

Between Canvas and Clay: How Students See Themselves as Learners through Metaphor

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the self-perceptions of third-semester students in an Introduction to Literary Studies course through their metaphorical poetry. This study aims to understand how metaphor serves as a tool for expressing their identities in learning. Tasked with crafting poems metaphorizing their experiences as learners, students used symbols such as nature, objects, and abstract states to convey complex aspects of self and growth in academia. The research applied a qualitative design with a thematic analysis framework, focusing on the symbolic language in the student poetry. Methodologically, each poem was examined through close reading to identify recurring metaphors and themes. These metaphors were then analyzed and categorized, exploring how they reflect the students' inner worlds and learning perceptions. The 15 participants were third-semester students who drew on personal and universal imagery inspired by a model poem provided as an example. Findings reveal various themes in students' self-concept as learners, including resilience, adaptability, introspection, and the duality of strength and vulnerability. Many students chose metaphors from nature (such as "tree" or "water"), symbolizing growth and adaptability, or from functional objects (such as "book" or "canvas"), representing knowledge and potential. Others used abstract ideas like "shadow" and "twilight" to capture the nuanced feelings tied to learning and identity formation. The study concludes that metaphorical poetry is a reflective tool, encouraging students to articulate and examine their learning identities. This approach demonstrates the potential of creative assignments in fostering introspection, making it valuable for educators seeking to deepen student engagement. The findings highlight metaphor as a powerful means for students to conceptualize and communicate their educational journeys.

INTRODUCTION

This research explores and analyses students' self-perceptions as learners, focusing on how these perceptions are articulated and represented through metaphorical poetry. The study seeks to understand the cognitive and emotional dimensions of students' identities as learners, examining the influence of cultural, social, and psychological factors on their self-concept. Additionally, the research will investigate the role of metaphorical poetry as a reflective tool, assessing how it enables students to express their learning experiences and identities creatively. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to understanding the intersection between self-perception, creativity, and language in educational contexts.

How students perceive themselves as learners is vital in shaping their educational experiences and influencing their motivation, resilience, and engagement. Cultural, social, and psychological factors shape these profoundly personal and multifaceted self-perceptions. Traditional academic assignments, such as essays and standardized tests, often fail to capture the richness of these reflections. Educators have increasingly adopted creative methodologies, such as metaphorical expression, to help students articulate

their inner worlds and the complexities of their learning journeys. However, integrating creative assignments, particularly poetry, in higher education remains underexplored, leaving significant gaps in understanding how such tasks influence students' perceptions of themselves and their learning.

Metaphors, as cognitive and linguistic tools, provide a powerful means to frame abstract and intricate concepts in tangible, relatable terms. In educational contexts, metaphors serve as windows into how students understand and interpret their roles, challenges, and aspirations as learners. Despite a growing body of research on metaphor in education, little attention has been given to how students use metaphorical poetry as a reflective tool to explore their learning identities. Furthermore, while studies highlight the benefits of creative assignments in fostering engagement and self-expression, few address the initial challenges students face in adapting to creative tasks or how their perceptions of such activities evolve.

Creativity in language learning and teaching is an increasingly significant area of inquiry, particularly as educators seek to enhance student engagement and foster a deeper understanding of language use. This theoretical review synthesizes existing literature on creativity in language, exploring its definitions, implications for language acquisition, and the role of creative writing as a pedagogical tool.

The research title "Between Canvas and Clay: How Students See Themselves as Learners through Metaphor" investigates the intricate relationship between metaphorical expression and self-perception in educational contexts. Previous studies have explored various dimensions of metaphor use in understanding identity formation among students, particularly in their learning experiences.

One significant study by Vidović and Domović examines the development of teachers' beliefs as a core component of their professional identity. They argue that metaphors can be a powerful tool for uncovering more profound layers of identity, emphasizing the importance of aligning students' lay beliefs with research-based educational concepts (Vidović & Domović, 2019). This proposition aligns with the current study's focus on how students articulate their identities through metaphor, suggesting that metaphorical frameworks can reveal underlying beliefs about learning and self-concept.

Li's narrative inquiry into medical students' professional identity highlights the role of metaphors in shaping identity. The study emphasizes how metaphors can facilitate a deeper understanding of students' growth and professional aspirations, suggesting that metaphorical language is instrumental in navigating complex identity landscapes (Li, 2023). This perspective reinforces the notion that metaphor is not merely a linguistic tool but a cognitive framework that shapes how students perceive themselves concerning their educational journeys.

Landau et al. further contribute to this discourse by exploring how metaphor enhances identity-based motivation among college students. Their findings suggest that metaphors related to personal journeys can significantly impact students' engagement and motivation, indicating that how students frame their educational experiences through metaphor can influence their academic identity (Landau et al., 2014). This statement supports the idea that metaphorical expression is a crucial aspect of self-perception in learning contexts.

In the realm of teacher education, Chien's study emphasizes the importance of metaphor analysis in developing a "Teacher Self." By engaging student teachers in discussions about their metaphorical representations, the study highlights how such practices can enhance professional learning and identity construction (Chien, 2019). This statement is particularly relevant to the current study, which seeks to understand how students use metaphor to articulate their identities as learners.

The state of the art in the present study builds upon these foundational insights by employing a qualitative approach to analyze metaphorical poetry created by students. By focusing on the symbolic language and themes in their expressions, the study aims to uncover the multifaceted ways in which students perceive themselves as learners. This approach aligns with existing literature on metaphor and identity. It contributes new empirical evidence to the field, demonstrating the potential of creative assignments to foster self-reflection and deeper engagement in educational settings.

The synthesis of these studies illustrates a strong framework for understanding the interplay between metaphor, identity, and learning. The current research extends this discourse by examining how metaphorical expression serves as a lens through which students can articulate and explore their identities as learners.

Existing research acknowledges the value of metaphor in education and creative tasks as tools for engagement, and there is limited exploration of how metaphorical poetry can be explicitly used to examine students' self-perceptions as learners. Additionally, there is a lack of focus on the dynamic process of how students navigate and transform their initial apprehensions about creative writing into positive, reflective experiences. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by examining the dual role of metaphorical poetry as both a pedagogical and reflective tool, highlighting its potential to foster introspection, self-expression, and meaningful engagement in higher education.

Creativity in Language

Creativity in language is known as generating novel and meaningful expressions utilizing linguistic resources in innovative ways. This definition aligns with the work of Beaty and Silvia, who discuss how cognitive abilities influence the production of figurative language, suggesting that creativity is closely linked to cognitive processes such as working memory and executive function (Beaty & Silvia, 2012). Furthermore, Glăveanu emphasizes the need to reconceptualize creativity beyond individual cognitive processes, advocating for a more holistic understanding that incorporates social and cultural contexts (Glăveanu, 2013).

The Role of Creative Writing

Creative writing is a powerful pedagogical tool in language education, enabling learners to explore their linguistic capabilities while expressing personal thoughts and emotions. Durdas et al. highlight that creative writing enhances language skills and fosters critical and imaginative thinking, allowing students to engage meaningfully with language (Durdas et al., 2022). Alkhaldi also endorsed this perspective, arguing that writing is crucial in developing critical thinking skills for effective language learning (Alkhaldi, 2019).

Research by Jurado indicates that creative writing activities can significantly impact vocabulary acquisition, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The study demonstrates that creative writing enhances students' vocabulary, contributing to their language proficiency (Jurado, 2023). This finding highlights the potential of creative writing to facilitate language learning beyond traditional methods.

Creativity and Language Acquisition

The relationship between creativity and language acquisition is complex and multifaceted. Fernández-Fontecha's research suggests that creative learners employ various lexical retrieval strategies, which can enhance their language acquisition processes (Fernández-Fontecha, 2023). It aligns with findings from Tran, who discusses how advanced artificial intelligence approaches can support creative language learning, emphasizing the importance of interactive and communicative methods in language education (Tran, 2024).

Moreover, Alanezi also explored the impact of standardized assessments, such as the IELTS writing test, on students' creativity. She notes that such assessments can limit opportunities for creative expression in writing tasks (Alanezi, 2024). It highlights the need for educational frameworks prioritizing creativity alongside linguistic accuracy, allowing students to demonstrate their creative potential.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite the benefits of integrating creativity into language learning, challenges remain. Huh and Egbert emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for learners to express themselves creatively, noting that preservice teachers must understand the significance of creativity in language education (Huh & Egbert, 2010). Additionally, Dai and Zheng's exploration of self-translation in creative writing illustrates the cultural and linguistic complexities that learners face when engaging in creative tasks (Dai & Zheng, 2019). This finding suggests that educators must consider their students' diverse backgrounds and experiences when implementing creative writing activities.

Creativity is vital in language learning and teaching, offering learners opportunities to engage with language in innovative and meaningful ways. Integrating creative writing into language curricula can enhance vocabulary acquisition, foster critical thinking, and promote self-expression. However, educators must navigate the challenges associated with standardized assessments and diverse learner backgrounds to realize the full potential of creativity in language education. Future research should continue exploring creativity dynamics in language learning, focusing on effective pedagogical strategies that support creative expression and linguistic development.

Creativity in Creative Writing

Creativity in writing is often characterized by the ability to generate original ideas and express them in novel ways. According to Mardiningrum, creative writing is intrinsically linked to personal experiences and self-discovery, enhancing its appeal to students (Mardiningrum, 2024). This connection to lived experiences fosters engagement and cultivates imagination, a crucial creative writing component. Utami et al. also support the relationship between creative writing and creative thinking skills. They assert that writing activities sharpen students' creativity, highlighting the interplay between creative expression and cognitive development (Utami et al., 2018).

Pedagogical Implications

Integrating creative writing into educational curricula significantly fosters creativity among learners. Özdemir and Çevik emphasize that creative writing activities positively influence students' attitudes toward writing, suggesting that such activities can enhance both engagement and success in writing tasks (Özdemir & Çevik, 2018). This claim aligns with findings from Seliem et al., who argue that creative writing is an open-ended design process that builds upon creativity and enhances critical thinking skills (Seliem et al., 2020). Moreover, implementing creative writing exercises in EFL classrooms can improve language mastery, as students are encouraged to express themselves freely and employ their imagination (Elsawi, 2020).

The role of the teacher in facilitating creative writing is also crucial. Ahmadi posits that teachers must understand psychology to effectively guide students in their creative endeavors, as character and personality significantly impact the writing process (Ahmadi, 2019). This perspective underscores the importance of a supportive learning environment that nurtures creativity and encourages risk-taking in writing.

Factors Influencing Creativity

Several factors influence the creative process in writing, particularly in EFL contexts. For instance, learners' emotional and psychological states are critical to their creative expression. Deveci's research highlights that students' self-perceptions of creativity are essential, as reflective thinking during writing supports the development of reasoning and curiosity skills, which are integral to creativity (Deveci, 2021). Piscayanti's research also indicates that poetry writing can be a mindfulness practice, fostering a sense of openness and positivity that enhances creativity (Piscayanti, 2022). Mixed media and varied teaching approaches can stimulate creativity, as students are encouraged to experiment with different forms and styles in their poetry (Asteria et al., 2021). Furthermore, diverse teaching strategies, such as task-based writing exercises, can enhance students' creative writing abilities by allowing them to explore various forms and styles (Ghani & Din, 2017).

Moreover, the cultural context in which poetry is taught significantly impacts students' creative expression. As noted by Ghani and Din, EFL learners often face challenges in creative writing due to a lack of exposure to diverse literary forms and cultural references (Ghani & Din, 2017). Promoting creativity in EFL classes can improve language mastery and motivate students to engage with the language more deeply (Aldujayn & Alsubhi, 2020). This premise is fundamental in diverse classrooms where students bring different cultural backgrounds and experiences to their writing, allowing for a rich tapestry of poetic expression. Addressing these challenges through culturally relevant materials can foster a more inclusive and engaging student writing experience.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite the benefits of fostering creativity in writing, challenges persist. The perception of creative writing as an overwhelming task can deter students from fully engaging in the creative process. Sulastri's findings suggest that while writing poetry can be challenging, it also encourages students to think creatively and arrange words expressively (Sulastri, 2023). This duality highlights the need for educators to create supportive environments that mitigate anxiety and promote exploration in creative writing.

Additionally, the assessment of creative writing presents its own set of challenges. Morris and Sharplin argue that consistent assessment criteria are essential for evaluating creative writing effectively, as these criteria should reflect the qualities observed in students' work (Morris & Sharplin, 2013). Developing transparent and fair assessment methods can help educators provide constructive feedback that fosters growth and creativity in writing.

Creativity in creative writing is a multifaceted concept encompassing personal expression, cognitive development, and cultural context. Educators can better support their students in developing their writing skills by understanding the definitions, pedagogical implications, and influencing factors of creativity. Integrating creative writing into educational curricula and an awareness of the challenges and cultural contexts can lead to more affluent and more meaningful learning experiences for students. Further, it is worth exploring innovative pedagogical strategies that foster creativity in writing, ensuring that students are equipped to express themselves fully and authentically.

Creativity in Poetry Writing

Creativity in poetry writing can be understood as the ability to generate original ideas and express them through language in innovative ways. Kristiantari et al. emphasize that creative thinking skills are essential for students engaged in poetry writing, as these skills enable both convergent and divergent thinking, which are crucial for producing meaningful poetic texts (Kristiantari et al., 2023). This argument aligns with the broader definition of creativity as the ability to create novel and appropriate work, a concept supported by various psychological theories.

Pedagogical Implications

Teaching poetry writing in EFL contexts has significant implications for fostering creativity among learners. Wilson discusses the metaphor of poetry as a space for integrated thinking, where the interplay between discipline and playfulness can enhance creative expression (Wilson, 2013). This notion is echoed by Liao, who highlights the need for pedagogical strategies that support creativity in poetry writing, suggesting that teachers should be equipped with the necessary tools and frameworks to facilitate this process (Liao, 2018). Furthermore, Masadeh argues that EFL teachers must understand how to authentically promote creativity, which can lead to enhanced student engagement and creativity (Masadeh, 2021).

Integrating creative processes into poetry writing instruction can lead to varied and enthusiastic student responses. Research indicates that students produce more diverse and innovative poetic works when teaching materials are developed based on creative processes (Kusmana, 2020). This fact suggests that the design of poetry curricula should prioritize creative engagement, allowing students to explore their unique voices and perspectives.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite the benefits of fostering creativity in poetry writing, challenges remain. Myhill and Wilson highlight that teachers often feel constrained by standardized curricula and assessment practices, which can stifle creativity in poetry instruction (Myhill & Wilson, 2013). This tension between the desire for creative expression and the demands of educational frameworks necessitates reevaluating how poetry is taught in EFL contexts.

Furthermore, perceiving poetry writing as challenging can deter students from fully engaging in the creative process. Sulastri's findings suggest that while poetry writing is often viewed as difficult, it can also be a positive challenge that encourages students to think creatively and expressively (Sulastri, 2023). Addressing these perceptions and providing supportive environments for poetry writing can help mitigate these challenges.

Creativity in poetry writing is vital to language learning in EFL contexts. Educators can better support their students in developing their poetic voices by understanding the definitions, pedagogical implications, and influencing factors of creativity. Integrating creative processes into poetry instruction and an awareness of the challenges and cultural contexts can lead to richer and more meaningful learning experiences for EFL learners. Future research should continue to explore innovative pedagogical strategies that foster creativity in poetry writing, ensuring that students are equipped to express themselves fully and authentically.

Metaphor

As a linguistic and literary device, a metaphor is defined as a figure of speech that involves an implicit comparison between two unlike entities, suggesting that one thing embodies the qualities of another. This definition is rooted in the understanding that metaphors are not merely ornamental language but serve significant cognitive and communicative functions. According to Lakoff and Johnson, as cited by Ruslan et al. (2024), metaphors shape our understanding of the world by framing our experiences with familiar concepts, influencing our thoughts and actions. This cognitive perspective emphasizes that metaphors are fundamental to human thought processes, as they allow individuals to conceptualize abstract ideas through more concrete imagery.

In literature, metaphors enrich the text by adding layers of meaning and emotional resonance. They enable authors to convey complex emotions and ideas succinctly, creating vivid imagery that engages readers' imaginations. For instance, metaphors in poetry often evoke feelings and associations that literal language might fail to capture. The use of metaphor can transform ordinary experiences into profound reflections, as seen in the works of poets like Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost, who utilize metaphor to explore themes of nature, existence, and human emotion (Ruslan et al., 2024). Furthermore, literary theorists argue that the effectiveness of a metaphor lies in its ability to create connections between disparate elements, thereby enhancing the thematic depth of a narrative (Ruslan et al., 2024).

In linguistics, the study of metaphor extends beyond literary analysis to encompass its role in everyday language and communication. Research indicates that metaphors are pervasive in everyday speech, influencing how people articulate their thoughts and experiences. For example, the metaphorical expression "time is money" reflects societal values regarding productivity and efficiency, illustrating how metaphors can shape perceptions and behaviors in various contexts (Ruslan et al., 2024). Additionally, cognitive linguistics posits that metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but are rooted in our conceptual framework, suggesting that our understanding of the world is fundamentally metaphorical (Ruslan et al., 2024). This perspective highlights the interplay between language, thought, and culture, emphasizing that metaphors are integral to personal and collective identities.

Metaphor is a multifaceted concept in linguistics and literature, serving as a crucial mechanism for understanding, expression, and communication. Its significance lies in bridging abstract concepts with tangible experiences, enriching literary texts and everyday discourse.

Literary Metaphor

The following are the types of literary metaphors:

1. **Conceptual Metaphors:** These metaphors frame abstract concepts in terms of more concrete experiences, allowing for a deeper understanding and interpretation of literary texts (Vries et al., 2018).
2. **Primary Metaphors:** These are basic metaphors that arise from bodily experiences and are often universal across cultures, serving as building blocks for more complex metaphorical expressions (Vries et al., 2018).
3. **Extended Metaphors:** These metaphors are developed over several lines or throughout a text, elaborating on the comparison and enhancing thematic depth (Vries et al., 2018).
4. **Dead Metaphors:** These metaphors have become so common in language that they are no longer recognized as metaphors, often losing their original imagery (Zencir & Avci, 2023).
5. **Mixed Metaphors:** These occur when two or more metaphors are combined, often leading to humorous or jarring effects, which can add complexity to literary texts (Zencir & Avci, 2023).
6. **Implied Metaphors:** These suggest a comparison without explicitly stating it, allowing for subtler interpretations and deeper meanings in literature (Steen et al., 2014).
7. **Visual Metaphors:** These are expressed through visual means, often found in art, film, or multimedia contexts, and can enhance literary narratives (Çolak et al., 2016).
8. **Cultural Metaphors:** These metaphors are specific to particular cultures and reflect the values, beliefs, and experiences of that culture, often enriching literary texts (Ronderos et al., 2021).
9. **Animal Metaphors:** These use animals to convey specific characteristics or behaviors, often reflecting cultural associations with specific animals (Monti, 2006).
10. **Journey Metaphors:** These conceptualize life or experiences as a journey, emphasizing progress, challenges, and destinations, often used in character development (Clarke & Holt, 2009).

11. War and Peace Metaphors: These metaphors explore themes of conflict and resolution, often used to convey complex social and political issues (Rogers, 2023).
12. Lexical Metaphors: These involve using specific words or phrases that carry metaphorical meanings, often enhancing the richness of the text (Chueasuai, 2021).

The problems in this research are formulated as "What types of metaphors do the students use in their poetry expressions?" and "How do students perceive themselves as learners, and how are these perceptions expressed through metaphorical poetry?"

Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing literature on creativity in education, emphasizing the transformative potential of metaphor and poetry as reflective tools. By addressing the challenges and rewards of creative writing, educators can cultivate classroom environments that nurture intellectual curiosity, personal growth, and a deeper appreciation for the creative dimensions of learning.

METHOD

This section outlines the procedures and techniques to investigate the research problem, ensuring the study's validity and reliability. It details the research design, participant selection, data collection, and analysis processes.

a. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how students perceive themselves as learners through metaphorical poetry. The approach was selected to capture the depth and richness of students' self-perceptions and reflective processes. A thematic analysis framework was employed to identify and interpret recurring themes and symbols within the metaphorical poetry.

This study adopts a qualitative approach, using thematic analysis to examine recurring symbols and themes in the students' poetry. Close readings of the poems reveal patterns in how students perceive their academic and personal growth, offering insights into their evolving identities as learners. The findings illuminate the value of metaphorical poetry in transforming initial resistance to creative writing into a meaningful and enjoyable experience, providing educators with strategies to integrate creative assignments effectively into literary studies curricula.

b. Participants

The participants were 15 third-semester university students enrolled in an *Introduction to Literary Studies* course. These students majored in literary and cultural studies, emphasizing critical thinking, textual analysis, and creative writing. Participants were purposefully selected based on their enrollment in the course, ensuring they were exposed to the curriculum's theoretical and creative aspects. Written consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring ethical compliance.

c. Data Collection Procedures

1. **Introductory Poetry Activity.** At the beginning of the semester, students engaged in an introductory poetry-writing activity designed to familiarize them with creative writing. This activity aimed to challenge their initial perceptions of poetry as difficult or intimidating and to demonstrate that poetry could be an enjoyable and reflective medium.
2. **Metaphorical Poetry Task.** Midway through the semester, students were tasked with writing metaphorical poems reflecting their perceptions of themselves as learners. The task was introduced

with a model poem to provide inspiration and structure. Guided discussions and brainstorming sessions were conducted to help students explore potential metaphors drawn from nature, objects, or abstract concepts.

3. **Poem Submission.** Students submitted their poems in written form, accompanied by a brief reflective note explaining the choice of their metaphors. These reflective notes provided additional context for interpreting the symbolic language used in their poetry.

d. Data Analysis Procedures

1. **Close Reading.** Each poem was subjected to a close reading to identify and interpret the metaphors and symbolic language used. Reflective notes accompanying the poems were reviewed to understand the students' rationale behind their metaphor choices.
2. **Thematic Analysis.** Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns in the students' poetry. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework:
 - i. **Familiarization with Data.** Reading and rereading the poems and reflective notes to immerse in the data.
 - ii. **Generating Initial Codes.** Systematically coding significant features, such as metaphor types (e.g., nature, objects, abstract concepts).
 - iii. **Searching for Themes.** Grouping similar codes to identify broader themes related to learning identities (e.g., growth, adaptability, introspection).
 - iv. **Reviewing Themes.** Refining themes to ensure they accurately represented the data.
 - v. **Defining and Naming Themes.** Assigning clear labels to the themes, such as "resilience," "vulnerability," or "potential."
 - vi. **Writing the Report.** Synthesizing findings into coherent narratives that addressed the research questions.

e. Rationale for Methodology

The qualitative approach was chosen to explore subjective experiences and interpretive processes. Metaphorical poetry provided a creative and reflective medium for students to express their learning identities, capturing nuances that might not surface in conventional assignments. Thematic analysis, as a flexible and rigorous method, allowed for the systematic examination of patterns in the symbolic language used by students, ensuring the reliability of the findings.

This methodology ensures a vigorous investigation of how students perceive themselves as learners, allowing for critical evaluation of the study's validity and reliability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1: Key Metaphorical Patterns in Students' Poems

No.	Metaphor Types	Examples	Key Insights
1.	Conceptual Metaphors	Open book, Canvas	Learning as self-construction and evolving identity.
2.	Nature Metaphors	Tulip, Tree, Water, Plant	Learning as a process of growth, endurance, and external influences.

No.	Metaphor Types	Examples	Key Insights
3.	Object Metaphors	Sword, Coffee	Learning as both powerful and demanding .
4.	Animal Metaphors	Snake, Dove	Learning as requiring intelligence and humility .
5.	Journey Metaphors	Water	Learning as a fluid, transformative experience .
6.	War and Peace Metaphors	Sword	Learning as a disciplined struggle .
7.	Cultural Metaphors	Woman, Princess, Gemini	Learning as shaped by identity and societal roles .
8.	Implied and Extended Metaphors	Clay, Shadow, Twilight	Learning as emotional and relational, shaped by recognition and transitions .

Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Student Poems

No.	Themes	Related Poems	Analyses
1.	Resilience and Growth	3, 5, 7, 9, 10	These poems use nature metaphors (tulip, plant, tree, water, clay) to depict learning as a process of growth and endurance . Students perceive learning as requiring resilience, external support, and self-improvement .
2.	Emotional and Psychological Struggles	10, 11, 15	Metaphors such as shadow, clay, and twilight express emotional struggles, invisibility, and transitions in learning . These poems reflect the complexities of self-identity and feeling unrecognized in academic spaces .
3.	Knowledge as Power and Responsibility	1, 2, 14	Metaphors like books, swords, and canvas depict learning as a source of empowerment . While some see it as a process of self-construction , others view it as a disciplined battle requiring skill and awareness .
4.	Social and Cultural Identity in Learning	8, 12, 13	These poems use cultural metaphors (woman, princess, Gemini) to convey how societal expectations and identity shape students' academic experiences . Learning is seen as both a duty and a reflection of personal background .

Discussion

The discussion starts with answering the first research question about the patterns/types of metaphors in the students' poems.

1. Types of Metaphors Found in the Students' Poems

The students' poems demonstrate various metaphors, each reflecting a unique perspective on learning. This analysis elaborates on the types of metaphors found, how they function in the poems, and their more profound implications.

a. Conceptual Metaphors (Framing learning as a structured experience)

Examples:

Poem 1: "I am an open book"

Poem 14: "I am a canvas"

In poem 1, the student represents themselves as an "open book," symbolizing their willingness to receive, share, and construct knowledge. The metaphor conveys a passive receptivity, indicating a student who is open to being shaped by learning. Allowing others to "write" on them suggests that the learning process is interactive and influenced by external inputs like teachers and peers.

In poem 14, the canvas metaphor represents learning as a process of self-construction and revision. The reference to "a black paint underneath the white paint" suggests that past experiences shape new knowledge, reflecting that education is cumulative and transformative.

Conceptual metaphors frame abstract ideas (like learning) in tangible, familiar terms to enhance comprehension. "Open book" conveys the idea of transparency and receptivity—the student perceives themselves as an entity that can be written on, learned from, and shaped by knowledge. "Canvas" represents self-construction and revision, emphasizing that learning is an artistic process where previous knowledge is layered, erased, and built upon. These metaphors suggest that students see learning as dynamic, ongoing, and influenced by external input. They acknowledge their role in shaping their knowledge while being open to new insights.

b. Nature Metaphors (Learning as growth and endurance)

Examples:

Poem 3: "I am a tulip"

Poem 5: "I am like a plant"

Poem 7: "I am a tree"

Poem 9: "I am water"

In poem 3, the tulip metaphor portrays learning as a delicate yet enduring process. The reference to "trials and tribulation" highlights struggles in academic life, but the phrase "I'll never give up" emphasizes persistence and determination.

In poem 5, the "plant" metaphor conveys a need for nurturing in learning. The poet suggests that growth depends on external validation—"can grow tall with compliments and easily collapses only with blasphemy." This highlights the emotional sensitivity of students in academic settings, where encouragement fosters progress while criticism can be discouraging.

In poem 7, the tree metaphor reflects stability and usefulness in learning. The poem acknowledges that trees provide "O²" and serve as places of refuge, suggesting that the student perceives themselves as both a learner and a supporter of others' learning experiences. The line about people protecting or destroying the tree symbolizes the impact of social interactions on academic identity.

In poem 9, water symbolizes fluidity, adaptability, and necessity. The phrase "I make a life, to give a life" positions the student as a sustaining force in learning, indicating that they see knowledge as something that should flow and be shared with others.

Nature metaphors are often associated with personal development and resilience. "Tulip" highlights fragility and perseverance—while delicate, the flower continues to stand tall, mirroring how students endure academic struggles. "Plant" and "Tree" represent stability and usefulness, indicating that the student sees learning as something that benefits both personal growth and society. "Water" embodies fluidity and adaptability, illustrating that learning is an essential and ever-changing force. These metaphors indicate that students perceive learning as a natural, evolving process requiring care, patience, and adaptability.

c. Object Metaphors (Learning as functional and instrumental)

Examples:

Poem 2: "I am a sword"

Poem 4: "I am a cup of coffee"

In poem 2, the sword metaphor conveys strength, danger, and discipline in learning. The student acknowledges that learning is a tool that can be wielded wisely or recklessly, emphasizing the power and responsibility that come with knowledge.

In poem 4, Coffee, known for its bitterness and energy-boosting effects, represents the dual nature of learning—challenging yet stimulating. The metaphor suggests that while education may be initially difficult ("bitter"), it becomes more enjoyable with time and familiarity.

Object metaphors often depict learning as a tool that serves a purpose, sometimes highlighting the challenges and rewards of education. "Sword" represents power and defense—the student perceives knowledge as something that can be wielded skillfully or dangerously. Learning is a battle requiring discipline and caution. "Cup of coffee" suggests a mix of bitterness and sweetness, paralleling the struggles and joys of learning. While knowledge acquisition can be challenging, it ultimately provides energy and enrichment. These metaphors suggest that students see learning as a skill or tool that can be powerful but also challenging.

As an Object Metaphor (Functional, Usable), the "sword" is a tangible tool used for a specific purpose—defense or attack. The poem implies that knowledge (or learning) must be wielded skillfully like a sword. This metaphor can be interpreted as the student may see education as a weapon that grants intellectual power, discipline, and control, much like how a sword is used with precision and intent. The key meaning of "I am a sword" as an Object Metaphor is that Learning is a tool that, when used wisely, empowers the learner.

In categorizing metaphors, some can fit into multiple types depending on how they are used in the text, such as the word "sword." That is why it is found in two different metaphor labels. The "Sword" metaphor functions as a concrete object (an instrument to be used) and a symbolic representation of struggle and discipline. The word "sword" rightfully belongs in both categories, Object and War and Peace metaphors. As an Object Metaphor, the sword is a functional tool representing skillful knowledge use. As a War and Peace Metaphor, the sword symbolizes intellectual battle and strategic learning.

d. Animal Metaphors (Learning as a balance between instinct and intellect)

Example:

Poem 6: "Wise as snakes, gentle as doves"

In poem 6, this metaphor contrasts wisdom (snake) with kindness (dove). The snake symbolizes strategy and intelligence, indicating that learning involves cunning and calculated thinking. The dove symbolizes gentleness and peace, suggesting that learning should be compassionate and human-centered.

Animal metaphors often reflect behavioral or cognitive traits. The "snake" represents wisdom, suggesting that learning requires intelligence, strategy, and cunning. The "dove" represents gentleness—signifying that learning also involves compassion, patience, and peace. This dual metaphor balances intellect with morality, implying that knowledge should be used wisely. This metaphor shows that students view learning as a complex process requiring both mental sharpness and emotional intelligence.

e. Journey Metaphors (Learning as movement and progress)

Example:

Poem 9: "I am water"

Journey metaphors describe learning as fluid and essential for survival in poem 9. "Water" represents continuity, movement, and necessity—the student sees learning as a lifelong, flowing experience that adapts to different situations.

Journey metaphors conceptualize learning as progress, transformation, or movement. "Water" highlights adaptability and necessity, showing that students see education as a continuous process that flows and takes shape differently. This metaphor emphasizes that the student sees learning as a lifelong, evolving process that is not static but constantly reshaping their identities.

f. War and Peace Metaphors (Learning as struggle and discipline)

Example:

Poem 2: "I am a sword"

The sword metaphor positions learning as a disciplined struggle that demands mastery; knowledge is portrayed as a powerful tool that must be wielded wisely—it can protect (empower the learner) or harm (if used recklessly).

The sword metaphor suggests that learning is a battleground requiring discipline, strategy, and strength. The student might view academic life as competitive or filled with intellectual challenges that must be overcome. This metaphor reflects a strong, goal-driven mindset, where learning is not just about knowledge acquisition but also mastery, precision, and survival.

Understanding the Dual Classification of "I am a Sword"

The "Sword" metaphor appearing in both Object Metaphors and War and Peace Metaphors raises an important question about overlapping metaphorical categories. The reasoning behind this overlapped classification is presented below.

In the poetic lines: "I am a sword, I am dangerous, and I am strong. But I can be your guard, and I can be your pal. If you're not careful, you could get hurt." The key imageries are a "sword," a physical object (a tool or weapon), and a symbol of war, combat, and power. Since the sword metaphor carries both literal (object) and symbolic (conflict-related) meanings, it fits into two overlapping categories.

The dual classification of "Sword" is valid because it carries concrete and symbolic meanings. It is an object with a purpose (Object Metaphor) and a weapon representing intellectual struggle (War and Peace Metaphor). This argument demonstrates how metaphors can be multi-layered, providing rich interpretations of the learning experience.

g. Cultural Metaphors (Learning as influenced by identity and societal roles)

Examples:

Poem 8: "I am his woman"

Poem 12: "I am a princess"

Poem 13: "I am a Geminian"

Cultural metaphors reflect how societal roles and identity influence learning experiences:

Poem 8, "his woman", suggests confidence shaped by gender expectations, linking self-worth to learning ability. Poem 12, "Princess", indicates a sense of privilege and responsibility, telling the student views education as both a gift and a duty. Finally, "Geminian" highlights dual personality traits, portraying learning as an experience of shifting engagement levels between motivation and detachment.

Cultural metaphors connect learning to personal identity, traditions, or social expectations. "His woman" suggests that the student's self-perception in learning is tied to confidence and gender identity, implying an awareness of social roles and expectations. "Princess" indicates leadership and responsibility, showing that the student views learning as a privilege and a duty. "Geminian" metaphorizes duality in learning, suggesting that students' academic experiences fluctuate between success and failure, engagement and detachment. These metaphors reveal that learning is a scholarly pursuit and a personal and cultural experience influenced by society, identity, and emotions.

h. Implied and Extended Metaphors (Subtle and continuous metaphorical comparisons)

Examples:

Poem 10: "I am clay"

Poem 11: "I am a shadow"

Poem 15: "I am twilight"

These metaphors convey more profound emotional complexity and identity struggles. Firstly, "Clay" suggests malleability, transformation, and a lack of belonging, implying that learning shapes identity but can be challenging. Secondly, "shadow" symbolizes presence yet invisibility, reflecting a student's struggle with recognition and validation in learning. Lastly, "twilight" represents transition, fleeting significance, and emotional depth, suggesting the student feels appreciated only in difficult times.

Implied and extended metaphors provide a more profound emotional resonance in the poems. "Shadow" symbolizes presence and invisibility, suggesting a feeling of being overlooked or not fully seen in the learning environment. "Twilight" represents transitions and fleeting moments, indicating that the student feels valued in moments of difficulty but forgotten during times of success. These metaphors highlight the emotional complexities of learning, showing how students grapple with recognition, belonging, and self-worth in education.

The above discussion shows how the students' metaphors reveal that the students see learning as more than just acquiring knowledge— such as a journey of growth and self-discovery (Nature and Journey Metaphors), a struggle that requires skill and resilience (War and Object Metaphors), an emotionally complex experience (Implied and Extended Metaphors), A social and identity-driven process (Cultural Metaphors).

2. Themes Analyses

The students' metaphorical poems reveal profound insights into how they perceive learning—not merely as a process of knowledge acquisition but as a deeply personal, emotional, and transformative journey. Below is an expanded thematic analysis, reflecting the core ideas, emotional depth, and educational implications embedded in their poetry.

a. Resilience and Growth: Learning as a Journey of Transformation

This theme is found in the following related poems:

Poem 3: "I am a tulip"

Poem 5: "I am like a plant"

Poem 7: "I am a tree"

Poem 9: "I am water"

Poem 10: "I am clay"

Thematic Analysis:

Many students metaphorized their learning process as natural growth—a journey that requires patience, external support, and resilience. Their metaphors capture the gradual and sometimes challenging nature of education.

Growth and Adaptability: "I am a tulip" and "I am like a plant" reflect how students face obstacles yet continue to grow. This statement suggests that learning is not instant but requires nurturing persistence and an environment that fosters success.

Strength and Stability: "I am a tree," with its deep roots and protective branches, represents the idea that learning leads to a solid intellectual foundation. Some students see themselves as knowledge providers, indicating that education is also about supporting others.

Fluidity and Adaptation: "I am water" metaphorizes learning as a flexible, ever-changing experience. Water flows take different forms and nourish everything around it—much like knowledge spreading, adapting, and sustaining intellectual life.

Struggles of Transformation: "I am clay" expresses a sense of being shaped by education and struggling to find form and meaning. This proposition implies that learning is not just about absorbing information but about reshaping identity, which can be enriching and disorienting.

b. Emotional and Psychological Struggles: The Weight of Learning

The poems related to this theme are:

Poem 10: "I am clay"

Poem 11: "I am a shadow"

Poem 15: "I am twilight"

Thematic Analysis:

Several students metaphorized their learning experiences as emotionally challenging, isolating, or psychologically demanding. Their metaphors reflect feelings of uncertainty, invisibility, and emotional complexity.

Struggle for Identity and Recognition: "I am a shadow" conveys a sense of presence yet invisibility, highlighting how students might feel unnoticed or undervalued in academic spaces. Learning is seen not just as an intellectual endeavor, but as a quest for validation and self-worth.

Emotional Transitions and Fleeting Recognition: "I am twilight" suggests that the student feels appreciated only in moments of difficulty but is forgotten in times of success. This metaphor captures the loneliness of being a support system for others while struggling personally.

Transformation and Struggle: "I am clay" portrays a malleable but uncertain state, emphasizing the difficulty of adapting, evolving, and finding one's place in the educational system.

c. Knowledge as Power and Responsibility: The Duality of Learning

Related Poems:

Poem 1: "I am an open book"

Poem 2: "I am a sword"

Poem 14: "I am a canvas"

Thematic Analysis:

Several students metaphorized learning as a source of power, discipline, and responsibility. Their metaphors highlight both the empowerment and burden of knowledge.

Openness and Vulnerability: "I am an open book" expresses that knowledge is accessible, transparent, and influenced by external sources. However, it also suggests vulnerability, as being "open" means being shaped by others' perceptions.

Discipline and Intellectual Combat: "I am a sword" represents learning as a battle that requires skill, precision, and control. The sword is protective and dangerous, reflecting that knowledge is powerful but must be wielded carefully.

Creativity and Self-Definition: "I am a canvas" suggests that learning is about self-expression and continuous redefinition. Knowledge is not fixed but an evolving, creative process where students shape their own intellectual landscapes.

d. Social and Cultural Identity in Learning

Related Poems:

Poem 8: "I am his woman"
Poem 12: "I am a princess"
Poem 13: "I am a Geminian"

Thematic Analysis:

Several students metaphorized learning through cultural, gendered, or personality-based frameworks, reflecting how education is shaped by identity and societal expectations.

Learning as a Gendered Experience: "I am his woman" suggests that gender roles influence students' confidence and self-perception in learning. It implies that learning is tied to cultural perceptions of self-worth and identity.

Learning as Privilege and Responsibility: "I am a princess" conveys a sense of inherent responsibility and expectation, suggesting that some students feel that education is both an opportunity and a burden.

Learning as a Dual Experience: "I am a Geminian" reflects the unpredictability of the student's engagement in learning, highlighting the shifting emotional and intellectual states in education.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the types of metaphors students use in their poetry expressions and how they reflect their perceptions of themselves as learners. The findings reveal that students employ various metaphors, including conceptual, nature, object, animal, journey, war and peace, cultural, and implied metaphors. These metaphors highlight learning as a dynamic and multifaceted experience, often depicted as a process of growth, resilience, and transformation (e.g., "I am a tree," "I am clay"), as well as a source of discipline and responsibility (e.g., "I am a sword," "I am an open book"). Students also metaphorize their academic journey as emotionally complex, expressing struggles with identity, recognition, and transition through extended metaphors such as "I am a shadow" and "I am twilight." Additionally, cultural metaphors indicate that

learning is shaped by personal and societal expectations, reflecting the influence of identity on education. Through these metaphors, students perceive themselves as active and passive participants in learning—some see it as an empowering tool that grants knowledge and self-expression.

In contrast, others experience it as a demanding and sometimes isolating process. These insights suggest that learning is not solely an intellectual pursuit but an emotional, personal, and social experience. Using metaphorical poetry as a reflective tool allows students to articulate their educational challenges, aspirations, and identities in ways that conventional assessments may overlook. Educators can leverage these insights to foster a more student-centered approach, recognizing learning as a cognitive and emotional journey. Ultimately, the study highlights the significance of metaphor in understanding students' self-perceptions and the broader educational experience, emphasizing the need for a holistic and empathetic approach to teaching and learning.

A key suggestion for this study is to expand the scope of metaphorical analysis by incorporating a larger and more diverse group of students across different academic disciplines and educational levels. While this study focuses on third-semester students in an Introduction to Literary Studies course, future research could explore whether students in science, engineering, or social sciences use different types of metaphors to describe their learning experiences. Additionally, a comparative study between novice and advanced learners could provide insights into how metaphorical perceptions of learning evolve. Another avenue for further research is integrating qualitative interviews or reflective discussions alongside poetic analysis to gain deeper insights into students' thought processes when constructing metaphors. This statement would allow researchers to understand what metaphors students use, why they choose specific imagery, and how it relates to their learning journeys.

Furthermore, incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives, such as cognitive linguistics and psychology, could enrich the interpretation of metaphorical expressions by linking them to broader theories of learning, identity, and motivation. Lastly, educators can apply these findings to develop metaphor-based pedagogical strategies, encouraging students to engage in self-reflective writing exercises that promote deeper learning awareness. By refining and expanding the current approach, future studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how metaphors shape students' perceptions of education and identity.

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