

## “Dear my dearest me”: Reading self-image through students’ haikus

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### ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical stage in identity development, where individuals begin to define and express their self-image. This study explores how adolescent students construct their self-image through haiku, focusing on the diction, tone, and mood of their compositions. Drawing on Rosenberg’s (1989) theory of self-image, the study analyzed nine haikus written by second-year university students in Exploring Poetry class. Two central themes emerged: self-deprecation and self-appreciation. These themes reflect the degree to which the students’ present self-image aligns with their ideal self. The overall findings point to haiku’s potential as a creative medium that supports personal reflection and emotional awareness, serving as a meaningful outlet for identity exploration. By offering a non-intimidating medium for self-expression, haiku encourages students to engage with their internal states and articulate aspects of self that may otherwise remain unspoken. This research highlights the value of integrating reflective literary practices into the classroom as a pedagogical strategy to support adolescent development. In so doing, the study contributes to broader conversations on the role of creativity in fostering emotional and psychological well-being in educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, diction, haiku, poetry analysis, self-image

**Received:**

1 June 2025

**Accepted:**

28 January 2026

**Revised:**

20 January 2026

**Published:**

30 January 2026

**How to cite (in APA style):**

Gandana, I. S. S., & Fadilah, K. R. (2026). “Dear my dearest me”: Reading self-image through students’ haikus. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 15(2), 582-591.  
<https://doi.org/10.17509/k885r490>

### INTRODUCTION

Late adolescence, which often overlaps with young adulthood, is a transformative period in identity development, during which individuals continue to navigate self-discovery while balancing social expectations (Erikson, 1980; Steinberg, 2014). During this stage, the search for identity often involves tension between conforming to external norms and asserting one’s own sense of self (Rosenberg, 1989). At the center of this process is self-image, understood as individuals’ perceptions of themselves, including their abilities, personal qualities, and sense of worth (Lachowicz-Tabaczek & Śniecińska, 2011). Research has consistently shown that a positive self-image is closely associated with emotional well-being and psychological resilience, enabling individuals to cope more effectively with stress, social pressure,

and self-doubt (Ismail & Tekke, 2015; Lupu & Petrescu, 2012).

Self-image, as defined by Morris Rosenberg (1989), encompasses individuals’ attitudes and perceptions about themselves, shaping their internal evaluations and broader interactions with the world. This concept is crucial in understanding one’s mental and emotional state, which can profoundly impact one’s behavior (Băban, 2009). Rosenberg’s theory of self-image distinguishes between the *present self*—how individuals see themselves in the moment—and the *ideal self*—the person they aspire to be. He explains that the gap between these two selves can create emotional tension. In contrast, when the present self closely aligns with the ideal self, individuals tend to develop a stronger sense of self-worth and feel more socially connected. Nurturing this alignment, especially during

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adolescence, promotes emotional stability and supports overall mental well-being.

Theories of the self (see Burke & Stets, 2014; Polkinghorne, 2015) maintain that the self holds a dual role: it is both the one who acts (subject) and the one who is observed (object). While it is often an object of perception, it is also simultaneously an active agent capable of reflecting, goal-setting, and decision-making. Through this reflective process, individuals develop self-awareness, construct self-image, and move toward self-actualization—a concept Carl Rogers (in McLeod, 2007) describes as the natural desire to grow and become the best version of oneself, realizing one's full potential.

Research shows that individuals who reach self-actualization often feel at ease with who they are and are better equipped to manage life's challenges (Ajmal & Javaid, 2019; Lupu & Petrescu, 2012). Self-actualization, therefore, plays a crucial role in fostering emotional stability, resilience, and a clear sense of purpose. More fundamentally, the ability to reach this state is closely tied to how individuals perceive their self-image (Ismail & Tekke, 2015). Given this strong connection, exploring self-image is not just relevant—it is pivotal. A better understanding of how self-image is formed, shaped, and expressed can offer valuable insights into the emotional landscape of individuals, particularly adolescents, who are in a formative stage of identity development. By researching self-image, we can more effectively support young people in cultivating self-acceptance, confidence, and mental well-being, making it a critical area of inquiry in educational contexts.

Self-image is not a static construct but an evolving one, intricately shaped by ongoing socialization and cultural expectations (Routledge & Robson, 2021). It starts to take root in childhood and continues to develop throughout adolescence (Ventegodt & Merrick, 2015). This phase, marked by significant cognitive, emotional, and physiological changes, is often characterized by confusion and identity re-evaluation (Rosenberg, 1989). Erikson (1980) famously characterized this developmental stage as an "identity crisis," where adolescents are preoccupied with defining who they are. In today's world, the pressure to meet social media ideals can intensify this identity struggle, creating a tug-of-war between personal values and societal expectations. Such tension is, in fact, a defining feature of adolescent identity development (Ismail & Tekke, 2015). These inner conflicts can often lead to confusion and anxiety, highlighting the need to support adolescents' mental well-being during this crucial phase. In this context, offering a space for self-expression can play a meaningful role in this process, as it allows adolescents to articulate their thoughts and emotions, which are essential for emotional development and the formation of a clear

sense of self. Through self-expression, they not only process their inner experiences but also connect meaningfully with others (Borawski, 2019; Clark & Finkel, 2004).

Poetry, as a form of creative expression, offers a powerful means of self-exploration, providing an outlet for individuals to express the complexities of their inner world and to convey emotions that might otherwise be difficult to articulate. Through metaphor, imagery, and symbolic language, poetry gives voice to the unspoken in a way that is deeply personal and reflective (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Lawrence, 2008). The act of writing poetry invites introspection, helping individuals shape their thoughts and emotions through deliberate word choice and structure. This makes it particularly meaningful for adolescents grappling with their identity formation (Aslam et al., 2014). Among the various poetic forms, haiku stands out for its simplicity and brevity. With its three-line structure of 5, 7, and 5 syllables, haiku offers a concise way to express thoughts (Addiss, 2022). Though brief, haiku can convey deep emotions and insights, inviting adolescents to engage in mindful, reflective expression that nurtures both creativity and self-awareness (Bazzano, 2002; Cobb, 2013).

In educational contexts, introducing haiku into reflective writing activities can provide students with a meaningful way to explore their emotions and self-image. Through haiku, students can gain deeper insights into their evolving identities and express their emotional states more clearly, helping them to understand their place in the world better (Gair, 2012; Sulastris et al., 2022). While current research on adolescent self-image (e.g., Lupu & Petrescu, 2012; Routledge & Robson, 2021) provides valuable findings, it predominantly centers on external influences and adopts a quantitative research approach, such as through surveys and questionnaires. This methodology, though informative, offers limited space for the individuals themselves to voice their self-perceptions in a nuanced, personal, and creative manner. Addressing this gap, the present study positions haiku not merely as a literary exercise but as a tool for enhancing mental well-being through self-expression, introspection, and emotional awareness. In light of this, the present study seeks to address the following research question: What insights do students' haikus reveal about their self-image and experiences as late adolescents?

## **METHOD**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore students' perceived self-image through their self-written haikus. It focused on how late adolescents use haiku to express complex emotions and reveal personal perceptions of themselves. Due to its simplicity and brevity, haiku has been widely

used as a reflective writing form that supports personal expression and exploration. In the context of second language learning, haiku writing has been shown to encourage learners to articulate thoughts, feelings, and lived experience, allowing them to focus on meaning and emotional reflection (Iida, 2012; Mega et al., 2023; Sulastri et al., 2022).

The participants in this study were university students aged 18–19 majoring in English Language and Literature. While this age range is often associated with young adulthood, developmental psychology also conceptualizes it as late adolescence, a period during which identity and self-image continue to develop (Erikson, 1980; Steinberg, 2014). For this reason, the study adopts the term ‘late adolescence’ to frame the participants’ developmental stage.

As part of the Exploring Poetry class, students were asked to write a haiku as a reflective activity. The task invited students to compose a haiku that expressed their thoughts, feelings, or perceptions about themselves. Students were introduced to the basic structure and formal conventions of haiku, and their compositions were written with these features in mind. At the same time, the task encouraged students to draw on personal emotions, inner experiences, or self-perceptions, without predefined themes or examples related to self-image, allowing them to approach it in an open and reflective manner. The prompt did not explicitly use the term *self-image*; instead, it was intentionally open-ended to allow students to interpret and express aspects of the self in their own terms.

The decision to analyze a single haiku per participant was intentional. The study does not aim to trace students’ self-image as a developmental trajectory over time; instead, it focuses on how self-image is articulated in a specific moment of creative self-expression. Given the brevity and density of

haiku, a single poem can convey rich emotional and meaningful expression, allowing for close analysis of diction, tone, and mood. This approach aligns with qualitative research that prioritizes depth of interpretation and close textual reading, especially when the study focuses on meaning-making rather than on identity development across time.

Nine students’ haikus were selected from a total of twenty, as they demonstrated greater length and depth, each comprising more than five stanzas. The extended length of their poems was considered significant, as it provided greater scope for exploring personal reflections, emotional depth, and nuanced expressions of self-image, which aligned with the aim of the study. The titles of the nine haikus analyzed in this study are: (1) “The Girl with a Mask”, (2) “My True Self”, (3) “Made of Things”, (4) “Little Insecurities”, (5) “Their Best Daughter”, (6) “Precious Diamond”, (7) “Dear My Dearest Me”, (8) “About Me”, and (9) “An Ordinary Girl”. Data analysis followed a thematic approach, focusing on the diction, tone, and mood of each haiku. The thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and significant themes in the students’ expressions of self-image.

In the analysis, tone and mood were treated as related but distinct elements. Tone was identified by focusing on how the speaker positions or evaluates the self through word choice and statements in the poem (for example, whether the voice sounds self-critical or affirming). Mood, on the other hand, refers to the overall emotional feeling created by the poem as a whole, as experienced by the reader. In practice, tone was determined by what the speaker expresses about the self, while mood was interpreted from the overall emotional effect of the language. Table 1 presents examples of how diction, tone, and mood were analyzed and connected to the broader themes.

**Table 1**  
*Examples of haiku analysis*

Haiku excerpt	Key diction	Tone (writer’s stance toward self)	Mood (emotional effect on the reader)	Thematic interpretation
“But all just frontage/With the heart of a devil/A dark self within”	frontage, devil, dark	Self-critical, condemning	Unease, tension	Self-deprecation
“Don’t cry. You’ve done really well/Yes, through thick and thin.”	don’t cry, done well	Reassuring, affirming	Comfort, warmth	Self-appreciation
“I don’t feel pretty/There’s no beauty in me.”	don’t feel, no beauty	Self-doubting	Sadness, empathy	Self-deprecation
“I’ll start to love you/Yes, I will love you deeper.”	love you, deeper	Hopeful, self-accepting	Hopefulness	Self-appreciation

It is worth noting that the present study intentionally focuses on self-image as it is expressed through poetic texts. While interviews or focus-group discussions could offer further insight into how students understand and explain their self-image, the analysis does not aim to trace students’ developing self-image over time, but rather to

examine how students perceive themselves in a specific moment through language. From this perspective, the use of English as a foreign language is treated not as a limitation, but as part of the expressive context in which self-image is articulated.

The analyses of the haikus were done collaboratively by both authors, with any discrepancies in interpretation resolved through discussion. After analyzing each haiku individually, the findings were compared across the nine poems to identify common themes and understand the shared ways in which the students portrayed their self-image through their poetry. Only relevant excerpts from the haikus, rather than the full texts, are presented in the next section.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Analysis of the students' haikus revealed two dominant themes in their expressions of self-image: self-deprecation and self-appreciation. These themes emerged from patterns in the students' lexical choices as well as the tone and mood conveyed across the poems. Together, they reflect how students negotiate perceptions of the self, fluctuating between critical self-evaluation and affirming self-recognition.

Drawing on Rosenberg's (1989) distinction between the present self and the ideal self, the findings show how students represent tensions between how they position themselves in the present and how they imagine or aspire to an ideal version of the self. These tensions are expressed through contrasting word choices, shifts in tone, and opposing self-descriptions within individual poems. The haikus thus offer a textual space in which self-image during late adolescence is articulated through emotional reflection and evaluative self-positioning. In the analysis that follows, references to feelings or tensions are grounded in how they are expressed in the poems, rather than in claims about students' lived psychological experiences. The poems are, therefore, treated as forms of self-representation, and the analysis focuses on how self-image is articulated in language.

### **Self-deprecation**

Several haikus illustrated self-deprecating views, where the students expressed dissatisfaction with their current self-image, often highlighting perceived flaws or insecurities. For example, in "The Girl with a Mask", the student presents a duality between the public self and the hidden self:

*Black hair and black eyes  
With tanned skin and cute flat nose,  
Yet taller than most.*

*A girl of honor,  
Who never breaks a promise;  
True to her own words.*

*But all just frontage,  
With the heart of a devil,  
A dark self within.*

*Hated by many  
Outrageous profanity  
Oozing from her core.*

*None shall defy her,  
For their end shall not be good  
A masked villainess!*

The poem begins with an apparently positive tone, constructing a self-image that is proud and self-assured at the same time. This confidence is emphasized in the stanza: "A girl of honor,/Who never breaks a promise;/True to her own words." Here, the speaker presents a persona grounded in moral integrity—reliable, trustworthy, and principled. However, this positive portrayal functions merely as a façade. The subsequent stanzas unravel inner tension and self-doubt that the writer is actually experiencing. The tone shifts sharply in the third stanza: "But all just frontage,/With the heart of a devil,/A dark self within." The speaker disrupts the earlier idealized self, exposing what she perceives to be her true nature to the extent that she condemns herself. This dissonance continues in the lines: "Hated by many/Outrageous profanity/Oozing from her core." The diction here—"hated," "outrageous," "oozing"—evokes a deep emotional turmoil. The use of the word "oozing" suggests that this internal darkness is not only present but also uncontrollably seeping into her outward self.

The final stanza intensifies this portrayal of the fractured self: "None shall defy her,/For their end shall not be good/A masked villainess!" The speaker adopts the persona of someone feared, powerful, and dangerous, yet still hidden behind a mask. This metaphor underscores a tension between the self that is shown and the self that is concealed. In this sense, the "villainess" can be seen as protecting the fragile self beneath.

The haiku exemplifies Rosenberg's (1989) concept of self-image that is shaped by the interplay between the present self and the ideal self. The conflict between how the writer wants to be perceived (honorable, admired) and how she internally views herself (dark, flawed, rejected) creates a sense of internal fragmentation. The poem thus serves as a powerful example of the internal struggles adolescents may face as they reconcile their perceived present self with external expectations, often shifting between self-praise and self-reproach.

Similarly, "My True Self" presents a student's outward appearance of confidence and poise, but the inner self is described as fragile and lonely:

*Full of happiness,  
Shine brightly like a moonlight,  
Blooms like a flower.*

*A well-behaved girl,  
Like her mom taught her to be  
Confident and brave.*

*But that is not her,  
At least that is what she thinks.  
She is imperfect.*

*Scared and insecure,  
Of the world ahead of her,  
The world's against her.*

*Lonely and fragile  
She kept it all to herself,  
So no one can see.*

*Pretends to be fine,  
When her world crumbles apart.  
That is who she is.*

The haiku expresses a critical assessment of the self; it is introspective and honest, yet it also conveys vulnerability and emotional exhaustion. The words “shine,” and “blooms,” “scared,” “fragile,” “pretends,” and “crumbles” highlight contrasts between how the writer is perceived (or expected to be) and how she truly feels inside. The idealistic portrayal conveyed at the beginning, as reflected in the phrases “full of happiness”, “a well-behaved girl” and “confident and brave”, which gives an impression of a positive self-image, gradually shifts to a picture of inner struggle and quiet despair, pointing to a person who is “lonely and fragile”. Her choices of words such as “imperfect,” “scared”, and “insecure” further reflect this inner conflict and vulnerability, indicating a dissonance between external expectations and internal reality. By the final stanza, the tone reveals resignation and emotional exhaustion; the lines “pretends to be fine,/When her world crumbles apart” encapsulate a deep, silent struggle and emotional pain—an identity crisis. The juxtaposition between the seemingly outward strength and internal vulnerability resonates with Rosenberg’s idea of how individuals’ self-image can be distorted by their perceived shortcomings. The recurring imagery of “lonely” and “fragile” emphasizes the emotional weight of this dissonance.

In “Made of Things”, the student portrays a fragmented self, unable to comprehend or accept who she is fully:

*Some days I feel blue  
Some days I read and feel red,  
Are those days untrue?*

*I sit and wonder  
What is it that made me, me?  
Too fuzzy to see.*

*Do you remember,  
The ‘me’ who I remember?  
Maybe I’m just me.*

The haiku captures the writer’s quiet struggle and frustration to comprehend the self in its entirety.

The overall somber and lethargic tone was constructed through repetition of the writer’s thought process that questioned her own experiences and emotions. Through a series of quiet reflections and rhetorical questions, the poem reveals a blurred sense of identity shaped by fluctuating emotions and the absence of a clear sense of self. The melancholic tone was sustained through phrases such as “Some days I feel blue” and “Too fuzzy to see”, which conveys a mood of emotional ambiguity and detachment. The central question—“What is it that made me, me?”—encapsulates Rosenberg’s idea of a disoriented self, where the individual struggles to connect the present self with a coherent self-concept. The closing line, “Maybe I’m just me,” suggests a reluctant acceptance, a surrender to the ambiguity. This haiku offers a compelling glimpse into the adolescent’s internal world—one marked by introspective questioning, emotional ambivalence, and a search for self-understanding.

The theme of self-deprecation is also evident in “Little Insecurities”, where the writer expresses dissatisfaction with their physical appearance:

*Once upon a time,  
There was a beautiful girl,  
Born in the village.*

*She wasn’t happy,  
Feeling the world was so harsh  
About how she looked.*

*No matter how much  
People say that she’s pretty  
She does not believe.*

*“They’re just polite.”  
“They would never speak the truth!”  
“Just say I’m ugly.”*

*There is no white skin.  
There is no perfect long hair.  
There are no red lips.*

*I don’t feel pretty.  
There’s no beauty in me.  
They would think that, too.*

The haiku captures a female student’s deep dissatisfaction with her physical appearance and the resulting feelings of inadequacy, conveyed through a dejected and self-deprecating tone. Her self-image is primarily shaped by her perception of physical traits, which profoundly affects her self-confidence and psychological well-being. This is evident in lines like “No matter how much/People say that she’s pretty/She does not believe”, where external affirmation is dismissed, revealing a lack of self-acceptance.

Her internal dialogue further reflects this struggle: “They’re just polite.”/“They would never

speak the truth!”/“Just say I’m ugly.” These lines expose her distrust of compliments and her assumption that others conceal their true opinions. Her fixation on specific physical features—“There is no white skin/There is no perfect long hair/There are no red lips”—emphasizes how beauty standards have contributed to a diminished self-worth.

The final stanza—“I don’t feel pretty/There’s no beauty in me”—underscores a painful disconnection between her current self-image and the ideal self she wishes to embody. This dissonance illustrates a lack of self-acceptance and an overreliance on external validation. The haiku offers a striking reflection on how self-image, shaped by both internal beliefs and societal ideals, can deeply affect one’s emotional and psychological state.

### **Self-appreciation**

The shift toward self-appreciation in the other five haikus suggests a growing sense of self-acceptance and emotional maturity. The haiku “Their Best Daughter” initially reflects a theme of dissatisfaction with one’s self-image, characterized by a somber tone and a mood of despondency and exhaustion. However, as the poem progresses, it shifts to a comforting and hopeful tone, suggesting the potential for self-improvement over time:

*A real depressed girl,  
Who has a lot of courage,  
Finding her real home.*

*The world seems so dark,  
Wishing she could disappear  
Oh, please let her go.*

*Sick of seventeen  
Though the golden years, they say.  
God, please hug her now.*

*She did all she could.  
Trying, smiling but dying,  
Dying to escape.*

*Little brain, listen!  
Everything will be just fine.  
Time is medicine.*

The haiku as a whole captures the complexity of adolescent mental health, characterized by feelings of isolation, self-doubt, and yearning for healing. It illustrates the difficulty of navigating inner turmoil and the simultaneous desire for acceptance and release from pain. Although the haiku starts with a somber mood, the final stanza shifts to an uplifting mood that encourages self-betterment and gives a sense of comfort. “Little brain, listen!” implies an internal dialogue, encouraging the writer to hold on and trust in time as a healing force. The shift from despair to hope underscores a key theme in the haiku: despite an initially negative self-image, there is a clear movement toward personal growth. This

progression highlights resilience and the potential for transformation, suggesting that even amidst internal struggle, change is possible. The poem reflects a growing recognition of one’s worth while also introducing a moral dimension of the self rooted in values such as compassion and acceptance. This depiction, hence, points to an evolving identity, one that recognizes the importance of embracing both personal flaws and strengths with a spirit of integrity and openness.

Similarly, “Precious Diamond” offers a positive affirmation of self-image. The writer expresses appreciation toward herself, highlighting the positive attributes she believes she possesses. The haiku conveys an encouraging tone, comparing oneself to a jewel, and emphasizes not only her psychological and intellectual qualities but also her skills and moral values.

*A tenacious girl;  
In her, sits a strong-willed heart,  
Brave and unafraid*

*A real brilliant gem,  
Smart, talented, beautiful  
She is all in one.*

*A beautiful soul.  
Loved by so many people,  
A precious diamond.*

The haiku continuously expresses reassurance that the self will persevere despite obstacles and failures. The reassurances simultaneously suggest that she does not depend on others’ evaluations to construct her self-image:

*She might fall and trip,  
Even failing miserably,  
But she will prevail.*

*People’s scornful words,  
And the world’s hurtful laughter,  
Will never get her.*

The haiku expresses a strong sense of self-appreciation and confidence. The tone is encouraging and self-assured, reflecting the writer’s belief in her own worth. She describes herself as “a tenacious girl” with “a strong-willed heart,” showing resilience and inner strength. Positive traits are emphasized throughout—she is “smart, talented, beautiful” and “all in one,” suggesting a well-rounded, affirming self-image. Even in the face of failure (“She might fall and trip,/Even failing miserably”) and external negativity (“People’s scornful words,/And the world’s hurtful laughter”), the writer asserts that “she will prevail” and that such judgments “will never get her.” The consistent tone of optimism, confidence, and warmth—especially in “A beautiful soul,/Loved by so many people,/A precious diamond”—conveys not only a positive self-image but also a sense of inner

strength, resilience, and a sense of having the ideal self.

Similarly, the haiku “Dear My Dearest Me” expressed a tone of encouragement and gentleness, evoking a comforting and uplifting mood:

*Hello, are you there?  
The one with that lonely stare  
I want to know you*

*You, the great actress  
You’re me stuck in the mirror  
Not anyone else*

*Now, I will tell you  
“Don’t cry. You’ve done really well  
Yes, through thick and thin.”*

*I have not freed you,  
But I do want to thank you  
For still loving me.*

*I’ll start to love you  
Yes, I will love you deeper  
To heal you further.*

The writer’s use of the second-person pronoun in this haiku creates a sense of intimacy, as she directly addresses herself (e.g., “Now, I will tell you/Don’t cry. You’ve done really well/Yes, through thick and thin”). This creates a personal dialogue in which she acknowledges both the emotional and psychological aspects involved in constructing self-image. The lines “I have not freed you/But I do want to thank you/For still loving me” suggest an awareness of her vulnerabilities, yet they also highlight her inner strength, as she appreciates her perseverance in the face of challenges.

The compassionate tone of the haiku emphasizes self-love and appreciation, as the writer reassures herself with words of encouragement and warmth. Her commitment to growth is evident in lines such as “I’ll start to love you/Yes, I will love you deeper/To heal you further.” Here, the writer expresses a desire to enhance her self-image, affirming a belief in the possibility of positive change. The overall mood is hopeful and soothing, with an underlying sense of self-appreciation. The intimate dialogue created by first- and second-person pronouns reinforces the idea of a nurturing relationship with oneself, focusing on self-acceptance and emotional healing.

The haikus “About Me” followed a similar tone of encouragement and comfort towards one’s own self-image.

*This is about me.  
I stand facing the mirror,  
Thinking what I think.*

*I am not perfect.  
I’m not good in anything,  
But I try my best.*

*My parents once said  
They would still be proud of me  
Whatever happens.*

*I envy sometimes,  
Envious of my friends who are  
Good in everything.*

*But I am so glad  
To be in a family  
That loves me truly.*

This haiku presents an introspective reflection on self-image, weaving together themes of self-doubt, envy, acceptance, and gratitude. The speaker expresses honest vulnerability through lines like “I am not perfect/I’m not good in anything,/But I try my best” and “I envy sometimes/Envious of my friends who are/Good in everything,” revealing a deep awareness of perceived shortcomings. At the same time, the poem embraces appreciation and emotional warmth, as reflected in “But I am so glad/To be in a family/That loves me truly.” This emotional turn sets a tone that moves from insecurity to reassurance, reflecting a growing sense of self-appreciation. The haiku points to a transformation of perception, rooted in the writer’s gratitude for the unconditional love and support of her family. The haiku offers a glimpse into adolescent self-image, striving to nurture self-love and appreciation.

Likewise, the haiku “An Ordinary Girl” is marked by a blend of self-doubt and aspiration, blending the introspection of solitude with the desire for connection and growth. The tone and mood shift between self-awareness, determination, and hope, providing a picture of the writer’s evolving journey toward self-actualization:

*Come, get to know me;  
A girl who enjoys solitude,  
But she likes the crowd, too.*

*Ordinary girl,  
Lazy to do anything,  
But she has a dream.*

*A dream since childhood  
That she must seek and achieve  
So she has to rise.*

*It’s a long journey,  
To fly like a butterfly  
But the bud will bloom.*

*Before withering,  
She’ll be able to break free.  
Now, she is reborn.*

The haiku explores the writer’s evolving self-image, suggesting that despite perceived flaws or slow beginnings, she sees herself as capable of change and eventually flourishing. Through the

imagery of a butterfly and a blooming bud (“It’s a long journey,/To fly like a butterfly/But the bud will bloom”), the writer evokes themes of growth, transformation, and inner potential. These metaphors convey powerful optimism. While the writer may, at one time, feel “ordinary,” there is an underlying belief that she has the potential to transform and flourish. The contrast between the “lazy” start and the “reborn” ending reflects the dynamic process of developing a healthier, more empowered self-image. The final line, “Now, she is reborn,” marks a moment of self-renewal, highlighting not only resilience but a deepening self-appreciation. Overall, the haiku presents self-image as a dynamic process shaped by self-reflection, determination, and the hope of becoming a better self. This haiku also suggests that self-image is not static but evolves over time.

To sum up, haikus categorized under ‘self-appreciation’ often highlight the positive traits of one’s personality, such as warmth, dignity, and thoughtfulness. These poems not only acknowledge personal flaws but also promote growth and self-betterment, reinforcing a self-image that aspires to align with one’s ideal self. These haikus depict a journey toward achieving dreams and realizing potential—illustrating the ongoing process of self-discovery and self-improvement. Those students who are able to show appreciation toward themselves, as indicated in their self-acceptance and empathy, can be said to have a stronger sense of self-worth. By recognizing both their weaknesses and strengths, these students foster a healthier psychological outlook, which supports a more positive mindset and encourages openness in relationships with others. This aligns with the view that a balanced self-image—sustained by internal confidence and external support—contributes to mental health and overall well-being (Rosenberg, 1989).

The findings of this study underscore the complexity of adolescent self-image, which fluctuates between self-deprecation and self-appreciation. These two themes are not mutually exclusive; instead, they reflect the dynamic nature of adolescent self-perception, where negative self-assessments may give way to positive affirmations, or vice versa, as part of the process of self-exploration. Adolescents grappling with this dissonance may experience insecurity, anxiety, or a fragile sense of self-worth. Yet, in the same breath, some of these haikus also highlighted the students’ resilience—a growing sense of self-awareness that emerges from confronting insecurities and then transcending them.

This study illuminates how creative expression can help adolescents embrace their strengths and weaknesses, fostering a healthier self-image. The theme of self-appreciation in these haikus reflects the adolescents’ capacity for self-improvement.

Rogers’ theory (in McLeod, 2023) suggests that a positive self-image results from empowering self-reflection and empathetic understanding of oneself, which are central to the process of personal growth and emotional well-being. Haikus, despite their brevity, offer a profound way of engaging with complex internal dialogues—both harsh and kind. As portrayed in the haikus, the stark contrast between self-deprecation and self-appreciation highlights how the students are reflecting on—and grappling with—their insecurities alongside their aspirations. The ability to reflect on and reshape one’s self-image is, in fact, central to adolescent development (Porter, 2015). As self-image is continuously influenced by socialization, peer interactions, and self-reflection, creative expression through haiku offers a valuable outlet for adolescents to explore their identity in a safe, structured way (Al-Khouja, Weinstein, Ryan, & Legate, 2022), which not only fosters self-awareness but can also contribute to improved mental health.

This study extends the work of Sulasti et al. (2021), which raised questions about the ability of haiku to capture complex reflections. This study confirms that haiku can effectively facilitate self-introspection. The minimalist nature of haiku appears to encourage students to reflect on themselves in a clear and direct manner, using carefully chosen words to express deep emotional states. The restriction of syllables in haiku did not hinder expression; rather, it invited students to distill their thoughts and feelings into sharp, powerful meaning.

This study also aligns with Iida’s (2010, 2012, 2016) and Hama’s (2017) findings, which highlight the effectiveness of poetry in self-expression. Haiku encourages students to engage with their emotions creatively, making it an effective tool for therapeutic reflection and identity exploration. Apparently, the power of haiku lies in its paradoxical nature—where less is more, and in the absence of excessive elaboration, the depth of emotion and thought emerges more clearly. Through this art form, adolescents discover not only their voices but the rhythm of their growth.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights how adolescent students use haiku as a tool for self-expression and exploration, offering insights into how self-image is articulated through poetic language. The two prominent themes—self-deprecation and self-appreciation—emerge as indicators of how students represent tensions and self-perceptions within the haikus. Haikus reflecting self-deprecating themes tend to foreground negative self-evaluations shaped by external influences and social expectations, while self-appreciative themes point to more affirming self-positioning grounded in self-awareness and personal validation.

The findings suggest that haiku, with its concise and structured form, provides a meaningful space for adolescents to engage in self-reflection. By allowing students to express both positive and negative emotions in a brief and manageable format, haiku offers a creative and accessible medium through which self-image can be articulated. The analysis also lends support to Rosenberg's conceptualization of self-image as shaped through the relationship between the present self and the ideal self, as reflected in students' contrasting self-descriptions within the poems.

By focusing on haiku as a moment of self-expression, this study foregrounds how students construct and negotiate self-image at a specific point in time rather than tracing self-image as a developmental trajectory. This text-centered focus enables close analysis of affective meanings and evaluative self-positioning as they are expressed in poetic language. At the same time, this analytical scope constitutes a limitation. As the study relies solely on students' haikus, it captures self-image as represented in textual form rather than through students' explicit reflections on their experiences. Future research could therefore extend this work by combining textual analysis with interviews or focus-group discussions to explore how students interpret their own poems and reflect on their self-expressions over time and across contexts. From this perspective, the use of English as a foreign language is treated not as a limitation, but as part of the expressive context in which self-image is articulated.

Finally, this study points to the pedagogical potential of creative writing activities, such as haiku, in educational settings. Encouraging students to reflect through poetry may support self-awareness and emotional reflection, both of which are closely linked to the development of a positive sense of self. Integrating creative writing into classroom practice can, therefore, provide opportunities for students to engage with their inner experiences in meaningful ways. Future studies may further explore the use of haiku across different age groups and cultural contexts, as well as its potential to support self-expression, emotional growth, and intercultural understanding.

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