

The Impact of Creative Writing Activity on EFL Learners' Non-Core Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract

In the context of ELT and EFL classrooms, creative writing has been underutilized in language learning and critical consciousness development (Stillar, 2013). This paper presents a quantitative approach that aims to explore the impact of a creative writing activity in terms of non-core vocabulary acquisition within B2-level EFL classrooms. By conveying a set of in-class and autonomous creative writing activities, the study deepens not only into vocabulary acquisition but also into second language acquisition (SLA) purposes. The investigation aims to discover the extent to which the instruction of creative writing activities fosters EFL learners' acquisition of non-nuclear vocabulary. Following a quantitative methodology, a non-core vocabulary pre-test and post-test were administered to students. These tests included sections for analyzing students' knowledge of non-core vocabulary and the linguistic repertoire used in vignette descriptions (strip comics). Results from a paired samples t-test suggested that integrating creative writing activities in EFL environments not only enhanced lexical acquisition but also fostered detachment from cultural nuances and the influence of the students' mother tongue. All the scrutinized elements within the students' linguistic repertoire were improved after the creative writing instruction. Within this analysis, the verbs and adjectives were the elements that were the most improved in terms of specificity and concreteness. Overall, the study sheds light on the potential benefits of integrating creative writing activities in EFL classrooms. The findings hold promising implications for EFL educators seeking innovative strategies to enhance language learning and intercultural competence.

Keywords: Creative writing, Discourse analysis, ELT, EFL, Non-core vocabulary

1. Introduction

English is recognized today as a global language, inextricably linked to the concept of 'language spread' (Phillipson, 1994). Its historical, cultural, and linguistic significance has grown immensely, with English serving not only as a means of international communication but also as a vehicle for explaining global issues. This widespread adoption has firmly established English as a 'world language,' a status that continues to expand (Arbor, 1986). The scope of English Language Teaching (ELT) has consequently seen a remarkable ascent, often referred to as "a language [...] whose users never sleep" (Quirk, 1985, 1). Currently, over 750 million individuals employ English, with less than half considering it their mother tongue (McCrum, Cran, and Macneil, 2002, 9-10). This phenomenon has given rise to the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) worldwide, encompassing a range of specialized domains, including technology, economics, and politics.

Despite the multitude of activities and methodologies within ELT and EFL, one challenge persists: enabling foreign learners to detach from the linguistic and cultural nuances of their mother tongue, particularly as they progress beyond B2 levels. This critical stage necessitates a transition towards fluency that involves minimizing reliance on native language thinking. However, it has been observed that writing, one of the fundamental linguistic skills, often remains entwined with the user's native language. Several studies have found that writing is inherently influenced by the user's mother tongue, influencing the organization of ideas and sometimes leading to the literal translation of lexical chunks into the target language (Tang, 2012). In essence, writing becomes a skill where the speaker's mother tongue is subconsciously involved (Cumming, 1990; Sun and Wang, 2020, p. 12).

Creative writing is emerging nowadays as a powerful tool within ELT, allowing students to not only achieve linguistic objectives such as lexical improvement, grammar correction, and structural proficiency but also to explore their thoughts and emotions. These creative tasks are key to self-understanding and personal growth (Forsell et al., 2020), highlighting their potential for raising critical consciousness in EFL classrooms (Stillar, 2013; Gilbert, 2021) and enhancing proficiency in second language (SL) writing. Despite this, limited data exists on the extent to which creative writing activities contribute to the acquisition and practice of non-core and emotional vocabulary (Carter, 1998).

This instruction provides students with the opportunity to express their visions freely, using their knowledge of previously taught grammar and vocabulary (Boiko and Baybekova, 2020; Yasir et al., 2021). The development of learners' writing identities is highly facilitated through creative writing activities (Parra, 2021; Yang and Reynolds, 2022), nurturing proficiency in the language alongside the development of their personal ideas. Furthermore, creative tasks enhance students' cognitive skills, contributing to the development of their interest, memory, and critical thinking (Şenel, 2021; Rakhmanbergenova and Kulakhmetova, 2022). As such, creative writing represents an effective and multifaceted language-learning tool in EFL classrooms.

None of the prior studies, however, focused on the impact creative writing instruction has on EFL student's acquisition of concrete and proficient vocabulary. Specifically, this study concentrates on enhancing the lexical proficiency of B2 EFL students using a quantitative methodology. Non-core vocabulary, in other terms, pertains to the usage of 'non-nuclear terms' (Dixon, 1971) within the students' lexical repertoire. These terms, distinct from core vocabulary items in terms of their coreness and meaning, offer a means of conveying more expressive and nuanced messages within the speaker's discourse (Nguyen, 2023).

Consequently, this paper seeks to assess the extent to which creative writing instruction facilitates the acquisition of non-core vocabulary, promoting detachment from cultural and mother tongue nuances. By exploring this under-researched facet, this study endeavors to contribute valuable insights to the field of EFL instruction and vocabulary acquisition. The investigation was conducted by administering a pre-test and a post-test to 25 B2-EFL students in an academy located in Lleida, Spain.

The participants were selected based on their age range, gender, and English language level, ensuring that the participants were representative of the population.

The elapsed time between the administration of the pre-test and the post-test allowed the students to immerse themselves in different creative writing activities. The EFL learner had several tasks during these seven weeks in which they had to develop some stories and improve them after having provided thorough feedback on the lexis used. The general terms of the stories were highlighted in order to make students search for more concrete words (with the usage of thesauri). Along with these autonomous tasks, different activities ensured the integration of creativity into the classroom, as well as the introduction of several non-core terms they could use in their stories.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to compare and analyze the impact of creative writing instruction within non-core vocabulary acquisition in B2-EFL classrooms. This study aimed to explore (1) principally the extent to which creative writing has had an impact on the non-core vocabulary acquisition of EFL students, and (2) which of the themes analyzed within the descriptions has ameliorated more thanks to creative writing activities. To this end, the following research questions guided this current study:

RQ1. To what extent has creative writing had an impact on the non-core vocabulary acquisition of EFL students?

RQ2. Which of the criteria analyzed within the descriptions has ameliorated more thanks to creative writing activities?

2. Literature Review

Before interpreting the various data collected in the investigation, we may state the proper studies that provide the proper background for the development of the current study. Some research in EFL has focused on the impact of creative writing on this linguistic skill, nonetheless, the drawing together of all the preestablished literature notes the gap by which non-core vocabulary has been poorly analyzed through creative writing activities.

This kind of engaging activities can provide a fostering in linguistic acquisition, apart from encouraging learners' autonomy and promoting self-awareness (Tang, 2012; Schrader, 2017; Şenel, 2021; Rakhmanbergenova and Kulakhmetova, 2022). Additionally, the acquisition of non-core vocabulary through creative writing contributes to an insight into learners' cognitive and affective engagement within the target language (Carter, 1998).

2.1 Non-core Vocabulary and Cultural Detachment

Numerous scholars, including Carter (1998), Dixon (1971), and Nguyen (2023), have extensively explored the critical factors influencing the acquisition of vocabulary within the realm of language learning. These scholars have dedicated their research efforts to delineate the intricate dynamics between different categories of vocabulary and the development of language proficiency. In particular, their investigations have centered on the nuanced distinction between core and non-core vocabulary, which has emerged as a focal point in the semantic examination of the English language. This emphasis on core and non-core vocabulary underscores the significance of lexical diversity and its impact on language acquisition, providing valuable insights into the intricacies of vocabulary development.

It shall be commented, beforehand, on the fact that in English “the expressive meaning might be said to be conveyed more predominantly at the level of lexis than at other levels (with the possible exception of intonation)” (Carter, 1982, p. 39). This expressive language is, indeed, linked with the lexical concreteness of the speaker's linguistic repertoire. In other terms, the more concrete vocabulary is used, the more expressive and meaningful is the conveyed message. For this reason, non-core vocabulary is a vital contributor to creative writing and, thus, language mastery.

Core vocabulary, on the one hand, can be defined as the ‘basic items’ of a language (Carter, 1982, p. 39), implying, in several ways, the most important role in the first stages of language acquisition. This coreness may imply a broader meaning of language, that, to a certain extent, characterizes poor linguistic concreteness. It can be stated, therefore, that core terms “tend to have greater frequency than non-core (non-nuclear) items. This is not to say that the least nuclear verb is more frequent than the most common non-nuclear one; rather that in almost every case a certain nuclear word will have greater frequency than non-nuclear words that are related to it” (Dixon, 1971, p. 441).

Core vocabulary encompasses lexical items characterized by unmarked usage, contributing to effective communication (Carter, 1998, p. 35). To illustrate the concept of marked and unmarked language usage, consider the phrases "How big was it?" and "How little was it?" (Carter, 1998, p. 35). The former embodies an unmarked connotation, while the latter implies a marked meaning of the term (Baker, 2008, p. 11). These distinctions emphasize how core vocabulary is often associated with the unmarked, basic elements of language, enhancing comprehensibility. In contrast, non-core vocabulary items offer more specific and nuanced meanings within the speaker's discourse (Nguyen, 2023). This interchangeability of core and non-core terms underscores their roles in conveying varying levels of concreteness in meaning (Carter, 1998; pp. 38-40).

Non-core vocabulary implies, on the other hand, some of the least used lexis, while it can be also interpreted as the usage of concrete and expressive language. Since core terms represent the basic and neutral connotation of the message, non-core words are highly linked with the specific meaning of the utterance. This notion is, therefore, associated with the cultural values of the language. In other words, while core vocabulary may be easily translated to the learners' L1, non-nuclear terms are detached from the speaker's mother tongue, since the meaning may not rely that much on direct translation. It can be concluded that “non-core words are less easily translatable” (Carter, 1998, p. 57). This does not only link non-core vocabulary with a more specific and proficient usage of the language, but it does also imply a cultural detachment in the speaker's usage of the L2 (Carter, 1987, p. 184).

Having stated the prior, it can be concluded that, while core vocabulary is mainly taught during the first stages of second language acquisition, non-core terms characterize the mastery of a language, by using a more specific and ‘technical’ meaning of language. Even though nuclear terms refer to the simplified yet comprehensible communication of a language (Blum and Levenston, 1978), non-core words can be extremely useful for expressive language (Nguyen, 2023). For this reason, it can be stated that concrete language can be more effective in generating sensory-based details and vivid imagery (Ding et al., 2023, p. 7), as in the case of creative writing.

2.2 Non-core Vocabulary and English Language Teaching (ELT)

As previously mentioned, non-core vocabulary encompasses words that, while less commonly used, play a pivotal role in grasping the subtleties of culture and emotion within language. Beyond their infrequent usage, acquiring non-core vocabulary proves essential for effective communication and fostering intercultural competence (Hinkel, 2004). These words contribute to infusing language with a heightened level of expressiveness and creativity (Carter, 2004, p. 141), owing to their substantial connotative power, which resonates strongly with readers.

Firstly, it should be mentioned that EFL textbooks mainly include the most frequent words of the language divided by family groups. It may also be true, however, that “EFL learners may be exposed to the same semantic domains and similar vocabulary input through the textbooks and teaching materials in different countries and educational levels” (Akbarian et al., 2020, p. 10). According to these findings, EFL textbooks may rely on core vocabulary on a repeated basis, being exposed to similar vocabulary at different language levels.

Despite no research has focused directly on the influence and impact of non-core vocabulary in EFL students, it can be stated that non-nuclear terms, nevertheless, provide a language vocabulary

improvement within learners. This is mainly present in writing activities, since the more expressive and concrete the word is used, the more 'non-coreness' it conveys (Carter, 1998, p. 57). It is also true that this lexical group can be more difficult to present in EFL classrooms, due to their untranslatability. However, through different activities involving creative writing and language play, students can easily engage with the target language's lexicon and incorporate some of these into their linguistic repertoire.

Language play refers to the creative manipulation of language for various purposes (Carter, 2004), such as aesthetic expression, humor, or communicative experimentation. It involves deviating from conventional language use, often by introducing linguistic elements like wordplay, puns, metaphors, or unconventional sentence structures. Language play serves not only as a means of engaging with language in novel ways but also as a tool for fostering creativity and deepening one's understanding of the linguistic and cultural nuances embedded in language. In the context of the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom, language play encourages students to explore language beyond its basic functions, promoting active engagement with the target language and offering opportunities to experiment with vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns.

Furthermore, it plays a pivotal role in facilitating the acquisition of non-core vocabulary, allowing learners to access the rich tapestry of linguistic expression that extends beyond everyday communication. As a dynamic aspect of language use, language play is central to the pedagogical approach discussed in this literature review, where creative writing activities harness its potential for enhancing linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence. Within the context of the EFL classroom, the employment of language play serves as a catalyst for stimulating creativity and active engagement in the target language (Belz and Reinhardt, 2004). Beyond its role in fostering creativity, it also proves instrumental in expediting the acquisition of non-core vocabulary and promoting a deeper grasp of cultural nuances (Cook, 2000).

For these reasons, the teaching of non-nuclear terms within an EFL classroom can provide several benefits in the learners' involvement with the language, as well as a great linguistic improvement in terms of vocabulary. By using words that have less frequency than others, students will get immersed in the language itself, and they will try to play with the language throughout their learning process.

2.3 Creative Writing and Linguistic Acquisition

In addition to its role in fostering self-awareness, creative writing emerges as a potent instrument for catalyzing linguistic development, with a particular emphasis on the acquisition of an enriched vocabulary. Smith's (2013) underscores the significance of the emotional resonance engendered by language use. It is crucial to acknowledge that effective communication often hinges on the subtle nuances within word choices. In this regard, creative writing offers learners an invaluable avenue for embarking on a journey to explore the intricate subtleties inherent in language. This process not only equips them with a heightened linguistic sensitivity but also fosters a deeper comprehension of the culture and context within which the language is embedded.

In terms of linguistic acquisition, creative writing can help learners develop various language skills, including grammar, vocabulary, and discourse competence (Belz and Reinhardt, 2004; Maley, 2009; Boiko and Baybekova, 2020; Yasir et al., 2021). By engaging in creative writing activities, learners are able to experiment with language and learn how to use it effectively in context (Cook, 2000). Additionally, creative writing can facilitate the acquisition of non-core vocabulary, which is essential for understanding cultural nuances and expressing emotions (Smith, 2013). Furthermore, creative writing can foster learner autonomy, as learners take ownership of their writing and engage in self-directed learning (Oberman and Kapka, 2001; Şenel, 2021; Rakhmanbergenova and Kulakhmetova, 2022).

Several studies have hypothesized that creative writing instruction can enhance linguistic development in EFL environments. More concretely, this kind of activity fosters language development at various levels: lexical resources, grammatical resources, discourse management, and even phonology (Maley, 2009). Creative writing methodologies enable EFL students to play with the language, allowing

them to attempt to express more personal messages. Taking into consideration the prior arguments, it can be concluded the fact that creative writing instruction is crucial in not only the development of EFL writing skills but also their second language development.

Furthermore, the learning of non-core vocabulary terms is an important aspect of second language acquisition (SLA), as these terms can create a greater sense of cognitive awareness for the learner (Carter, 1998). By engaging in creative writing activities, students can develop a deeper understanding of the culture and context in which the language is used and can gain exposure to a wider range of vocabulary and language structures. Apart from immersing in several activities that lead them to self-understanding processes and individual growth (Forsell et al., 2020; Parra, 2021; Yang and Reynolds, 2022), this English language teaching methodology enables them to acquire proficient and culturally detached vocabulary.

To sum up, it can be stated how language creative language can increase the learner's engagement with the target language and, therefore, empower them to explore complex language (Tin, 2012, p. 179). Moreover, the role of language creativity has been on the rise (Cook, 2000), so, creative writing activities can encourage students to stretch and destabilize learners' interlanguage (Tarone, 2000).

3. Research Methods

In this study, a non-core vocabulary pre-test and post-test were administered to students in order to evaluate the effectiveness of creative writing activities in improving their vocabulary usage. The pre-test and post-test consisted of three different sections, including describing the vignettes using as much vivid language as possible, testing the knowledge of some terms, and testing the correct knowledge of some others. The first part of the pre-test and post-test, which involved analyzing the vignettes' descriptions, allowed the 'nuclear' terms of the students' texts to be divided between core vocabulary and non-core vocabulary. This enabled the total amount of concrete vocabulary used by the students to be extracted before and after the creative writing instruction through discourse analysis.

During the period between the two tests, a series of creative writing activities were implemented to provide students with sufficient resources to explore and learn non-core vocabulary consciously or unconsciously. Some of these activities involved writing a story and using different drafts to improve the vocabulary used in the piece. Once the feedback of the draft was given, students were able to see which terms could be improved, while linking them to various online resources for them to investigate (e.g., thesauri, dictionaries...). While the story represented the biggest source for investigating concrete and non-nuclear lexis, two worksheets were also used to raise students' awareness of non-core words.

More concretely, some worksheets from Smith (2012) were used in order to confront students with concrete terms (e.g., glance at, glare at, gaze at, frown at, stare at...). This also allowed students to practice creative writing before handing in the final draft of the story they were writing. Another worksheet also implied students to transform literal descriptions into actions, by applying the rule of 'show it, do not tell it'.

Finally, a paired samples t-test was conducted to analyze the results of the different test sections. The pre-test and post-test results were analyzed using paired samples t-test to determine the effectiveness of creative writing activities in improving the non-core vocabulary usage of the participants. The data collected was analyzed using statistical software to obtain descriptive and inferential statistics, including means, standard deviations, and effect sizes.

Overall, this research design allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of creative writing activities in improving the non-core vocabulary usage of EFL students at a B2 level. The selection of participants, the use of a pre-test and a post-test, and the implementation of creative writing activities ensured that the study was rigorous and provided reliable results.

3.1. Participants

The study included a total of 25 participants from different B2 EFL classrooms in an academy located in Lleida, Spain. The participants were selected based on their age range, gender, and English language level. The test takers were residents of the same Catalan province, so their linguistic landscape was, as aforementioned, similar in their mother tongues; being both groups Catalan-Spanish bilinguals. Thereby, the sociolinguistic setting was hardly indistinguishable, since both groups studied their L1 languages (Catalan & Spanish) in their local High School, and it was 'natively' managed in social and linguistic conditions.

On the one hand, the age range of the participants was between 10 to 23 years old, with 12% falling in the age range of 10-14 years, 64% in the age range of 15-17 years, and 24% in the age range of 18-23 years. In terms of gender, 68% of the participants were female, and 32% were male, however, this was not an influential variable since the results did not differ from gender. On the other hand, the English language level of the participants was also taken into consideration during the selection process. Despite the fact that all the participants belonged to a B2 EFL class, each of them was asked which was their English level. Specifically, 32% of the participants were at the B2.1 level, 48% were at the B2.2 level, and 20% were at the C1.1 level. This ensured having different commencements and contrasting the evolution of each student.

Overall, the participants were enrolled in 3h/per week English classes within the academy, apart from the secondary education classes. This selection process ensured that the participants were representative of the population and allowed for the findings to be generalized to a wider audience. The selection of participants was a crucial aspect of this study, as it aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of creative writing activities in improving non-core vocabulary usage among EFL students. To ensure the study's relevance and generalizability, participants were carefully chosen to represent a diverse range of ages, genders, and English language proficiency levels.

3.2. Instruments

Employing a meticulously structured research design, the study commenced by administering a pre-test prior to the initiation of the creative writing instructional phase. Spanning a duration of approximately 7 weeks, this instructional segment implied a wide range of creative writing activities, whilst aimed at presenting students with non-core vocabulary elements, thereby enhancing their linguistic repertoire.

Subsequently to this instructional period, a post-test was administered to analyze the students' progress and their assimilation of the targeted skills and knowledge. Each test comprised three distinct sections designed to comprehensively evaluate different facets of the students' lexical competence. One pivotal section entailed the description with vivid language, based on provided vignettes, providing an avenue for students to exhibit their creative aptitude. Vignettes, furthermore, have been used in many linguistic and scientific studies since they represent an "elicitation tool" (Erfanian et al., 2020) favoring the data collection and comparison by researchers.

Within this section, students were invited to use as much vivid and non-core vocabulary as possible, since "clearly non-core, expressive or attitudinal elements are expected to be more foregrounded in the genre of description" (Carter, 1998, p. 112). This particular evaluative component underwent meticulous scrutiny through the lens of discourse analysis, guided by Carter's vocabulary categorization (1998). Within this analytical framework, the intrinsic semantic core of students' expressions was methodically dissected, with a clear distinction drawn between core and non-core vocabulary components.

The analysis of nuclear terms was conducted by categorizing them based on their functions within the given sentences. This categorization provided valuable insights into the areas that exhibited the most significant improvements. The terms were systematically organized into distinct categories, including

'subject matter,' 'characters,' 'adjectives,' 'verbs,' and 'other elements.' This strategic division allowed for a comprehensive examination of which specific linguistic components showed the greatest enhancement in terms of concreteness, consequently shedding light on the extent to which non-core vocabulary usage improved following the implementation of creative writing instruction.

This meticulous categorization of nuclear terms served as a valuable tool in our analysis, enabling us to assess the specific areas of language development that were influenced by creative writing instruction. It not only provided quantitative data on vocabulary improvement but also offered qualitative insights into the subtleties of non-core vocabulary usage within different linguistic contexts. As a result, our study was able to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the impact of creative writing activities on vocabulary enhancement.

The tests also involved a section in which students had to check the terms they knew the knowledge of. Some of these words were taken from Smith (2012) since the author developed several activities by which students could try to integrate non-core vocabulary terms into their writings, by changing the broader words (e.g., *see, do, thing...*). Finally, the last section aimed to see whether the students knew the correct meaning of some non-nuclear terms. The percentage for both sections was extracted in order to be posteriorly analyzed and compared.

The choice of instruments, including pre-tests, post-tests, and vignettes, was driven by the research objectives of this study. These instruments were designed to comprehensively evaluate vocabulary acquisition through creative writing activities. Vignettes, in particular, were used to elicit expressive language, aligning with the study's focus on non-core vocabulary. The division of vocabulary into core and non-core terms served to measure the effectiveness of creative writing in enhancing concrete and expressive vocabulary usage.

3.3. Data Analysis

In this study, the data analysis combined the capabilities of sophisticated statistical software with meticulous manual analysis techniques. The data analysis process commenced with a crucial step: data cleaning. During this meticulous phase, the primary objective was to identify and rectify any missing or inaccurate data points. This rigorous process aimed to enhance the integrity of the dataset by eliminating potential sources of bias or distortion. Through painstaking scrutiny, the data was ensured to accurately represent the information collected from the participants.

Following data cleaning, a journey into descriptive statistics unfolded. This crucial phase involved calculating essential statistical parameters, including mean, median, and standard deviation. These summary statistics provided a comprehensive overview of the main characteristics of the dataset. Measures of central tendency (mean and median) and dispersion (standard deviation) were examined to gain insights into the data distribution and identify outliers or anomalies that might warrant further investigation.

With a firm understanding of the dataset's characteristics, the study proceeded to the realm of inferential statistics. This phase served a pivotal role, involving the testing of hypotheses and concluding the broader population based on the sample data. The application of inferential statistics allowed findings to be extrapolated beyond the confines of the study participants, providing valuable insights into the wider context of non-core vocabulary acquisition through creative writing activities.

Complementing the quantitative analysis, manual techniques, particularly content analysis, were engaged. This approach was instrumental in dissecting open-ended survey responses and qualitative data. Through content analysis, participant responses were systematically categorized into meaningful themes. This nuanced exploration allowed for the identification of recurrent patterns, subtle nuances, and emerging trends within the qualitative data, enriching the understanding of the intricate dynamics at play.

To differentiate between core and non-core vocabulary, a practical method—a continuum stretching from one extreme to the other—was adopted. This continuum approach, informed by the work of Baker (2008) and Carter (1998), provided a contextualized categorization of vocabulary terms based on their degree of coreness or non-coreness. This pragmatic technique offered a valuable perspective on the nuanced spectrum of vocabulary usage in the study. Overall, the data analysis approach was comprehensive and utilized a range of techniques to ensure accurate and meaningful results that were posteriorly analyzed through a paired samples t-test.

The data analysis process employed a combination of statistical software and manual techniques to ensure a thorough examination of the collected data. This multifaceted approach was chosen to address the study's objectives, which included assessing the impact of creative writing on vocabulary development and distinguishing between core and non-core vocabulary. Statistical analysis allowed for hypothesis testing and quantitative insights, while content analysis enabled us to explore qualitative aspects of vocabulary usage. The continuum method provided a practical way to differentiate between core and non-core terms, aligning with the research's focus on vocabulary categorization.

4. Results

4.1. Impact of Creative Writing Instruction on Non-Core Vocabulary Acquisition (RQ1)

As it can be observed in the following quantitative analysis (*see Table 1*), the table mainly represents the percentage of non-core vocabulary usage or knowledge of the terms within the pre-test and post-test. Primarily, the following table analyzes the development of the students in the pre-test and the post-test, having as the only variable the instructional setting based on creative writing activities.

Table:1: Results within the pre-test and the post-test

Measures	Pre-test	Post-test
Usage of non-core vocabulary (section 1)	7%	15.3%
Usage of core vocabulary (section 1)	22%	16%
Knowledge of the terms (section 2)	39%	72%
Correct knowledge of the terms (section 3)	59%	82%

Taking into consideration the prior data, it could be hypothesized that all the different criteria were ameliorated after taking the creative writing instruction. Whilst some measures improved more than others, in sum all the criteria had an exponential increase. It shall be noted that the usage of non-core vocabulary improved within the vignettes' descriptions (from 7% to 15,3%), and, at the same time, the usage of basic, or even, non-concrete language decreased (from 22% to 16%). The percentages were extracted out of the total number of words per section, and it represented a decrease in the usage of simple vocabulary and, thus, an increase in succinct language.

4.2. Criteria Improvement within Vignette Descriptions (RQ2)

The different elements analyzed within Section 1 were also taken into consideration when running the different analyses. As it can be observed in the following table, there has been a notable change in each of the criteria scrutinized in the students' descriptions of the vignettes.

Table:2: Scrutinized elements within section 1

Elements	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Core vocabulary	Non-core vocabulary	Core vocabulary	Non-core vocabulary
Subject matter	88%	4%	25%	75%
Characters	73%	27%	38%	62%
Adjectives	72%	28%	23%	77%
Verbs	80%	20%	61%	39%
Other elements	76%	24%	53%	47%

The prior table represents a specified scrutiny of the various elements analyzed within the students’ descriptions. As it can be observed, the mean usage of core vocabulary decreases exponentially in all the different criteria. At the same time, the non-core vocabulary usage increases in all the elements. Whilst there are some linguistic elements that improve this concreteness usage (i.e., adjectives), the rest of the criteria show an enhancement within the period of creative writing instruction.

4.3. Paired-Samples t-Test Results

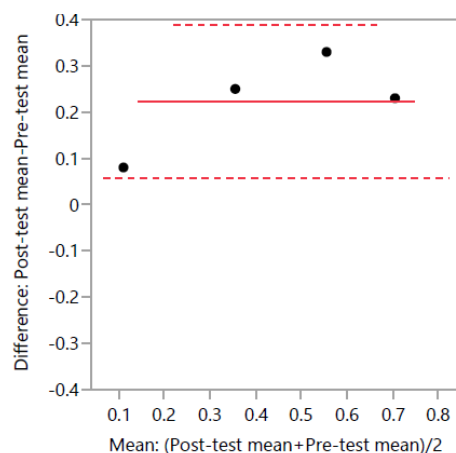
Table:3: Results from the Paired-samples t-test

Pre-test mean	0.32
Post-test mean	0.5425
Mean difference	0.2225
P-value	0.0237
Standard error	0.05218

The previous table, moreover, represents the results obtained in each element from the Paired-samples t-tests. Overall, the results suggest that there was a significant improvement in performance from the pre-test to the post-test. The mean difference of 0.2225 indicates that, on average, students performed better on the post-test than they did on the pre-test. The t-ratio of 4.263957 indicates that this difference is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.0237.

In the graph presented below (*see Image 1*), you can observe these values in conjunction with the various elements subjected to the Paired-samples t-test. The analysis encompassed a comprehensive approach, involving a blend of meticulous manual scrutiny and the utilization of online resources, leading to the following key findings:

Image:1: Graph obtained from the matched pairs



Post-test mean	0.5425	t-Ratio	4.263957
Pre-test mean	0.32	DF	3
Mean Difference	0.2225	Prob > t	0.0237*
Std Error	0.05218	Prob > t	0.0118*
Upper 95%	0.38857	Prob < t	0.9882
Lower 95%	0.05643		
N	4		
Correlation	0.96098		

The obtained results reveal a noteworthy mean difference of 0.2225 between the pre-test and post-test scores, underscoring a substantial improvement in students' performance following the completion of the creative writing activity. This observed increase in performance signifies a positive outcome, signifying the beneficial impact of the activity on student learning.

The t-ratio of 4.263957 is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the observed difference in scores was not due to chance and that the activity had a real impact on student performance. Additionally, the confidence intervals suggest that we can be 95% confident that the true mean difference lies between 0.05643 and 0.38857. This range is relatively narrow, which suggests that the results are fairly precise.

Further analysis of the results revealed a strong positive correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores, with a correlation coefficient of 0.96098. This suggests that students who performed well on the pre-test tended to perform well on the post-test, indicating that the activity was effective in improving the skills and knowledge that were tested on both the pre-test and post-test. The p-values for the one-tailed tests were 0.0118 and 0.9882, respectively, allowing us to reject the null hypothesis that there was no improvement in performance and support the alternative hypothesis that there was a performance improvement.

Overall, the findings present compelling evidence of enhanced non-core vocabulary acquisition and utilization among the participants. Concurrently, a notable decline in the use of core vocabulary and empty language is evident, indicating a substantial shift in linguistic proficiency attributable to the creative writing intervention.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was primarily to analyze the extent to which a creative writing activity had an impact on lexical acquisition, more concretely, on non-core vocabulary. Thereby, a pre-test and a post-test were administered, having as the only variable the instruction given in terms of creative writing, as well as the variety of resources and activities linked to non-core vocabulary. The

results from the test established the significance of the activity within the B2 EFL students. The findings demonstrate an enhancement in all the criteria scrutinized.

5.1. Creative Writing Impact on EFL Vocabulary Acquisition

Concretely, it should be mentioned that the difference between the pre-test and the post-test was, according to the Paired samples t-test results, considerable enough. Mainly, the mean difference was 0.2225 (see *Image 1*), representing a considerable improvement in the utilization of non-core vocabulary amongst the EFL students. This fact can be explained by the total amount of activities oriented towards non-core terms. Moreover, through creative writing activities, the students were able to immerse themselves in these kinds of terms, and, at the same time, use some of them in their stories.

These findings align with previous research that has explored the impact of creative writing activities on EFL students. While earlier studies may not have explicitly focused on non-core vocabulary, they have consistently noted that creative writing fosters students' sensitivity to choosing the "right" words (Smith, 2013, p. 15). The present study extends this understanding to encompass the acquisition of figurative and expressive non-core vocabulary.

Moreover, the concrete yet abstract nature of non-core vocabulary has been acknowledged as a challenge for second-language learners (Altairra and Basnight-Brown, 2011). This study's results suggest that integrating creative writing activities into EFL curricula can address this challenge by facilitating the acquisition of such vocabulary. This finding resonates with previous research that emphasizes the role of creativity and linguistic exploration in language acquisition (Brown, 2007).

5.2. Elements Enhanced within the Creative Writing Instruction

Focusing on the results obtained from the descriptions of vignettes, it is evident that various linguistic elements within students' descriptions experienced significant changes during the creative writing instruction. The analysis reveals notable improvements in the concreteness of language and a reduction in the usage of core vocabulary, empty language, and non-concrete terms.

Subject Matter

Within the 'subject matter', there was a substantial reduction in the use of core vocabulary. This can be attributed to the elimination of unnecessary or empty language within students' descriptions, resulting in a shift towards more concise and descriptive language. This reduction, from 88% to 25%, underscores the effectiveness of creative writing in encouraging students to use more vivid and precise vocabulary when introducing the description itself. In other terms, the students made more direct and concrete references to the vignettes or the writers of the comic strips rather than employing personal sentences with empty significance in the description.

Characters

In the case of 'characters', the creative writing instruction led to a significant increase in the concreteness of students' descriptions. The percentage of descriptions that exhibited concrete language when referring to characters increased from 27% to 62%. This indicates that students became more adept at providing detailed and specific character descriptions through creative writing activities. Instead of referring to the various characters in a broad linguistic manner (e.g., *man, boy, person...*), the creative writing instruction helped them to concretize the terms used when describing or alluding to the vignettes' characters.

Verbs

The analysis also reveals a noteworthy improvement in the use of concrete verbs and vivid, descriptive language. The creative writing activities led to a 19% increase in the usage of concrete verbs, signifying that students were better able to convey actions and events with precision and detail. This allowed students to be more precise when referring to the different activities of the characters.

Moreover, this resulted in a decrease of simple verbs (e.g., *do, think...*), showing a difference from 316 verbs (representing 80%) to 183 verbs (representing 61%). Despite the fact that broad verbs are commonly used in speech, the creative writing instruction provided them with the idea that 'the more concrete, the better'. As explained with the non-core vocabulary worksheet, the students tried to change the most common verbs (e.g., *see*) for others with more specific meanings (e.g., *glare, glance...*).

Adjectives

Among the linguistic elements analyzed, adjectives demonstrated one of the most significant improvements. The creative writing instruction provided students with a wide range of non-core adjectives, resulting in a 43% reduction (from 72% to 23%) in the usage of simple and broad adjectives. This indicates that students were more inclined to employ expressive and nuanced adjectives when engaging in creative writing. As commented on the 'verbs' subsection, the students tried to employ the most concrete language when referring to the emotions or states of the characters since the creative writing instruction allowed them to critically think about more specific adjectives for the most common and broad ones (e.g., *happy*).

Other Elements

The category of 'other elements' within the descriptions represents a mixed result. While there was an increase in descriptive and concrete elements related to the vignettes (from 24% to 47%), there was also a decrease in the usage of non-concrete vocabulary (e.g., generic terms like "things" and "people") from 76% to 53%. This dual effect suggests that creative writing encouraged students to focus on specificity and clarity when describing elements within the vignettes.

These enhancements in linguistic elements align with the broader literature on the impact of creative writing on language development. Previous studies have highlighted the role of creative writing in promoting descriptive and expressive language use (Brown, 2007). The present study reinforces this notion, showing that creative writing activities can significantly improve the specificity and richness of language in EFL students' descriptions.

Previous studies affirmed the fact that creative writing allows EFL students to consciously use the already taught grammatical and lexical resources (Boiko and Baybekova, 2020; Yasir et al., 2021). This study, however, has demonstrated the central effect of this kind of instruction within the student's non-core vocabulary acquisition. Apart from having stimulated creativity and active engagement within the English language (Belz and Reinhardt, 2004), the creative writing methodology has enhanced EFL student's writing skills (Maley, 2009; Boiko and Baybekova, 2020; Yasir et al., 2021). Furthermore, it has fostered learners' autonomy (Oberman and Kapka, 2001; Şenel, 2021; Rakhmanbergenova and Kulakhmetova, 2022) since within the different tasks, they had to search for the most concrete meaning of each term, having a notable result in their writing skills.

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of creative writing on vocabulary acquisition and linguistic elements, it is not without limitations. Future research could further explore the long-term effects of creative writing instruction on vocabulary retention and expansion. Additionally, investigating the transferability of these skills to other language domains, such as speaking and listening, would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the benefits of creative writing in EFL education.

In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrate that creative writing activities, coupled with resources and activities targeting non-core vocabulary, have a substantial impact on EFL students' lexical acquisition. The improvements observed in linguistic elements within students' descriptions highlight the potential of creative writing to enhance language specificity and richness. This study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for the integration of creative writing in EFL curricula as a means to promote linguistic development and engage students in the intricacies of non-core vocabulary acquisition.

6. Conclusion

This investigation provides valuable insights into the effects of integrating creative writing activities into EFL classrooms on students' vocabulary acquisition. The findings reveal a substantial enhancement in lexical proficiency, particularly regarding non-core vocabulary. For instance, students demonstrated a mean difference of 0.2225 in their grasp of non-core vocabulary items, with marked improvements in the specificity and concreteness of their language choices (non-nuclear terms usage enhanced from 28% to 77%).

The study primarily focused on B2-level students, a critical stage in language development. At this stage, students not only work on expanding their vocabulary but also strive to detach from cultural nuances and the influence of their mother tongues. Achieving this detachment is a crucial step toward fluency and effective communication in the target language. It has to be mentioned, moreover, that intermediate-level students struggle many times with the inability to “express their communicative intentions accurately [...] mostly due to problems at the level of associative aspect of lexical competence” (Dawaele and Pavlenko, 2002, 270). The creative writing activities implemented in this study played a pivotal role in facilitating this linguistic transition.

It is crucial to exercise caution when interpreting these outcomes, given the study's specific focus on the acquisition of non-core vocabulary within a condensed seven-week instructional period. During this relatively brief timeframe, students not only made notable strides in expanding their vocabulary but also displayed a remarkable enhancement in grammatical accuracy within their written compositions. This improvement was particularly evident in their discerning choice of verbs and adjectives, reflecting a heightened level of language precision and specificity (e.g., 43% reduction of non-concrete adjectives). These findings underscore the potential of creative writing activities not only to enrich vocabulary but also to refine the overall linguistic proficiency of EFL learners, a promising avenue for future research and pedagogical exploration.

Future studies should adopt a more comprehensive approach, encompassing an extended instructional timeframe, potentially spanning a full academic year, and accounting for students across various English proficiency levels. Such research could yield a deeper understanding of the broader impact of creative writing activities on multiple facets of language acquisition, including oral communication skills and overall language proficiency. Additionally, one promising creative writing activity to achieve these results within EFL students could involve writing a story based on a specific topic. Students could aim to incorporate as many specific language elements as possible. Afterward, they could revise their work in collaboration with the professor, utilizing thesaurus tools to enhance vocabulary specificity. This iterative feedback process could further enhance language acquisition outcomes.

Expanding the research scope in this manner would not only provide a more holistic understanding of the transformative potential of creative writing activities in EFL learning but also offer insights into the nuanced aspects of language acquisition. This broader perspective would enable researchers to delve deeper into the specific strategies and techniques employed within creative writing instruction that yield the most significant language acquisition benefits. Such investigations could involve analyzing the impact of various creative writing prompts, the role of peer collaboration in language development, or the effectiveness of instructor feedback in enhancing vocabulary and linguistic proficiency. Through these in-depth explorations, educators and researchers alike can gain a more comprehensive grasp of how to harness the full potential of creative writing as a pedagogical tool in the realm of foreign language acquisition.

Overall, the investigation affirms that creative writing instruction can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners, specifically in non-core lexis. These activities effectively challenge students with concrete, expressive, and figurative language, facilitating proficient language use.

The incorporation of these findings into English teaching methodologies has the potential to maximize the benefits of creative writing in foreign language acquisition.

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