

Teaching Poetry in English First Additional Language Classroom through Online Classroom Presentation at a South African Rural University

By

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Abstract

Poetry is a key element of many literature curricula around the world wherein literary scholars such as Hanauer (2001) presented various theoretical works that provided principles for poetry pedagogy. The challenging task which teachers face while teaching the English language through poetry is enhancing the sense of value and enjoyment among students who are not interested in poetry due to students' low proficiency, teachers using traditional teaching methods and the selection of poetry texts among others. Against this background, this study investigated the effectiveness of teaching poetry in English First Additional Language classroom through online classroom presentation at a South African Rural University. This study was guided by Poetry Teaching (POT) Framework in teaching English First Additional Language through poetry which fosters four strands of language (reading, listening, speaking and writing) to highlight the role of poetry in achieving linguistic outcomes with specific features of poetry (i.e. themes, structure, commentary, setting, tone, mood, historical context, symbols, motifs, use of language, deviant forms used, figures of speech, inherent meanings in lines etc.) were given attention to make this framework peculiar to using poetry in the language classroom. Qualitative approach was employed through semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore the experiences and challenges of pre-service teachers in teaching poetry in English First Additional language classroom through classroom presentation. The findings of this study revealed that using online classroom presentation to incorporate poetry into the English First Additional classroom helped pre-service teachers to realize their potential of sharing experiences for better interaction, cooperation and understanding of the analysis of poems. The study also found that teaching English poetry as a model in English First Additional Language curriculum reinforces students' grammatical and lexical knowledge and promote their creative writing skills. This study recommends further research to investigate the effectiveness of similar models or frameworks to foster the incorporation of literature into language teaching curricula to provide deeper insight and help language teachers to be aware of students' previous experiences with poetry, not only in English First Additional Language but also in their mother tongue, and to identify the reticence and frustrations that might have arisen from poetry lessons.

Keywords: Poetry pedagogy, Poetry Teaching (POT) Framework, literary texts, online classroom presentation, linguistic knowledge

1. Introduction

Literature is about human experiences and human reactions to different situations around wherein students find literary texts more motivating than non-literary ones. Various genres of literature are used to teach different language skills to make language teaching more realistic, interesting and effective as a way of educating and entertaining readers (Syamsia & Ishmael,

2021). Literature also fosters learners' motivation to read and write which also can improve their reading and writing proficiency to serve their academic and occupational needs as it focuses on form and discourse processing skills and improves vocabulary expansion and reading skills as it provides learners with authentic, pleasurable and cultural material (Motlhaka and Jore, 2022; Proitsaki, 2019). Literature involves various genres such as poetry, drama, short story and novel in teaching and learning languages which offer four benefits: authentic material, cultural enrichment, language advancement, and personal growth. Scholars point to the value of the literary text as an effective stimulus for students to think critically and express their feelings and ideas in a language in integrating literature in the language classroom (Gönen, 2018; Mavhiza & Prozesk, 2020). Among the literary genres used in language teaching is poetry which can be used as a valuable resource to introduce and practice the language by exposing students to authentic models –real language in a context which can develop their language skills. This provides students with an opportunity to enrich their vocabulary in a new way by offering meaningful context which can be used and remembered effectively, encourage students in developing their creativity where they can discover interesting ideas for creative writing simultaneously and offer opportunities to project students' feelings and emotions, thus fostering personal involvement in students.

During the twentieth century, literary scholars presented various theoretical works that provided principles for poetry pedagogy and literary theory has informed teachers in their work which shifted towards an increased focus on readers' responses whereas the teaching of form receives less attention (Hanauer, 2010). Undeniably, poetry in language classroom appeals to the imagination through the form, rhythm, and word choice that can create vivid visual images for the audience and employs varied ways to transfer the writers' ideas and feelings such as using similes, images, synonyms, expressions, symbols, and metaphors. It also includes themes and contents that resonate with students which encourages discussion between class members, provokes emotional responses from the students, and does not require too much teacher-centered model. This suggests that the poets use words in various and distinct methods to transmit their ideas, emotions, and moral lessons to evoke students' imagination and interest to learn the language. Moreover, poetry is full of images in which poets use to convey their emotions, intentions, and thoughts to promote language learning among English First Additional Language learners, as well as to encourage learners' awareness of and confidence in their cultural identity (Mavhiza & Prozesk, 2020). In other words, poetry provides learners with many linguistic benefits such as the potential to enrich vocabulary, improve pronunciation, foster grammatical knowledge and practice language skills and forms along with its value in providing a rich source for language input as well as linguistic and cultural knowledge (Hanauer, 2010). Poetry is a key element of many literature curricula around the world which emphasise elements such as understanding yourself and others, the development of students' interpretations and scaffolding learners' individual voices.

Poetry stands out from the other literary genres, as it is more impressive and effective in the way that reaches the readers and it is a valuable authentic material, which motivates students to learn the language in an energetic, enjoyable, and motivating way (Ugwuzor, 2020). Reading poetry can arouse students' interest in the language as they touch the beauty of the language that poets use and offers students a real context can be a beneficial source to develop and reinforce students' knowledge of language skills (Sigvardsson, 2020). In this case, the language teacher should exploit the deviancies of the poetic language to arise the language awareness of the students towards how language can be adapted or changed to fulfil different communicative purposes by making sure that the poem selected is appropriate in

length and the level of students' comprehension (Friedman, Pedersen & Bacon, 2019). It is worth-mentioning that the selection of the poems and how to teach it is the most important thing in teaching poetry because it influences the students' reactions, perceptions, and motivation in learning poetry especially for the EFAL learners. Even though, the form has been practiced for a long time, poetry teaching is something with which many teachers struggle and feel uncertain about how to approach poetry in ways that will engage learners (Sigvardsson, 2020; Syed & Wahas, 2020). Teaching English through poetry may offer students opportunities to learn the four basic language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. It also helps students to develop areas within their linguistic knowledge, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Syed & Wahas, 2020). However, poetry is regarded as the most sophisticated genre of literature, comprising of a variety of contents that are narrative, lyrical and dramatic in nature, which may make it difficult for teachers to teach English through poetry because students' proficiency level, the teachers' method of teaching and the chosen poetry texts amongst others. Against this background, the researcher finds it critical that an investigation should be carried out to determine how online classroom presentation enhances students' understanding of the poem after they were taught basic versification of English poem likes stanzaic forms in a poem, rhythms, rhyme scheme, metrical lines, poetic feet, punctuation, and figurative language in a poem. In this case, the students were asked to choose one poem from six English poems that were prescribed then make an analysis of basic versification of English poem after that they present online through Blackboard to determine how online presentation enhances their understanding of teaching English through poem.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study used Poetry Teaching (POT) Framework which was designed to enhance the idea of implementing poetry in language teaching. This framework combines both stylistic and reader response approaches by building relationship between readers and poems as well as by making use of various linguistic choices poems provide for teaching purposes (Gönen, 2018). It integrates ideas from all three models proposed by Carter and Long (1991) seeing them as complementary to each other while using poetry in language teaching. POT is also nourished by the idea of meaningful literacy practice proposed by Hanauer (2015) which prioritizes reflection on life experiences through literary texts. POT is relevant to this study because it fosters four strands of language (reading, listening, speaking and writing) as much as possible to highlight the role of poetry to achieve linguistic outcomes with specific features of poetry (i.e. themes, structure, commentary, setting, tone, mood, historical context, symbols, motifs, use of language, deviant forms used, figures of speech, inherent meanings in lines etc.) were given attention to make this framework peculiar to using poetry in the language classroom.

3. Aim of the study

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of teaching poetry in English First Additional Language classroom through online classroom presentation at a South African Rural University.

4. Research methodology

Researcher used qualitative approach to investigate the effectiveness of teaching poetry in English First Additional Language classroom through classroom presentation at a

South African Rural University. In this study, qualitative approach helped the researcher to understand the experience, meaning and perspective of participants on the teaching of poetry in English First Additional language classroom through classroom presentation to achieve their linguistic understanding with specific features of poetry such as themes, structure, commentary, setting, tone, mood, historical context, symbols, motifs, use of language, deviant forms used, figures of speech and inherent meanings in lines etc. using semi-structured in-depth interviews.

5. Sampling

This study has a population of 10 third-year pre-service teachers at a historically black university situated in one of South Africa's remote rural areas. The university has more than 17 years of tuition. Most of the students at this university are from high poverty backgrounds who receive a national loan for tuition and basic amenities for their studies. They are enrolled in a first semester module, Poetry Analysis in English (HEGE 031) for pre-service teachers registered for a Bachelor of Education in Senior Phase and FET degree majoring in English in the School of Education. With a mean age of 25, all pre-service teachers were conveniently sampled and purposive sampling technique was carried out to select only students whose home language is Sepedi language among a range of other indigenous languages they had proficiency such as Xitsonga, Setswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Siswati and Tshivenda. The choice of Sepedi language formed part of the exclusion criteria that sought to limit the number of participants from large sampling frame of 198 students.

6. Data collection

The data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore the experiences and challenges of pre-service teachers in teaching poetry in English First Additional language classroom through classroom presentation to achieve their linguistic understanding with specific features of poetry (Sonnet 130 by William Shakespeare) such as themes, structure, commentary, setting, tone, mood, historical context, symbols, motifs, use of language, deviant forms used, figures of speech and inherent meanings in lines etc. guided by community of inquiry model which draws from multiple voices and a socially oriented research procedure which put control of the interaction and construction of knowledge in the hands of preservice teachers rather than the researcher. The interview session lasted for ± 15 minutes for each preservice teacher.

7. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis approach was used to analyse data after the transcription of the semi-structured in-depth interviews wherein pre-service teachers reflected on their linguistic understanding with specific features of poetry such as themes, structure, commentary, setting, tone, mood, historical context, symbols, motifs, use of language, deviant forms used, figures of speech and inherent meanings in lines etc. The analysis of data was guided by the following research questions:

- How does the use of online classroom presentation to teach poetry in English First Additional language classroom enhance pre-service teachers' specific features of poetry such as themes, structure, commentary, setting, tone, mood, historical context, symbols, motifs, use of language, deviant forms used, figures of speech and inherent meanings in lines etc.?

- What are pre-service teachers' perceptions about the use of online classroom presentation to teach poetry in English First Additional language classroom?

8. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of teaching poetry in English First Additional Language classroom through online classroom presentation. The following themes emerged during the analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews:

Promote communication and individual expression

Analysis and interpretation of poetry leads to multiple meanings and creativity connected to poems and various modes which depends on individual's experience and understanding. The teaching and learning of poetry involves communication, expression and reflection than it has with analysing specific language techniques and unpicking the poem as well as the ability to listen, understand another person and asking questions (Abdikarimova, Tashbolot kyzy & Abdullaeva, 2021). The following extracts show how experience related to online classroom presentation promoted communication and individual expression about using poetry in language teaching:

Excerpt 1

I think I discovered myself both as a student and as a teacher. I understand that a piece of poem can create a sense of togetherness in the class while at the same time encourage individuals to express themselves confidently. For example, we had different views about the dangers of lust and love as demonstrated in the poem.

Excerpt 2

I believe my learners in the future will enjoy reading poems when I use the techniques I learned here of appreciating and acknowledging multiple views to enhance my understanding of poetry.

Excerpt 3

The use of poetry in language teaching provided us with a better and broader perspective of educational function which triggered critical thinking while increasing emotional awareness of painful emotional and physical consequences of falling in love.

Above excerpts indicate that the teaching of poetry through online classroom presentation creates a sense of togetherness in the class and encourages individuals to express themselves confidently to trigger critical thinking and emotional awareness. The study found that using online classroom presentation to incorporate poetry into the English First Additional classroom helped pre-service teachers to realize their potential of sharing experiences for better interaction, cooperation and understanding of the analysis of poems. With this in mind, the findings support the notion that when poems are used to create interactive and collaborative atmosphere, they promote communication and individual expression (Diehl, 2021). In other words, using poetry to teach English through online classroom presentation broadens pre-service teachers' horizons and paved the way for motivation, language development, and student involvement. Thus, online classroom presentation provides the opportunity for students to express themselves, contributing aesthetic values and cultivating inner beliefs through the learning of English through poetry.

Reciprocal exchange of ideas

Reciprocal exchange of ideas in language learning helps students to use actual communication to exchange meaningful ideas and develop real relationships and interactions with each other as they value and appreciate each other's comments in the construction of new knowledge and language skills. Respondents highlighted the following regarding their reciprocal exchange of ideas during the teaching of poetry through online classroom presentation:

Excerpt 1

Online classroom presentation enabled me to learn from peers' analysis and interpretation of a poem which improved my linguistic knowledge of English language and interpersonal skills about real beauty vs. clichéd beauty which implies that we should accept our lovers for what they are as well as what they are not because anyone can use artful means to make himself or herself more attractive, no one is really beautiful anymore.

Excerpt 2

Learning English language through poetry enhanced my critical thinking skills and clarified misunderstanding from different perspectives and created an avenue to know each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Excerpt 3

I think online classroom presentation maximizes each other's learning by negotiating meanings from different perspectives through discussion and questioning in developing relationships which facilitated our internalizing of critical analysis and interpretation of a poem in understanding the responsibilities of being beautiful wherein the speaker urges the young man to make his beauty immortal by having children, a theme that appears repeatedly throughout the poem.

The findings of this study show that learning English language through poetry develops pre-service teachers' comprehension strategies, content knowledge and language skills in a supportive context from different perspectives through mutual understanding. In this way, building up relationships based on reciprocal exchange of ideas strengthens personal and social connections for expanded learning opportunities beyond the classroom in promoting effect of poetry to build communication and enhance emotions. In other words, poetry offers opportunities for students to project their feelings and emotions, thus fostering personal involvement in students because poetry deals with universal themes and human concerns (Syed & Wahas, 2020). The reflective attitude of online classroom presentation towards the interactive outcomes of using poetry helped to unveil the valuable effect of using poems as a way of developing mutual understanding in unlocking personal reactions and shaping language learning into a more personal experience. Under these circumstances, poetry can foster more personal involvement in the language classroom and strengthen social bonds among students (Chanmann-Taylor et al., 2016). Furthermore, the findings of this study concur with Yimwilai (2015) who found that literature-based lessons lead to the activation of more and higher critical thinking skills than conventional instruction, which empirically validates both theoretical insights and the beliefs of the pre-service teachers in this study. Therefore, the training prospective teachers on how to respond to literary texts

through classroom presentation can help to create a common ground for sharing experiences among students.

Fostering language skills

Fostering language skills through online classroom presentation fosters multi-skill development, and create more communication opportunities with peers when using poetry in the language class. Respondents highlighted the following on how the teaching of English language through poetry fosters their language skills:

Excerpt 1

Poetry instils and inculcates the reading habit among us and enriches our vocabulary and language content.

Excerpt 2

It improves our language proficiency by developing our linguistic knowledge, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Excerpt 3

It enhances our thinking skills as we explore the text more meaningfully.

Most compelling evidence suggests that incorporating poetry was perceived as beneficial for fostering language skills, interaction, and creating context for teaching in the language class. This finding is aligned with research on the benefits of using poetry for language development wherein classroom presentation stimulates discussion and sharing of ideas despite the fact that poetry has often been considered as an individual activity (Hanauer, 2015). The most compelling evidence shows that poetry serves as an expandable in-depth analysis of a text, thus promoting learner's critical thinking skills (Wai & Abidi, 2020). The results confirm that pre-service teachers believe that poetry-based English lessons are more useful for developing language skills such as pronunciation, grammatical and lexical knowledge than for intercultural or motivational gains (Mora, Coyle & López, 2020). Although this may be true, the opportunity poetry brings in the language classroom increases interaction with reference to responsiveness, emotional engagement and authenticity to engage students in literary experiences in a foreign language classroom. The findings of the study also revealed that when poetry is effectively incorporated into the language classroom in an interactive fashion, it may promote expressive abilities of the students and serve as a common ground to construct social connections within the class environment (Chanmann-Taylor et al., 2016; Iida, 2016). In this sense, online classroom presentation utilizes interaction among pre-service teachers featuring their reserves for interpretation, discussion and mutual understanding. As evident in reflections, online classroom presentation had the potential to practice language and become a vehicle for genuine creation in the language classroom.

Poetry as language teaching methodology

Using poetry in the language classroom has many benefits from both linguistic and literary perspectives. Respondents highlighted the following regarding the use of poetry as a language teaching methodology:

Excerpt 1

I think the use of poetry in language teaching is the storehouse of human experiences, ideas and emotions which both educate and entertain readers. It also changes negative beliefs or perceptions about teaching language skills through poetry.

Excerpt 2

The incorporation of poetry in English learning makes pedagogic interactions more exciting and opens up opportunities for language acquisition, which increases language skills and extends linguistic knowledge through student-centred approach.

Excerpt 3

Using poetry as language teaching methodology fosters grammatical knowledge and practice language skills and forms as a source of language input.

It is evident that poetry can become part of language teaching methodology because when poetry becomes accessible to pre-service teachers, they may feel more motivated to use poems while teaching English as a First Additional Language. However, lack of training on using literature as part of language teaching methodology creates a tendency to underestimate the role of poetry in EFL/ESL teaching contexts (Çetinavcı and Tütüniş, 2012). In this study, experiencing poetry through online classroom presentation helped pre-service teachers to change their negative beliefs into positive, and to gain awareness about integrating poetry in language teaching. It was clear from online classroom presentation's reflections that poetry could be used as a resource for thought-provoking discussions and language awareness which creates a positive poetry experience in training teachers and providing opportunities to change negative beliefs about the role of poetry in language teaching (Hughes and Dymoke, 2011). Given these points, pre-service teachers were able to learn about the structure of language and elements of a sentence and recognize the different techniques for connecting thoughts to improve their performance because poetry in this study was regarded as a source of material for the development of literacy skills and the basic language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking (Syed & Wahas, 2020). Another key point mentioned by Al-Bakri (2019) in support of the findings of this study shows that poetry enhances students' language skills along with their personalities as they become more confident to share their thoughts with others. Thus, the findings of this study are supported by Motlhaka and Jore (2022) who found that using of literature in language teaching is very advantageous because it offers four benefits: authentic material, cultural enrichment, language advancement, and personal growth. This suggests that benefits for using poetry in teaching can strengthen and integrate language skills (vocabulary, grammar, authenticity, motivation, pragmatic knowledge) and can develop cultural awareness through language development.

9. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of teaching poetry in English First Additional Language classroom through online classroom presentation. The findings of this study revealed that using online classroom presentation to incorporate poetry into the English First Additional classroom helped pre-service teachers to realize their potential of sharing experiences for better interaction, cooperation and understanding of the analysis of poems. In this study, experiencing poetry through online classroom presentation helped pre-service teachers to change their negative beliefs into positive, and to gain awareness about integrating

poetry in language teaching. This suggests that benefits for using poetry in teaching can strengthen and integrate language skills (vocabulary, grammar, authenticity, motivation, pragmatic knowledge) and can develop cultural awareness through language development. In this method, language skills are not be taught in isolation but in an integrated way, incorporating a set of text-based, learner-centered activities which add fresh momentum into the teaching of literature by stimulating students' desire to read and encouraging their responses. Thus, teaching English poetry as a model in English First Additional Language curriculum reinforces students' grammatical and lexical knowledge and promote their creative writing skills. It is evident that poetry is an effective framework of language teaching methodology which could motivate pre-service teachers to use poems to teach English First Additional Language and change negative beliefs about the role of poetry in language teaching. Therefore, this study provides insight into the use of poetry as a tool to train pre-service language teachers to integrate literature in a language classroom. Further research is undeniably required to investigate the effectiveness of similar models or frameworks to foster the incorporation of literature into language teaching curricula to provide deeper insight about the effectiveness of the framework. This might help language teachers to be aware of learners' previous experiences with poetry, not only in English First Additional Language but also in their mother tongue, and to identify the reticence and frustrations that might have arisen from poetry lessons.

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