

Using Poetry in EFL Classes: Is It an Effective Learning Tool or It Is a Kind of Redundancy?

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استخدام الشعر في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: هل هو أداة تعليمية فعالة أم مجرد تكرار؟

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of using poetry as a pedagogical tool in EFL Libyan classroom at English department, Faculty of Education, Elmergib University. The study focuses specifically on learners' perceptions and previous experiences during poetry course to identify the role of poetry in learning language from students' perspectives. The researcher adopted qualitative approach and used semi-structured, face-to-face interviews for collecting required data that analyzed inductively. The participants of the study were ten female students enrolled in third year, (2024-2025). The findings revealed that poetry is an effective tool for learning language. Students felt that they were motivated, and their language developed in pronunciation, vocabulary, oral skills, cognitive skills and their emotional awareness increased. In short, poetry is a powerful pedagogical tool and it has an educational function which provides an environment where poetry and linguistics complement each other.

Keywords: Poetry, Role of Poetry, EFL Classroom, Students Perspective, Effective Tool.

المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في فعالية استخدام الشعر كأداة تعليمية في فصول تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة المرقب. تركز الدراسة بشكل خاص على تصورات الدارسين وتجاربهم السابقة خلال مساق الشعر لتحديد دور الشعر في تعلم اللغة من وجهة نظرهم. اعتمدت الباحثة المنهج النوعي، واستخدمت المقابلات شبه المنظمة وجهاً لوجه لجمع البيانات المطلوبة، والتي تم تحليلها استقرائياً. شملت الدراسة عشرة طالبات مسجلات في السنة الثالثة (2024-2025). وأظهرت النتائج أن الشعر أداة فعالة لتعلم اللغة. شعر الطلاب بتحفيزهم، وتطورت لغتهم في النطق والمفردات والمهارات الشفهية والمعرفية، وزاد وعيهم العاطفي. باختصار، يُعد الشعر أداة تربوية فعالة، وله وظيفة تعليمية تُوفر بيئة يتكامل فيها الشعر واللغويات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر، دور الشعر، صف تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، منظور الطلاب، أداة فعالة.

Introduction

Integrating literary texts into educational environment for learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has adopted for many years. In spite the fact that, using literature in general in the field of education has considered as a topic of a debate among some educators and researchers. It has claimed that literary texts have a little contribution to language development and the language that is used and acquired from literary texts as poetic language which is full of odd vocabulary is not commonly used in

everyday communication and does not have a benefit in the language development. Savvidou (2004) for instance, has her own perspective relating to including poetry in educational field. She states that sometimes the poetic language itself is the reason of excluding this genre from the field of learning, so that she and many others insist that literature should be kept away or excluded from the field of learning.

On the other hand, some scholars and language specialists assume that literature is a basic component in learning second language and it is not as a subsidiary one. In addition, they maintain that all genres of literary texts should be essential part in education programs that help learners to improve their levels on different aspects of language. Parkinson and Thomas (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012) point out that literary text has authentic nature that fosters and empowers the mental training of the learners and their knowledge about language in different parts of life. This issue raised many questions related whether literary texts as poetry is an effective pedagogical tool that can be used to enhance language acquisition and develop language skills, or it is a kind of redundancy that has a little contribution in learning environment. From students' perspectives, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of poetry as pedagogical medium in EFL classroom in the sense that is it as effective tool as other linguistic subjects.

Statement of the problem

Despite increasing the importance of the literature in learning language and its role in enhancing language skills and increasing language proficiency, some EFL educators and instructors belittle the importance of poetry as a pedagogical tool for language development. According to their perspectives, many factors such as language complexity and the deviate use of language contribute to neglect poetry as effective teaching medium and it is not considered as important as other language subjects. In our educational institution, Faculty of Education, Elmergib University, poetry is one of literary texts that is included in the academic curriculum. It isn't given sufficient time to be taught, equivalent to other linguistic subjects, in the sense that poetry isn't given the same time allocated as other language subjects which are taught twice a week (4 hours) while poetry and other literary texts are taught only once a week (2 hours) . This research investigates the effectiveness of studying poetry in EFL classroom from students' perspective and its impact on language development. In addition, this study aims to decide whether poetry has essential role in classroom language or it is a subsidiary one not as important as other language subjects.

The objective of the study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using poetry in EFL classroom. It is an attempt to identify the role which poetry plays " from students' perspectives" in enhancing and motivating language learning in the English department at Elmergib University. Specifically, this study aims to determine whether poetry is good educational medium and has a significant impact on developing and improving language learning.

Research questions

- 1-How does exposure to poetic language enhance language learning?
- 2- Which aspect of language can be improved by utilizing poetry in classroom language?
- 3- Is a poem a good educational device that empowers and fosters language learning?

The significance of the study

This study sheds light on the effectiveness of utilizing poetry in learning language. It is significant for teachers and students. For both, this study may help them recognize the role of poetry in learning English as a foreign language, whether it is an effective tool in EFL classroom or its role isn't as important as linguistic subjects. Although using poetry as a pedagogical tool for learning language is a controversial issue among many scholars and experts of language, the findings that are obtained from students' perspectives will determine its role as a genre that is used to enhance language learning and improve different language aspects or it does not have beneficial learning values. In addition, the findings of this study are significant for instructors to pay much serious attention on supporting the incorporation of poetry into learning environment in the case of achieving improvement in learning language and having a positive impact during poetry course from learners' perspective.

Literature review

For a long time ago, educators and specialists in language teaching and learning attempt to develop and improve the means of learning language effectively and the tools that can enhance and facilitate learning English as a foreign or second language. Poetry is the genre of literary texts that is used for this reason. Majority of scholars and specialists in language teaching and learning believe that poetry is a genre that is basic in education program as it contributes to one way or another in acquiring language.

The benefits of using poetry as teaching material

As other literary texts, poetry is considered as a valuable source which used by many scholars and educators in teaching and learning language. It can be said that there is a consensus about the benefits of using this genre in education program and this view is strongly supported by the majority of scholars

and specialists in language teaching and learning in different educational environments. Lazar, (2012) states that poetry is a component which is a valuable in education program as it offers to learners a linguistic enrichment and it is one that can be used to engage learners to the aesthetic features of language.

According to Panavelli (Syamsia & Ismail, 2021) poetry is a beneficial source that get learners practice the language and develop their language skills. In addition, it motivates students to be creative and acquire new vocabulary which can be remembered in efficacious way.

Integrating poetry into ESL/EFL classroom has significant functions. First, poetry is the tool that enhances students' cultural awareness and provide a chance to improve their basic language skills. Second, this genre of literary texts reinforces acquiring new vocabulary and expanding students' linguistic knowledge. (Guizar, 1992)

Similarly, another benefit reflects the students' specific reactions towards poetry exposure, which stimulate learners to connect personally with the poem. Lazar (2012) believes that literary texts have educational value in the classroom. It can help students to stimulate their imagination, improve their critical ability and enhance their emotional awareness. Moreover, Lazar states that if learners respond to the text personally, they will express their own opinions and emotions in English with confidence and will foster their ability to relate this text experience to the values of their own society.

Another suggestion is given by Mittal (2014), she points out that there are many opportunities which this literary text (poetry) offers in classroom. She claims that poetry is educational aid which gives students enormous chance of learning different or various aspects of language, for instance, it enriches their linguistic repertoire in related to vocabulary, structures and expressions which in return, have its impact on both students' and teachers' behavior in communication between each other inside classroom.

As the majority of educators and researchers agree that the benefits of poetry are not limited on a particular aspect of language. It has been claimed that poetry has a vital role in teaching and learning students to read beyond literal meaning and to think critically. According to (Langer, 1997, Dale & Farruk 2024) studying poetry and interpreting the poetic language gives a chance to cognitive skills to be improved in classroom. This skill " to think critically " is one of the dimensions which poetry can be good resource for its implementing. In addition, this corresponds with Nunan (1988) who states that developing students' cognitive skills or the ability to think critically in learning language is one of priorities that is required for learning to be successful and it is consider from the important goals of foreign language syllabus.

The exposure to poetic language has its impact on students' pronunciation as many scholars and educators claim. They assume that poem is a good device for improving learners' pronunciation. Kellem 2009, (Dalal & Farruk, 2024) points out that the patterns which used in poetry language have their effect on recognizing syllables and increasing students' awareness in regard to intonation and stress patterns.

In sum, incorporation literary texts including poetry in the educational program is considered from many scholar's perspective as significant as other teaching materials as it provides an environment in which many aspects of language can be improved. Scholars as (Collie& Slatter,1987, Mckay,1982; Povey, 1972; Widdowson, 1990; Valdes, 1986; Canfield, 2003) and many others assure that language skills, cognitive skills, linguistic knowledge, motivation and cultural awareness are learning outcomes that poetry is appropriate medium for obtaining and acquiring these benefits (Raba'a, 2025).

The advantages and benefits of integration literary texts in particular poetry into classroom language, which mentioned above are one side of the matter. In other words, as there are pros of using poetry, there are cons of using this genre. Although, poetry is widely accepted as a pedagogical tool for reinforcing language learning and many learning benefits can be achieved by using poetic language, some researchers and those who are specialists in language teaching and academic curricular have their own points of view in regarding to poetry and its reintegration in the field of education. For instance, Suvvidou (2004) argues that poetry should be excluded from language teaching and learning because of its deviate use of language and the creative language which used in poems is not as ordinary one that is used in conversation.

According to Mckay (1982), literature offers a little contribution in learning and that is because of the complicated structures that are found in poems and unusual use of language. In addition, she points out that studying literature does not help learners meet their occupational and academic needs.

Another point of view is not in favor of including poetry in classroom language. According to Topping (Mart, 2018), literary texts should be excluded from classroom language. Topping insists that literary texts as poems have no role in supporting language learning and do not improve students to be fluent. Furthermore, the language that learners' study by using literature as a medium is not in conformity with standard one. This deviation of language usage as Topping argues constitutes an unfavorable factor which influences on language teaching and learning.

In terms of FL learners, Widdowson 1982 (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014) claims that literary text in classroom language can be "misleading models" and the disruptive use of language might lead foreign language learners to be confused and not as stimulating one.

As a researcher, I have to note that many scholars as (Mckay, Suvvidou and Widdowson) who mentioned above and many others they only express their points of view in certain learning environments where literary text is not considered as powerful pedagogical tool, in the sense that they do not reject or they are not against literary texts to be included in classroom language as many researchers thought, but they have some reservations related to the role of factors that contribute to viewing literary text as not an effective medium in classroom language. For instance, Mckay (1982) believes that literary text to be successful in classroom; it should be selected carefully and approached in a way that foster the reader to interact with the text.

In addition, Mckay (Kabinawa and Santosa, 2024) states that literary texts, in particular poetry, helps learners to appreciate other genres of literature and obtain a deep knowledge of social differences. Similarly, Suvvidou has different opinion related to literature in classroom language, in the sense that Suvviduo does not completely reject literature inclusion in education field as many writers indicate, but she criticizes certain integrating approaches in teaching and learning literary texts in classroom language that play a vital role in the effectiveness of literary text. Suvvido (Skela, 2014) suggests three integrating approaches that should be used to deal with literary text: cultural awareness, linguistic knowledge and student's personal response.

Widdowson 1982 (Kabinawa& Santosa, 2024) emphasizes on the mutual benefits of interpretation of literary text and language analysis. The complexity of grammatical structure in poetry and its aesthetic features make it an effective tool for learners to master spoken language. Also, Widdowson (1982) (Brumfit & Carter, 1986) literary text encourages students' ability to interact with text to infer meaning.

Teaching language by using poetry as a medium in classroom is a conversional point in the field of education. This issue motivates many instructors and language experts to investigate the effectiveness of this literary genre in language learning.

Several studies have been conducted to explore the role of utilizing poetry in classroom language. For instance, an experimental study conducted by Ozen and Mohammadzadeh (2012) showed that poetry can be used to teach vocabulary in an effective way. Students who received vocabulary instruction through poems acquired more extensive vocabulary compared to traditional course book activities According to Bakri (2022) study, poetry as a tool for teaching English has a positive impact on EFL Palestinian students in terms of vocabulary development, pronunciation and motivation.

Another descriptive qualitative study conducted by Suwastini and Dewi (2023) revealed that poetry has a positive effect on improving students' speaking skills aspects in terms of enriches students' vocabulary, improve pronunciation through reading poems and leads to grammar mastery by familiarizing learners with sentence structure. In addition, poetry can help learners to be fluent and confident in communication.

Investigating the effectiveness of poetry in teaching language was also done in a study conducted by Wahas, Syed and Sahauddin (2024) at Aligarh Muslim University. The findings showed that poetry is a primary component in classroom language as it improves language skills, motivates learners and helps learners to develop their grammar and vocabulary.

There are as many studies investigate the role of poetry in learning language, as there are researchers. But we should take into our considerations, not all results of studies can be generalized and can't be applied to all learning environments. The current study aims to examine the effectiveness of poetry in learning English language. While many studies investigate the pedagogical merits of utilizing poetry in education filed, but few have explored the role of poetry through students' personal experience and perceptions. This study uses semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to investigate the pedagogical role of teaching poetry from students' perspectives. Also, as it apparent, there are no studies have been conducted in this field in this educational institution, faculty of education, Elmergib Universit.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of poetry in learning English language from students' perspectives and to determine whether poetry is an effective medium that has a kind of contribution to language learning and enhances the way of learning. To achieve this purpose, the researcher adopts a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interview as data collection tool to explore students' personal experiences and perceptions during poetry course.

Participants

The participants of this study are ten EFL students. They are studying in the third year at the English department, Education Faculty – Elmergib University for the academic year 2024- 2025. They aged 21 to 25 years old.

The instrument of the study

To obtain the required data for this study, the researcher used a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured, face-to-face interviews as an instrument for data collection. The questions focused on the impact of poetry course on students' language acquisition. It is an attempt to determine whether poetry course effects positively on acquiring language and in which aspect of language does this literary genre help learners to be developed and motivated in learning environment setting.

The procedure of the study

Some of students agreed to take part in the current study and the researcher informed them about its objectives and the importance of their participations in this study. The participants enrolled in third academic year, English department, Faculty of Education, Elmergib University. Poetry is a course that they had taken once a week (2 hours). By the end of poetry course, an interview guide was prepared by the researcher containing open–end questions exploring students' view on the impact, benefits and their experience of using poetry in classroom language. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a quiet room inside the faculty to ensure the participants react effectively in quite place. Most students' interviews lasted about 35-45 minutes, but some of them lasted more than 45 minutes because they wanted some clarification in some points related to questions. The researcher chose note taking instead of audio-record during the interview and that is because some of interviewee refused to be recorded.

Data analysis

The interviews were documented manually through note taking, with the assistance of my colleague. The researcher analyzed the data by using thematic analysis. According to the interview data, codes were derived inductively and categorized to address the research questions which seek to investigate the effectiveness of poetry in learning English from the learners' perceptions and their own previous experience.

The Findings

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of poetry in learning language from students' perspective and their experience in the class. For this aim, the analysis of interview data revealed the following themes:

Developing oral skills

The participants stated that from their perspective during poetry course, they trained to be active in class and to explore their points of view through group discussion. In addition, they claimed that studying poems gave them a good opportunity to interact with each other through presentation skills in which they were encouraged to interact effectively and to be as fluent as possible without fearing of mistakes. " Honestly, at the beginning of the course I was very shy. I did not have the courage to be involved in oral communication, but after three or four classes, I was encouraged to communicate and share my opinions and feelings with my colleges through presenting a poem in my own words " (sample three)

" Poetry course enhanced my speaking and gave me a chance to share my experience and feeling without fear of mistakes". (sample one)

Expanding student's vocabulary

The participants indicated that exposure to poetry provides a good learning environment in which learners can acquire range of new vocabulary and expressions in a way that isn't as acquiring from other materials. In addition, they stated that understanding the complexity language in some poems is not simple and it needs to pay their attention on language structures and unfamiliar vocabulary with help of their instructor.

" Actually, during poetry course, I learned new words and expressions in a way that can be memorized in a simple way. Working with literary text to understand the vocabulary and its meaning in a context helped me to comprehend unfamiliar ones." (sample one)

" poetic language deviates from normal use and isn't as standard one, is accepted as true, but being engaged in poetry course, in my perspective is a good experience. Learning vocabulary in isolation as lists is very boring. This genre offered to me an opportunity to acquire a vocabulary pack by which my lexical acquisition increased."(sample three)

Emotional engagement and motivation

According to participants' perspective, some poems helped them to become involved emotionally in the text and this emotional involvement" personal connection" with text (poem) in regarding to their own feelings, opinions and their experience motivated learners and enhanced their learning and appreciation of poetic language.

" In my opinion, I was interested in reading poetry. For me it is enjoyable. Some poems stimulated me to share my experience because we have the similar poem themes in my life. " (sample five)

" Some poems are enjoyable. I remembered my childhood when I was watching cartoon films. Chimney Sweeper poem reminded me how sad I was.! ". (sample one)

Critical thinking

The participants believed that reading poems is not as simple as reading other texts. They reported that exposure to poetry introduced them into an environment where they are involved in group discussion, analyzing information, posing questions and exchanging points of view.

"Understanding the deep meaning of poems is facilitated by the interpretations in group discussion" (sample four)

" Poetic language is thought-provoking which entails hard work in a thoughtful way to cope with the poetic language and its challenges in terms of deep meaning and the poem message "(sample two)

"Poetry course helped me to be confident in sharing my opinions, even if they were different from others. Asking questions and listening to my classmates' interpretations opened my mind to different perspectives " (sample seven)

Pronunciation

In terms of pronunciation perception, participants stated that they have noticed an improvement in their spoken language which entirely depends on their phonetics and phonology background knowledge. They believed that reading poems enhanced their learning by paying more attention to phonological constituents such as rhyme, rhythm, stress, alliteration, syllable and intonation.

" Reading poems gave me a chance to improve my pronunciation and to concentrate on how to pronounce accurately, taken into my consideration the features of spoken language such as stress and intonation" (sample four)

"Personally, I noticed my pronunciation improved, especially when I had to read a poem aloud in the class. I practiced the rhythm so many times that became natural" (sample seven)

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of utilizing poetry in classroom language from students' perspectives, whether it is an effective pedagogical tool that enhances language learning and which aspects of language can be achieved and motivated by this genre in the field of education. Based on these objectives, the researcher used semi- structured interviews to obtain the data according to the participants' perspectives. The findings of study revealed that poetry can be used as an effective tool for enhancing language learning and motivates learners to improve different aspects of language.

The results of this study indicate that poetry has a significant role in enhancing language learning as improving vocabulary and oral skills. These benefits support the opinions of Widdowson (1982) who suggests that the features of poetic language help students to master spoken skills. Also, Guizar (1992) and Mittal (2014) who believe that poetry enhances acquiring vocabulary and develop learners' oral skills. In addition, this result aligns with previous study conducted by Suwastini and Dewi (2023) which revealed that poetry has a positive impact on motivating and developing learners' speaking skills. Similarly, this finding corresponding with studies of Bakri (2019) and Ozen and Mohammadzadeh (2012) who claim that poetry is an effective medium for teaching vocabulary.

To engage emotionally and to be motivated through poetry are what the findings of this current study manifested. This positive view according to learners' perspectives supports Lazar's point of view (2012) who indicates that personal responding with literary texts helps learners to share their own ideas and emotions in a confident way. Also, the findings of study indicated that the selection of poems themes according to the participants touch their humanity and in this case a learner is involved as a whole person. This reactive impression reflects the criteria of poems selections which play important role in leading learners to be interactive in classroom language. Moreover, this finding compatibles with McKay (1982) who claims that the success of literary text in classroom depends on carefully selection and should be approached in a way that foster learners to interact with the text.

According to the findings, poetry encourages the participants to think critically which in return helps them to appreciate the target language effectively. This merit "cognitive or critical thinking skills" can be achieved by using poetry in classroom language, this benefit supports the Langer's opinion (1997) and many other scholars (Bakri, 2019) for instance, McKay (1982), Lazar (1993). Additionally, another benefit that the findings of this study manifested is the pronunciation improvement. This enhancement of pronunciation learning increases the value of poetry as pedagogical tool in classroom language and supports many scholars such as Kellem (2009) as well as aligns with findings of studies conducted by Suwastini and Dewi (2023) and Bakri (2019).

Overall, the findings clarify that there is a relationship between poetic language and linguistic, in the sense that learners use their linguistic background knowledge to deal with poetic language, such as practicing language skills, how to pronounce and to recognize complicated grammatical structures in poetry. In addition, linguistic features of a literary text help students to understand the meanings of the poem language and appreciate its aesthetic features. These activities in classroom which motivate learners to practice language in its different branches support Lazar (2012) who indicates that linking poem linguistically to branch of language being taught as vocabulary or grammatical area is enjoyable

and reinforcing learning and help learners to revise that branch. In addition, this support Widdowson's stylistics method (1975) which provide as Widdowson claims a link between linguistics and literary criticism (Lazar ,2012).

Conclusion

The objective of this study is to examine the role of poetry in the EFL classroom from students' perspective. The findings indicated that poetry is an effective medium for learning and teaching language. It can be used as a primary component of academic curriculums to achieve different learning goals as motivating learners in different language aspects, developing their linguistics repertoire and reinforcing their ability to interact with the text by using different activities as cognitive skills and oral presentations. Based on the results of this study, the researcher can conclude that poetry is educational device that helps learners to practice their language skills, recognize and appreciate the linguistic values of poetic language in classroom. In the same time, this consider as an indicator for a complementary nature between literature and linguistic.

The recommendation

It is recommended that poetry should be seen as a primary resource in classroom language. Instructors and educators shouldn't underestimate its valuable learning functions. In addition, poetry should be incorporated in a way that facilitates learning target language and makes the learning environment as stimulating one for acquiring different language aspects. Selection of poems is very important factor in classroom language, so it should be chosen carefully.

The researcher suggests future studies related to this area of learning which could investigate the role of poetry that it plays in improving language skills as writing and listening and the way of exploiting poems in classroom.

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