

## English Literature | Full Research Article

# Exploring Afghan EFL Students' Attitudes toward Writing English Poetry

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### Abstract

The current study explores EFL Afghan students' attitudes towards writing English poetry. This study aims to investigate how EFL Afghan students perceive writing poetry by examining four basic themes (difficulty, value, emotion, and attitude) adopted from Iida's (2012a) research. This study has a qualitative design. The study participants were selected from the English department of Language and Literature Faculty at Herat University, Afghanistan. The data were analyzed through a coding system. The coded data's reliability was computed using SPSS statistical package version 26. The inter-rater reliability of the Correlation coefficient estimated agreement across raters of ( $r=.89$ ) demonstrates a significantly high correlational value between the raters. The results showed that Afghan EFL students have positive attitudes toward writing English poetry. The findings revealed some reasons (such as expressing emotions and thoughts, enjoyment, discovering abilities, confidence, and enriching the vocabulary and language skills) that make Afghan EFL students willing to write poetry in the English language. However, some obstacles (such as the word choice, the poem's structure, self-expression, self-doubting, frustration, lack of knowledge, and previous learning experiences) make Afghan EFL students reluctant to write English poetry. The finding also reported a significantly high correlation between Afghan EFL students and Liao's (2018) study on EFL/ESL M.A. TESOL students' perception. The study concluded with some implications.

**Keywords:** Poetry, Attitudes, EFL, qualitative, correlation

## Introduction

Poetry is included in Afghanistan's education curricula and is considered a precious and authentic material for teaching national languages. Students start reading poetry in their native language from the first grade of school. Moreover, teaching English poetry is also considered valuable in the language and literature faculties of Afghan universities.

Poetry, a literary genre, is suggested by many researchers (see Iida, 2012a, 2012b; Garvin, 2013; Hanauer, 2012) as a practical and helpful teaching material integrated into the language classrooms. Students' and teachers' attitudes toward poetry integration into language teaching are counted as very important. Scholars have studied: learners' attitudes toward poetry writing (see Iida 2012a; Liao & Roy, 2017; Shirkhani, 2015), teachers' attitudes towards poetry (see Liao, 2018), teachers' desire to teach poetry (see Masbuhin & Liao, 2017), poetry value (see Iida, 2012b), the poetic identity and voice (see Hanauer, 2015; Iida, 2016b), and poetic inquiry and role of emotion (see Chamcharatsri, 2013b; Iida & Chamcharatsri, 2020) in ESL/EFL courses.

Whereas these studies were conducted in different countries (Japan, the United States, China, and others) to contribute to the identifications and pedagogical concepts on poetry writing in a second language, no study has focused on Afghanistan's context. Since the discussion of Afghan EFL learners majoring in English language and literature attitudes remains absent in the existing literature, this study will aim to answer the two overarching research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Afghan EFL students toward writing English poetry?
2. What are EFL Afghan students' reasons for being willing or unwilling to write poetry in English?

### **Problem Statement**

Teaching poetry has long been integrated into the English language and literature curricula, dealing with explicit pedagogical challenges for instructors in many contexts (Wilson & Myhill, 2012). Accordingly, Khatib (2011) stated that it is usually anticipated that English poetry is too challenging for ESL/EFL learners to handle. However, poetry reading is valued in the Afghan context, and less attention is paid to encouraging students to write English poetry. Ignoring this issue makes students lose their interest in expressing their feeling and thoughts by writing poetry.

### **Significance of the study**

This study is significant because it examines Afghan students' attitudes, majoring in literature, towards poetry writing. Additionally, the current study will investigate the attitude correlation between EFL students of Japan (Iida, 2012a), ESL/EFL M. A. TESOL students of the United States (Liao, 2018), and EFL students of Afghanistan (the current study).

In regards to the importance of poetry, many researchers argued that poetry develops language. It offers students a different perception of grammar and syntax rules and dynamic figurative languages (Chanmann-Taylor et al., 2016). According to Iida (2016b) and Iida and Chamcharatsri (2020), poetry improves students' expressive abilities, enriches their involvement, and enables them to express their ideas and emotions through poetry. Moreover, poetry can construct social connections among students (Chanmann-Taylor et al., 2016).

Furthermore, teaching poetry can provide plentiful opportunities for learners to develop their vocabulary, improve their creative writing, and stimulate creativity and inspiration (Saeed Adam & Babiker, 2015). When learners are exposed to plenty of English poetry, the persuasive contexts can help them learn, practice, recall vocabulary, and generate poems effectively. According to Hanauer (2012), teaching poetry promotes

learners' individual experience and plays a role in evolving concepts of 'human diversity. Similarly, Pushpa and Savaedi (2014) emphasized that poetry can arouse motivation if teachers use effective teaching strategies. Therefore, using and teaching poetry in the language classroom can foster an expressive language learning experience.

## Literature Review

Many scholars around the world have studied the use of poetry in ESL/EFL classrooms. They mainly focused on the attitudes and perceptions of students and teachers towards poetry writing. They also emphasized the role and value of poetry in second and foreign language teaching and learning.

In a study, Kuru Gönen (2018) proposed implementing a poetry-teaching framework for language teachers to find out ways to connect language teaching methodology and literature. This study aimed to help teachers integrate poetry into language teaching following a step-by-step procedure in the framework. During this procedure, the researcher introduced different activities and materials for 21 English department instructors in Turkey. The researcher collected the data through participants' reflective diaries, observation of their teaching performances, and semi-structured interviews done at the study's end. The findings showed that if a systematic and guided framework is implemented in language classrooms, poetry can be compelling, provoke motivation, develop creativity and self-expression, and multi-skill growth and interaction among students. Therefore this study advocates that poetry can be part of the curriculum of language teaching.

In 2012, Iida conducted two studies in Japan to examine the value of writing haiku (Japanese poetry) in the second language. In the first study, Iida (2012a) explored the second language learners' perceptions, attitudes, and emotions toward writing haiku in the English language. He selected his participants from first-year students of an EFL writing course at a college. The study's design was qualitative, and the researcher gathered the data during six weeks instructing students to write haiku in English and reflect on their experiences. Iida used a coding system to analyze the data. The findings revealed that, even though writing haiku in the target language is challengeable, it is also valuable for EFL students. The results also showed that writing haiku helps EFL students improve their linguistic knowledge in the target language. Also, in his second study, Iida (2012b) evaluated how poetry writing improves learners' second language (L2). Another purpose was to explore the relationship between academic prose and the impact of writing haiku. The study was designed as interference in which 20 EFL students wrote pre- and post-argumentative essays and haikus in the English language. The researcher analyzed the data through statistical analysis. Results presented a noteworthy variance: 1) the significant dissimilarities of linguistic usages in the pre- and post-tests, and 2) improved versions of the written post-argumentative essay showing that writing haiku influenced the EFL students' documented performances. Moreover, the L2 haiku corpus formed by students discovered the English haiku as direct, short, personal, and expressive poetry.

Additionally, Liao (2018) researched to explore ESL/EFL M.A. TESOL students' perspectives through the lens of some factors, namely difficulty, value, emotion, and attitude, adopted from Iida's (2012a) study. Participants were 18 M. A. TESOL students who studied in western

Pennsylvania of the United States. The study had a qualitative design, and the data collection was done through interviews. The results designated that the participants recognized the value of applying poetry writing in second language classrooms. However, they acknowledged that writing poetry in a second language comprises numerous complications. The findings also demonstrated that writing poetry in a second language classroom has positive and negative emotions, but positive emotions are more frequently declared.

Likewise, Iida and Chamcharatsri (2020) investigated a poetic inquiry to examine the role of emotions in the language learning process. The study design was qualitative, and data collection was done through 209 English poems written by 21 Japanese EFL college students. The results indicated 14 different themes and 22 diverse emotional responses. The findings demonstrated that students could express positive and negative emotions and their trials, desires, adversity, and language learning failure through poetry. The study concluded with some pedagogical implications for L2 poetry writing in the EFL classrooms. Above all, the study recommends that writing poetry can be influential if applied in ESL/EFL language classrooms.

Moreover, Liao and Roy (2017) examined L2 students' perceptions about writing poetry in a second language. The participants were 49 EFL undergraduate students in Bangladesh who answered the questions of an online survey. The data's statistical analysis indicated a considerable negative correlation between L2 students' desire and interest in English poetry writing and the frequency of reading and writing poems in the English language. The findings showed that the more students are exposed to extensive literature, especially poetry, the more impractical poetry may be contributed. Moreover, the results illustrated that L2 engineering students perceive higher confidence and desire to write poetry than L2 English literature students, reinforcing the notion that English literature can have a damaging effect on L2 students' desire to write poetry in the English language.

Furthermore, Shirkhani (2015) investigated students' attitudes towards using poetry in foreign language learning. All 63 participants who attended this study were engineering students of Islamic Azad University. The study's design was quantitative, and a questionnaire was used for data collection. The results revealed that most students are eager to read and write Persian poetry, but some (only about one-third) are interested in English poetry. The data also specified that students' reluctance and unwillingness toward English poetry is not directly related to their lack of knowledge about the English language since they believed that some aspects of the foreign language could be improved by English poetry. Although researchers have investigated students' attitudes towards poetry writing in EFL/ESL classrooms in different countries, no research has been done in the Afghan context. Therefore, this current study aimed to explore how 12 Afghan students of the English Department at Herat University perceive poetry writing and what reasons motivate and demotivate them to write English poetry.

## Research Method

### Participants

The study participants were selected from the English department of Language and Literature Faculty at Herat University, Afghanistan. There were five male and seven female students. Almost all participants had the experience of reading and writing poetry in the English language. The rationale for selecting senior and junior students is that English poetry is instructed from the 5th semester at the English department. Table 1 represents some background information about participants. It is notable to mention that the researcher used pseudonyms to keep their names confidential.

Table 1.

*Participants' Demographic Information*

No.	Name	Gender	Level	Number of written poetry in the native language	Number of written poetry in English
1	Akbar	Male	Senior	Two poems	Two poems
2	Elnaz	Female	Junior	None	Four poems
3	Rahim	Male	Junior	Four poems	Seventy-two poem
4	Kawsar	Female	Senior	Two poems	One poem
5	Fariyal	Female	Junior	40 poems	One Poem
6	Rustam	Male	Senior	Ten couplets	One poem
7	Ariya	Female	Junior	None	One poem
8	Faraidoon	Male	Senior	Ten poems	One poem
9	Mahsa	Female	Junior	Two poems	One poem
10	Mary	Female	Junior	More than 200 poems	More than 30
11	Ehsan	Male	Junior	One sonnet and four poems	One poem
12	Soma	Female	Junior	None	None

### Data collection

The data were collected through Email interviews. Since it was during the vacation, students were not available to have face-to-face interviews. According to Creswell (2012), the researcher can interview each individual using email to collect open-ended data. First, the researcher emailed the interview questions (Appendix) to 15 students and explained the purpose of the research. Twelve students responded to the interview questions and resent them to the researcher.

### Data Analysis

The data were collected through interviews and analyzed using a coding system. To analyze the data by using the coding system, the researcher followed three phases: 1) data preparation, 2) the adjustment of the coding system, and 3) the presentation of the data to reach conclusions for EFL Afghan students' attitudes toward writing English poetry.

The first phase of the data analysis was data preparation. Since the researcher collected the data through email, participants transcribed their responses and sent them back to the researcher. The researcher read the interview scripts several times to propose a coding system to analyze the data.

The second phase of the data analysis was the adjustment and endorsement of the tentative coding system. To inspect how 12 EFL Afghan students identify writing poetry in the English language, the researcher coded the data by four basic themes (difficulty, value, emotion, and attitude) adopted from Iida's (2012a) study in Japan. In this phase, the researcher read the data to code and initialize the categories and subcategories. Reviewing and revising the coded data was done repeatedly to be sure of proper categorization. Since the coding and frequency of participants' responses were considered very important, she asked one of her colleagues to code the data considering four basic themes. Then, she wanted to measure the inter-rater reliability. She used the Intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) using SPSS statistical package version 26. The inter-rater reliability of the Correlation coefficient estimated agreement across raters of ( $r=.89$ ) which demonstrates a significantly high correlational value between the raters.

The data analysis's final phase presented the coded data in a table found from the written interviews. This phase aimed to finalize the basic themes (difficulty, value, emotion, and attitude) and present the final results based on the 12 EFL Afghan students' attitudes about poetry writing.

## Results

The current study highlights Afghan EFL students' attitudes toward writing English poetry considering four main themes adopted from Iida's (2012a) research: difficulty, value, emotion, and attitudes. All four themes/ categories and subcategories are shown in Table 2 with the frequency of participants' responses and examples taken from the interview data.

Table 2

*Frequency of Participants' Responses about Poetry Writing Related To Four Themes: Difficulty, Value, Emotion, and Attitude with Examples.*

Category	Subcategory	No. Percentage	Examples
Difficulty	Vocabulary	9/12 (75%)	When I was writing my poetry, one of the difficulties I encountered was the word choice that should have been used to formulate both rhyme and rhythm. (Akbar)

	The structure of the poems	4/12 (33%)	The things that I dislike are poem features. I don't like to add elements such as exaggeration or paradox. (Ariya)
	Topic or content of the poems	2/12 (16%)	The difficulties that I faced when I tried to write poetry were the topic or content of the poem and word choice. (Elnaz)
	Self-expression	2/12 (16%)	I feel like poetry is a means to express my feeling and emotions, but how to express these feelings is somehow challenging for me. I think it is because I am not professional with what words to use and how to use them. (Soma)
	Lack of knowledge	3/12 (25%)	Lack of knowledge about poetry elements make[s] it impossible, and without prior reading poems, I couldn't write any poem. (Rahim)
	Previous learning experiences	2/12 (16%)	Although we studied the elements of poetry, I don't have much experience in writing poetry. (Soma)
Value	Self-Expression	9/12 (75%)	I learned how to transfer my thoughts and feelings with writing poetry in an artful way. (Faraidoon) I got useful experience. It helped me become more interested in showing my emotions through writing poems. (Mahsa)
	Self-discovery	1/12 (8%)	Poetry is essential because we can give life to words and express our feelings and emotions in a few short words, but with a very deep meaning. And we can share any pain or unspoken words that we have in our hearts, and we have not told anyone in our language. (Mary)
	Relaxation	3/12 (25%)	I cannot express myself in my language. I do not cry easily, especially when I am upset. I cannot even talk to anyone. I do not want anyone to understand my unhappiness, and that is why I express all my feelings in the form of

			a poem, and this writing poem calms me down. (Mary)
	Language Skills	5/12 (41%)	It increases my ability to use different words, and I learned many rules in writing poems. I [have] written poetry, and the reason was the acquaintance with other words and terminology in that language. (Kawsar)
	Culture and literature	5/12 (41%)	While I am really willing, the reason is to know about the culture, arts and ingenious in that language. (Kawsar)
Emotion	Expressing feelings	9/12 (75%)	By writing poetry, I can express my feeling better and have more emotion in them. (Fariyal)
	Enjoyable	11/12 (91%)	Having a poetry assignment is enjoyable because everyone can express their opinions and feelings through poetry. (Akbar)
	Confident	8/12 (66%)	The first reason is my high imagination to use a lot of beautiful similes and metaphors. I have also studied many poems of other poets in the past and have known the elements of a poem in the previous semester. So having enough information about a poem can help me write poetry. (Soma)
	Self-doubting	3/12 (25%)	I don't notice this skill; maybe I can write poetry; if I try a lot and know the structure of writing poetry, I can do it. (Elnaz)
	Frustrated	2/12 (16%)	The thing that I don't like about poetry writing is that you need to think hours to find the exact words to not get out of the rhyme chain. (Ehsan)
	Interest	5/12 (41%)	I am interested in writing poetry in English and also in my mother tongue because by writing poetry, I can express my feeling, emotion about something or someone. (Elnaz)

Attitude	Acceptance	9/12 (75%)	I think it is an exciting opportunity to motivate me write poetry and it is enjoyable because I can arrange my speech and feeling into rhyme. Writing poetry makes me more creative. (Elnaz).
	Unsureness	2/12 (16%)	I'm not sure because I don't have enough knowledge of that [poetry writing] now. (Ehsan)
	Resistance	3/12 (25%)	As I said, the reason which I'm not interested in English poems is my lack of knowledge deeply in English literature. (Ehsan)

Table 2 shows difficulty as one of the categories/ themes presented by different subcategories. Nine participants believed that the word choice is one of the challenges they face while writing poetry because they prefer to add rhyme to their poems. Ehsan, one of the participants, stated, "The difficulties that I faced were choosing appropriate words in order not to get out of rhyme chain. Besides, Mahsa, another participant, declared, "Mostly, I have faced [problem] with word choice. I could not know which word sounds much better to use it." Also, four participants stated the difficulty of the poem's structure and some figurative languages such as exaggeration and paradox.

"I like to know how to write poetry because I am interested in writing poetry, and I don't know its structure, so I think knowing the form is very important for me" (Elnaz). Moreover, two participants felt challenged in selecting good topics and content for their poems. They believed that if their poems have good topics, readers may tend to read their poetry. Furthermore, two participants mentioned that failing to express themselves is another challenge while writing English poetry. They stated that self-expression is time-consuming for them. Another difficulty, as revealed by three participants, is the lack of knowledge.

Regarding this problem, Elnaz mentioned, "I learn that writing poetry [is] not easy and I should think carefully and need more time to write it." Furthermore, two participants pointed out that they struggled writing poetry because they had not experienced it before. The data infers that the difficulties students faced were more related to writing poetry than personal emotions.

Table 2 represents value as the second category, which is presented in five subcategories. Self-expression and self-discovery are two subcategories that describe the value theme. Nine participants declared that they could express their thoughts through writing poetry. For instance, Faraidoon pointed out that he learned how to transfer his thoughts and feelings by writing poetry in different and artful ways. Also, one participant believed that she could discover her abilities during writing poetry. Three participants mentioned that poetry writing could make them relax, free of any tension and sorrow. "In my opinion, poetry is essential in

our life because as a writer we can express our feeling, sadness, happiness and as reader or listener make them relax and enjoy reading and listening to it" (Elnaz).

Moreover, five participants stated that they improved their language skills through writing poetry. Finally, five participants pointed out that poetry writing could develop their knowledge of culture and literature. "Poetry is considered one of the countries [']s properties and the essential part of literature" (Ehsan). Based on the participants' viewpoints, the value category is considered very important since they express and artfully discover themselves.

Table 2 also displays the category of emotion highlighted by the participants. The majority of the participants stated that poetry writing is enjoyable for them. Correspondingly, nine participants said they could express their feelings through poetry, which they can never tell in prose. Kawsar asserted, "I believe poetry helps us to express our feelings better than usual speech to audiences." Moreover, eight participants pointed out that they feel confident over their writing poetry abilities; however, three participants doubted their poetry writing capability. Ehsan noted, "I don't have its ability naturally, but if I want, certainly I can do my best." Likewise, two participants felt frustrated during writing poetry. As Mahsa mentioned, "Poetry writing is time-consuming in English, and rhyme and some other figures of speech such as metaphor, exaggeration make me frustrated."

Furthermore, five participants showed their interest in poetry writing. "Yes, I am interested because now I am familiar with rhythm and rhyme and some rules of a poem in English language and it is interesting for me when I read an English poem especially when I write" (Mary). To conclude this part, although some of the participants had the negative feeling (self-doubting and frustration), most of them represented positive feelings such as interest, enjoyment, and confidence.

Attitude is the last category shown in Table 2. The majority of the participants accepted poetry writing as a powerful skill that could affect humans' spirits and polish their emotions. For example, Rahim emphasized, "Poetry has magic on the human spirit, morale and using poems in the format of music has a remarkable effect on humankind, and this individually shows its importance." Additionally, Faraidoon said, "I love poetry a lot, the way I find it a way of relaxing while I am angry and sick of the situation. I am willing to read and often writing poems." On the other side, two participants revealed their uncertainty toward poetry writing due to the lack of knowledge and previous experience. "I have not any special experience from the poetry writing, but when we write a poem, we can get a new experience from poetry writing." (Ariya). Furthermore, three participants showed their resistance or negative attitude toward poetry writing because they felt they did not know English literature enough. To sum up, most participants had a positive attitude toward poetry writing.

Additionally, this study tested the correlation between three studies: EFL students (Iida, 2012a), M.A. TESOL students' perception (Liao, 2018), and Afghan EFL students' attitudes towards writing poetry in the English language Table 3.

Table 3.

*Correlation between EFL Students (Iida, 2012a), ESL/EFL M.A. TESOL Students' Perception (Liao, 2018), and Afghan EFL Students' Attitudes towards Writing Poetry in the English Language.*

		EFL students (Iida, 2012a)	Prospective EFL/ESL M.A. TESOL students (Liao, 2018)	Afghan EFL Students (Current study)
EFL Students (Iida, 2012a)	Pearson Correlation	1	.133	.232
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.565	.312
	N	21	21	21
Prospective EFL/ESL teachers (Liao, 2018)	Pearson Correlation	.133	1	.545*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.565		.011
	N	21	21	21
Afghan EFL Students (Current study)	Pearson Correlation	.232	.545*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.312	.011	
	N	21	21	21

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 illustrates that the Pearson Correlation test suggests no significant correlation between EFL students (Iida, 2012a) and EFL/ESL M.A. TESOL students (Liao, 2018) groups as  $p=.565$ . Moreover, there is no significant correlation between Afghan EFL students and EFL students (Iida, 2012a) groups as  $p=.312$ . However, there is a significantly high correlation between Afghan EFL students and EFL/ESL M. A. TESOL students (Liao, 2018) groups as the  $p=.011$  and  $r=.545$ .

## Discussion

The current study's primary purpose was to explore EFL Afghan students' attitudes towards writing English poetry. This study investigated the participants' attitudes through the lens of four themes (difficulty, value, emotion, and attitude) adopted from Iida's (2012a) research in Japan. Moreover, Liao (2018) examined the same categories in her study. Therefore, the current study tries to discuss: 1) how Afghan EFL students perceive English poetry writing, 2) the reasons why they are willing or unwilling to write English poetry, and 3) to find out the correlation between Afghan EFL students' attitudes with two other studies: Iida (2012a) and Liao (2018) which all focused on similar categories, but in different contexts and different years.

Table 3 shows no significant correlation between EFL students (Iida, 2012a) and M.A. TESOL students' (Liao, 2018). Moreover, there is no significant correlation between Afghan EFL students and EFL students (Iida, 2012a). On the other hand, there is a significantly high correlation between Afghan EFL students and M.A. TESOL students' (Liao, 2018).

Table 4 shows that Afghan EFL students and M.A. TESOL students (Liao, 2018) face similar challenges while writing poetry concerning the difficulty category. Afghan EFL participants (33%) believe that it is difficult to follow a particular structure in writing English poetry.

Table 4

*Comparison between EFL Students (Iida, 2012a), M.A. TESOL Students' Perception (Liao, 2018), and Afghan EFL Students' Attitudes towards Writing Poetry in English Language.*

Category	EFL Students (N=20)	(Number) Percentage	M.A. TESOL students' (N=18)	(Number) Percentage	Afghan EFL Students (N=12)	(Number) Percentage
Difficulty	Syllables	14/20 (70%)	Features of Poems	12/18 (67%)	Structure of the poems	4/12 (33%)
	Self-expression	13/20 (65%)	Self-Expression	4/18 (22%)	Self-Expression	2/12 (16%)
	Seasonal references	10/20 (50%)	Topic or Content of the Poems	7/18 (39%)	Topic or content of the poems	2/12 (16%)
	Vocabulary	8/20 (40%)	Vocabulary	13/18 (72%)	Vocabulary	9/12 (75%)
	Previous learning experiences	6/20 (30%)	Organization or Format of the Poems	4/18 (22%)	Previous learning experiences	2/12 (16%)
	Remembering	3/20 (15%)	Lack of Knowledge About Writing Poetry	4/18 (22%)	Lack of knowledge	3/12 (25%)
Value	Self-expression	15/20 (75%)	Self-Expression	13/18 (72%)	Self-Expression	9/12 (75%)
			Self-Discovery	8/18 (44%)	Self-discovery	1/12 (8%)
	Vocabulary	17/20 (85%)	Therapeutic Healing	6/18 (33%)	Relaxation	3/12 (25%)
			Language Skills	5/18 (28%)	Language Skills	5/12 (41%)
	Applicability to other genres	14/20 (70%)	Writing Ownership	4/18 (22%)	Expressing feelings	9/12 (75%)
	Audience awareness	6/20 (30%)	Connecting with Others	2/18 (11%)	Culture and literature	5/12 (41%)

Emotion			Enjoyable/Free	15/18 (83%)	Enjoyable	11/12 (91%)
	Interest	11/20 (55%)			Interest	5/12 (41%)
	Sense of achievement	10/20 (50%)	Confident	11/18 (61%)	Confidence	8/12 (66%)
	Surprise	8/20 (40%)	Self-Doubting	9/18 (50%)	Self-doubting	3/12 (25%)
	Anxiety	6/20 (30%)	Anxious	9/18 (50%)		
	Reluctance	2/20 (10%)	Frustrated	4/18 (22%)	Frustrated	2/12 (16%)
Attitude	Acceptance	14/20 (70%)	Acceptance	14/18 (78%)	Acceptance	9/12 (75%)
	Unsureness	3/20 (15%)	Unsureness	4/18 (22%)	Unsureness	2/12 (16%)
	Resistance	8/20 (40%)	Resistance	2/18 (11%)	Resistance	3/12 (25%)

Similarly, M.A. TESOL students' (67%) viewed the poems' features or structure as one of the main difficulties. Surprisingly, both Afghan EFL students (16%) and M.A. TESOL students (22%) show difficulties expressing emotions and opinions. However, Iida's (2012a) participants (65%) revealed more problems in self-expression in the process of haiku writing. Besides, Afghan EFL students feel struggled (16%) in the poem's topic or content, while M.A. TESOL students (39%) also have such feelings. The data shows that both studies' participants met challenges in reflecting their experiences when composing poetry.

Moreover, in Liao's study, 72% and in Afghan EFL, 75% of the participants face vocabulary difficulty. It is a fact that the poets need to be careful to integrate rhyme, rhythm, and other elements in their poetry by choosing the right words that can carry the proposed meaning and certain music. However, in Iida's study, only 40% of the participants agree that vocabulary is problematic in writing haiku in English. Furthermore, there are other features of the difficulty: lack of knowledge about the format of poetry (22%) from M.A. TESOL students' previous learning experiences (30%) from EFL students of (Iida, 2012a) and (16%) from EFL Afghan students. It can be inferred that all three groups were not exposed to poetry writing to gain experience. Lack of knowledge is the last difficulty mentioned by M.A. TESOL students' (22%) and Afghan EFL students (25%). This issue causes both groups to be frustrated composing poems in the English language. Therefore, it can be interpreted that both studies' participants were not given a chance to write poetry, express feelings, and to examine their own life experiences in a more personal and expressive way. These data sets show that ESL and EFL students need more instruction in poetry writing, and teachers should pay more attention to minimize these difficulties.

Additionally, as Table 4 illustrates, value is another category perceived by EFL Afghan students about English poetry writing. Among all subcategories describing value, self-expression received the highest percentage in the three studies, 75% Afghan EFL, 72% M.A. TESOL students' (Liao, 2018), and 75% (Iida, 2012a). Many statements that arose from the Afghan EFL group are more focused: writers' self-discovery (8%), relaxation (25%), language skills (41%), expressing feeling (75%), and culture and literature (41%), which are parallel to self-discovery (44%), therapeutic healing (33%), writing ownership (22%) and connecting with others (11%) for M.A. TESOL students. Some of the values (self-discovery, expressing emotion) perceived by Afghan EFL students were emphasized by Garvin (2013) and Iida (2016b). According to Liao (2018), advanced students accept the achievable skills as the value, and they would be capable of identifying intrapersonal, interpersonal, and

sentimental development. The study infers that Afghan EFL students know the value of poetry writing. Further research must be done to influence their perceptions about poetry writing in the English language.

Moreover, Table 4 displays students' positive and negative emotions toward writing English poetry. As positive emotion, most participants (83 % in Liao's study and 91% in the current research) view poetry writing as enjoyable. Also, 41% of the Afghan EFL students show their interest in writing poetry. When students' emotions, such as enjoyment and interest, are taken into account, it would help language learners express their feelings and experiences inside the language classroom (Chamcharatsri, 2013b; Iida 2012, 2016a, 2020). Confidence is another positive feeling perceived similar in Afghan EFL students (66%) and M.A. TESOL students' (61%). However, there is a slightly different rate (50%) in Iida's (2012a) sense of achievement in the emotion category. Thus, these studies' data contribute to understanding ESL/EFL students' emotional involvement when writing English poetry in different contexts. On the other hand, there are two opposing emotions pointed out by Afghan EFL students and M.A. TESOL students: self-doubting and frustration. The raters for frustration are similar for Afghan EFL (16%) and M.A. TESOL students' (22%). However, the raters for self-doubting, Afghan EFL (25%) and ESL/EFL (50%), are pretty different. The two articles' data show a higher percentage of positive emotions that prove that teachers teach poetry writing with positive considerations in both contexts. Still, some investigations must be done to highlight students' emotions in the Afghan context.

Finally, Table 4 represents three different attitudes (acceptance, unsureness, and resistance) that declare Afghan students' perceptions of writing English poetry. The most frequent attitude for these three studies is acceptance, showing 70% for the EFL students, 78% for the M.A.TESOL students, and 75% for Afghan EFL students. It seems that the majority of participants show a positive attitude. The second attitude, unsureness, also demonstrates a similar percentage: 15% (Iida), 22% (Liao), and 16% (current study). This data represents that the participants are willing to compose poems. The last attitude, resistance, shows similar raters between Afghan EFL (25%) and M.A. TESOL students' (11%). However, the percentage of this attitude is higher (40%) in Iida (2012a) than that of the two other studies. It means that Afghan EFL students and M.A. TESOL students' negative attitudes are not as much as Iida's participants'. Therefore, the similarity of positive attitudes (78% & 75%) and negative attitudes (11% & 25%) between Afghan EFL students and M.A. TESOL students' can be inferred that poetry writing is acceptable and counted as practical skill in both contexts. However, the number of participants in both studies was limited. A quantitative study might be needed in the Afghan context to examine Afghan teachers' and students' attitudes with larger samples and statistical assessments.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to explore EFL Afghan students' attitudes towards writing English poetry. The study investigates the participants' attitudes through the lens of four themes (difficulty, value, emotion, and attitude) adopted from Iida's (2012a) research. This study has a qualitative design, and the data were collected through interviews with 12 Afghan EFL students of the English Department from Herat University. The study discusses the data

comparing two other studies (Liao, 2018) and (Iida, 2012a). Interestingly, data suggest a significantly high correlation between Afghan EFL students and M.A. TESOL students.

The data represents some reasons that Afghan EFL students are willing to write poetry in the English language. First, they can express their feelings and emotions through poetry. According to Iida (2016a), Students express their emotions to recreate and describe an actual moment related to personally meaningful memory while writing poetry in a second language. Second, the study represents that Afghan EFL students identify the value of poetry writing. Many studies existed in literature (see Chamcharatsri, 2013; Hanauer, 2015; Garvin, 2013; Iida, 2012a, 2012b, 2016a, 2016b) that examined the value of poetry writing. Moreover, enjoyment, discovering abilities, confidence, expressing thoughts, and enriching the vocabulary and language skills are the other reasons that motivate Afghan students to be willing and write English poetry. These reasons reveal that teachers in both contexts teach poetry writing with positive concerns.

On the other hand, the data shows some reasons that make Afghan EFL learners unwilling to write English poetry. The difficulty of vocabulary, the poem's structure, lack of knowledge and previous learning experiences, topic or content of the poems, and self-expression are the main obstacles that hesitate Afghan EFL students to write poetry. Besides, two negative emotions, namely self-doubting and frustration, are the other reasons that make Afghan EFL students reluctant to compose English poetry. It is notable to mention that the discussed problems are aligned with M.A. TESOL students' (Liao, 2018). The data shows that both studies' participants struggle to reflect on their experiences writing poetry in the English language. Moreover, the study represents that Afghan EFL students have positive attitudes towards poetry writing in the English language; however, they show some negative attitudes.

As a result, this study implies that Afghan teachers should minimize the obstacles that prevent learners from composing poems. Teachers should expose the students to different types of poems, plan good lesson plans, teach poetry writing strategies, assign projects to write English poems, and provide formative feedback. Moreover, further research must investigate positive and negative emotional aspects and examine some educational backgrounds that affect EFL Afghan students' and teachers' attitudes.

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## About the Author

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions

Dear participants:

I want to collect data for research entitled Exploring EFL students' Attitudes toward writing English poetry. Please respond to the following questions concerning writing English poetry. The information would be kept confidential and won't be shared with any parties. And instead of your real names, pseudonyms will be used. Thank you very much.

1. Have you ever read or written any poems in your mother tongue (first language)? Why or why not?
2. Do you think poetry is important? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe that people are born with the ability to write poetry? Why or why not?
4. Is it essential for you to know how to write poetry? Why or why not?
5. Are you interested in reading or writing poetry in English? Why or why not?
6. What are the reasons that you are willing to read or write English poetry?
7. What are the reasons that you are not willing to read or write English poetry?
8. How many years of poetry instruction have you had in school and university?
9. Did you experience poetry writing during the years of learning English?
10. How many Persian and English poems have you ever written? Tell me the exact number if you remember.
11. What kinds of difficulties (word choice, topic or content of the poem, lack of knowledge about poetry, etc.) did you face when writing your poetry?
12. What did you learn from the poetry writing experience?
13. Do you think including figures of speech (figurative languages) is essential in poetry? Why or why not?
14. Do you think each poem should have rhyme? Why or why not?
15. What elements do you like about poetry writing?
16. What elements do you dislike about poetry writing?
17. Do you think you are capable of writing poetry? Why or why not?

18. If it was in a writing/ literature class, your teacher tells you to write your poems, what will you think of such an assignment? Ex: easy, challenging, enjoyable, boring/ tiring?