

The Poetic Form of Haiku as a Guide to Poetry and Music Composition: Primary School Students' Views and Attitudes

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Abstract: Language, poetry and music intersect in activities which aim to strengthen fifth grade students' creativity, their collaborative skills and their interest in poetry as well as to familiarise them with poetry and music composition. The activities include i) the composition of haiku poems and short narratives that lead conceptually to the haikus and ii) song composition. The students (N=14) demonstrated a positive attitude towards the activities and cooperated effectively with their team, whereas their interest in poetry increased. They were enthusiastically engaged in songwriting, an activity the majority of the students had not previously participated in.

Keywords: Haiku, Music, Poetry, Language, Geography, Primary Education Students.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge (cf., Soulis et al. (2023) for topics related to education in the 21st century), combining different subjects can increase student interest and participation in class, as it offers students additional incentive for learning. In this way, students are actively engaged in the educational process, which is not limited to a sterile transmission of knowledge and control for its acquisition (Kaldi & Konsolas, 2018; Matsagouras, 2009).

In our study, language, poetry and music are all combined in activities designed for and implemented by fifth grade students (10-year-old students) in class. The writing activities include creating poems □using the closed poetic form of haiku□ and short narratives which lead conceptually to the haikus. On the other hand, the musical activities include the composition of songs based on the haikus the students had written. All activities are carried out through collaborative techniques, guided discovery and cooperative exploratory learning (MacDonald et al., 2006).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Haiku originated in Japan in the 17th century (Nguyen & Roth, 2019). It is a short poem which consists of seventeen syllables, divided into three unrhymed lines of five, seven and five syllables each (Hawkins, 2002). The haiku lines form a single sentence but carry a complete meaning.

Moreover, haiku is a condensed form of expression that can convey meanings to the listeners/readers in a complex and creative manner (Prendergast et al., 2009). Individuals can articulate their ideas, emotions and thoughts on different thematic schemes while participants' creativity is activated, as documented in several studies (Anthony, 1998; Berbel et al., 2021; Garifullina & Bashinova, 2017; Prendergast, 2004; Prendergast et al., 2009; Stahlberg et al., 2021; Savishinsky, 2007; Taylor, 1985).

According to Russell (2003, p. 99), "composing haiku loosens a hold on historical distance that can make literature less appealing to new readers, shaking a fixation on chronology, and allowing learners to play with the expanded boundaries of a nonlinear temporality." Consequently, and in addition to the fact that haiku is a simple closed poetic form, it can be employed to introduce students to poetry (Blasko & Merski, 1998). It can also

introduce students to the creative activity of music composition, as they can set music to their haiku poems.

In our study, fifth-grade students worked in groups and utilised the poetic form of haiku to express their thoughts and feelings about topics related to flora, fauna and endangered/protected species (in Greece), as part of their Geography class. This theme is associated with the fifth grade Greek Geography textbook material. Initially, students were acquainted with a set of words related to the theme, an activity which provided an opportunity for vocabulary enrichment (cf., Efthymiou, 2013; Mitsis, 2012 for vocabulary teaching). The vocabulary items were also partially chosen on the basis of the grammatical phenomena the teacher could refer to (e.g., compounding, semantic relations). The students were then introduced to the poetic form of haiku; they read a poem and they were engaged in an exercise in which they had to replace the last word in each line of the haiku (Russell, 2003). The teacher also referred to and discussed syllabification with the students who subsequently proceeded to create their own haikus. Once these were written, each student group was asked to compose a short narrative which preceded the haiku and conceptually lead to it, by incorporating specific language features (e.g., past tenses) in their writings. Finally, the students were invited to compose songs by setting music to the haikus they had written. This belongs to the creative activity of music composition within the educational context. It is one of the most creative musical activities which can be implemented as a follow up activity to musical improvisation (Brophy, 2001; Kratus, 1991; Stamou et al., 2018). In our study, once each student group wrote their haiku, they experimented with creating various melodic combinations through music improvisation (Nikolaou, 2023a) until they reached the final melody. Additionally, during the melodic composition of the haikus, the teacher encouraged the students to let their imagination run free and to express their ideas without inhibition, aiming to help them live the "flow experience" through the expression of their creativity. The flow experience, as proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1997), is an extremely pleasant one, as an individual becomes fully absorbed in a creative activity.

Research Purpose and Research Questions

Our study investigates the enhancement of the students' creativity and collaborative skills as well as their interest in language, poetry and music. More specifically, the following research questions are the focus of this paper:

What are the perceptions of the students regarding the written activities that included the composition of i) a haiku and ii) a short narrative leading conceptually to the haiku?

What are the perceptions of the students regarding the musical activities that included song composition and in which haikus are set to music by the students themselves?

What are the students' opinions about their collaboration with their team?

Did the students' interest in poetry increase as a result of the implementation of the haiku-based activities?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Fourteen (14) fifth grade students (7 boys and 7 girls) who study at a primary school in the Prefecture of Thesprotia in Greece participated in the study. The school is fully equipped (i.e., with interactive whiteboards, a separate music room, percussion musical instruments, etc.), something that facilitated the implementation of the activities.

Project Design

Two staff members-researchers who teach in a Department of Primary Education in a Greek University and specialise in Music Education and Greek as a foreign language, respectively collaborated with a primary school teacher-researcher who holds a postgraduate degree in Arts in Education and has also studied piano and singing.

The collaboration arose from the teacher's need to enrich his teaching with alternative and more creative activities, in which geography, language and music are combined within an interdisciplinary framework where the arts support the teaching of other subjects (Eisner, 1999; Nikolaou, 2023b).

In the first part of the second activity, the students got further acquainted with new vocabulary, as more fauna species were presented and discussed in class (see Worksheet 2a, Table 2). Supplementary information as well as the corresponding pictures were provided for each species and reference was also made to semantic relationships (i.e., kalamari = squid/inkwell) as well as to expressions with figurative meaning which include some of the list's vocabulary items (e.g., Ine megali supia aftos (Is big cuttlefish he) = He's very sly/sneaky). Moreover, the students had to sort the words into groups (e.g., reptiles, fish, mammals, birds, amphibians, invertebrates) and, once their answers were discussed, to identify the species, the pictures of which were displayed by the teacher on the interactive whiteboard.

Table 2. Worksheet 2a

Worksheet 2a
Activity: Sort the words into groups.

Balkan whip snake	shark	great white pelican	squid
Atlantic horse mackerel	salamander	seal	rat
otter	annular seabream	cuttlefish	Eurasian curlew
cattle	common wall lizard	toad	frog
	snail	turtle	European anchovy
			bat

Birds

Fish

Mammals

Reptiles

Amphibians

Invertebrates

In the second part of the activity (Worksheet 2b, Table 3), endangered/protected species in Greece were presented and discussed in a similar fashion. In addition, reference was made to the compounds in the word list.

Table 3. Worksheet 2b

Worksheet 2b
Endangered/protected species in Greece

dalmatian pelican	lammergeier	audouin's gull
golden jackal	Balkan chamois	slender-billed curlew
		brown bear

Activity 3: The Students get acquainted with the Closed Poetic form of Haiku

The teacher first presented the haiku shown in Table 4 to the students and asked them to count the syllables in each line. This haiku is included in the poetry collection Ta

elahista by Katerina Vlachou (2018).

Table 4. Haikou □ Poetry collection Ta elahista by Katina Vlachou

Vrohi sto dasos, fila nekra pu peftun. Homa tha ginun	Rain in the forest, dead leaves that fall. Soil they will become.
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Then, he drew the students' attention to the number of syllables in each line of the haiku
Table 5 was shown on the interactive whiteboard.

Table 5. Number of syllables in each line of the haiku

Vrohi sto dasos (5 syllables), fila nekra pu peftun (7 syllables). Homa tha ginun (5 syllables).
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The teacher explained to the students that haiku poems have the following structure:

1st line: 5 syllables 2nd line: 7 syllables 3rd line: 5 syllables

Background information about the closed poetic form of haiku (as discussed in section 2) was given to the students. As a final step, the students were prompted to replace the last word in each line of the haiku with a new one that fits semantically and has the same number of syllables.

Activity 4: The Students Compose Haiku poems

In this activity, the students were invited to compose their own haiku poems (Worksheet 3, Table 6) on flora, fauna and/or endangered/protected species in Greece.

Table 6. Worksheet 3

<p>Student group:</p> <p>Theme: Flora, fauna, endangered/protected species</p> <p>Work in groups and:</p> <p>1) Write your own haiku poem.</p> <p>2) Write a short paragraph-narrative which leads us conceptually to the haiku. Use the past tenses.</p> <p>3) Find different melodies, appropriate for your haiku, and compose a song using the haiku you have written.</p> <p>1) Narrative:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>2) Haiku's topic:</p> <p>1st line: 5 syllables:</p> <p>2nd line: 7 syllables:</p> <p>3rd line: 5 syllables:</p> <p>3) The haiku is set to music by the student group:</p>

Once each student group wrote their haiku, they nominated one of their members to read the haiku to the class. This was followed by a class discussion about each group's poem.

Activity 5: The Students Write a Short Narrative that leads conceptually to the Haiku

The teacher urged the students to create a short narrative (Worksheet 3, Table 6) that would lead conceptually to the haiku they had written. In their narratives, they had to use the vocabulary of the theme (flora, fauna, endangered/protected species) as well as the past tenses. Once the task was completed, a nominated member of each group read the narrative and a class discussion followed.

Activity 6: Song composition – The Haiku is set to Music by the Student Group

The teacher encouraged the students to compose songs based on the haikus they had written. All members of each group sang their song to present it to their classmates. A class discussion about the three songs concluded this activity.

Presentation of the Work Produced by the Students

In Tables 7, 8 and 9, we present the students' work for activities 4, 5 and 6. The final melodies chosen by the students for the melodic composition of their haikus □ were recorded

on sheet music by the teacher.

Table 7. Worksheet 3 Student group 1


<p>Student group: 1</p> <p>1) Narrative: Last week we went on a trip to a forest. There we found a cave, in which there were vipers, Balkan whip snake, bats and brown bears. What impressed us the most were the thousands of bats on the roof. They were very hard to see because they had the same black colour as the roof. It was a perfect but scary experience.</p> <p>2) Haiku's topic: Halloween 1st line: 5 syllables: I nihterida (The bat) 2nd line: 7 syllables: kimate sti spilia tis (sleeps in its cave)</p>
<p>3rd line: 5 syllables: san ti labada (like the candle).</p> <p>3) Song composition: The haiku is set to music by the student group:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I nihterida (The bat)</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">I ni hte rida ki mate stispi lia tis san ti---- la ba da</p>

Table 8. Worksheet 3 Student group 2


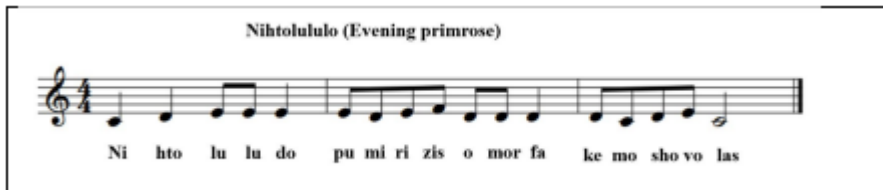
<p>Student group: 2</p> <p>1) Narrative: Once upon a time there was a little dog which was tied up in the yard of its house. When it got dark, a rat jumped out of the next-door apartment's bush and cut the rope. It (the little dog) started to wander the streets and a great white pelican saw it over a utility pole. It (the pelican) helped it (the little dog) and took it home.</p> <p>2) Haiku's topic: Little dog 1st line: 5 syllables: Skilaki mikro (Dog little / Little dog) 2nd line: 7 syllables: pu na ise tha se vro (where could you be, I will find you) 3rd line: 5 syllables: skilaki gliko (sweet little dog).</p> <p>3) Song composition: The haiku is set to music by the student group:</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Skilaki mikro (Dog little / Little dog)</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Ski laki----- mi kro pu na i se tha se vro---- ski la ki----- gli ko</p>

Table 9. Worksheet 3 Student group 3

<p>Student group: 3</p> <p>1) Narrative: Once upon a time, in a remote orchard, there was a beautiful evening primrose that enchanted with its smell the brown bear, the viper, the blackbird, the Balkan whip snake, the turtle and the inhabitants of this orchard every night. One morning these animals saw a man getting ready to cut it. Immediately all the animals rushed up to him, saying: "Please don't cut it." The man said to them: "I don't want to cut it all, I just want to cut a bunch." The animals then replied affirmatively. So, to this day it spreads its fragrance throughout the orchard.</p> <p>2) Haiku's topic: The evening primrose 1st line: 5 syllables: Nihtoluludo (Evening primrose) 2nd line: 7 syllables: pu mirizis omorfa (that you smell nice) 3rd line: 5 syllables: ke moshovolas (and you give off a sweet smell).</p> <p>3) Song composition: The haiku is set to music by the student group:</p>



Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through: a) participant observations □ the primary school teacher also had the role of a researcher b) diaries, in which the primary school teacher's self-reflections were recorded in detail upon each activity's completion. The three members of the project team met regularly not only to discuss the implementation of the activities and the progress made (Morrison, 2002) but also to note down their own comments and to suggest modifications, where necessary. c) a questionnaire (see the Appendix) with open and closed-ended questions which was distributed to the students. Data were interpreted through content analysis (Harwood & Garry, 2003).

FINDINGS

Based on the data analysis and interpretation, the findings of our research are represented in the following themes which also answer the research questions: a) students' perceptions regarding the writing activities, b) students' perceptions regarding the musical activities, c) students' opinions about their collaboration with their team and d) students' opinions about their interest in poetry.

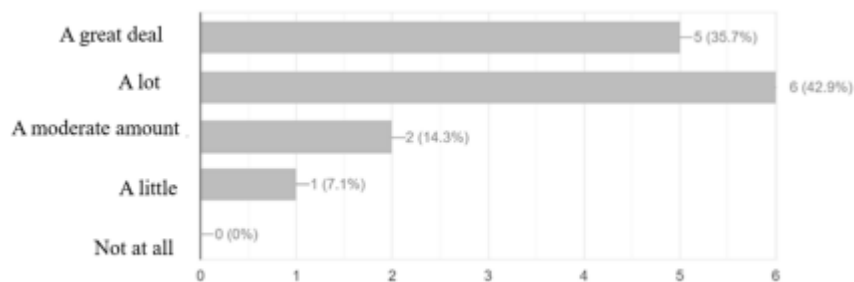
Students' Perceptions Regarding the Writing Activities

The Utilisation of the Closed Poetic Form of Haiku for Poetry Composition

The majority of the students (78.6%) stated that they participated in the composition of the haiku to a great extent (35.7% "A great deal", 42.9% "A lot"), while a small percentage (21.4%) to a moderate (14.3%) and a little (7.1%) extent (Graph 1).

Graph 1. Students' responses to the question

"In your opinion, to what extent did you contribute to the creation of the haiku?"



Based on the students' comments to question 6 ("Did you like one of the activities? Please explain which one and why."), we conclude that the activity □ in which the students wrote their own haikus □ was implemented in a pleasant atmosphere. The following comment is indicative:

I liked the creation of the haiku because we had great ideas and we laughed.

In relation to the difficulties the students faced during this activity, these were mainly related to the fact that they had not done anything similar previously, as can be seen in one the comments in question 7 ("Was an activity difficult for you? Please explain which one and why."):

I had a hard time creating the haiku and we had a hard time coming up with the verses because I had never written a haiku before.

For some students, finding the right words to create the verses was difficult.

I had a hard time creating the haiku because some things did not fit together. I had a hard time creating the haiku because we could not match the words.

However, based on the work produced by the groups (see Tables 7, 8 and 9), it is evident

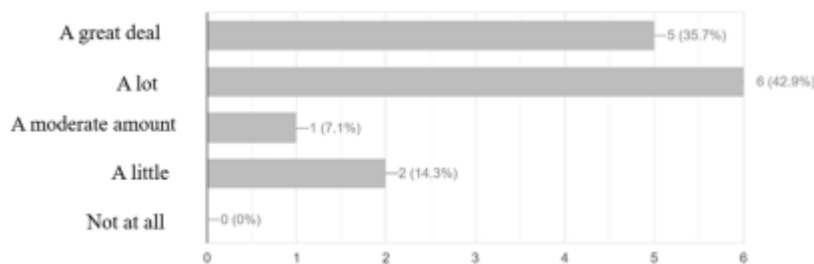
that all three groups were able to successfully complete the activity. As an answer to question 8 (“Did any of the activities stress you out? Please explain which one and why.”), only one student stated that (s)he got anxious during the activity because (s)he lacked inspiration. I was nervous about creating the haiku because I had no inspiration.

The Students Write a Short Narrative

The students’ responses indicated that 78.6% considered that they were involved in the creation of the narrative to a great extent (35.7% “A great deal”, 42.9% “A lot”), while a small percentage (21.4%) responded “A moderate amount” (7.1%) and “A little” (14.3%) (Graph 2).

Graph 2. Students' responses to the question

“In your opinion, to what extent did you contribute to the creation of the narrative?”



Based on their qualitative comments about the creation of the short narrative it is evident that the activity took place in a pleasant atmosphere and the students felt creative, as they embellished their narratives with funny elements.

I enjoyed the short narrative because it was creative and funny.

Moreover, the students stated that they also contributed to the activity’s completion on a personal level.

I enjoyed the narrative because I myself helped the team to reach the best outcome.

They felt, though, that they had a difficulty in connecting the narratives to their haikus in a meaningful way.

I found it difficult to create the narrative because it was hard to match something with the haiku we wrote.

I had a hard time with the narrative preceding the haiku because nothing was coming to me in the text.

Even so, the activity was successfully implemented, as it can be seen from the groups' worksheets (see Tables 7, 8 and 9).

Another difficulty was related to the fact that not all team members contributed equally to the creation of the narrative.

I found it difficult to devise the short narrative leading up to the haiku because most people did not participate.

This □namely, the lack of participation in certain cases□ was further confirmed by the anxiety some of the students experienced during the activity, as they felt that they had to complete the narration on their own.

I was stressed about creating the short narrative because I and one of my classmates sat in class to write it.

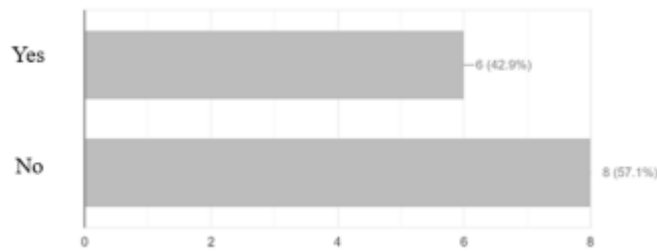
Students' Perceptions Regarding the Musical Activities

The Students Compose Songs: The Haikus are Set to Music by the Student Groups

The quantitative results demonstrated that the majority of the students (57.1%) had not previously participated in songwriting activities (Graph 3).

Graph 3. Students' responses to the question

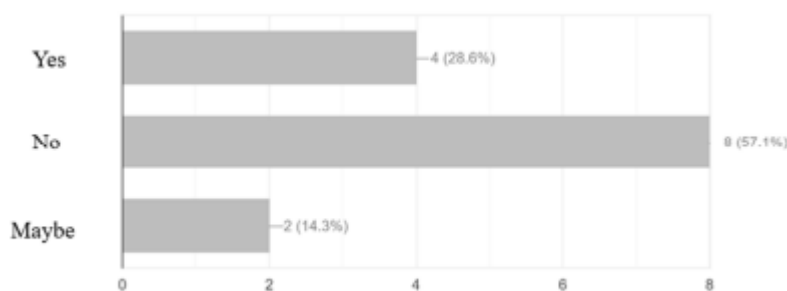
“Have you ever previously participated in songwriting activities?”



Moreover, prior to the activity in which the students composed their own songs by setting music to the haikus they had written, the same percentage (57.1%) thought that they could not make a song (Graph 4).

Graph 4. Students' responses to the question

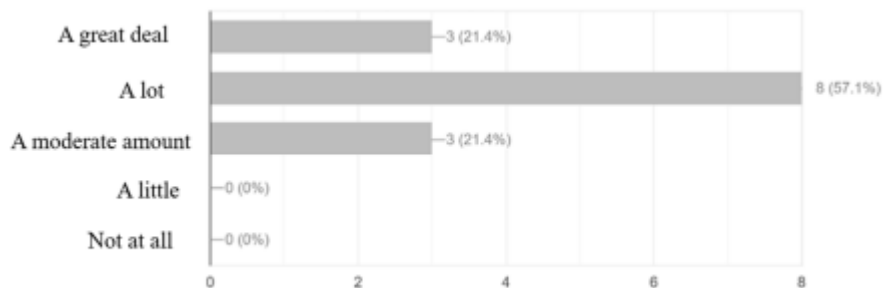
"Prior to composing your own song in the activity did you think you could make a song?"



However, the vast majority of the students (78.5%) stated that they contributed to the melodic composition of the haikus (21.4% "A great deal", 57.1% "A lot") (Graph 5).

Graph 5. Students' responses to the question

"In your opinion, to what extent did you contribute to the melodic composition of the haiku?"



The students' answers to question 6 indicated that this was an activity they particularly enjoyed, as it was carried out in a pleasant classroom climate. For example, they mentioned that:

I enjoyed composing a song because we laughed and we told many jokes. I liked composing a song because we laughed.

Furthermore, the students worked together effectively.

I liked composing a song because a friend of mine had the best idea.

I liked composing a song because we laughed and because we collaborated more than in any other activity.

I enjoyed composing a song because we laughed a lot and I feel that we worked together very well.

They even stated that they were entertained with the song's composition and its performance in the classroom.

I enjoyed composing a song because I like singing.

However, it was pointed out that they had some trouble finding rhythm and melody for this activity.

I found the melodic composition difficult because we did not know the rhythm. I found composing the song difficult because, at first, I could not think of a melodic composition.

This difficulty stressed the students to some extent.

The melodic composition of the haiku stressed me because it was very difficult. Composing the song stressed me because I thought the rhythm did not match.

Finally, one student claimed that she was a little embarrassed during the melodic composition activity, as she was worried about the students' criticism on her voice.

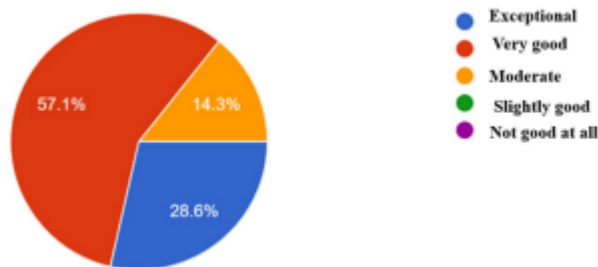
I was stressed about composing the song because I was embarrassed when my classmates would hear me and there was a possibility that they would make fun of me.

Students' Opinions about their Collaboration with their Team

As far as team collaboration is concerned, 85.7% of the students said that they considered it positive (26.6% "Exceptional", 57.1% "Very good"), while only 14.3% rated it as "Moderate" (Graph 6).

Graph 6. Students' responses to the question

"How would you describe your collaboration with your team?"



This was further demonstrated by the students' comments to question 2 ("Tell us something negative or positive about your collaboration with your team as far as the implementation of the three activities (creation of the haiku and the short narrative, song composition) is concerned."). The following statements are indicative:

The positive thing for me was that we all participated.

My team was very good and we collaborated well.

The positive thing was that we worked all together.

We were able to work together with ease and finish quickly.

The positive thing is that we collaborated very well.

However, although there were no "slightly/not good at all" answers, there were less positive opinions regarding the students' collaboration with their team members. This was mainly due to the fact that their classmates did not participate in the implementation of the activities to the same extent. The following student responses are indicative:

Negative in our collaboration was that two people in my group asked the others whether the narrative fits or not but they put whatever they wanted.

Something negative about our group collaboration was that not all the children participated.

So, we did not work together as we should have in the group.

Some kids did not collaborate (with the team) and did not participate.

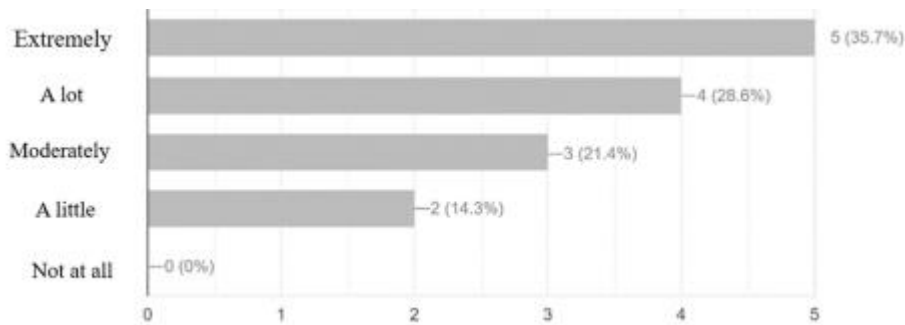
With my team we collaborated very well but some of them did not participate enough.

Students' Opinions about their Interest in Poetry

The analysis of the data showed that 64.3% of the students stated that their interest in poetry increased (35.7% "Extremely", 28.6% "A lot"), while 21.4% responded "Moderately" and 14.3% "A little" (Graph 7).

Graph 7. Students' answers to the question

"Do you think that your interest in poetry increased as a result of the haiku activities?"



The following comments indicate the students' stimulation of their interest in poetry:

My interest in poetry was stimulated because I learned to create and read poems. I became very interested in my haiku.

I learn excellent things through the poems.

My interest in poetry increased because I did not know how to write good poems. I am already very interested in poetry and I am even more now.

Nonetheless, there was one negative comment:

My interest in poetry has increased a little because I never read poetry and I do not intend to either.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The study is subject to limitations in terms of the generalisability of its results, as the sample was small. However, the homogeneity of the participants □since all students have the same age and a similar cognitive level□ contributes to the existence of similar characteristics from which we can draw safe conclusions.

DISCUSSION – CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the students showed a positive attitude towards all the activities in which geography, language, poetry and music were combined. More specifically and according to their statements, the students' interest in poetry was stimulated through the activities in which the closed poetic form of haiku was utilised for the creation of poems and through those in which the class was invited to compose short narratives that lead conceptually to the haikus. Moreover, the activity in which they compose songs by setting their haikus to music made them feel creative, entertained and involved in something the majority of the students had not participated in before. It is encouraging that, generally speaking, the students collaborated with their group members for the activities' successful completion. Nevertheless, they identified, as expected, instances where some students were more involved than others.

We would like to note that □based on the work each group produced and in relation to the theme's vocabulary□ it is observed that the students chose more frequently used vocabulary in the writing activities. This was expected (even when we were designing the activities), as the vocabulary they used probably corresponds to their needs and interests to a greater extent. However, it may also be related to the difficulties they felt they encountered □on the basis of their statements□ in finding appropriate words for the creation of the haikus and the narratives, difficulties that may be further associated with the poetic form, its structure (number of syllables) and the meaningful connection that they had to achieve in their writings. The language activities helped the students to get acquainted with new vocabulary, were used as a prompt for the writing activities and further served as revision activities for the consolidation of the grammatical phenomena previously taught in the Language class. Consequently, the aim was not to evaluate haiku as a tool for vocabulary consolidation □this remains open for future research. The main objective, namely the creation of haikus and short narratives (on flora, fauna, endangered/protected species) as well as their melodic composition as means to stimulate student creativity and interest in poetry and to foster students' collaborative skills, was achieved.

The activities presented in this study can be used in class as incentives for the

cultivation and development of students' writing skills and for vocabulary enhancement, among others. Furthermore, the poems created by the students can be represented through other arts, besides music (e.g., representation with movement (rendering the number of syllables with steps and creating a simple choreography), visual representation (either as a free-form or rendering the syllables with shapes to create patterns), or dramatic representation of the content of the lyrics). Additionally, parts of the narrative texts, leading to the haikus, can be rendered with music/sound by using percussion musical instruments or sound objects. This will turn the narratives into sound stories (Nikolaou, 2023c) in which some students can become narrators while others may invest the text with sounds. Moreover, students could represent their melodic compositions through graphic notations or via the creation of listening maps (Kerchner, 2000).

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