



## **Reading Competence and Creative Writing at Primary School Students**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to analyze current research focused on the issue of creative writing in primary education. The first part of the study defines key concepts that underlie the analysis. The notion of competence at a general level is defined, as well as the notion of competence in native language communication at a specific level. The primary method used is systematic analysis. The systematic analysis of studies from the last 6 years allowed the identification of four research directions: studies based on examining the effects of creative writing on the development of some components, research that highlights the measurement of the impact of different activities on the development of creative writing skills, studies aimed at validating tools for evaluating the creative writing products of primary school students, research focused on the systematic analysis of specialized literature on the topic of creative writing.*

**Key words:** Ability; creative writing; primary education; reading competence; systematic analysis

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## **1. Introduction**

Creative writing is an essential component of teaching, learning, and assessment in primary education. However, there is global evidence to suggest that creative writing is often neglected (Gibson & Ewing, 2020). International research on writing instruction has identified a loss of innovative or creative pedagogical practices due to the pressure on teachers to teach prescribed writing skills that are assessed in standardized tests (Göçen, 2019; Stock & Molloy, 2020).

Developing the skills and abilities relevant to the autonomous, critical, and creative study of literary or non-literary texts addresses many of the issues that arise during the school years, becoming "a requirement and a standard for achieving quality in modern education, for shaping reading competence" (Neașu & Damian, 2021, p. 11). Reading and analyzing literary texts elicit a wide range of emotions and feelings in young students, helping them form opinions and positive attitudes towards the surrounding world. Investigating the formation of reading competence in primary education becomes necessary, especially since reading performance and reading competence are points of interest in international assessments (PISA 2002, 2015). A competent teacher recognizes the importance of text creation as part of reading competence. The role of the educator is to enhance the understanding of the writing process through personal experience and improve teaching practices accordingly (Gains & Graham, 2011).

Pedagogical approaches to creative writing are unique in shaping certain aspects, such as accuracy, fluency, and creativity (Ibrahim, 2013). Writing is a complex process that requires students to make decisions about word choice, sentence structure, and ways to engage readers (Barton et al., 2023). Such decisions require deeper reflective judgments from both teachers and students. Creative writing is essential for the development of young learners (Grainger et al., 2005) as it allows them to use their imagination and expand their problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. According to Tin (2011), the creative use of writing can contribute to the development of students' language skills and encourage them to use a richer vocabulary. Tok and Kandemir (2015) argue that creative writing stimulates language development from various perspectives, including grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and discourse. This process involves students speaking productively in accordance with specific language development learning tasks in primary education, connecting words into sentences and sentences into relevant descriptions, definitions, and narratives (Rini & Cahyanto, 2020). There are positive effects of using creative writing in primary schools on the development of logical reasoning and analytical skills in grammar learning. Involving students in the writing process will help them explore ideas before creating a written work. Creative writing can not only shape language proficiency (Lutzker, 2015) but can also increase students' motivation and engagement in classroom activities (Avramenko et al., 2018). Creative writing encourages young learners to think creatively, enjoy their work, and have an attitude of respecting the work of others (Chen & Zhou, 2010). Additionally, creative writing can engage students in critical thinking to discover solutions to various problems. Nasir (2021) emphasizes that creative writing encourages students to personally engage and enjoy the writing process. However, the results of some studies (Bražienė, 2019) indicate that in primary education, teachers often do not have enough time to develop students' creative writing skills in line with the curriculum. According to Maninji (2021), issues related to students' creative writing skills are related to cohesion, fluency, and creativity. These skills gradually develop as students transition from writing and reading skills to reading competence.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Reading Competence

In general terms, competence, as per recent analyses, represents "a complex combination of knowledge, skills, interpretations, values, attitudes, and desires/expectations that lead to concrete and effective actions undertaken by an individual in the world or in a specific field" (Hoskins & Crick, 2010, p. 5). Specifically, the notion of competence in native language communication refers to the "ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts, and opinions, both in oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), to linguistically interact appropriately and creatively" (Gillera, 2014). Competence in native language communication is one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2018), which involves the student "identifying, understanding, expressing, creating, and interpreting concepts, feelings, facts, and opinions, both orally and in writing, using visual, auditory/sound, and digital materials in various disciplines and contexts." It implies the ability to communicate and connect effectively with others in an appropriate and creative manner.

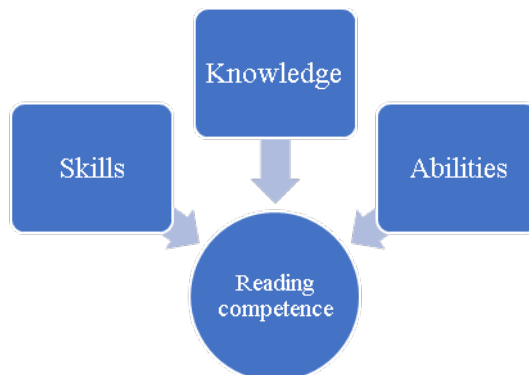
As a component of communication, literary competence involves knowledge of a system of codes and experience of transtextuality (Cornea, 1998, p. 87). It is more than a simple acquisition, as its specific feature is creativity, the ability to invent complementary meanings, establish connections, and produce certain interferences. Literary competence, also known as reading competence in specialized literature, entails "the development of the reading skill, as well as the ability to understand and interpret what is read, to understand the meaning of words, to experience the feelings conveyed by the literary text" (Paga, 2021, p. 98).

According to C. Șchiopu (2009, p. 12), reading competence consists of forming a reader "capable of conducting interrogative-interpretative reading of literary texts of various genres and species, distinguishing value from non-value, interpreting literary phenomena in interaction with certain data from the fields of philosophy, history, sociology, ethics, aesthetics, the arts, etc., as well as through the lens of their own axiological universe."

Structurally, reading competence is based on the following components (Pamfil, 2000, p. 64):

- Knowledge about the text (genre, structure, message, author, vocabulary).
- Reception skills, including outlining the main ideas, explaining words, summarizing, characterizing the characters, etc.
- Attitudes, which involve expressing the feelings experienced during the reading of the literary work, forming personal opinions about the presented phenomena, and more.

Among these three components of reading competence, there is an interdependent relationship (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Components of reading competence

## **2.2. Creative Writing Ability**

Wang (2019) defined creative writing as an original form of expression that involves an author's imagination to engage a reader. Creative writing is "an art form as it contains the same key elements of art: significant form, expression of emotion, originality and creativity" (Wang, 2019, p. 120). According to Demir (cited in İŝçi et al., 2020), creative writing represents the capacity to reconstruct existing knowledge, concepts, and events by establishing associations between them through the use of imagination. Wyse et al. (2013) highlighted that creative writing lacks a fixed structure, and teaching it requires an "open" pedagogical approach to allow students to exercise their imagination. Other definitions of creative writing involve the notions of imagination, choice, and originality in children, and numerous studies have explored the concept of creativity in and through the writing process (Barton et al., 2023). The results of creative writing showcase students' cognitive and creative competence in exploring ideas for crafting literary compositions.

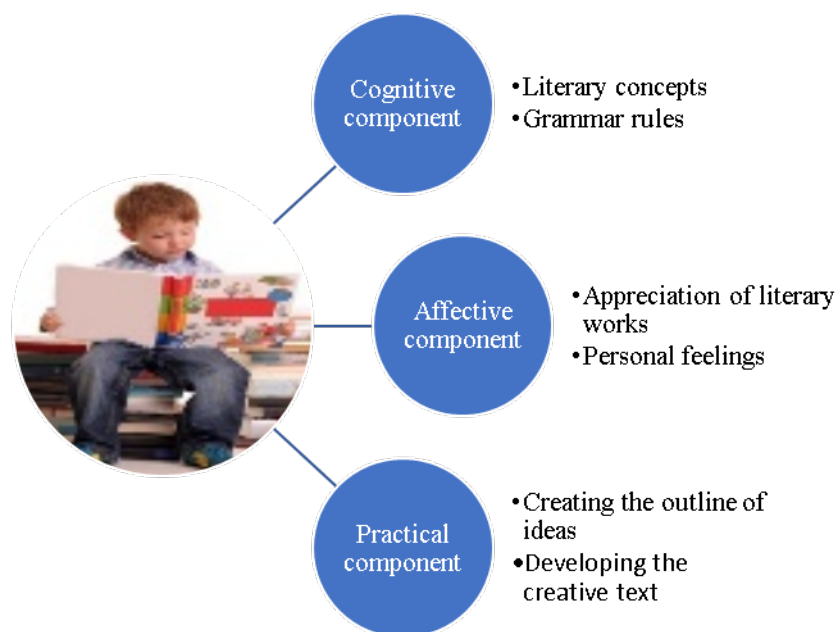
Creative writing is a product of creativity because it involves productive and expressive language skills (Alkhaldi, 2023). Creative writing activities help students translate ideas into meaningful and purposeful words. The process of creative writing involves flexibility, elaboration, competence, and fluency. According to Oxford dictionary, creative writing is "writing, typically fiction or poetry, which displays imagination or invention (often contrasted with academic or journalistic writing)" (Oxford Dictionaries, English, 2017).

Madhkour (2008) identified the characteristic elements of creative writing skill: originality or the ability to generate unique ideas; selective aggregation, which consists in recombining the elements of a situation or problem, changing its structure and finding innovative solutions; finding successive solutions to problems related to the writing process, or producing elements of the original story; group thinking, for grouping ideas that might not normally be associated with each other or reproducing rare and valuable ideas; divergent thinking, as the process of producing a wide range of ideas in response to a certain stimulus or outcome.

The characteristics of the creative writing process are (Starko, 2010, p. 127): fluency, which involves generating a multitude of ideas, flexibility, referring to considering different categories or viewpoints, originality, which pertains to generating unusual ideas, elaboration, which involves adding details to enhance ideas. Abdul Bari (2010) added a new element, problem sensitivity, which refers to the writer's awareness of the existence of problems or weaknesses in the written position and suggests solutions to them, or adding new knowledge, or introducing changes or improvements to them.

According to Nasir (2021), creative writing encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes involved in improving flexible writing skills across various tasks and genres, transforming a text into a coherent one, and critiquing and analyzing various written genres. Creative writing is closely related to literature learning, conveying its uniqueness through various literary genres (Barbot et al., 2012). Literary works are created through information and context that become abstracted in another world through visual, imaginative, and emotional experiences (Peterle, 2019). Creative writing activities are carried out in primary education through simple narratives, poetry, folklore, historical narratives, biographies, rhymes, and poetry.

The products of creative writing require the cognitive component of literary competence so that students can develop original writing. Additionally, these products activate the affective component by stimulating appreciation for written literary works. Another component involved in producing creative writing products relates to practical aspects, applying the theoretical elements needed in crafting creative texts. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the three components of reading competence and the ability to engage in creative writing.



**Figure 2.** Components of reading skills involved in developing creative writing ability

Barton et al. (2023) identified a series of personal, structural, and/or cultural conditions that could impact the efficiency of students' creative writing. In Table 1, examples are provided for each of the three categories of conditions.

**Table 1.** Key Conditions of Creative Writing

Personal	Structural	Cultural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creative thinking;</li> <li>- Student motivation and engagement; and</li> <li>- Knowledge and skills;</li> <li>- Cognitive and metacognitive abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Approaches of professional authors and artists in teaching creative writing;</li> <li>- Approaches involving playful activities and the use of visual arts and theater.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reconceptualization of creative writing instruction;</li> <li>- Analysis of dominant linguistic and ideological constraints.</li> </ul>

Tin (2011) uses the term "linguistic creativity" to refer to the playful use of language to construct new meanings based on the transformation of the current conceptual world and the engagement of creative thinking.

According to Santosa et al. (2019), creative writing activities require continuous guidance. Teachers should support students in developing their creative writing skills both within the school environment and outside the classroom (Nasir, 2021).

### 3. Systematic analysis of current studies on creative writing

Ulu (2019) investigated creative writing and storytelling elements in fourth-grade students regarding their narrative writing skills. The study's data revealed that the creative writing levels of fourth-grade students were not adequate in terms of originality, fluency of thoughts, flexibility of ideas, story organization, vocabulary richness, sentence structure, and writing style, fluency of thoughts, flexibility of ideas, and adherence to grammar rules.

Stukavcová (2017) achieved a qualitative study to observe how creative writing contributes to vocabulary enrichment and personal development. Vaezi and Rezaei (2018) developed an instrument with the key criteria to consider in evaluating creative writing products.

The purpose of the research conducted by Babayigit (2019) was to examine the effects of creative writing activities on attitudes toward reading and writing in fourth-grade students. As a result of engaging in creative writing activities, an improvement in attitudes toward reading, writing, as well as language and communication lessons in elementary school was observed.

In the study initiated by İşçi et al. (2020), elementary school students' creative writing products were evaluated concerning "compliance with creative writing criteria" and content. It was found that there was a difference between groups of students in terms of success in creative writing based on the variable related to the time allocated to reading. There was a significant difference between students who read books for 30 minutes or more per day and those who read books for less than 30 minutes per day.

Popović (2021) examined the understanding and application of writing strategies and assessed the significance of these strategies in relation to themselves as writers in primary school students. The research was based on the creation of prose texts, such as literary-artistic texts (short stories and novellas), as a form of descriptive and narrative creative writing.

Uslu & Uslu (2021) examined the impact of collaborative digital storytelling on creative writing and social-emotional learning skills of fourth-grade students. The experimental group was assigned a collaborative digital storytelling task, while the control group was given the task of preparing a visual presentation. The data obtained indicated a significant difference in the post-test scores of creative writing between the research groups.

Barton et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of international literature to explore the manifestation of creativity in writing and the conditions influencing its occurrence in primary school students. The research results indicated that a significant number of participants self-assessed as successful creators of a written text.

Table 2 provides a systematic analysis of studies from the past 10 years, highlighting the research purpose, methods and tools used, and the main results obtained.

**Table 2.** Studies focused on investigating creative writing in primary education

Author(s)	Purpose	Participants	Research Methods	Results
Stukavcová (2017)	examining how creative writing contributes to vocabulary enrichment and personal development	-	Case study	The benefits of teaching creative writing in primary school are determined.
Vaezi & Rezaei (2018)	validation of an instrument for assessing creative writing products		rubric for evaluating creative writing	The proposed creative writing grid can play an essential role in improving the quality of instruction and promoting student learning.
Babayigit (2019)	examining the effects of creative writing activities on reading and writing skills	35 fourth-grade students	The experiment	An improvement in attitudes towards reading, writing, as well as language and communication lessons was observed.
Ulu (2019)	investigating creative writing and storytelling elements regarding narrative text writing skills	182 students	The experiment	The levels of creative writing among fourth-grade students were not adequate.
İşçi et al. (2020)	evaluating students' products based on	122 fourth-grade students	The Scale for Evaluating	An important variable for success in creative writing

	adherence to creative writing criteria		Creative Writing Products (Beydemir, 2010)	is the time allocated to reading.
Popović (2021)	assessing the significance of writing strategies in relation to oneself as a writer	154 students	The questionnaire	A significant number of research participants rate themselves as a successful creator of a written text.
Tsatsou-Nikolouli, & Mavrogeni (2021)	improving empathy through the use of creative writing as an educational tool	573 students	The experiment	A statistically greater improvement in the empathy rating was found in the intervention group compared to the control group.
Uslu & Uslu (2021)	examining the effect of collaborative digital storytelling on creative writing	60 fourth-grade students	The experiment	The use of digital storytelling had a positive impact on the creative writing skills of the students in the experimental group.
Al-Tamimi & Jaber (2022)	investigating the effects of using the cubism strategy on the development of creative writing skills	71 students	The experiment	There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the students in the experimental group and the mean scores of the control group.
Barton et al. (2023)	international literature analysis	-	Systematic literature review	The emergent personal, structural and cultural properties that characterize the practice of creative writing have been identified with the help of Archer's critical realist theory of reflexivity.
Hashim et al. (2023)	using iPad to improve creative writing	50 students	The questionnaire	Data analysis demonstrated that learners have a positive perception towards using the iPad to improve creative writing.

#### 4. Results and discussions

It is observed that most studies in this field predominantly involve fourth-grade students. As research methods, experiments are prevalent to determine the effects of using creative writing on students (Babayigit, 2019; Ulu, 2019; Tsatsou-Nikolouli, & Mavrogeni 2021; Uslu & Uslu, 2021). Another result from the systematic analysis of studies indicates the lack of validated tools for assessing creative writing products. Few tools for evaluating creative writing products have been identified (Beydemir, 2010; Vaezi and Rezaei, 2018). There are no validated instruments in this field for the population in Romania. It is found that the most recent research by Hashim et al. (2023) leverage digital resources to improve creative writing skills, indicating that future studies will integrate innovative technologies.

Following the analysis of studies focused on the investigation of creative abilities in primary education, three categories of research can be delimited:

a) studies based on examining the effects of creative writing on the development of some components, such as reading and writing skills (Babayigit, 2019), vocabulary enrichment and personal development (Stukavcová, 2017), empathy (Tsatsou-Nikolouli, & Mavrogeni, 2021);

b) research that highlights the measurement of the impact of different activities on the development of creative writing skills, such as the use of collaborative digital storytelling (Uslu & Uslu, 2021), the cubism strategy (Al-Tamimi & Jaber, 2022) or digital resources, iPad (Hashim et al., 2023);

c) studies aimed at validating tools for evaluating the creative writing products of primary school students (İşçi et al. 2020; Vaezi & Rezaei, 2018);

d) research focused on the systematic analysis of specialized literature on the topic of creative writing (Barton et al., 2023).

Results of some research conducted in secondary education (Kovalan, 2018) have demonstrated the effectiveness of integrated technology for creative writing techniques in developing students' holistic linguistic skills. There are also studies that focus on training primary school teachers in creative writing skills. Akkaya (2014) assessed the perspectives of fourth-grade teachers regarding the creative writing process. Rachmajanti et al. (2022) implemented a program based on reflective training to improve the creative writing skills of teachers in a single cycle, including planning, action, observation, and reflection. Rini and Cahyanto (2020) state that in primary schools, creative writing activities are conducted in a guided manner, so teachers need to design learning that helps students achieve this. Therefore, training and practicing creative writing skills for primary school teachers are crucial. Other studies (Bražienė, 2019) focus on exploring teachers' attitudes toward teaching creative writing in primary education. Barbot et al. (2012) conducted a study involving a group of 15 experts in creative writing. The research findings indicated that creative writing occurs when students use their imagination and other creative processes to create fictional narratives or "unusually original" writing. They also noted that creative writing is important for the development of students' critical and creative thinking skills and their ability to approach life in creative ways.

## **5. Conclusions**

High confidence in their own writing abilities motivates primary school students for creative writing. In this way, they will be motivated to discover better strategic solutions, which determine the achievement of visible progress in terms of creative writing skills. The systematic analysis of studies from the last 6 years allowed the identification of four research directions: studies based on examining the effects of creative writing on the development of some components, research that highlights the measurement of the impact of different activities on the development of creative writing skills, studies aimed at validating tools for evaluating the creative writing products of primary school students, research focused on the systematic analysis of specialized literature on the topic of creative writing.

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