

## Research article

# Enhancing Primary School Teachers' Creative Writing Skills through Reflective Training

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**ORCID**Sri Rachmajanti: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7291-1212>**Abstract.**

In the domain of education, great teachers are those who facilitate students' learning effectively in an inspiring learning environment. Therefore, they should continuously develop and empower their professional and pedagogical competencies. In fact, there emerge abundant ways to empower themselves, and one of which is through the so-called 'reflective training'. As empirical evidence, English teachers in specific primary schools have not reached the expected level of CEFR criteria for creative writing (B1 at the minimum). For this reason, this study adopted action research via the implementation of reflective training to enhance the subjects' creative writing skills in one cycle incorporating planning, taking action(s), observing, and reflecting. Three instruments were employed, i.e., writing tasks, observation sheets, and questionnaires. Creative writing rubrics were taken from CEFR and Mozaffari to evaluate teachers' writing. The training made the teachers engaged in producing a piece of creating writing as output and allow them to reflect and improve it with the elements of creative writing aspects namely image, characterization, voice, and story. Teachers have successfully completed their writings with theories and skills in their writing products to reach the B2 CEFR level in creative writing.

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## 1. Introduction

Great teachers are those who enable to facilitate students' learning effectively in an inspiring learning environment. In the domain of education, teachers are educators professionally assigned to educate, teach, guide, scaffold, assess as well as evaluate their students in formal educational programs [1]. As a consequence, they are reinforced to develop and empower their professional and pedagogical skills continuously. In the Indonesian context, continuous professional development (CPD for short) for teachers is mandated by the Government Law on Teacher and Lecturer Competences no 14 year 2005. Therefore, teachers must always continuously update themselves to make them more empowered in facilitating students' learning during the instructional process in the classroom to challenge the 21st-century competencies. There are abundant ways for

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CPD, and one of which to empower the teachers is via the so-called 'reflective training'. Reflective training refers to facilitation to teachers starting from training to on-the-site assistance based on contextual identification and analysis of the issues in the school context, and reviewing strategies appropriate to local problems [2]. This training model suggested by Sulisty et.al. [2] is to refine past training models which are commonly conducted through 'hit and run' cascade modus with no mentoring scheme on the site. This implies that effective professional development training should embrace power and responsibility shared equally between the mentor and the trainees. Moreover, such training activities require the promotion of collegiality. Henceforth, the reflective training applies on-in-on phase (or three-phase action) implementation [2].

Pertinent to the local problems, empirically speaking, Indonesian young people's level of literacy from the international viewpoint is still unsatisfactory, as depicted in the results of a survey of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the Program of International Student Assessment. In 2013 Indonesian lower secondary school students achieved 396 (compared to OECD scoring 496) for reading in this instance), in 2015 obtained the score of 397 (487 for the OECD score), and in 2018 the reading competence was even lower than the previous years' attainment, 371 out of 487 [3]. It implies that the students' level of basic literacy (reading and writing) should be improved. Therefore, the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education and Culture has launched a program under the name 'School Literacy Movement' (*Gerakan Literasi Sekolah*) which is later modified into *Gerakan Literasi Nasional* [4] aiming at the formal inclusion of phase-by-phase literacy in curriculum framework at any levels of education. GLS was used to introduce literacy at school through reading habit formation at the start and then being accelerated to a higher level of literacy like developmental reading in which students are pushed to make a summary of what they have read, and at the final phase, triggered to read more subject-matter based reading materials. This sort of literacy approach is expected to provide the students with literacy competence in a gradual way. Thus, at school, it is on the teachers' hands to polish the students' competencies in literacy through teachers' scaffolding. Bruner [5] exclaimed that scaffolding is indispensable for young learners. They are going to become independent learners when they get mature with the assistance of their teachers and parents to develop skills. In other words, they are dependent on more knowledgeable people than they do in the course of the learning process.

Concerning the literacy movement, some schools in Indonesia have welcomed the government program including Laboratory Primary School of *Universitas Negeri Malang* (henceforth *UM Lab Primary School*). For the English lesson, the literacy program starts

in all grades even as early as the first grade, and as a consequence, the English teachers are required to be professionally competent in handling the program. Fortunately, routine teacher training is conducted by university scholars, especially for novice ones. A study by Rachmajanti and Sulisty [6] revealed that in training teachers, there exist aspects needing to be taken into account such as the innovation in education, the clarity of the syntax of the introduced strategy, the significance of the strategy, and the cognitive demand of the class in which the strategy will be implemented. Ariani et al. [7] conducted a training on process-oriented writing for the English teachers at this primary school. They found that teachers were still grappling to understand the international standard framework, which heavily emphasizes writing, and this had affected their teaching and writing skills. Through the training, the teachers were able to identify the stages of writing and understood the writing aspects, such as the organization and language used to allow them to compose well-written non-fiction texts. Puchta [8] and Pinter [9] postulated that reading and writing are interrelated competencies, so creative writing might not happen when reading is less.

Based on the result of analyzing some English teachers' pieces of creative writing at *UM Lab Primary School*, it was discovered that the teachers obtained a score of B1 [7, 10]. At this level, teachers have the competence to write descriptions on a range of familiar subjects within their field of interest. However, with the need to write a fiction text in the curriculum, at least B2 level needs to be obtained to provide a clear and detailed description of real or imaginary events and experiences. Thus, they needed training on how to write and teach creative writing skills to their students. The current study was then conducted to uncover the result of the reflective training to improve the English teachers' creative writing skills in the hope that the teachers later cater for the students' opportunities to write creatively.

Creative writing involves major qualities associated with creativity, especially in language use. Creative writing includes personal, imaginative expression in a variety of text types [10]. Specifically, there are four key concepts: aspects described, type of texts, the complexity of discourse, and use of language [10]. Burroway [11] and Mills [12] mentioned that creative writing consists of four major elements: image, voice, characterization, and story. These aspects will be valuable feedback to be discussed as part of the expectation or assessment in the creative writing composition.

## 2. Method

The current study was conducted as a follow-up action from the previous study conducted by Ariani et al. [7]. They found that the teachers in their study needed a further training to improve their creative writing. Thus, the current study used the action research (AR) method to solve the teachers' problem and improve their creative writing skills. Latief [13] mentions that action research is an effective way to improve English teachers' performance and the students' achievement in learning English in the classroom. The current study participants were 6 teachers from UM Lab Primary School Malang and 2 teachers from UM Lab Primary School Blitar.

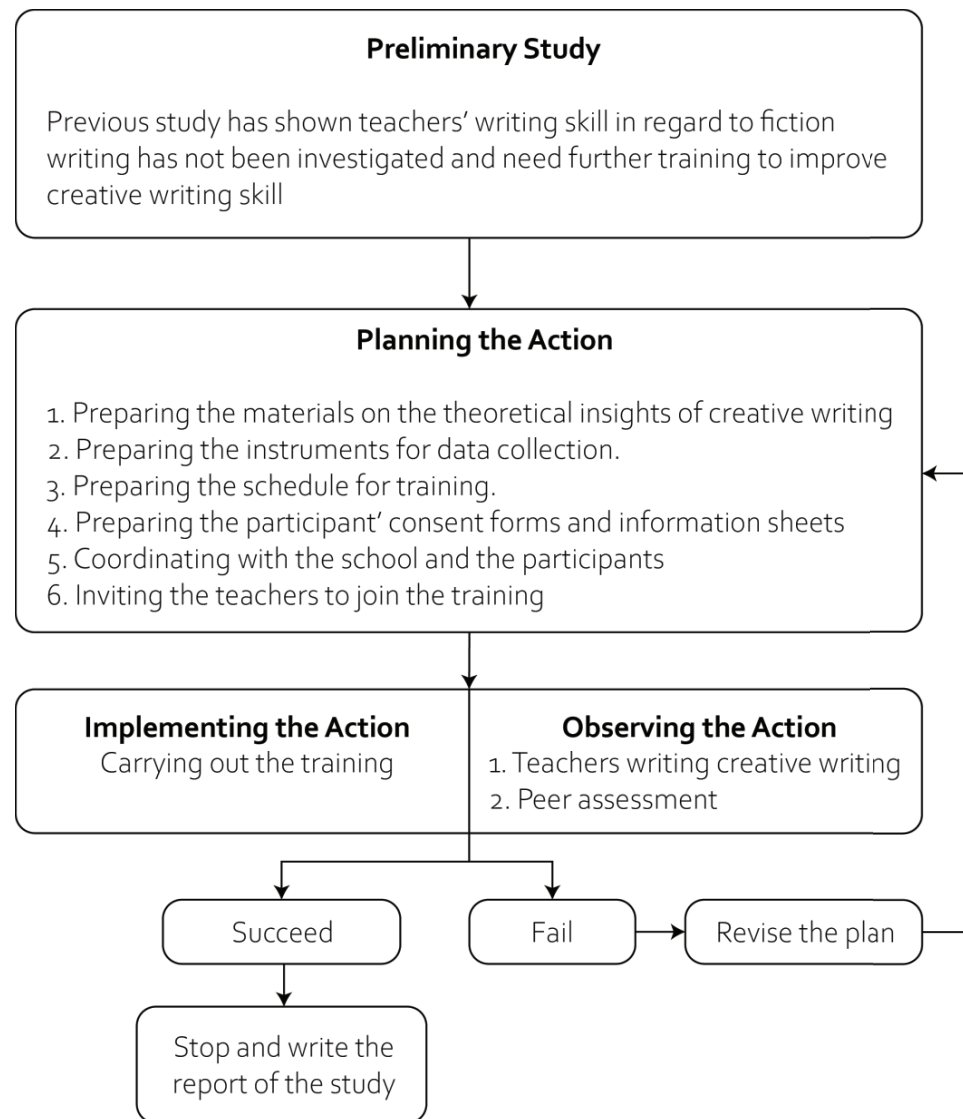
The current study involved four broad phases of action research comprising planning, taking action(s), conducting observations, and evaluating the result of the action, which is called "reflection" (see [14, 15, 16]). Data were collected using three instruments, i.e., writing tasks, observation, and questionnaire. These instruments were validated by peer review among the researchers prior to data analysis. The complete procedures of the current study are depicted in the following figure.

### 2.1. Procedures of the AR

#### 2.1.1. Planning

The figure describes the procedures of current study action research. The research started with a preliminary study where researchers gathered data from previous research regarding the teachers' writing skills. It was found that teachers' writing skill concerning fiction writing has not been investigated and need further training to enhance their creative writing skills.

Once we identified the problem, we then prepared the materials for the creative writing training. We used writing prompts and five senses strategies to help the teachers activate their imagination and develop their ideas. Hyland [17] states that writing prompts contain some supporting tools such as pictures and diagrams. The ideas born from the prompts given will be the sources of information that will give the learners the power to be creative in forming the ideas and writing them. The teachers must have a creative mind to provide the learners with various writing prompts. Using the five senses (hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch) is another strategy that the teachers can use to promote creative writing and get the learners to start writing [18]. The five senses stimulate learners' imagination of the world around them.



**Figure 1:** Procedures of the action research.

Next, we prepared the instruments for data collection such as the peer assessment and researchers' assessment. The rubrics were taken from CEFR [10] and Mozaffari [19] to evaluate the teachers' writing holistically and analytically. Weigle [20] mentioned there are two types of rubrics: 1) holistic rubric, which evaluates the overall quality of writing, and 2) analytical rubric, which focuses on a different aspect of writing. To determine whether or not the first cycle was successful, the researchers set up criteria of success based on the holistic creative writing rubric from CEFR and the analytical rubric of creative writing. If the first cycle results do not meet the criteria, a second cycle will be conducted. The CEFR rubric of creative writing as a holistic rubric provides an overall picture of what writers can achieve in creative writing. Below is the CEFR descriptors for the creative writing rubric. The following table is the rubric for CEFR creative writing. An

analytical rubric was also used to evaluate teachers' writing to complement the holistic creative writing rubric. Burroway [11] and Mills [12] mentioned that assessing creative writing included major qualities including image, voice, characterization, and story.

The table below is a rubric developed by Mozaffari [19] which refer to the previous four qualities. With the analytical creative writing rubric from Mozaffari [19], there are four elements to assess in the creative writing products. These include: (1) image; (2) characterization; (3) voice; and (4) story. The scale is from 1 to 4, making it 16 as the highest score. The score is categorized as low (0 – 5), mid (6-10), and high (11 – 16). The teachers are considered successful in completing the creative writing task if they integrate all elements and obtain high scores (11-16). The writing results in this study have been assessed and evaluated by the four researchers playing a role as an inter-rater to ensure the validity of the scores.

The next thing we did was prepare the schedule of the training. The training was conducted in six sessions, and it started with the theoretical aspects of creative writing and then the practical application with a reflection. Table 1 describes the training schedule.

TABLE 1: The Training Materials for Creative Writing.

Sessions	Theory
Session 1 (60')	Theory of basic literacy and school literacy movement in Indonesia
Session 2 (120')	Theory of creative writing Writing practice & peer assessment
Session 3 (120')	Creative writing using prompts and five senses Writing practice using five senses
Session 4 (120')	Theory of assessing creative writing Practice of assessing creative writing and
Session 5 (60')	FGD: Teachers' reflection on their writing based on the rubric and peer assessment
Session 6	Revision of teachers' writing

The teacher participants' consents were sought prior to conducting the training. Then, information about the training was sent through WhatsApp messages to the school administration staff. The staff then gave the information sheet along with the consent form to the teachers. Finally, we arranged the training with the schools and invited the teachers to join.

### 2.1.2. Carrying out the action (the training)

The training was conducted in six sessions. The first session was allocated to the theory of basic literacy and the school literacy movement in Indonesia. In the next session, this was followed by the theory of creative writing and its practice, followed by peer assessment.

In the third session, we workshopped writing prompts and using five senses. The teachers were introduced with different kinds of prompts and five senses to help the teachers explore different parts of their senses. These sensory explorations enabled the teachers to apply what they saw, felt, smelled, tasted, and touched in their writing. At the end of the session, the teachers wrote a paragraph using a prompt and developed the paragraph using the five senses.

In the fourth session, teachers were provided information about the theory and practice of assessing creative writing. This is important to find out what aspects to be written to produce creative writing. The fifth session was devoted to teachers' reflections. Here, they reflect on their writing based on the rubric and peer assessment. Finally, on the last session, teachers revised their writing and submitted their final revision with feedback from the researchers and peer assessment.

### 2.1.3. Doing observations

The observations were conducted to see if the teachers had implemented the theories of the five senses to activate their imagination in writing. The observations were from observing the teachers writing the creative writing, and the peer assessment activity.

### 2.1.4. Reflection of the actions

The reflection took place when teachers were involved in the discussion with the researchers and their colleagues in the peer assessment activity. These activities allowed them to examine and evaluate their writing and identify mistakes, errors, and aspects to be improved based on the creative writing rubric.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed that 5 of 8 teachers obtained a mean score (6 -10) for their preliminary writing conducted prior to the training. It can be seen that not all teachers

obtained the maximum score for image, characterization, voice, and story. Most of them were able to gain 1-3, with some exceptions reaching the score 4.

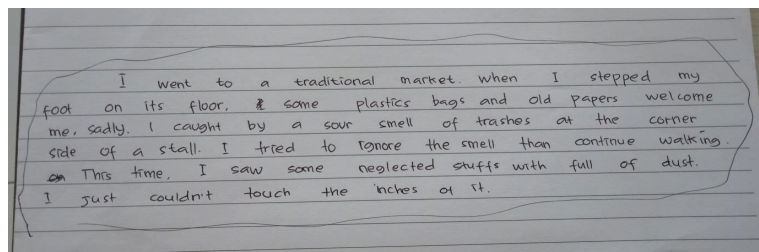
After the training, the teachers made improvements in the previous four aspects for their creative writing. Most of them had successfully got high scores (11-16), making them pass the success criteria. Six teachers received 14, 15, and 16 as the total scores, and it means they have written a better story by including some elements of creative writing that they learned during the training. The teachers improved their scores in the four aspects that have been mentioned in the previous paragraph.

TABLE 2

Participants	Image		Characterization		Voice		Story		Total Score	
	Pre training	Post training	Pre training	Post training	Pre training	Post training	Pre training	Post training	Pre training	Post training
T1	2	4	2	3	2	4	1	4	7	15
T2	3	4	2	4	3	4	1	4	9	16
T3	3	3	2	2	2	3	1	1	8	9
T4	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	4	13	16
T5	2	4	3	3	2	3	1	4	7	10
T6	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	13	14
T7	3	4	3	3	3	3	1	4	10	14
T8	3	4	2	3	2	4	4	4	11	15

### 3.0.1. Examples from the teachers' writing

#### 1. Excerpt 1 (Teacher 5)



One of the teachers composed this preliminary writing, and it obtained a total score of 7 out of 16. For the image, she obtained only 2 for the score. This score indicates that the teacher's ability to use significant details for making the story clear was minimal as the writer did not include all the five senses to create a strong image of the story. As for the characterization, the teacher got score 3, which means that the teacher can show several characters' actions and thoughts to reveal the character. She also used indirect characterization to let the readers think about the character's feeling towards her environment, but this is minimal and lacks development. The writing voice received



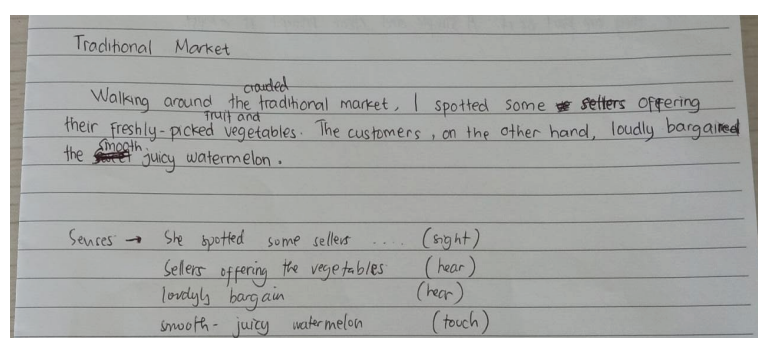
a score of 2, which is related to the teacher's use of minimal use of images and some words that were not accurately used to describe the situation. For the story, since the teacher did not use enough narrative elements to tell the story, this aspect received a score of 1. This might result from how teachers define what a creative writing is and what it looks like. An example of this is presented in a previous study by Akkaya [21], where several teachers defined creative writing as completing stories that have not been finished, while actually, the writing should be something original that creative writers create to express themselves. This shows how some teachers still had not had clear view of creative writing before the training.

### 1. Excerpt 2 (Teacher 5)

I went to a traditional market. When I stepped on its floor, some plastic bags and old papers welcomed me. Sadly, I tried to sniff out the strong stinky smell of garbage which was taking over the whole market. I tried to ignore the smell then continued walking. This time, I saw some neglected stuff full of dust. I just couldn't touch the inches of it.

After making some revision based on the instructor feedback, the teacher's writing improved from only 10 to 16. The image received a maximum score of 4, indicating how the teacher has used more details for her writing. The score for characterization remained the same since there was no change or revision in the characters' actions and thoughts. As for the writing voice, the teacher has revised some parts of her writing by deleting words that were previously used inaccurately, which results in a clearer story. However, the narrative in the story had not been developed in a more detailed plot and still received a score 1 after being revised. Mozaffari [19] mentioned that story refers to a narrative that puts the event in a sequence started from A to Z. Teacher 5 did not successfully narrate her story to convey a purpose while it is essential for creative writers to start and finish the story completely and clearly.

### 1. Excerpt 3 (Teacher 4)



The above writing is taken from an excerpt, another piece of teacher's writing in the preliminary stage and received 9 out of 16 as the total score. The teacher has used four senses in her writing; thus, the image aspect got 3 out of 4 as a clear image of what happened in the market is illustrated there. However, for the characterization, the teacher only obtained a score 2 since there was a limited description of the character's action. The teacher also could not provide any information about the character's appearance, feelings, or thoughts about what was happening in the traditional market. As for the voice element, the writing received a score of 3, which is related to the teacher's use of images and some keywords describing the situation. For the story, the teacher did not provide any narrative to tell the story making this aspect receive only a score of 1. This indicates a similar problem like what Teacher 5 experienced about how they see "a story". The overall result of these teachers' writing also somehow reflected how they have limited knowledge of creative writing and the elements and the necessary techniques to help them make the composition [21].

#### 1. *Excerpt 4 (Teacher 4)*

Walking outside the traditional market, I was immediately struck by the unfamiliar atmosphere. I had been used to coming here during the day, but somehow it was different at dawn. The traditional market was surprisingly busier at dawn than it was during the day.

As I reached the main gate, I spotted some sellers offering their freshly-picked fruit and vegetables. I didn't know exactly what to get since I was only here to accompany my mom. When she heard someone shouted 'Broccoli', she instantly led me closer to the seller. Then, she left for some beef and told me to pick up some fresh broccoli. I carefully laid my hands on each of the green broccoli to make sure it was good enough and finally paid for the biggest one.

Soon, I was headed to the meat stall and found my mom bargaining for the beef. I never liked it when I had to go to the meat stall as the stench was too strong for my nose to bear. Once she was done getting the meat, I quickly pulled her to the crowded fruit stall. I saw a bunch of ripe mangoes were on the table. The sweet smell of the mangoes had made me forgotten the unpleasant smell of the meat stall. Then, my mom and I decided to get some of them.

Afterwards, we went home and I could finally taste the soft and sweet mangoes. While enjoying the fruit, I could hear my mom yelling at me from the kitchen. "Can you even distinguish between a broccoli and a cauliflower? You just bought a cauliflower!" She said. I guessed I should shop with her more often.

The revised version of Teacher 4's writing received a maximum score of 16, which means that each aspect of creative writing scored 4. Thus, the teacher has successfully brought all five senses to her writing, and it allows the reader to not only read but imagine the situation in the market. The five senses are important in writing as they allow writers to visualize the idea in their minds; therefore, they will find it easier to organize the writing [18] and express themselves. That is what makes the five senses are also emphasized in the composition of creative writing.

Furthermore, characterization also obtained the maximum score as the teacher accommodated the instructor's feedback to improve the characterization by providing more information about how the writer feels about the crowded situation in the market and the loud noises from the sellers. The teacher even added the story in more detailed and specific ways, which made it more interesting. It can be seen that the teacher used both the indirect characterization and direct characterization in her creative writing. As for the voice, the teacher made significant changes by adding richer adjectives to give the reader a more detailed image of the market and the character's view of the market's situation and what happened among the characters in the story. The narrative has been developed way better compared to the preliminary writing. The storyline is presented very clearly, starting from the beginning to the end of the traditional market, even until the character and her mom reach home. The story ends with the character's opinion about what she had to do next. Weldon [22] mentioned that a story is more than the 'and then, and then, and then'- a story needs to resolve itself, and this has been successfully implemented by teacher 4.

### 3.1. Reflecting the training

Reflective training refers to facilitation to teachers starting from training to on-the-site assistance based on contextual identification and analysis of the issues in the school context and reviewing strategies appropriate to local problems [2]. Therefore, in the reflective training, the teachers had the opportunity to plan, actualize their teaching strategy contextually, and then reflect on how they have implemented it in their classes.

During the study, teachers participated in the FGD to discuss the result of their writing. Here, the researchers were able to provide feedback based on the theory and rubric of creative writing. In this stage, teachers talked about what they have acquired in the workshop and reflected on the theory and rubric to improve their creative writing compositions. They discussed their writing skills and how to actualize the theory and practice from the training and after that reflected their writing experience and products.

Not only they reflect on the writing practice, but they also reflect on how the training has provided new insight to their professional development. Teachers mentioned the training provided a platform to self-reflect. Teachers mentioned the benefits of taking part in the creative writing training. One teacher mentioned that the training is interesting, valuable, and inspirational.

*“Thank you for the opportunity, we were given very interesting material and very useful for us as teachers. Hopefully we can implement it well and can improve the ability of our students in terms of creative writing.”*

Another teacher said that the training has provided a platform for professional development.

*“Training like this is highly expected to be sustainable because it improves the teaching profession.”*

These responses from the teachers are in line with what another study [23] found that teachers that were involved believed how creative writing training in group supported them in terms of personal, social, and professional life, as well as the opportunity to create creative writing that they wished to experience long before the training. Moreover, as the first teacher expressed, the teacher in that study hopes that training can help the students in creative writing activities. This is possible as the creative writing workshop where teachers have the chance to be guided by professional writers encourages them to improve the teaching of creative writing, which might positively impact students' motivation and confidence [23]. These qualities are essential for the students and the teachers themselves as the problem found by Yoo [24] showed how teachers lack confidence in writing creatively due to being used to only writing academically.

By getting involved in the creative writing training, teachers realize that both teaching and writing processes require creativity and agency to invest themselves in both activities [24]. It implies that for the teachers to teach the students the necessary skills to also be able to write creatively, they need more than producing a piece of creative writing. The teachers should also support the students to use language creatively by observing, brainstorming, narrating, describing, and should not expect the students to write similarly to what their friends do [21].

## 4. Conclusion

This study has found that teachers were able to practice reflective practice on the training to improve their creative writing skills. The teachers reflected the training as support that inspires and facilitates them in professional development to implement

techniques in writing creatively and teach the students to be more active in producing their creative writing. In addition, the teachers have built awareness of the significance of teaching creative writing and interest in the practice of creative writing. Further studies are needed to investigate topics related to creative writing and reflective practice with more participants to promote literacy skills, particularly in teaching writing in primary education.

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