Shaping Purpose-Driven Learning Through Creative Writing

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Abstract

Existing literature predominantly emphasizes policy frameworks and technological solutions, neglecting the transformative potential of creative writing in facilitating purpose-driven learning. In the context of advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this study addresses the underexplored role of creative writing as a catalyst for societal change and sustainable development. This research seeks to bridge this gap by employing a qualitative methodology that is grounded on a social constructivist model that subsists on focus group conversations and sharing between students and participants that enable the gathering of rich empirical material in the form of narrative responses. The narrative responses are utilized to inspire creative writing initiatives linked to purpose-driven learning. By analysing the impact of creative narratives, poetry, and storytelling on societal perceptions and behaviours, this study aims to uncover the mechanisms through which creative writing influences attitudes towards sustainability and promotes actionable engagement. The anticipated findings intend to showcase the efficacy of creative writing in fostering empathy, encouraging innovative thinking, and amplifying diverse voices, thus providing valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and practitioners involved in sustainable development endeavours.

Keywords: creative writing, narrative analysis, purpose-driven learning, social constructivism, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Purpose-driven learning has emerged out of the dire need to inject socio-emotional values in students alongside the development of lifelong learning goals. Educators are more inclined to promote discovery, encourage exploration and empower students to broaden their worldview through interaction and engagement with societal happenings. The trend in purpose-driven learning utilizing SDGs as the forefront seem to be directed at making students agents of change by connecting them to the relevant stakeholders through various problem-based discussions and capstone projects. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are implementing all sorts of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary research that serve to study human-systems through frameworks that address specific challenges. This supports the notion, as Filho and colleagues (2023) suggested, that this process is a dynamic and ongoing approach where the curriculum is transforming to meet purpose-driven learning via the integration of sustainability topics and new modules that can shoulder the endeavour sought after.

A number of research in the area share this transformative notion of pedagogy, approach and sustainable teaching and learning practice that can push the agenda of the SDGs. Cebrián and colleagues (2020) pointed out that diversified learner-centred strategies in the classrooms such as interactive action-oriented activities, and self-directed initiatives can support the linking of formal and informal learning in a purposeful manner. In the light of this, the need for defining common frameworks and definitions has always been central to this agenda to provide not only sustainable practices in the classroom, but also to derive models and technological solutions that have a more global and policy changing impact. While developing policy frameworks and technological solutions are the modus operandi of stakeholders, classroom practices hinge on creating innovative teaching and learning mechanisms and transformative institutional approaches to sustain SDG competencies in the long run. The need for finding new ways to embed, inject and cultivate this agenda for the long haul needs to be addressed from the HEI levels because it can determine future professions that are aligned to this cause (Oltra-Badenes et al., 2023).

If the expectation is for students to be the driver of change, then the nature of the stimulus has to be one that crafts a pathway that not only nurtures talent but also promotes at its core the concept of rigorous scholarship and the development of new ideas through its authentic approaches. However, systematic reviews have highlighted how student activities and assignments more often than not fall in these categories: questionnaires that assess students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours towards sustainability, reflexive diaries, interviews, conceptual maps, rubrics, and scenario and vignette visioning. These are more summative than it is formative, Cebrián and colleagues (2020) point out. These approaches also lack what Muhammad Yunus refers to as social innovation through sociological imagination, for example (Papi-Thornton, 2013).

Hence, what can be gathered is that there is a further need to diversify how we engage our students in this purpose-driven endeavour. Bringing the SDGs into the classroom to bridge students with underserved communities, for example, requires not only ingenious approaches but also approaches that are character- formative if the educator is to aid knowledge, grow awareness and facilitate the perception of the relationship between SDGs and communal

wellbeing. This study answers this call by exploring how creative writing can be used to drive the SDGs in the attempt to shape purpose-driven learning. The study seeks to investigate why creative writing can be used to mould purpose-driven learning and how this endeavour delivers on learning outcomes that are grounded in the SDGs.

Literature Review

The Call for Purpose Driven Learning: The Motivation

As mentioned earlier on in the introduction, the notion of purpose-driven learning, as propounded by Moreno (2022), centres on unleashing the innate passion of the student. The endgame is in the goals that we set out to achieve. However, what constitutes as purpose learning may differ in context from one classroom to the other. While some may be motivated by culturally relevant stimulus to engage their students, others may use task-based or problem-based scenarios to power the learning experience. The bottom line is about moving beyond mere testing and pushing for more outcome-based activities. This trend post-pandemic is a result of reimagining and reinventing education for a more purposeful and long-term impact.

Previous studies in the area have highlighted a number of endeavours in favour of this goal-oriented learning. Lodge and Ashford-Rowe (2024) discuss this from the viewpoint of the process rather than the end product. Their study advocates how goals should not be about obtaining credit hours but more about aligning classroom practices with effective learning that is neither about input nor output, but more about understanding of mechanisms on how things are learnt, then drawing on that as a goal. Gironella (2023) uses gamification methods to identify student motivators in the light of driving learning that matches needs and wants. This study attests to effectively leveraging on students' unique intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to create an empowering, supportive, and highly effective learning model. The core of a purpose-driven learning framework is about ensuring that something is learnt in a very student-centred ecosystem.

Purpose-driven learning is more often than not student-led. Njoku (2019) examines the nature of a student-led learning activity revolving public health issues. The act of integrating the students within the community under study enabled the student to drive the task via inquiry mode. Learner-centred strategies are seen to drive purpose-driven learning. An extended endeavour towards purpose-driven learning is also seen in attempts to create social impact. Weakley and colleagues (2021) developed a university-voluntary sector collaboration for social purpose goals. Entrenched in service-learning, this form of learning is not only driven by a cause to achieve civic engagement goals but also to drive the point home about how HEIs can anchor teaching and learning for social change. The purpose of learning is embedded in student engagement with community partners, for example, providing a mission and a vision. However, the challenge lies in the structural aspects of these tasks as well as the conceptual framework and designs of these pedagogical approaches.

Implementing SDGs in Teaching and Learning: The Challenges

A form of purpose driven learning that is gaining pace is the incorporation of SDGs into the curriculum in order to motivate students to move in a fruitful direction. Still in its infancy, this approach has covered quite a bit of ground over a short period of time. If approached effectively, this strategy is able to achieve outcomes that promote forward-thinking amidst other character-crafting values that are highly sought after in many industries. In Ilhavenil and Logewaran (2023), the study attempts to teach forms of empathy which is deemed pivotal in a multicultural context. It is also pointed out that in an Asian context, this agenda is rather fuzzy. With this in mind, the study explores how the Moral Education in Malaysian schools can serve as a case-study or context to explore the development of empathy amongst high school students. While this contributes to further understanding how young adults process empathy, the learning framework can be further extended into a context of a larger scope. Extracting values from a value-based module is one way to go but extracting values such as empathy from a business studies module, for example, not only opens up pathways to accidental learning, but also showcases how any module can be utilized to generate empathy given an effective teaching strategy. For instance, in Zakaria and colleagues (2021), the study approaches the teaching and learning of core values such as empathy by integrating global citizenship as a tag along feature across subjects taken in selected Malaysian primary schools. As a default setting, the SDGs become an overarching framework that is embedded within the education system. The expected communal values alongside other critical cognitive skills are developed at the grassroots.

HEIs on the other hand do have a moral obligation to ensure students develop holistically instead of merely churning out graduates that are academically prepared. Industries today are looking for more than that. Employability, relevancy, innovation, and a host of other cognitive and soft skills are given priority today. Adopting the SDGs into the teaching and learning framework is one step forward which enables integration and incorporation of key goals that merge theory with practice. In fact, there are a number of studies that discuss this humanizing factor in higher education and the need to move in this direction (Abdul Razak & Moten, 2023; Phung & Raju, 2021; Sarifuddin et al., 2021).The idea is to apply what is learnt in a context that enables students to not only gather firsthand empirical material but also to experience, observe and be part of a sustainable solution which is aligned to specific SDGs depending on their specializations. For example, Parahakaran and colleagues (2021) discuss practical approaches to teaching values through Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines in Malaysia. This then extends into creative innovations and modelling of solutions that address human problems as seen in Del Cerro Velazquez and Lozano Rivas (2020) where the teaching of technical drawing was utilized for an eco-urban project.

The list of success stories is promising. However, in order to maintain the dynamic flow of ideas while aligning module objectives with learning outcomes can prove to be a challenge (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019; Leite, 2022). There are a number of studies that share this sentiment about balancing this form of teaching and learning. There is an ongoing concern about methodologies, approaches, frameworks and so on. It is one thing to be noble and try to

incorporate lifelong learning skills in a module, but it is also crucial that the student recognizes what is transpiring in this process learning method. Therein lies the expertise of the educator and this is perhaps one of the main hurdles in adopting SDGs as part of the teaching and learning transaction. Ahmed (2020) refers to this predicament as part of a methodological challenge. In that sense, the pathways to exploring methods, approaches, models, and frameworks have not been fully exhausted. Studies are using all sorts of ways to implement SDGs in the classroom. In Markakis (2023) diagnosing, reviewing, explaining, assessing, and managing (DREAM) technique is applied in an Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) module. Further to that there are also studies, just to name a few, that have reported using case studies, grounded theory, experiential learning, practice-based models, and other formative approaches (Baena-Morales et al., 2021; Dean et al., 2018; Kwee, 2021; Ohta et al., 2022). This is an indication that there is a need to explore this further. The avenues to which the educator can introduce SDGs in a classroom setting is numerous in the light of finding ways to meet learning outcomes alongside module descriptions. With the inception of STEAM, where the Arts have also been introduced as having the ability to expand education and application, the role of language, literature and the humanities cannot be undermined in this respect to take on global concerns as part of its responsibilities.

The Role of Creative Writing: Opportunities and Possibilities

The creative arts and the social sciences have always been entrenched in cultural facets that bring with them sociological elements. Being so, many of these modules and courses are about individuals, communities, and larger scale societies against the backdrop of human conditions. More often than not, these are themes that inspire art and writing. Creative writing can be seen to thrive on these parameters. Previous research on the roles of creative writing has brought to the fore its immense capacity to promote profound thinking, foster critique about the world and facilitate students' personal growth (Gilbert, 2021). Furthermore, its therapeutic quality is known to heal as practiced in many psychological interventions (Gladding, 2021; Ruini & Mortara, 2022).

Philips and Kara (2021) bring out a fundamental purpose of creative writing when they link it to social science practice. The study makes two pertinent points about how participants (subjects) can provide empirical material that is thick and rich for the utilization of the researchers, in this case writers. Those data points can then be used to explore various ways of expressing through writing. In another study, Kerslake (2021) introduced Literature in her classroom, specifically, Ted Hughes works. It ranged from narratives to poetry. Kerslake talks about how the material inspired students to write their creative pieces tackling ecological issues. Logan and Grillo (2023) offers an interesting study on how creative writing can be used to re-imagine Black futures. The research centres on providing alternative responses to climate change and thinking differently about sustainability. This echoes what was mentioned earlier in Yunus where he talks about using sociological imagination to create social fiction (Papi-Thornton, 2013). These endeavours can potentially provide solutions or at the very least conjure up conversations about ways forward.

In the light of this, this study takes inspiration from the many studies that have attempted to show the potential embedded in a creative writing module. Its capacity to target the SDGs while spewing out lines of creativity is possible given the nature of the art form that is not limited by form, structure, and expression. Although there is research in the area, it is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, there are studies that have put creative writing in the forefront as a vehicle to create awareness of the SDGs. Tong (2023)'s study revolved around getting students to come up with a collection of creative writing work based on SDGs. They either worked collaboratively or independently. The findings, however, were focused on students' behaviour in tackling the issues rather than the deliverables or end product. The study reported that students showcased a greater sense of intersectionality, belonging and openness. While this is promising data, Crewe (2021) discusses creative writing as a practice-led research approach. This means that creative writing is seen as a methodology in itself to harness SDGs as well as create a platform for its study. It is with this in mind, this study explores how creative writing bridges the gap between academia and communal concerns, facilitating the activation, production, organisation and transmission of stories, monologues and poems that not only bring to the fore the SDGs but also mobilize action and advocacy.

Methods

The Social Constructivist Approach

The Social Constructivist Model emphasizes the co-construction of shared meanings through extensive conversations, interactions and engagement between the researcher and the situated communities. Introduced by Vygotsky, this paradigm which is largely a social approach to understanding the dynamics of how individuals and communities are shaped and influenced by their environment provides an analytical framework which parameters are defined by narrative responses and extended dialogues with one another. Being so, it centres on the how's and why's of the human experience and condition in a negotiated way.

Studies have endorsed the use of social constructivism in forms of learning that are associated with case studies, research projects, problem-based learning, collaborative discovery learning, simulations and the like (Akpan et al., 2020). Park (2023) refers to constructivism as a catalyst to creating agency which is one way to arrive at possible solutions because it brings to the fore norms and actual identities of groups. Mishra (2023) adds that constructivism is built along the lines of student-centred learning, which not only extends the notion of autonomy that Park (2023) maintains, but also delivers on major learning principles such as active learning and putting theories into context which facilitates perspective and meaningful learning that is aligned with societal concerns. In fact, William (2024) attests to this approach as valuable when studying human-related phenomenon that intersects with gender, identity and culture. The context of this study that bridges the attainment of SDGs with purpose driven learning alongside the rich narrative responses of specific communities presents ideal grounds for the use of a focused group discussion that subsists on a social constructivist platform. It fulfils all the tenets of what this study is founded on: purpose-driven learning.

Context

Empirical material was acquired from selected B40 households in the Klang Valley through focus group discussions over a period of time. In the context of Malaysia, this refers to the segment of society within the bottom 40% of income earners, often considered to be communities at or below the poverty line. They are typically characterized as households that rely on a single income recipient and most heads of household are generally described as having lower educational qualifications and are employed in lower skilled jobs, making them blue-collar workers. The study employed a human-centred approach, as described by Kleine (2023), with data gathered mainly through extensive interactions and engagements with participants on university premises.

As an extension to an empowerment workshop held by the institution, 35 students undertaking a creative writing module leveraged on this opportunity to interact and engage with representatives who voluntarily came forward to tell their stories. Five students were assigned to five participants in a group. The language of communication was mostly Malay with sprinklings of broken English. All students were apt in both languages; hence language was not a barrier in most cases. An informal conversational approach was applied to put the participants at ease. They were also informed that this was non-identifiable research, and a consent form was administered alongside an application for an ethics review.

Narrative Analysis

The study adapted Gubrium and Holstein (2012)'s narrative analysis technique to generate the findings and build themes that facilitated the answering of the research questions. Its emphasis on text, context and audience is a fitting lens to study the internal and external organization of participants' stories. The narrative responses were categorized into four parts: activation, production, organization and transmission. This step enabled the drawing of linkages and connections between motivation of utterances and the actual form of the verbal expressions giving way to the understanding of the participants' social world and the production of data.

Moenandar and O'Connor (2024) highlight how this form of narrative study presents facets of social realities that ironically underlines the dangers in the practice because of its capacity to reveal inside stories. In the same vein, Rompianesi and Hilt (2024) point out that in their study, it put into perspective who were the heroes, victims and villains allowing them to identify the implications of policies and reforms on that sect of society. Gubrium and Holstein's (2012) approach stresses the reiterative relationship between the situational and the interactional aspects of narratives. It considers the environment, situations and conditions that drive the narrative's production. Hence, while utilizing this method informed the study in terms of how local relevancies shaped participants' responses, it also suggested that their narratives could be used to impact change. Rosser and Soler (2024) discuss this power to shape reality and knowledge in relation to Gubrium and Holstein's (2012) method which this study acknowledges as a fundamental outcome of purpose-driven learning.

The role of the educator was defined by the social constructivist's notion of mentoring, motivating and mediating within the whole instructional process. Guided by the research questions, the study was conducted in three phases to ensure rigour, consistency and data driven findings:

Phase 1

Utilizing social constructivism to navigate the study allowed students to gather firsthand information through conversations and observations that expose them to both, verbal and non-verbal cues in the narrative responses of their selected participants. Furthermore, students developed a sense of ownership of how their creative writing pieces, which were their deliverables in the form of stories, monologues, and poems, were activated, produced, organised, and transmitted. The focus group discussions were guided by Gubrium and Holstein's (2012) framework on the Narrative Reality approach where questions are designed to meet the interactional and situational terrain. The interview questions revolved around gathering backstories of participant's lived experiences that help in understanding the context of their situations and the communal value of their roles and relationships. Students met with participants three times over a four-week period. In this phase, students collected data that can potentially shape the content of their creative writing task.

Phase 2

Students worked collaboratively to generate a creative writing piece that was either in the form of a short story, a monologue, or a collection of poems. The raw empirical material from the narrative responses of the participants were also framed around Gubrium and Holstein's (2012) method of analysing narrative reality. The narrative responses were segmented into four parts, namely: activation, production, organisation, and transmission. Using this as a guide, students discussed motivations, contextualization, verbal, and non-verbal expressions presented by the participant. These co-constructed data points were then utilized to build a plot line complete with setting, characters, dialogue, point of view, conflict, resolution, and theme- depending on the type of creative writing form they chose to pursue. Their shared meanings to the narrative responses of their participants were seen in the content, language and organisation of their work which was an important step to applying real-world knowledge amidst the SDGs.

Phase 3

The final phase puts into perspective the learning outcome and deliverables that the task endeavoured to explore. In order to fully understand the foundation and motivation of the group's creative writing choices, the educator who is the researcher in this context conducted a focus group discussion with the groups of students. The creative writing pieces were considered their narrative responses to the issues brought forward during their sharing sessions with the B40 participants. Using the same frame of reference that the students used in phase 1 with the participants, the educator directs questions that attempt to understand the activation, production, organisation and transmission process behind their short stories, monologues, and

collection of poems. This step is a reflective one for students as they justify and explain critical decisions that they made in shaping their work. This co-construction of meanings between the educator and students enables the uncovering of the mechanisms through which creative writing influences attitudes towards sustainability and promotes actionable engagement, and vice versa. This phase solidifies the intent to showcase the efficacy of creative writing in accelerating the SDGs that can go beyond just fostering empathy.

Research Framework

The research framework integrated the conceptual and theoretical components that this study is based on. The diagram elucidates the process alongside the three phases carried out during the data gathering procedure:

Figure 1
Research Framework
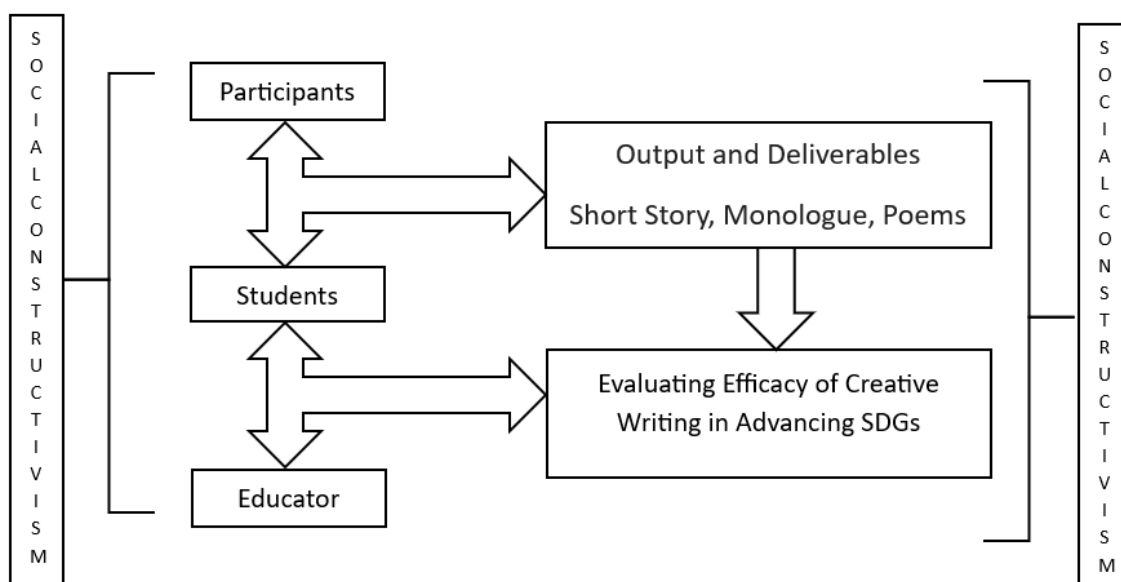
Source: Author's own work

Findings and Discussion

Capturing the Voices of the Unheard

Often, when it comes to social policies, the economy and the implementation of certain strategies, the tendency is to look at these things from the macro level where a larger scope of things are applied. A one size fits all perspective is common and even acceptable when governments or policymakers introduce new agendas on the pretext of supporting the various communities in their needs and wants. The "blanket" approach is a one size fits all solution, and it does not always consider the individuals and communities at the micro levels. Gubrium and Holstein (2012) posit that in order to find out about how policies impact society, it is the

underserved or marginalized that need to be studied and not the elite. Hence, the narrative expressions of the students encapsulated this notion of capturing the unheard voices that usually drown amidst the "noise" or are often sidelined.

In this study, students had the opportunity to capture the worlds of fishermen, house husbands with disabled children, farm hands, construction and factory workers. The eye-opening predicament of "kais pagi makan pagi, kais petang makan petang" (translation: to live from hand to mouth) statement put into perspective for the students what it meant to be poverty stricken. The recurring cry of "siapalah kita?" (translation: who are we) were some of the notable narrative responses that were included in their poems. There was a shock value in the tone of the students when they re-enacted the stories of their participants. The participants "acceptance" and "resignation to their fate" marked by the words "Insya Allah" (translation: if God wills/God-willing) irked them. In fact, many of their final creative writings were unsettling expressions in the form of questionings. There was a collection of poems entitled, *Why?*, *The Ignored* ? and *How Did We get Here?* There were also parodies to classic titles like *Paradise Lost Indeed!* and *# All Lives Matter!*.

Students showcased a combination of skills at this juncture: inquiry-based learning marked by incessant questionings, the use of puns and sarcasm to poke fun and mock the lack of an avenue for all sects of society to be heard in matters concerning their participants' livelihoods and an elevated ability to listen, translate and transcribe. Above all, the exercise created awareness about "how the other half of the world lives" exclaimed a student. This aligns with what Parra (2021) highlights about approaches needing to be such that they strengthen the writing voice and identities. Sweeney (2024) also presents a perspective that focuses on the creative writer being able to free their voices when the subject matter inspires them. However, the findings of this study suggested that while the student's writing voice was amplified alongside their identities, it was the voices of the participants that were freed from the burden of silence giving way to their identities. They are "seen" and "heard" now; a student summarized. Jungcurt (2022) argues that there is often a gap in data sets in relation to addressing societal issues as there are unknown voices, silent voices, muted voices, unheard voices and ignored voices. While this is true, this exercise in creative writing did however bring some predicaments to light narrowing the gap a little between what is and what is perceived contributing to a more holistic picture of the situation of those left behind. This had a direct connection with SDG 10, reducing inequalities, as it demonstrated how citizen-generated data, as pointed out by Jungcurt (2022), can more adequately describe people's conditions and thus, their needs.

Realizing Organic Connections and Relationships

This study also brought to the fore the unconscious use of "I", "we", "us", "our" when expressing the participants' narrative responses into stories and monologues. The participants' stories became their stories; the participants' voices became their monologues. As though the struggle was theirs, embedded between the lines were the voices of student agency. For example, the plight of factory workers and their predicaments were embodied in a monologue entitled, *Our Battle,* spoken in first person perspective. The student spoke as a factory worker.

Likewise, the journey of the seabound fisherman who is at the mercy of climate change, was expressed as "I who lives in fear of the elements/ Ride the tumultuous waves or the'll be no tomorrow". This action of putting themselves in the shoes of their participants indicates a form of camaraderie and an attempt to relate. When asked about this gesture, students saw their experiences with their participants as a revelation. They were privy to secrets and inside stories that would never be obtained in normal circumstances.

This bond that was created revealed the interplay between insider information and outsider perspective. This alignment is akin to producing an emic account versus an etic account, a concept propounded by Pike (1967) which discusses how perspectives of the world are derived. Smith (2020) in a study of critical strategies in creative writing endeavours re-affirms the concept of writer's circles as a form of bringing together diverse co-constructions of knowledge from insights sharing. However, this exercise offered the students a different sense of being in a group. It was an opportunity to be a part of their participants' lives and unexpected journeys bringing a different form of a collaborative experience that expands the critical strategies Smith (2020) proposes.

This process facilitated the students in understanding the participants' feelings, attitudes, experiences, and the vicious cycle of cause and effect. "We are all in the same boat, just different waters, yet all the water is connected to one big body of water, right?", reflects a student during the focus group discussion. In this way, the student is pointing out how we all belong to a larger ecosystem in which each individual, community and society has his role and part to play. "Kita same aje" (translation: we are all the same), a student recollects a participant's response to our symbiotic relationships. This brings to mind how education systems more often than not receive a lot of flak for failing to nurture complex values such as empathy and other forms of emotional intelligence (EMI) related qualities. In fact, Bai and Srivastava (2023) argue that institutions are more focused on building technocrats and individuals instead of citizens, adding that a restructure is required for a more value-based education. However, the findings in this study have shown that there is a way to mould technocrats and individuals that have both, the elite technical skills and the emotional disposition for empathy, self-awareness and social skills by changing the mechanisms of deriving information.

The notion that we are all somehow interconnected drove home the point about taking responsibility and taking action in small ways to create a positive ripple. What can be deduced here is that the student's EMI was put to the test and the best way forward was to take on the persona and use language in a way that it preserved the realities of their participants' situations. While this indirectly hit on some major tenets of EMI, the act of assimilating a character did build human linkages that can lead to greater understanding for the need of inclusivity, and less social injustice, at least at the awareness level. This made way for SDG 5 and SDG 10 which addresses creating inclusive societies alongside the building of empathy through adaptation and adoption of others' perspectives as their own.

Advocating for Action Through Social Fiction

Through participation in this exercise, students showcased progressive autonomy and the want to lead the rest of their peers towards a fruitful outcome as the participants were willing gatekeepers in their communities. Lee and colleagues (2023) reinforces this development in their study whereby students, in wanting to become active learners, become comfortable holding the reins once the task is fully understood. In the context of this study, listening to their backstories unleashed a portal into their realms; domains that facilitated students' understanding of multiple realities, social realities, constructed realities and perceived realities. In fact, this further echoes Jungcurt (2022) when he maintains that citizen-generated data, whereby empirical material is generated from people for people, has the potential of putting misconceptions and preconceived ideas about societies to rest. In the light of this, poems and short stories revealed titles that were forward thinking and captured the essence of advocacy. Titles such as *So, What Now?* and *Where Do We Go From Here?* epitomizes a call for action.

On another note, what was observed, which organically took place, was Yunus' aspirations for imagination to be used to create social fiction – "if we do not imagine, it will never happen", he maintains (Papi-Thornton, 2013). Social fiction, as indicated earlier in the literature review, is the designing of stories and creative works of art in any form that facilitates the imagination to visualize ideal situations. In these ideal portrayals, Yunus suggests, therein lies solutions, resolutions and innovation leading to the alleviation of societal problems. Dunne and Raby (2024)'s study on the other hand, argues for this notion as a form of social dreaming. While their study departs from looking solely at problems, it emphasizes desires and possible futures through the speculative "what if" question. Both studies can be seen to emerge from the similar philosophy opening debates and conversation surrounding the realities that we actually want.

Facets of social fiction and social dreaming were exemplified in *The Rise of the Pinks*- a story about how female factory workers empowered themselves to communicate dissatisfaction for the unfair treatment at the workplace. *The Blues Make Headway* is another example of how students took to storytelling in order to disseminate information on how blue-collared male employees can equip themselves against discrimination and unethical practices. As law students, both stories outlined the legal procedures and organisations that can help expedite action. "This was satisfying although I know it is just a fictional story, I felt like I helped someone", confessed one student. Another student talked about how this experience enabled the merging of the theories of law to the practice of law, all of which epitomises

This exercise that culminated into a show and tell webinar event entitled, *The Art of Advocacy: Healing Souls, Building Communities and Inspiring Change*, was a marked success. As a student led endeavour that publicly showcased mainly poems written by these students, the act of reciting their own work coupled with the aptly chosen expressions and imagery were about real people and real stories told in real time. In fact, previous studies have highlighted the capacity of students to reposition and reconceptualize approaches to the SDGs by simply using their voices and eyes (McGinnis & Mitra, 2022; Sass et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Creative writing does, in fact, provide a platform that could be used to facilitate a review of blanket processes and procedures alongside cookie cutter implementations that affect certain communities, in this case, the B40 communities in Malaysia. This exercise that was meant to inspire creative writers to engage in more meaningful writing turned into a check-in session with key stakeholders that revealed some implications of Malaysia's financial facilities such as the micro-financing support for women, ECER-Suri@Home program. This act in itself created a "third space", a commonly known term for a classroom environment that encourages exploration and experimentation. In this study, it created a creative writing space for challenging and questioning current policies.

Secondly, purpose-driven learning through creative writing can break the vicious cycle of stigmatization starting with classrooms. The endeavour shed light on human problems that have been largely ignored in a non- discriminatory manner. Generally, impacted individuals are often dismissed as uneducated and illiterate. This stigmatization creates the perception of what they say as unimportant and not deserving attention. Through this exercise, the study developed a channel to disseminate the information to the public via an educational setting, advocating for these affected communities in more palatable portions that were not only artistic but carried the voices of the people through student-led events. This builds on the idea that HEIs do in fact have the capacity to impact change through education models and frameworks that are driven by societal goals.

This study also exemplifies how appropriate mechanisms fosters actionable engagement. The people-centred approach, which is the basis of social constructivism, helped accelerate learning objectives and expected learning outcomes. The method and approach were the enablers, not the course module, syllabus, or on a broader note, the education system. There was a drive to act on goals because students saw the immediate link and connections between the theories that they learnt in the classroom and the application value that this mode of teaching and learning offered. It did not matter which SDGs students were trying to achieve, they acted in a collective and informed manner to produce tangible end products and deliverables, signifying and implying formative learning had taken place.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The nature of this research was explorative. Being so, it set out to experiment if creative writing can be used as a feasible mechanism to uncover stories from marginalized communities as a means to inspire purposeful writing. It acted as a preliminary step towards building actionable engagement and advocacy through coursework and formative assessments over a restrictive duration with a selected B40 group which reflect a particular sect of that community only. That being the case, students' works can be seen to capture a limited purview of a larger community.

Future research should expand parameters to include other voices that can produce findings that are representative of a larger group. This endeavour can be more effective if specific targets

of the SDGs are measured post phase three in order to evaluate learning outcomes such as empathy on the teaching front and pro-active action at the societal level. The foundation built in this study can be used to build a substantial framework on how purpose-driven learning vis-à-vis the SDGs can be utilized to inject meaningful learning especially in the liberal arts courses where syllabus is less prescribed and can be navigated from a more socio-cultural lens. For this reason, the context of the situation requires proper interventions and implementation for a longer sustenance of tasks like these so that the attainment of SDGs via classroom activities are not short lived.

Acknowledgement

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