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Figurative Language in Student Poetry: An Analysis of Eighth-Grade Students' Poems at MTs Ja-Alhaq Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT

Figurative language plays a crucial role in enriching poetic expression and developing students' literary competence, yet its systematic use among junior secondary school students in Indonesia has not been widely documented. This study aimed to analyze the types and functions of figurative language found in a collection of poems written by eighth-grade students at MTs Ja-Alhaq, Bengkulu City. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the data were collected through documentation of student-written poems and analyzed using semantic and stylistic approaches to identify and classify figurative devices. The analysis revealed frequent use of simile, hyperbole, personification, and repetition, which functioned to emphasize emotional intensity, convey abstract ideas, and enhance the aesthetic quality of the texts, while other devices such as metaphor, allegory, and ellipsis appeared less frequently. These findings suggest that students at the junior secondary level are capable of applying diverse figurative forms, reflecting both creativity and emerging literary awareness. The novelty of this research lies in its empirical focus on adolescent poetry within an Indonesian educational context, an area rarely explored in previous studies. The results imply that integrating figurative language instruction into the language learning curriculum can enhance students' creativity, critical thinking, and appreciation of literature, while also contributing to the broader development of literacy and character education.

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Introduction

Poetry has long been recognized as one of the most profound forms of literary expression, offering a medium through which individuals can articulate emotions, experiences, and worldviews with aesthetic and symbolic depth. Among adolescents, poetry writing serves not only as an outlet for emotional expression but also as an educational practice that fosters linguistic competence, creativity, and critical thinking (Jean-Berluche, 2024; Jin & Ye, 2022; Norton & Gregson, 2020). In the digital era, the proliferation of social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook has amplified adolescents' tendency to express their feelings through brief, emotionally charged texts resembling poetic forms, often accompanied by images or captions. While this trend reflects a democratization of literary expression, it also highlights a pedagogical challenge: students frequently adopt informal language patterns derived from popular culture, which can undermine their mastery of formal poetic devices and figurative

language that are essential for developing literary competence (Beaumont, 2022; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2018). Figurative language, or *majas* in the Indonesian context, constitutes a vital component of poetry, enabling writers to enrich meaning, evoke imagery, and elicit emotional responses from readers. Scholars have classified figurative language into various categories, including comparison, contradiction, affirmation, and association, each serving specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes (Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011). Mastery of these devices is not only a marker of advanced language use but also a crucial indicator of students' cognitive and affective engagement with literature (Feldman, 2019; Tskhovrebova et al., 2022; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Despite its importance, recent studies indicate a worrying decline in students' interest and competence in writing poetry, particularly with respect to the use of figurative language. Several factors contribute to this trend, including the dominance of visual and entertainment-based media, limited parental involvement in nurturing literary skills, and an educational emphasis that prioritizes STEM subjects over language and literature (Anning, 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Merino et al., 2024). Adolescents today are increasingly exposed to colloquial, slang, and even derogatory expressions in popular media, which, when internalized, can erode their sensitivity to linguistic aesthetics and their ability to employ figurative language effectively in literary creation (Bozzola et al., 2022; Nesi et al., 2018). This linguistic shift not only diminishes the artistic quality of student writing but also signals a broader cultural concern regarding the preservation of refined language practices and literary appreciation. Furthermore, teachers often face challenges in motivating students to engage deeply with poetry writing, as many adolescents perceive it as a demanding or irrelevant activity compared to their preferred digital modes of self-expression (Barton et al., 2024; Hadi Mogavi et al., 2024; Myhill et al., 2023).

Previous research on figurative language in Indonesian literary works has predominantly focused on novels, professional poetry collections, or song lyrics, providing valuable insights into stylistic patterns and cultural values embedded in such texts(Irshad & Yasmin, 2022). However, fewer studies have systematically examined how junior secondary school students apply figurative language in their own poetry writing, particularly in the context of classroom assignments. While some studies have identified the presence of simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and personification in student works, they often conclude that usage is limited, repetitive, and lacks variation, reflecting students' partial understanding of figurative devices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Moreover, existing research has seldom investigated the pedagogical implications of these findings for curriculum design and instructional strategies in Indonesian language education.

This constitutes a salient research gap: although the role of figurative language in literary texts has been widely studied, little empirical attention has been given to how adolescents at the junior secondary level, particularly those in MTs (Islamic junior high schools), engage with and apply various types of figurative language in their own poetic compositions. Addressing this gap is critical not only for assessing students' current literary competencies but also for informing pedagogical approaches that can foster greater creativity, linguistic refinement, and appreciation of literature among adolescents. Therefore, the present study aims to analyze the types of figurative language used in the poetry written by eighth-grade students at MTs Ja-Alhaq

Bengkulu City, to identify the most dominant forms employed, and to evaluate the implications of these findings for enhancing poetry instruction in Indonesian language education.

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze the use of figurative language in a collection of poems written by eighth-grade students at MTs Ja-Alhaq, Bengkulu City. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it enables the exploration of linguistic phenomena in depth and in their natural context. The data source consisted of students' written poems, which were collected through documentation techniques. Data were analyzed using semantic analysis methods to identify and classify different types of figurative language such as simile, hyperbole, repetition, personification, metaphor, ellipsis, and allegory. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data validity was established through semantic validation, while intra-rater and inter-rater reliability checks were conducted to maintain consistency and minimize researcher bias. The analysis process involved several steps: identifying figurative expressions within the poems, categorizing them based on established linguistic frameworks, and interpreting their function and meaning in relation to students' poetic expression. Ethical considerations were observed by maintaining the anonymity of student authors and ensuring that their creative works were respected as intellectual property. This methodological framework provided a rigorous, systematic, and ethically sound approach to documenting and interpreting the use of figurative language in junior secondary students' poetry, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of linguistic creativity in adolescent literary expression.

Results and Discussion

Types of Figurative Language Identified

The analysis of students' poems revealed the presence of multiple types of figurative language. The most frequently used were simile, hyperbole, personification, metaphor, and repetition, followed by less frequent forms such as ellipsis and allegory. Simile emerged as the most dominant figure of speech, as students often relied on comparison to express emotions and natural imagery. Hyperbole was also widely employed, reflecting the tendency of adolescents to dramatize personal experiences in their creative writing.

Frequency and Distribution of Figurative Language

Quantitative counts showed that among the collected poems, simile and hyperbole accounted for nearly half of all identified figures of speech, while metaphor and personification represented approximately one third. Repetition was commonly used to strengthen rhythm and emphasize key themes, while ellipsis and allegory were rarely applied, indicating limited mastery of more complex forms of figurative language. These findings suggest that students tend to rely on more accessible forms of figurative expression rather than experimenting with abstract or layered stylistic devices.

Contextual Themes in Student Poetry

The use of figurative language was strongly tied to thematic concerns in students' poems. Themes of friendship, love, family, and natural beauty were prominent, with figurative expressions often serving to intensify emotional resonance. Similes were primarily used to connect personal feelings to natural phenomena, while hyperbole underscored intensity of emotions such as longing or disappointment. This indicates that figurative language in student poetry is closely linked to the cultural and developmental context of adolescence.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with prior research emphasizing the pedagogical role of figurative language in developing students' creative and linguistic competencies. First, the dominance of simile and hyperbole reflects results from studies by Hossain (2024), Hossain, (2024), and Darling-Hammond (2020), which highlight how simpler figures of speech are more accessible to learners and act as foundational tools in creative expression. Second, the limited use of allegory and ellipsis echoes findings from Ayele (2023) who reported that students often struggle with abstract figurative devices due to insufficient exposure to literary models. Third, the reliance on figurative language to convey emotional themes supports observations by Peel (2023), Colston and Gibbs (2021), and Amitai and Van Houtte (2022), who stress that literature in education fosters empathy and emotional intelligence by allowing learners to articulate personal experiences. Fourth, the patterns observed in this study are consistent with Hossain, (2024) and Samaniego (2024), who emphasized that poetry writing activities enhance students' sensitivity to language and cultivate cultural as well as aesthetic appreciation. Finally, these results correspond with international studies, such as those by Hossain, (2024), which argue that literary stylistics can scaffold learners' critical and creative engagement with language.

The novelty of this research lies in its systematic documentation and analysis of figurative language in poetry written by Indonesian junior secondary students, an area rarely addressed in depth compared to studies focusing on adult or canonical literature. By focusing on adolescents' linguistic creativity, this study contributes new insights into how young learners employ language to construct meaning, negotiate identity, and engage with cultural expression.

The implications of the study suggest that poetry writing and figurative language analysis can be effectively integrated into language and literature curricula to enhance students' linguistic awareness, creativity, and critical thinking. Teachers should provide scaffolding that exposes students to diverse figurative devices and models of literary expression, enabling them to expand beyond simple similes and hyperboles toward more complex stylistic strategies.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis was limited to a single institution and a relatively small sample of student poems, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused solely on written products, without investigating students' cognitive processes or their oral performances of poetry. Future research should incorporate larger and more diverse samples, adopt longitudinal designs, and include multimodal approaches such as classroom observation and interviews to gain deeper insights into how students develop figurative language competence over time.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of figurative language in poems written by eighth-grade students at MTs Ja-Alhaq Bengkulu City demonstrates both the creativity and linguistic competence of adolescents in expressing emotions, ideas, and cultural values through literary forms. The analysis revealed that students most frequently employed figurative devices such as simile, hyperbole, personification, and repetition, which served not only as stylistic embellishments but also as tools to convey meaning, emphasize feelings, and enhance the aesthetic quality of their writing. These findings highlight that even at the junior secondary level, students are capable of experimenting with complex linguistic structures, thereby underscoring the pedagogical value of poetry writing in language learning. The novelty of this research lies in its systematic documentation and interpretation of figurative language in student poetry, an area that has received little empirical attention in Indonesian educational contexts. The implications suggest that teachers should integrate figurative language instruction more explicitly into the curriculum to strengthen students' literary awareness, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Nonetheless, this study is limited by its focus on a single school and reliance on written texts without exploring oral performance or students' interpretative perspectives, indicating that future research should adopt broader samples, multimodal approaches, and longitudinal designs to deepen understanding of how figurative language supports literacy and character development.

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