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*Feature Article***Pre-Service Turkish EFL Teachers' Attitudes toward Writing and Teaching Poetry**

Havva Zorluel Özer

*Syracuse University***Abstract**

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to explore pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes toward writing and teaching poetry, 2) to investigate the impact of poetry reading, writing, and instruction on their attitudes. Data from an online survey administered to 69 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Language Teaching Department at a public university in Türkiye reveal a general lack of confidence and interest among participants in writing and teaching poetry, alongside the associated factors.

Key words: creative writing, EFL, language teacher education, poetry

Introduction

English as a Foreign language (EFL) writing classrooms are often characterized as dehumanized settings where forms and abstract notions of language supersede emotions and personal experience (Hanauer, 2012). The problem is that language teachers focus too much on formality, while not enough on creativity, decentralizing the very individual human being in the process of literacy and language education. To address the problem of normative ecologies that prioritize the teaching of prescriptive rules in language classrooms, Hanauer (2012) suggests the pedagogy of meaningful literacy, an approach that places emphasis on personal expression and experience in teaching EFL writing. Facilitating a safe classroom environment for writers to express themselves in a foreign language, meaningful literacy promotes EFL learners' self-understanding and expression (Iida, 2012), voice construction and identity (Hanauer, 2015), and emotional engagement (Iida & Chamcharatsri, 2022), which are often neglected in traditional EFL writing classrooms. This approach has the potential to humanize literacy and language education and, in Hanauer's (2012) view, one effective tool for enacting such an innovative pedagogy is *poetry*.

Poetry has always been an important component of creative writing instruction. With recent interest in poetry as a form of meaningful literacy, it has grown beyond the field of creative writing and inspired

innovation in EFL writing pedagogy. While the scope of EFL research on poetry is vast, it has generally fallen into the following trajectories: pedagogies of teaching poetry to language learners (Disney, 2012; Hanauer, 2012; Saito, 2008; Spiro, 2007), poetry writing practices in language classrooms (Chamcharatsri, 2013; Fithriani, 2021; Garvin, 2013; Iida & Chamcharatsri, 2022), the characteristics of L2 poetry (Hanauer, 2010, 2012), voice and identity construction in L2 poetry (Akiyoshi, 2017; Halsall, 2021; Hanauer, 2015), assessment of L2 poetry (Hauer & Hanauer, 2017; Iida, 2008), and perceptions of writing poetry in a foreign language (Iida, 2012; Liao, 2017; Liao & Roy, 2017; Zhang, 2019). As seen in the list of trajectories, a growing amount of research has been devoted to the study of how students perceive poetry writing in a language other than their own (Iida, 2012; Liao, 2017; Liao & Roy, 2017; Zhang, 2019). However, when it comes to the perceptions of teachers about writing (Liao, 2018) and teaching (Masbuhin & Liao, 2017) poetry, empirical research is limited. The pedagogical challenge of this paper is to understand whether prospective teachers of English appreciate the value of poetry in EFL writing instruction. For this reason, this study examines pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' willingness to write and teach poetry. The following questions inform the research methodology:

- What are pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes toward writing and teaching poetry?
- In what ways do poetry reading, writing, and instruction influence pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes toward writing and teaching poetry?

Literature Review

The view of poetry as a pedagogical tool in teaching writing has given direction to various strands of research in literacy and language education. One strand of research focuses on developing pedagogical frameworks on poetry for teaching L2 writing. An earlier work on the topic by Spiro (2007), for example, presented how a creative writer's personal writing strategies could lead to authentic learning activities for L2 writers. Elsewhere, Disney (2012) and Saito (2008) offered strategies for teaching poetry to EFL learners drawing on their classroom teaching practices.

Alongside the extant scholarship, Hanauer's (2012) *Meaningful Literacy: Writing Poetry in the Language Classroom* is arguably one of the most influential works in guiding L2 poetry writing instruction. Outlining a pedagogical framework for designing an L2 writing course around poetry, Hanauer (2012) described three important stages of the course design as 1. generating personal motivation for self-exploration, 2. initiating a process of autobiographical exploration, and 3. facilitating poetic expression of autobiographical memory. To Hanauer (2012), these three steps demonstrate a simple way of facilitating poetry writing in the language classroom. These studies collectively give practical ideas and materials to EFL literacy educators about how to integrate poetry into L2 writing instruction and therefore serve as helpful resources for teachers.

Another avenue of research has emerged from the scholarship investigating the outcomes of integrating poetry as a meaningful literacy practice in language classrooms. For example, contrary to the common misconception that L2 poetry writing is difficult, the studies by Chamcharastri (2013) and Fithriani (2021) documented that language learners could write and appreciate poetry when given the chance. In addition, the extant literature showcased the pedagogical benefits of poetry writing for L2 writers. Assigning a poetry writing project to Chinese students in an undergraduate composition class, Garvin (2013) reported that the project not just facilitated opportunities for students to negotiate their individual identities but also enhanced their L2 writing skills. In a more recent study, Iida and

Chamcharatsri (2022) suggested that incorporating poetry writing into literacy and language education can foster "creativity, language play, and emotional expressions" (p. 64) and transform the L2 writing experience to a meaningful literacy practice. These studies establish the pedagogical value of poetry in teaching L2 writing and humanizing the language classroom by situating the individual language learner at the center of writing practice.

Other studies have shown language learners' perceptions of writing poetry in the target language. In his investigation of the first-year Japanese college students' perceptions, attitudes, and emotions regarding writing *Haiku*, "a three-line Japanese poem with a specific number of syllables in each line" (p. 1472) in English, Iida (2012) concluded that in many cases, students found poetry writing helpful for vocabulary acquisition and self-expression. In a similar research design, Zhang (2019) invited Chinese university students to compose a Chinese poetic form *Da You Shi* in English and found that the students' composition experience promoted their confidence in L2 poetry writing. Further studies delved into the factors influencing perceptions of L2 poetry writing (Liao & Roy, 2017), examining how prior writing experiences shape language learners' views on composing poetry in a second language (Liao, 2017).

Aligned with the objectives of this study, previous research also addressed language teachers' orientations toward the use of poetry in English education. The qualitative data in Liao (2018) suggested that despite the perceived difficulties of L2 poetry writing instruction, prospective language teachers considered poetry as a valuable and feasible pedagogical tool to utilize in language classrooms. Furthermore, in their comparative study of English teachers earning their degrees from the United States and Indonesia on their willingness to teach poetry, Masbuhin and Liao (2017) found that teachers with a degree from Indonesia showed lower interest and desire to teach poetry than the U.S.-educated teachers. In general, teachers' lack of desire to teach poetry resulted from curriculum-related factors and the perceived difficulty of poetry for teachers to teach and students to write. These studies added appreciably to our understanding of poetry as a pedagogical tool in the EFL classrooms. However, much work remains to be done to provide an empirical basis for outlining the pedagogical use of poetry. The more analysis of how EFL teachers approach the use of poetry as a pedagogical tool, the more informed

implications for incorporating poetry into L2 literacy instruction can be drawn.

Methods

Research Context and Procedure

This research was conducted in the English Language Teaching (ELT) Department at a public university in Northern Türkiye. Founded in 2018, the department accepted its first students in the 2019-2020 academic year. At the time of this study, 60 freshman, 46 sophomore, 54 junior, and 18 senior level students enrolled in the department. During their four-year education, students are required to take a variety of courses including basic skills courses (i.e., Writing Skills, Reading Skills, Listening Skills, and Oral Communication Skills), and field specific courses (e.g., Approaches to English Language Teaching, Teaching English to Young Learners, etc.). In addition to these, sophomore students are required to take a sequence of English Literature I-II courses where they are introduced to literary works from British and American Literature, whereas junior students take Literature and Language Teaching I-II courses in which they are familiarized with pedagogical approaches to using literature in language classrooms. A review of the curriculum for the ELT Departments in Türkiye, developed by the Council of Turkish Higher Education (YOK, n.d.), shows that the learning outcomes of these literature courses do not include writing or teaching poetry, but understanding the cultural history of English and American literature, as well as significant literary movements and periods, and the critical analysis and interpretation of literary texts. While teacher candidates are expected to integrate literature into the teaching of English in their future classrooms, they are by no means required to do so, and poetry writing is not among the objectives of K-12 English lessons.

After receiving the Institutional Review Board's approval given the ethical considerations for the study, an online survey was administered to all students in the ELT program via a web survey platform, Survey Planet. Students were invited to take the survey through an email. The survey included two open-ended questions and 5-point Likert scale items to measure

participants' demographics as well as confidence and willingness to write and teach poetry (see the Appendix).

Participants

Sixty-nine ($N=69$) students enrolled in the ELT department during the 2022-2023 academic year completed the online survey. The majority of participants were freshmen ($N=46$), while the remainder consisted of sophomores ($N=12$), juniors ($N=10$), and one senior level student. All students were aged between 18 and 24, and most identified as female ($N=46$). All students identified Turkish as their primary language, and they had been studying English as a foreign language since elementary school for approximately 10 years. They spent one academic year in the English preparatory program at the School of Foreign Languages before proceeding to the ELT department.

Data Analysis

To answer the first research question (What are pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes toward writing and teaching poetry?), descriptive statistics were measured for the quantitative data from the survey through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Additionally, qualitative data from the open-ended questions were coded thematically by the researcher following Saldana's (2009) coding manual. Furthermore, two statistical tests –Spearman rho and Mann-Whitney U– were employed with the finding of non-normally distributed data to answer the second research question (In what ways do poetry reading, writing, and instruction influence pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes toward writing and teaching poetry?).

Results

R.Q.1: What are pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes toward writing and teaching poetry?

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the rated items related to participants' confidence and willingness for writing and teaching poetry.¹

¹ Interpretation of the mean score is done rounding it to the nearest whole number. For instance, 2.21 would be read as 2 (somewhat disagree), whereas 2.94 would be 3 (neither agree nor disagree).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Pre-Service Turkish EFL Teachers' Confidence and Willingness to Write and Teach Poetry (N=69)

Item	Mean	SD
1. I feel confident that I can write poetry in my mother tongue.	2.94	1.18967
2. I feel confident that I can write poetry in English.	2.21	1.17410
3. I would like to learn how to write poetry in English.	3.50	1.36794
5. I would like to teach English poetry writing to my students.	3.46	1.40984

Note. Scale: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Somewhat disagree, 3 – Neither agree nor disagree, 4 – Somewhat agree, 5 – Strongly agree.

Table 1 shows that Item 2 had the lowest mean ($M=2.21$), demonstrating participants' lack of confidence in writing poetry in English. The participants rated their confidence in writing poetry in their mother tongue slightly higher ($M=2.94$) than in English ($M=2.21$). Regarding their willingness to write and teach poetry, participants ranked the former slightly higher ($M=3.50$) than the latter ($M=3.46$), both means indicating that participants were undecided about their wishes to write and teach poetry.

When asked if they had any concerns about writing poetry in English, 42 participants entered comments in

the survey. The coding of this data revealed four themes:

1. Proficiency in English language is important to be able to write poetry.
2. Writing poetry is a difficult task.
3. Pre-service EFL teachers are not interested in writing poetry.
4. Having not written poetry before is a cause of concern.

Table 2 includes examples from participants' responses coded for each theme.

Table 2

Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Concerns about Writing Poetry (N=42)

Thematic Categories	Examples
Language Skills ($N=25$)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think my English is good enough to write poetry. • I can't even write a simple sentence in English and I can't write something that rhymes. • I fear of making mistakes in terms of grammar.
Difficulty of Writing Poetry ($N=11$)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel very nervous about it. It could be difficult for us. • Writing poetry is a very difficult job, especially if you are doing it in a language that is not your mother tongue. • I think writing poetry in English is difficult to learn.
Lack of Interest ($N=8$)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's all about being interested to poems. I'm not sure about writing poems because I'm really not willing to write things. • My priority for English is basic skills rather than poetry. • I do not love writing poetry in any language.
Lack of Practice ($N=4$)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have not written or even read poetry in English. • I don't have any experiences or thoughts about writing poetry. • Neither I have written a poem in my mother tongue nor in English before.

Participants were also asked if they had any concerns about teaching poetry writing in English. Twenty-eight

($N=28$) participants answered this question and aligned with the previous data set, four themes emerged:

1. Pre-service teachers perceive their future students to lack interest/skills for writing poetry.
 2. Pre-service teachers feel pedagogically incompetent to teach poetry.
 3. Teaching poetry is difficult.
 4. Pre-service teachers are not interested in teaching poetry.
- Examples from participants' comments are presented in Table 3.

Table 3*Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Concerns about Teaching Poetry (N=28)*

Thematic Categories	Examples
Lack of Student Interest/Skills (N=9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not believe that all students will be willing to learn poetry. • I don't think everyone has the ability and inspiration to write poetry. • Students' limited vocabulary knowledge may be a problem.
Pedagogical Incompetence (N=8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can't teach others the subject that I myself can't learn and I am worried that I am inadequate. • I guess I can't teach because I have no talent in English about these issues.
Difficulty of Teaching Poetry (N=7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be hard to teach how to write poetry to those who can't write them in their native language in the first place. • Teaching is harder than learning, I think. • It will be difficult, but it can be beautiful.
Lack of Teacher Interest (N=5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if I learn how to write, I don't know if I enjoy or be eager to teach it. • I am not interested. • I don't want to teach!

R.Q.2: In what ways do poetry reading, writing, and instruction influence pre-service Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes toward writing and teaching poetry?

In response to how frequently they read poetry in English, 45 (65%) participants reported never, 15 (22%) stated one to two times, three stated three to five times, four stated six to seven times, and two stated eight or more times. As for the frequency of

writing poetry in English, almost all (N=64, 93%) reported that they never wrote poetry and five stated one-two times a month. Most of the students (N=64, 93%) also reported that they had never received any English poetry writing instruction in their education. To interrogate the connections between these background factors and confidence/willingness to write/teach poetry, a Spearman rho test was run.

Table 4*Correlations between Pre-Service Turkish EFL Teachers' Levels of Confidence/Willingness to Write/Teach Poetry and Background Factors*

Background Factors		Confidence in Writing Poetry	Willingness to Write Poetry	Willingness to Teach Poetry
Frequency of reading poetry	Spearman Rho	.256*	.304*	.335**
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.034	.011	.005
Frequency of writing poetry	Spearman Rho	.267*	.130	-.022
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.026	.286	.859
Years of poetry writing instruction	Spearman Rho	.217	.175	.071
	Sig. (two-tailed)	.073	.151	.563

Notes. 1. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed), 2. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A statistically significant positive correlation between frequency of reading poetry and confidence in writing poetry ($r=.256, p=.034$), willingness to write poetry ($r=.304, p=.011$), and willingness to teach poetry ($r=.335, p=.005$) was observed. Meanwhile, frequency of writing poetry was associated with confidence in writing poetry ($r=.267, p=0.26$), but not necessarily with the willingness to write and teach poetry. The number of years of poetry writing instruction that the participants received had a significant impact on neither their confidence nor willingness.

When asked “Have you ever taken English literature courses in your education?”, 24 participants said “yes”, 45 said “no”, which is not surprising given that the majority of survey respondents were freshman. To further investigate the influence literature classes may have on participants’ confidence and willingness to write and teach poetry, a Mann-Whitney U test was computed.

Table 5

Mann-Whitney U Test Comparisons (N=69, Yes=24, No=45)

Item	Grouping	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
1. I feel confident that I can write poetry in English.	Yes	42.11	1012.00	368.000	.023*
	No	31.18	1403.00		
2. I would like to write poetry in English.	Yes	37.77	906.50	473.500	.387
	No	33.52	1508.50		
3. I would like to teach English poetry writing to my students.	Yes	38.15	915.50	464.500	.325
	No	33.32	1499.50		

Note. * Statistically significant difference ($p= / < .05$).

Although participants who had taken literature courses (i.e., English Literature 1/2, Literature and Language Teaching 1/2 as described earlier), as part of the degree requirement in the ELT program, tended to rate all items higher compared to those who had yet not, the difference was statistically significant solely for Item 1 regarding confidence in English poetry writing ($U=368.000, p=.023$).

Discussion & Conclusion

Quantitative data revealed that pre-service Turkish EFL teachers lacked confidence in writing poetry and were hesitant to write and teach poetry. Although the frequency of reading poetry was related to both confidence and willingness to write and teach poetry, the frequency of writing poetry and the duration of poetry writing instruction received did not appear to be influential factors. However, these results cannot be deemed conclusive as the limited number of participants who wrote poetry and received poetry writing instruction renders the statistical analysis unreliable. Consequently, more data from a larger sample is necessary to establish more valid connections between writing poetry/receiving poetry writing

instruction and prospective teachers’ confidence and willingness to write and teach poetry.

Many participants perceived L2 proficiency as a prerequisite for writing poetry in a second language. This perception may partially explain the participants’ lack of confidence in writing poetry. As confirmed by Liao (2017), the more grammar-based the L2 learners’ writing experiences are, the less capable they perceive themselves to be in writing poetry. Iida and Chamcharatsri (2022) argue that it is important “not to overemphasize the correctness of linguistic use” when teaching poetry in the EFL classroom because “poetry writing is a literacy practice through which language learners/users freely articulate their voice and express themselves with their linguistic, stylistic, and literacy choices” (p. 64). By focusing on expressiveness and creativity, rather than imposing idealized standards and normativity, language and literacy educators can create safe spaces in the classroom for students to experiment and play with language in translating their thoughts to paper.

Results further showed that 24 of 69 participants took literature courses, whereas only five reported receiving English poetry writing instruction in their

education. This means that poetry writing was not necessarily part of the literature curriculum in the participants' English language teacher education program. This was echoed in the qualitative data, which revealed participants' concerns about writing poetry in a foreign language due to the lack of opportunities to practice poetry writing. Interestingly, although most participants had never written poetry, they believed poetry, particularly in a foreign language, was difficult both to write and teach. Hence, they expressed little interest in writing and teaching poetry. These results extend the findings of previous works on the perceived difficulties of L2 poetry writing instruction (Liao, 2018) and lack of teacher desire to teach poetry (Masbuhin & Liao, 2017). Extant research, however, has also established the value of poetry as a pedagogical tool (Chamcharatsri, 2013; Fithriani, 2021; Iida & Chamcharatsri, 2022) and benefits of such pedagogy in the L2 writing classroom (Garvin, 2013). It is, therefore, no longer a matter of whether to include poetry in the language classroom, but how to do.

Explorations of the "whys" of pedagogizing poetry in the language classroom offer insights into the benefits of a poetical approach to L2 literacy education. However, when it comes to the "hows", extant scholarship remains limited. Studies by Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2017), Çetinavcı and Tütüniş (2012), as well as Dymoke and Hughes (2009) advocate poetry for language teacher education and demonstrate practical approaches for introducing poetry to EFL teachers. The literature also demonstrates resources for implementing poetry in the L2 writing classroom (Chamcharatsri, 2013; Disney, 2012; Garvin, 2013; Spiro, 2007). And yet, there remains much work to be done to document the practical aspects of teaching poetry in language classrooms. More pedagogical works outlining the underpinning approaches to the introduction of poetry to L2 learners in various contexts can be helpful for language and literacy educators interested in incorporating poetry into their teaching but don't know how to. Meanwhile, instructors of L2 writing can experiment with poetry-based writing instruction, explore the possibilities, affordances, and challenges, and take action accordingly.

Furthermore, with the results of this study showing that the problem partly lies in the fact of there being a lack of practice and experience with poetry, language teacher education programs can facilitate opportunities for professional development by offering

workshops, seminars, and courses on meaningful literacy approaches to promote the affordances of poetry in language learning and teaching. Making poetry visible in the discourses of language teacher education can promote teachers' openness to using poetry in L2 writing instruction and facilitate more humanized classrooms where focus is not solely on grammar, standards, and norms but also the individual, personal experience, emotions, and self-expression. Such a humanistic approach to writing instruction can foster a supportive atmosphere in the classroom, encouraging an appreciation for L2 writers' creative engagement with the language without an over-emphasis on rule-based practices.

As with many empirical inquiries, this study has its limitations. First, the study focused on pre-service language teachers, including 46 freshmen, 12 sophomores, 10 juniors, and 1 senior student enrolled in the ELT program at a public university in Türkiye. Future research examining *in-service* teachers' perceptions of and experiences with poetry writing instruction can offer more practice-oriented insights into the topic. Second, this study was not experimental in design. Given the results of past experimental studies demonstrating English language learners' increased confidence and willingness to write poetry after having the experience of writing poetry in English (e.g., Zhang, 2019), future studies with experimental design can investigate the ways in which poetry writing experience can influence teachers' perceptions of teaching poetry in language classrooms. Finally, the results of this study concern teachers of English in Turkish EFL contexts. Pedagogical implications, therefore, may or may not be relevant to language teaching practices in other EFL contexts. To discuss the broader applications of the results, additional research in diverse settings is recommended.

Author Biography

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Appendix: Survey Questions

Section 1: Attitude Items

Please read the statements below and select the option that best reflects your level of agreement on each statement.

I feel confident that I can write poetry in my mother tongue.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

I feel confident that I can write poetry in English.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

I would like to learn how to write poetry in English.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

I would like to teach English poetry writing to my students.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

In the text box below, please answer the following questions.

What are, if any, your concerns with writing poetry in English?

What are, if any, your concerns with teaching poetry writing in English?

Section 2: Background Factors

What gender do you identify with?

- Female
- Male
- Other

Which category below includes your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55 or over

What is your mother tongue/first language?

- Turkish
- English
- Other (Please specify)

What is your foreign/second language?

- Turkish
- English
- Other (Please specify)

How long have you been studying English as a foreign language?

What is your major?

- English Language Teaching
- Other (Please specify)

I am a ...

- Freshman (first year student)
- Sophomore (second year student)
- Junior (third year student)
- Senior (fourth year student)

How many years of Turkish poetry writing instruction have you received in your education?

- None
- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 or more years

How many years of English poetry writing instruction have you received in your education?

- None
- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 or more years

Have you ever taken English literature courses in your education?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

If you answered yes to the previous question, which literature courses have you taken?

How many times each month do you read poetry in your mother tongue?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-7
- 8 or more

How many times each month do you read poetry in English?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-7
- 8 or more

How many times each month do you write poetry in your mother tongue?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-7
- 8 or more

How many times each month do you write poetry in English?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-7
- 8 or more