of language learning. Concerning the specific topic of this paper, the conceptual basis and the extant empirical evidence regarding haiku composition and ESL/EFL learning are addressed in the next section.

2.3 Haiku Composition in ESL/EFL Contexts

Haiku is a type of Japanese poetry consisting of 17 syllables that do not rhyme. These syllables are organized in three lines, distributed in a 5-7-5 pattern. In addition, haiku has another important element of form: kireji, that is, a cut or division signaled by a word or punctuation mark at the end of the second line. Besides these formal features, it is necessary to point out two content elements of haiku: a) kigo, a reference to the seasons by means of associative words or phrases, and b) reader-centeredness (Iida, 2010), which allows for distinct individual interpretations that differ from the reader's experience or intention.

Concerning creative haiku writing practices in EFL contexts, Iida (2010) asserted that *"poetry, in particular, offers special challenges, but one type of poem that is manageable for the EFL classroom is haiku"* (p. 1). Furthermore, Iida (2017) stated that the *"essence of haiku is to describe, as it is, what the poet sees and feels in their life"* (p. 264). In other words, haiku can be seen as a manageable medium that, although being a form of formal verse, provides the writer with more freedom for self-expression.

Iida (2011) researched the impact of haiku composition tasks on the promotion of academic writing skills, as well as the attitudes that language learners have towards the composition tasks. Based on the statistical comparison of pre- and post-essay-based test results, Iida (2011) concluded that haiku composition has a positive effect on academic literacy development. This effect is mainly connected to text length, word choice (vocabulary), and grammatical accuracy. Additionally, the content analysis of interview responses, journal entries, and the learners' original compositions reveal that participants considered haiku writing as a profitable activity that promotes self-expression, vocabulary acquisition, and opportunities for skill transfer across different writing genres. These later findings were confirmed by Iida's (2012, 2016b) follow-up research studies.

Iida (2012) focused on the learners' perceptions regarding haiku writing practices. The results of this study evinced markedly positive attitudes towards the composition tasks. The participants of the study, 20 Japanese EFL university students, highlighted how the negotiation of meaning, that is, finding the appropriate word choice to fit the poem's formal structure, facilitated vocabulary enrichment. Moreover, the results of Iida's (2016) case study agree with the previous empirical evidence, while also underscoring the value that haiku composition has for communicative practice and self-expression.

Furthermore, Iida (2017) studied the potential of multi-writing haiku pedagogy to develop and express voice in three Japanese EFL university students. The author concluded that, once the initial problems had been overcome, the participants were capable of carrying out the tasks and developed positive attitudes towards them. Iida (2017) also emphasized that haiku composition, being a feasible task for learners of all levels, promotes the development of voice, which in turn adds personal value to the learning process.

2.4 Meaningful Literacy

To finalize this section, it is important to remark that this study's theoretical foundation is Hanauer's (2012) meaningful literacy, an approach to second language literacy instruction that highlights the importance of students' emotional engagement with the learning process. The approach has been developed on the basis of four principles. The first is biographical literacy, which is the promotion of self-understanding through writing practices that employ an individual's personal experiences, memory, and imagination. The second principle is emotional writing, that is, the use of writing tasks that stimulate emotional reactions from both the writer and the readers. Third, there is personal insight, which is the promotion of better self-understanding through writing practices that integrate self-reflection processes. The fourth principle is authentic public access. Here, the writing product, and its inherent emotions, is socialized by making it accessible to others, particularly to those dear to the writer.

Thus, meaningful literacy should be understood as a student-centered literacy approach in ESL/EFL contexts that attempts to counter the overemphasis on overt and measurable communicative competence (Hanauer, 2012).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This paper reports on the qualitative component of a quasi-experimental mixed-methods study. The quantitative aspect of the study, which has already been published (Santillán-Iñiguez & Rodas-Pacheco, 2022), statistically analyzed the results of two essay-based tests applied at the beginning and the end, respectively, of a six-week intervention that promoted haiku composition. Consequently, in this research paper, a qualitative descriptive approach is used to analyze the responses to the open-ended questionnaire administered after the intervention. These questions sought to deepen our understanding of the participants' perceptions towards the use of haiku as a tool to improve their academic writing skills.

3.2 Participants

Thirty EFL pre-service teachers from an Ecuadorian university participated in the study. The participants were part of a conversation and composition course offered from September 2017 to February 2018. The participants were 22 women and 8 men selected through convenience sampling, as the researchers are part of the faculty staff of the university where the program is offered. The presumed proficiency level of the participants (B1 CEFR), which was determined according to the curricular development of the mentioned university degree program as well as the nature of the conversation and composition course, made the participants suitable for the study.

3.3 Intervention

The participants of the study were part of a six-week intervention that promoted haiku composition. This intervention was influenced by Iida's (2010) protocol. This protocol has five stages: (1) reviewing the concept of haiku (i.e., acquainting learners with the formal and meaningful characteristics of haiku); (2) collecting haiku material (i.e., stimulating the senses through question prompts); (3) composing haiku (for this stage, teacher support is crucial); (4) peer reviewing through collaborative work in small groups; and (5) publishing haiku (in other words, compiling and socializing the compositions).

3.4 Data Collection

At the end of the intervention, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to all the participants through Google Forms. This questionnaire was administered during a session in a computer laboratory, to which all participants were summoned. Participants had to provide the answers in writing, which took them about 25 minutes in total. As regards validity and reliability, the questionnaire was taken in its entirety from Iida's (2011) post-treatment reflection form, which was used with EFL university students of the same proficiency level as the participants of this study. The questionnaire consisted of seven items that inquired about the participants' perceptions and reactions towards haiku composition and the effect of this practice on the development of their academic writing skills. (The items of the questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 1.)

3.5 Data Analysis

Content analysis of all the answers to the survey questions was carried out. These answers were cross-tabulated to find thematic coincidences. The following themes (categories of analysis) were inductively obtained: (1) perceived enjoyment, appraisal, and effects of haiku composition to learn English; (2) strengths and weaknesses when writing haiku to learn English; (3) differences between the two written essays and the perception of improvement; (4) feelings about the two essays; and (5) reasons for recommending haiku composition as a tool to learn English.

4. Results

The main goal of this study was to examine the effects of haiku composition on the enhancement of academic writing skills. Due to the fact that the employed instrument was designed with open-ended questions, the information provided by the participants was processed and interpreted to assess their perceptions

regarding haiku composition as a tool for learning English. From the gathered data, the qualitative analysis revealed the findings presented below.

4.1 Theme 1: Perceived Enjoyment, Appraisal, and Effects of Haiku Composition to Learn English

The majority of the participants of the study declared that they enjoyed composing haiku, and they linked this enjoyment to specific beneficial effects of the practice as regards the development of the writing skill. These findings are presented in table.

Table 2: Triple-entry cross-tabulation of haiku as an English learning strategy

Enjoyment of the activity and skills development	Activity value		
	Positive	Null	Total
YES	26	1	27
Text structure	3	-	3
Expression of feelings/emotions	2	1	3
Spelling and grammar	1	-	1
Vocabulary	20	-	20
NO	-	1	1
Blank	-	1	1
SOMETIMES	1	1	2
Expression of feelings/emotions	1	-	1
Vocabulary	-	1	1
TOTAL	27	3	30

According to the results observed in Table 2, it is possible to affirm that most of the participants enjoyed haiku composition, considering its inclusion in the English learning process as something positive. Specifically, vocabulary improvement was mentioned as the most important benefit, compared to results derived from the other traditional English teaching techniques. A smaller group of participants indicated that this activity helped them improve the way they structure texts in English, their expression of feelings and emotions, and their spelling and grammar use. In addition, only two participants pointed out that they sometimes enjoyed doing this activity, which helped them to better express their feelings and emotions and to improve their vocabulary. However, one of them mentioned that haiku composition could not be considered useful for learning the English language. Finally, one participant affirmed that the activity was not enjoyable and that its inclusion in the language teaching-learning process was therefore not profitable.

4.2 Theme 2: Strengths and Weaknesses When Writing Haiku to Learn English

The perceived strengths and weaknesses that the participants identified when composing haiku are listed in Table 3:

Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses identified when writing haiku to learn English

Strengths	Weaknesses						
	Text structure	Expression	Inspiration	Kireji / Kigo	Sequences/ patterns	Vocabulary	Total
Creative writing	1	1	2	1	5		10
Expression of feelings/ emotions	-	1	-	-	3	1	5
Inspiration	-	-	1	-	5	1	7
Research	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Kireji / Kigo	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
Vocabulary	1	2	1	-	1	-	5
Total	2	4	4	1	16	3	30

As evidenced in the responses, the main results are reinforced, as half of the participants indicated creative writing and inspiration as strengths of haiku composition writing. These strengths were followed by improvement in expressing feelings and emotions, and vocabulary use. Very few participants stated that the technique increased their research skills. On the other hand, half of the surveyed students argued that the main weakness of the use of this technique to teach English is the comprehension and application of the sequences and patterns used in haiku. Additionally, only two participants remarked that dealing with the formal features of haiku – kireji and kigo – was a weakness they encountered.

A small number of participants stated that it was difficult for them to express themselves, find vocabulary, or be inspired to compose haiku. The relevant particularity of this study is observed in the answers provided by the participants who had difficulties understanding the sequences and patterns found in haiku. Almost all of them previously indicated that one of the skills that was more significantly developed after the intervention was creative writing, and that another benefit of haiku composition was increased inspiration. They also mentioned that it was easy to express feelings and emotions through haiku composition. Based on the above, it could be inferred that people who have a better aptitude to express emotions are likely to face some difficulties in handling the formal features of haiku, particularly when used as an English learning tool. However, they might also recognize and value the benefits of haiku composition tasks for the development of their communicative competence, particularly the writing skill.

4.3 Theme 3: Differences between the Two Written Essays and the Perception of Improvement

The participants of the study were asked to analyze the pre and post intervention essays that they wrote, to identify aspects of improvement. This information is presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Differences between the two written essays and the perception of improvement

Participants' perception	Differences among essays			
	First essay is best	Second essay is best	No difference	Total
Completeness	-	7	-	7
Structure	1	9	-	10
Ease	-	1	-	1
Grammar	-	1	-	1
Fewer errors in general	-	2	-	2
Grammar and spelling	-	1	-	1
Vocabulary	-	5	-	5
Blank	-	-	3	3
Total	1	26	3	30

As it can be seen, the majority of the participants mentioned that the essay they wrote after the intervention had a better development and communicative outcome. As can be seen, the main area of improvement was structure. There was a group that highlighted completeness as a remarkable feature of the second essay. Finally, the participants of the study also acknowledged improvements in vocabulary use. It is interesting to note, however, that there were three participants who did not identify any differences between the first and second essays. The same number of participants gave a null evaluation of the inclusion of this activity as a learning tool (Table 1). In addition, one participant argued that the first essay had a better development in terms of structure, compared to the second one. The participant linked this difference to her personal preference for the topic of the first essay, which allowed for a better organization of ideas. This difference, because of thematic preference, was not referred to by any other participant, thus indicating an improvement regarding awareness of the writing process itself.

4.4 Theme 4: Feelings about the Two Essays

Table 5 presents information about how the participants felt about the essays they wrote:

Table 5: Participants' feelings about the two essays

Feeling	Students feel differently about written texts		
	Yes	No	Total
Self-identification	1	-	1
Clarity	4	-	4
Expressing feelings / emotions	2	-	2
Ease / confidence	12	-	12
Vocabulary	1	-	1
Blank	1	5	6
Clarity with the first essay	1	-	1
Comfort with the first essay	3	-	3
Total	25	5	30

Regarding the participants' reported feelings about the essays written before and after the intervention (Table 5), the participants felt differently about the two final products. Half of them claimed that they felt more confident writing the second essay, whereas others expressed that they understood more clearly how to perform the activity in the second essay. However, four participants revealed that they felt better writing the first essay in terms of clarity and comfort regarding the written topics. Six participants did not answer the question, five of whom were participants who did not feel any difference when writing the two essays.

4.5 Theme 5: Reasons for Recommending Haiku Composition as a Tool to Learn English

Finally, students were asked to declare whether they recommend haiku composition as a learning strategy and the reasons for such suggestion. These data are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Reasons for recommending haiku composition as a tool to learn English

Reason	Recommendation		
	Yes	No	Total
It increases vocabulary	15	-	15
It helps to express ideas easily	9	-	9
It increases understanding	1	-	1
It develops writing skills	2	-	2
It does not fit into your way of learning	-	3	3
Total	27	3	30

The results displayed in the table show that most of the surveyed students would recommend haiku composition as an English language-learning tool, particularly because the technique increases vocabulary, aids the conveyance of ideas, and enhances writing and comprehension skills. However, it is necessary to note that three participants indicated that they would not recommend the use of haiku because this activity is not aligned with the way they learn English.

5. Discussion

In this paper, we present the qualitative aspect of a quasi-experimental mixed-methods study that sought to deepen our understanding of the use of haiku as a teaching material for the development of academic writing skills in EFL learners. More specifically, in this paper, we present the self-reported perceptions of the participants towards the use of haiku as a means to enhance their academic writing skills. To understand these perceptions, we attempted to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions of EFL students towards the use of haiku as a tool to improve their academic writing skills?

As can be noted from the results, most of the participants viewed the use of haiku in the EFL classroom as a tool that can positively influence their learning process. In addition, they seemed to have enjoyed using haiku. Most of the participants mentioned that this tool helped them improve their English skills. This has been demonstrated in other studies that examined the use of literature in the language classroom. For instance, Daskalovska and Dimova (2012) and Lazar (1993) concluded that literature can help students develop their target language skills in

a playful and joyful atmosphere. The majority of participants reported that they enjoyed haiku composition and saw it as a valuable technique to improve their target language proficiency. These results agree with what Hanauer (2010b) remarked regarding the suitability of poetry composition tasks for second and foreign language classrooms. Poetry composition is not only a feasible task for second and foreign language learners, but it also has the potential to increase motivation in students (Bjelland, 2016; Hess, 2003; Lazar, 1993; Panavelil, 2011; Scrivener, 2011). One of the reasons for this is the social recognition of the complexity and stylistic value of poetry (Lazar, 1993). In other words, students gain motivation when they realize that they can create texts in the target language that, while being personal and meaningful for them, belong to a genre of inherent complexity.

On the other hand, the low-rate negative responses towards haiku composition can be connected to the participants' personal preferences regarding language learning, but also to their personal negative experiences with the literary genre. This can be evidenced in other studies as well (Khatib, 2011; Povey, 1979; Scrivener, 2011). This fact requires deeper analysis when considering that the participants of the present study were EFL pre-service teachers. Negative personal attitudes towards poetry composition might lead teachers to avoid using poetry-based tasks in the classroom. These tasks, as can be seen above, have empirically proven benefits for students.

Furthermore, the students who participated in this study reported the benefits of the use of haiku in vocabulary. They mentioned that they were better able to recall and use the target language vocabulary after having done the activities that included haiku. This fact agrees with previous research (Iida, 2010, 2012; Kırkgöz, 2008; Liao, 2012; Panavelil, 2011; Scrivener, 2011). This finding can be linked to the meaning negotiation that haiku composition entails. In other words, to write haiku, students have to find words that convey the meaning while observing the 5-7-5 syllable pattern of the poem. Additionally, vocabulary acquisition is also facilitated by the personal and emotional value that poetry composition entails (Hanauer, 2012). When a student uses a word that is suitable for the formal features of a poem whose composition stimulates emotional reactions, recalling this lexical item in other genuine exchanges is significantly facilitated.

Another aspect of vocabulary acquisition related to haiku composition is the enhancement of the awareness of the connotative value of words. As Iida (2010) argued, haiku, like many other forms of poetry, can be seen as individual responses to personal experiences. At the same time, because of the reader-centeredness of poetry, haiku reading allows for multiple and discrete interpretations. Therefore, when writing haiku, the authors deliberately search for words to convey a personal message in a way that is not obvious and thus allows for different interpretations from the readers.

In general, the participants in this study thought of poetry, particularly haiku, as a tool that has many benefits in the English classroom. They believed that poetry composition could be used to enhance their writing skills, particularly in terms of

vocabulary acquisition. It should be noted, moreover, that the participants' perceptions regarding the manner in which haiku composition is beneficial are interrelated. For instance, vocabulary acquisition can promote ease of writing by facilitating self-expression, which in turn benefits the completeness and idea organization of their compositions. The value of poetry-based composition tasks has been connected to both structural and lexical aspects of the writing process. These benefits acquire more importance when considering the possibilities for literacy-skill transfer across different writing genres (Iida, 2012).

In addition, the participants thought that haiku can have a positive non-linguistic impact. In other words, it can help students express their emotions, motivate them, and aid the development of creativity. This personal emotional value perceived by the participants regarding haiku composition can be linked with the features of meaningful literacy discussed above. Students can use the target language with a new significance, that is, a means for self-expression and self-understanding. Thus, poetry composition can help lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1985), which in turn might create a relaxing classroom atmosphere where learning might take place in an enhanced manner in comparison with other more traditional techniques or materials. Given the positive perceptions of the participants and the fact that research has found that using poetry in the language classroom can have a positive impact on students' learning and emotions, it is surprising that this material is not being widely used by language teachers.

The findings of the present research study add to the extant empirical evidence on the influence of poetry-based activities in language learning. The novelty of these results resides in the fact that the study was carried out in a context – Latin America – where research about the use of poetry in the language classroom is almost non-existent. Thus, it is hoped that the dissemination and discussion of these and similar findings may cause a renewed appreciation of literature, particularly poetry, for second and foreign language-learning purposes.

6. Conclusions

The findings of this research study highlight the positive impact of haiku composition on academic writing skills within an EFL classroom. This study, which involved EFL pre-service teachers from an Ecuadorian university, described their perceived value of haiku composition in enhancing their academic writing in English. The results reveal that the majority of participants not only enjoyed the haiku composition but also recognized its value in enhancing their understanding and proficiency in writing English, particularly regarding vocabulary acquisition, as compared to traditional teaching methods. Consequently, participants expressed their positive perceptions towards haiku composition. Participants also indicated an increase in self-confidence, motivation, and creativity.

An important benefit of haiku composition identified by the participants was the enhancement of vocabulary. They reported improved retention and application of target vocabulary through the composition tasks, which demanded meaning negotiation and awareness of the connotative significance of words, as they

deliberately sought out words to convey personal messages that allowed for multiple interpretations. This aspect of vocabulary acquisition has implications for nuanced expression and interpretation in writing.

Furthermore, the participants' perception of an improvement of their writing and comprehension skills, specifically due to progress and growth of their vocabulary, had a significant positive impact on their attitudes towards the implementation of haiku composition as a strategy to develop writing skills. In this study, it is evident that participants enjoyed the implementation of this strategy. They expressed their endorsement of haiku composition tasks by mentioning that they had freedom to express feelings and emotions, which in turn lowered the affective filter (Krashen, 1985) and enhanced the language-learning experience. Even though some participants found it difficult to follow haiku patterns, they considered that this type of poetry promoted inspiration and developed creativity to find the appropriate words and meanings. In addition, as a result of the intervention, some participants recognized their sense of confidence and ease to communicate their ideas using the target language. Thus, poetry composition is not only likely to aid the development of the language macro-skills, but it also promotes a new and personal outlook towards the target language. These tasks prove beneficial, particularly in bolstering vocabulary acquisition. Adherence to the meaningful literacy methodology, which emphasizes the involvement of the learners, is recommended. It is important for teachers to keep an open mind and make the necessary adjustments, recognizing that the effectiveness of these tasks may vary based on the specific teaching context. Thus, educators can leverage the potential advantages of incorporating haiku composition into language instruction.

7. References

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Appendix 1

The questions were taken from Iida's (2011) reflection form:

- Did you enjoy learning to write and writing haiku in English? Do you think this was a valuable task for you (answer honestly)? If so, what did this task contribute to your understanding and ability to write in English?
- What were your strengths as a writer of haiku?
- What was difficult about writing haiku?
- Take a few moments to read through both of your essays. Do you think there are any differences between the first and second essay? If so, what are they?
- Think about your relationship with each of these texts. Do you feel differently about either of the texts? If so, please explain what the difference is in your opinion?
- Which of these essays would you say was closer to the way you feel about your writing in Spanish? Was writing your second essay the same as writing your first? If not, please explain the difference.
- Would you recommend this learning method to other EFL students? If so, why?