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The Portraits of Self-Love on the English Students' Poems for Creative Writing

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Abstract. *Self-love is the main key to building healthy relationships with oneself and others. It plays a very important role in shaping the world and enables one to succeed or fail in life. The university students, especially, are eager to be aware of self-love at their age because they will experience furious changes for adaptation. Realizing this urgency, the lecturer in Creative Writing Course assigned the students to write English Poems which expressed how they had loved themselves. Not surprisingly, every individual had a portrait of self-love. Therefore, this study is very interesting to execute because it can result in various portraits of self-love. In accordance with this objective, this study is designed as qualitative descriptive research by using Bleich's reader response approach. Documentation of the students' English Poems is the main instrument in this study, while the researchers took a role as a human instrument to collect and respond the data. It was found twenty-two portraits of self-love. Although various portraits of self-love had been figured out, the researchers had highlighted four portraits of self-love which were stated more over the others in the students' poems. They are 1) embracing self-imperfection, 2) realizing self-values and potentials, 3) facing the challenges and fears, and 4) being kind to ourselves by not focusing on satisfying others nor comparing ours to theirs. This study implies that all portraits of self-love, especially the four highlighted, must be respected by all parties, especially the lecturers. By using this study, the readers can generalize the results and hence disseminate them to promote people's self-love. Lastly, further researchers should evaluate the results by confirming, adding, or even debating some parts of this study in order to portray self-love with a broader consensus.*

Keywords: Creative, English, Self-love, Writing.

INTRODUCTION

Self-love is defined as the state of oneself to be wholistic, complete, healthy, and true inside which can build "psychological well-being" and avoid to dissatisfaction, meaninglessness, unworthy, unloved (Harshad & Ghosh, 2022). Self-love is also known as the further (expected) state after someone has found his/ her self-concept. So, it can be built based on how someone thinks about, then evaluates or perceives themselves (Aruna Bharathi & Sreedevi, 2013). This consciousness is considered to be one's self-knowledge which is mediating variable that causally impacts on a variety of desirable outcomes including academic achievement and life success (Marsh and Craven, 1997) as cited in (Aruna Bharathi & Sreedevi, 2013).

University students must have been aware about loving themselves because they are preparing futures with furious changes to adapt. Because of this tough challenge, there were many reports about self-harm, self-injury, even more attempts to suicide among the university students (Clements et al., 2023). Clements et al (2023) reported that self-harm increased over time in students who had not have self-love and it can be directly related to their experience and

life pressure including their academic requirements. Moreover, starting from 2005 Gollust et al had studied about the Healthy Minds to the students attending a large public university in the Midwest and reported the result that university students without consciousness to self-love are at risk for injuring themselves but they are unlikely to seek help (Gollust, Eisenberg, & Golberstein, 2008). Therefore, it is obligatory for any parties to have an important role for helping them in enhancing self-love to prevent self-harm and injury at their young critical stage.

Realizing this urgency, the lecturer in Creative Writing Course tried to take a role to help the students at Universitas PGRI Wiranegara by designing a task for writing English Poems which can be used to trigger their awareness on self-love. The lecturer believes that the students may hide their self-risk by keep smiling in front of people but they cannot cover their mental state in writing poems about themselves. This is based on Arya's et al (2023) statement that poems can describe emotions, culture, atmosphere, and conditions which affect the writers (Pal Arya & Singh, n.d.). Besides, Scheyer & Abdul (2022) also affirm that poems show the reflection of human life and represent honesty and realism on people. In addition, useful functions of poems are to preserve the people's tradition and belief system and to document the people history and background (Cizungu & Marie-Claire, 2024). Reviewing these researches really encourages the researchers to conduct the present research which is expected to discover the portraits of the students' self-love.

Some previous research had contributed in studying about poems. First, Jaafar (2014) had studied poems stylistics from linguistics perspective. Second, Rahman (2018) had studied several kinds of metaphor in semantic perspective on the students' poems. Third, (Katili, 2021) also made metaphoric analysis on the students' poems by using psycholinguistic approach. Katili also continued his study by exploring the students' creativity in writing poems based on a linguistic perspective (Katili, 2023). Reflecting these previous research, the researcher here needs to fulfil the empty space by discussing the students' poems by using reader-response approach in order to capture portraits of self-love. This research would be very different from the previous one because the present research will not concern itself with the poem's metaphors and styles but will analyse the poems' symbolism, then convert it into a more communally satisfying analysis related to self-love.

The researcher adopts the concept of reader-response of Subjective Criticism by David Bleich (Mailloux, 1979a). Bleich's theory is chosen because it develops the primacy of the individual self in reading and interpretation toward poems. It discusses the reading experiences created by the actual reader and proposes that the study of English be consciously reoriented from a knowledge-finding to a knowledge-making enterprise. Therefore, the researcher will be able to describe every student's portrait about self-love which is then negotiated within communal knowledge. Afterwards, the proposal knowledge about self-love by individual students would be the substrates of knowledge enterprise about self-love. The results of this research should be noticed, especially by English lecturers at Universitas PGRI Wiranegara, to better align with students' needs and to appreciate their own gains in pedagogical achievement in the future.

METHOD

In this section, the researchers explain the method used for portraying self-love on the students' poems. The researchers used qualitative description (QD) for conducting the present research in accordance with the objectives of the present research. According to (Kim, Sefcik, & Bradportrait, 2017), qualitative descriptive is a branch of study in which researchers generally examine a phenomenon naturally and draw conclusions using a naturalistic perspective. The phenomena were languages used by the students to portray self-love through poems for Creative Writing Course. The naturalistic perspective means the researchers' role in giving responses to the phenomena implies natural-scientific understanding; not statistical-measuring scales and controls.

The purposive data in this research were every single word that portrayed self-love in 22 poems made by the students who joined in Creative Writing Course in the odd semester, the academic year 2025/2026. The setting was in English Education Study Program of Universitas PGRI Wiranegara. Every single word in the poems can contribute to creating valuable interpretations related to self-love. Therefore, documentation of the students' English Poems became the main instrument in this study. Documentation is defined as a process to collect data that may be used for systematic evaluation or observation. As part of a study, it takes a variety of forms; both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material (Bowen, 2009). Based on this view, the documentation used in this research consisted of 1) documenting authentic writing of the students' poems, and 2) documenting the video of (the written) poem recitation on Youtube.

Next, in analyzing the documents, the researchers took roles as human instrument to collect and respond the findings. For valid results, the researchers applied reader-response approach by David Bleich. It was chosen because it opens wide understanding but manageable to formulate communal knowledge (Kunjanman & Aziz, 2021). This means that Bleich's theory does not stay at an unvalidated interpretation but it requires negotiation to create subjective knowledge to become communally validated knowledge. Although Bleich's criticism emphasizes the primacy of the individual self in reading and interpretation, this approach differs from the other reader-response theories because it excels the reading experiences of actual readers rather than those of ideal or informed readers (Mailloux, 1979b). Bleich's approach relies initially on psychoanalytic accounts of reading, but with the explanatory adequacy of "identity theme".

This approach can be seen operationally in the process of data analysis. In analyzing the data, the researchers applied Bleich's model which progresses from subjective response to resymbolization, and then to negotiation for validated knowledge (Mailloux, 1979b). The researchers read the poems thoroughly to build "Subjective response". It resulted first perceptual initiatives toward every word that portrays self-love. After this stage, the researchers made "evaluative symbolization". This was done for interpreting perceptual initiatives that resulted in the preceding stage. This should result "main ideas" gained from reading the poems and figuring out the perception of self-love based on the poems. The researchers listed the main ideas in an analysis table for ease. Last, the researchers negotiated the portraits by discussing with the student writers (as the community) and concluding a new knowledge enterprise about self-love.

Table 1. Analysis Table of Poems with Self-Love

No	Poem Title	Word Identification	Main Portraits of Self-love	Frequency	Notes
1					
2					
...					

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

From twenty-two poems, several portraits of self-love had been found in the students' poems for Creative Writing Course. Some poems stated only one portrait to love self, but the others stated more than that. Therefore, the twenty portraits of self-love were asserted in fifty-one statements. The twenty portraits of self-love and its statement calculation were as follows

Table 2. Twenty Portraits of Self-Love

1. "Having self-principles" was asserted in one poem.	11. "Making Affirmative Statements to Self Often" was stated in two poems.
2. "Listening to heart feeling" was asserted in one poem.	12. "Be confident in yourself" was stated in two poems.
3. "Giving Freedom" was stated in one poem.	13. "Filtering every seen and speech" was stated in two poems.
4. "Having supportive friends" was asserted in one poem.	14. "Understanding and forgiving self-failure as a lesson" was stated in three poems
5. "Sharing Happiness" was stated in one poem.	15. "Don't doubt about yourself" was asserted in three poems.
6. "Not Focusing on wounds and trauma" was stated in one poem.	16. "Caring for yourself" was also stated in four poems
7. "Not measuring physical appearance" was stated in one poem.	17. Be brave to face the challenges and fears" was stated in five poems
8. "Spending time with family" was asserted in one poem.	18. "Realizing self-values and potentials" was asserted in five poems.
9. "Seeking for peace" was stated in one poem	19. "Accepting self-imperfection" was stated in six poems.
10. "Never Give Up" was asserted in two poems.	20. "Being kind to ourselves by not focusing on satisfying others nor comparing ours to theirs" was stated in eight poems

Among these twenty portraits of self-love, the researchers highlighted four portraits of self-love based on the students' poems. They are 1) embracing self-imperfection, 2) realizing self-values and potentials, 3) facing the challenges and fears, and 4) being kind to ourselves by not focusing on satisfying others nor comparing ours to theirs. "Accepting self-imperfection" was stated in six poems. "Realizing self-values and potentials" was asserted in five poems. "Be brave to face the challenges and fears" was stated in five poems. Last, "being kind to ourselves by not focusing on satisfying others nor comparing ours to theirs" was stated mainly in eight poems.

Discussion

In this section, the researchers would like to elaborate on responses to the results. For the portraits of self-love that were mentioned once in the poems, the researchers analyze that they can be related to the four highlights of self-love. Firstly, "Having self-principles" relates closely to "Realizing self-values and potentials". In other words, the researchers saw that the self-principle is a kind of self-value that someone may have. The other values and potentials are having friends and a good family to spend our time with. It means "Having supportive friends" and "Spending time with family" are associated with the highlighted portrait of self-love "Realizing self-values and potentials". "Sharing Happiness", in one perspective, can also be the

life potentials but readers should be able to acknowledge the context of when someone is blessed by the happiness. Next, the portrait "Not Focusing on wounds and trauma" to love self can be claimed as the indicator that we love ourselves by "embracing self-imperfection". Last, "being kind to ourselves by not focusing on satisfying others nor comparing ours to theirs" requires some actions like "Seeking for peace", "Listening to heart feeling", "Giving Freedom", and "Not measuring physical appearance".

Like the nine portraits of self-love which were stated only once in the poems, the portraits of self-love with two or even three mentions in the poems can be associated with the four highlighted portraits. "Making Affirmative Statements to Self Often", "Filtering every seen and speech", "Understanding and forgiving self-failure as a lesson", and "Caring for yourself" can be the real actions of how we become "kind to ourselves by not focusing on satisfying others nor comparing ours to theirs". Then, the real attitude that indicates we are brave to face the challenges and fears is by "Never Give Up". "Be confident in yourself" and "Don't doubt about yourself" can be claimed as prerequisites before finally we "Realize our self-values and potentials." "Be confident in yourself" can also be claimed as the attitude when we accept our imperfection.

Based on this argumentation, the researchers here would analyze the four highlighted portraits of self-love in the students' poems for Creative Writing Course. The are:

Embracing self-imperfection

Brown, (2010) in his book states that imperfection is not an inadequacy. Yet, it can become our reminders that we're all in this world together- imperfectly. Not all people can accept their imperfections, but the more we do not embrace it the more we harm and lose peace in ourselves. Therefore, it is very valuable when the students can state the portrait of self-love is by embracing imperfection.

Furthermore, embracing our self-imperfection can make us realize our "beauty inside"(Prasad, 2023). Moreover, it is pride when we embrace imperfection, and hence we are loved despite our flaws. Embracing our self-imperfection can also let go of the idea that we need to be perfect, so we can start living fully.

Realizing self-values and potentials

Realizing human potential at scale necessitates a reimagining of how people cultivate their cognitive, emotional, and relational foundations of human capital through life experiences that (- Us - Sahar, 2021). Therefore, the portrait of self-love by realizing self-values and potentials becomes a big challenge for everyone thus not all people recognize their values and potential. Some people need other people to assess their values and potential in life, but somehow it is too late which then makes them useless. Actually, humans have one basic motive; that is the tendency to actualize (Jamaludin & Kosslyn, 2025). Before actualization, people need to realize their values and potential to achieve the highest level of 'human beingness'. In other words, our human beingness can be admitted low or high due to how we love ourselves by realizing our values and potential.

Facing the challenges and fears

Challenges are natural in life. Thus, we all face challenges in life, whether they are big or small to test our strength and resolve. Surely, the universe will choose somebody with certain challenges because he/ she has something special and a specific purpose to offer this world (Ukpong, 2020). Then, (Mc. Culloch (2009) reported that the feature of nearly all clinical mental health problems is fear. It is also a root cause of some of the most common mental illnesses. The researchers were very happy to find that the students had written to face both challenges and fear in their poems as a portrait of self-love. Meanwhile, some people tend to avoid challenges and cannot manage their fear, so they become very passive in life and excessively afraid of something new and change.

Being kind to ourselves by not focusing on satisfying others nor comparing ours to theirs.

This wonderful portrait of self-love must be campaigned to the people. It is because being kind and gentle with ourselves to discover who we are is the basic thing

before we pursue gaining of other valuable things in life (Brown, 2010). Unfortunately, many people do not behave kindly to themselves, such as by comparing themselves to others. Moreover, (Kam & Prihadi, 2021) reported that University students tend to develop a negative tendency to compare themselves with each other. Because of this phenomenon, there are many people who often find themselves trapped in an endless cycle of desires and wants. They pursue satisfaction in the sake of comparison, not purely for self-need and expectations (Prasad, 2023).

From this discussion, it is obvious that the four portraits highlighted in this research are plausible and valuable because they represent the basic needs of life. In other words, to love ourselves is to fulfill the basic self-needs in life. The other portraits are also essential to adopt for self-love, thus we can really understand the actual life-nature of our existence.

CONCLUSION

Self-love is an issue that offers understanding self to survive in life. Yet it seems to be ignored by many parties; thus, many people have engaged in self-harms. Regarding this phenomenon, it is urgent to integrate learning and realizing the importance of self-love through writing a poem for Creative Writing Course. The poems about self-love were twenty-two. As the result, there were found twenty portraits of how to love ourselves; which were stated in fifty one statements. Among the twenty portraits, the four portraits were mentioned in the poems more often. It is plausible since the four relate closely to the basic needs of human being.

By using this study, the readers can generalize the results and hence disseminate them to promote people's self-love. Lastly, further researchers should evaluate the results by confirming, adding, or even debating some parts of this study in order to portray self-love with a broader consensus.

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