

Use of Poetry in Second Language Teaching and Learning

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මේ අධ්‍යයනයේ අරමුණ වන්නේ දෙ වැනි භාෂා ඉගැන්වීමේ දී සහ ඉගැනීමේ දී කාව්‍ය භාවිතය පිළිබඳ අධ්‍යයනය කිරීම යි. දෙ වැනි භාෂාවක් ලෙස ඉංග්‍රීසි ඉගැන්වීමේ දී සහ ඉගැනීමේ දී කාව්‍ය භාවිතයෙහි බලපෑමක් ඇත් ද යන්න සොයා බැලීමට මෙන් ම එහි දී යොදාගැනෙන පෙලැඹුම්කාරකයක් සහ ඵලදායී මූලාශ්‍රයක් වශයෙන් කාව්‍යයෙහි භාවිතය මෙහි දී අධ්‍යයනය කෙරේ. ශාස්ත්‍රවේදී උපාධිය සඳහා ඉංග්‍රීසි භාෂාව ප්‍රධාන විෂයයක් ලෙස උගන්නා, අහඹු ලෙස තෝරාගත් දෙ වැනි වසර විද්‍යාර්ථීන් පිරිසක් මෙහි දී නියැදිය ලෙස යොදාගැනිණ. මෙය ඉතාමත් විෂයගත සහ ප්‍රතිඵල අරමුණු කරගත් පර්යේෂණයක් වන අතර, විද්‍යාර්ථීන්ට දෙ වැනි භාෂාවක් ඉගැන්වීමේ සහ ඉගැනීමේ ඵලදායීතාව අතින් කිසි දු වෙනසක් නො පෙන්වන්නකි. ඒ අනුව දෙ වැනි භාෂාවක් ලෙස ඉංග්‍රීසි ඉගැන්වීමේ දී කාව්‍ය භාවිතයේ ඇති ඵලදායීතාව පිළිබඳ වැඩි දුර සාකච්ඡා කිරීම අත්‍යවශ්‍ය වන ධනාත්මක මෙන් ම සෘණාත්මක බලපෑම් ද ඇති බව පෙනේ.

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මානවශාස්ත්‍ර පීඨය, කැලණිය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය

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(1) Introduction

Literature and language are inseparable parts in second language acquisition. Among the many other methods used in second language acquisition, poetry is a piece of literature used in language class room in appreciating the poetic diction, language expression etc. formed by the poet. In fact, poetry could also be used to learn and teach the second language communicatively and interactively in the language classroom.

(1.1) The Background of Study

English literature was first introduced to the Sri Lankan context during colonial period by the British. Mainly elites and the privileged people had the opportunity to get English education and appreciate the masterpieces in English literature. However, during the late 1980's and early 1990's, there was a growth of interest in using literature texts, particularly for language purposes. Apart from learning poetry to enjoy or appreciate, students were tended to practice the language skills through poetry in the classroom, and to use poetry as meaningful way in language expression. This has made teachers to use poetry for different ages and they were not restricted in selecting literature materials, as poetry was for language teaching, rather than for appreciation of literature.

(1.2) The Approaches in Teaching Literature in ESL Classroom

In considering teaching literature in the language classroom, there seems to be three significant approaches important in teaching literature, such as culture/literature model, language pattern model and personal growth model (Carter & Long 1991). The cultural model, contains the ideas, interpretations, thoughts of a literary work that make the learner aware of a specific culture or the ideas of a specific cultural group. Mainly this derived the ideas of a specific

cultural group in which the learner may be unfamiliar with. It is concerned as teacher based learning as the teacher provides background information of the particular culture and learners are not provided any opportunity to improve the language.

According to Hill and Robert (1995) in the language model, the learner is focused to learn text in a systematic and a methodological way in order to grasp the linguistic features such as literal and figurative language, and language models. This approach lends itself well to the repertoire of strategies used in language teaching such as cloze procedure, prediction exercises, jumbled sentences, summary writing, creative writing and role play which all form a part of the repertoire of English as a foreign language activities used by teachers to deconstruct literary texts in order to serve specific linguistic goals. This is precisely a learner centered method, where, rather than appreciating the literary devices in poetry, the learner engages in grasping the meaning, language models, and enhancing the language knowledge (grammar, vocabulary) through the poem.

In fact, the personal growth model is based on the personal experience of the learner. It bridges the gap between language model and cultural model. Mainly, this is considered with understanding the text better, reacting to the language expressed in the piece of literature, developing confidence with the learner and improving the creativity of the learner. Basically, the learner attempts to express the personal experience when presenting and make suggestions on the text. Overall, it seems that the language learner needs to be aware of the culture of the literature text, language knowledge and finally when expressing creatively, the personal experience with the text. In fact these three approaches are important in developing the linguistic knowledge and the language knowledge when interacting in the second language learning classroom. (Savvidou 2004)

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(2) Literature Review

According to many second language researchers like Burke and Brumfit, Little wood, McKay, literature and language are inseparable parts when it comes to language teaching. There are five perspectives in language teaching. For the first, literature provides instances of language structures in use, which can form the basis for instruction and practice in the language skills, especially reading comprehension accompanied by a varying amount of grammatical analysis, and explanation. For the second, literature becomes a vehicle for the learning of differences between language varieties. For the third, literature is the access to foreign culture and the intent for background studies. For the fourth, as the third provides literature for language for recording or reporting, fourth provides for generalising or theorising. For the fifth, literature works for linguistic, social or intellectual development of the foreign culture.

In fact language learning and literature seems inter related in the language class room and poetry would be an authentic source in language teaching and learning

According to the research article by DR.R.S.A.Susikaran (2013) playful poetry can be used for teaching grammar. This discusses the framing of the questions from the poem, and how to teach framing questions. In fact, the paper suggests simple poems and related activities that can enhance grammar learning at school level, and the beauty of the words make students learn grammatical terms used in the poem. In fact, the article further suggests poem as an effective tool for practicing specific grammatical structures and this can be a new approach to the traditional view of grammar classes.

The research article on teaching poetry to Saudi ESL learners: stylistic approach by Jameel Ahmad (2014), discusses how various tools of linguistic analysis can be used to teach poetry

to ESL learners in order to improve their proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, accent, intonation and integrated skills. The research has found that teaching of poetry with linguistic and communicative devices were very exciting and productive for Saudi learners. The students and teachers were really encouraged and enjoyed both the stylistics and communicative based approaches for teaching poetry in the ESL class. This stylistic approach was learner centered; learners were encouraged to analyse the poem linguistically such as its grammar features, lexical features, phonological features and geographical features. In fact, this has created motivation and opportunity for learners to develop their learning process.

In fact, the research article ‘Linguistic-stylistic technique and the effective teaching and learning of poetry in Nigerian senior secondary schools’ by G. B. Inyang(2009) suggests that linguistic-stylistic technique is more effective in enhancing students’ achievement and retention in poetry than the traditional method of teaching. In fact using this linguistic-stylistic enable student to understand the poetry and it will be rewarding to teachers. It recommends that English literature should adopt linguistic stylistic techniques in teaching various poetry and text books, seminars should introduce this for English literature teachers.

(3) Research Questions

Would poetry be an effective source in second language learning and teaching?

(4) Methodology

The sample is randomly taken from 40 students from second year Core English language class, in Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages, in Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. Then a pre-test and a post test are conducted. During the pre-test the students have learnt the prepositions lesson, by using a non-literary text, and

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they are tested after the lesson. The post test is conducted by using the poem 'Acquainted With Night' by Robert Frost to teach prepositions and they are tested at the end of the lesson.

The effectiveness of poetry in ESL is measured by comparing the two results of the groups. The feedbacks of students are taken as suggestions and to make conclusions of the research work. The suggestions and data are further analysed to find out the weaknesses and strengths when using poetry in the language classroom.

Pre-test Activity

The participants are taught a lesson on prepositions from the book Wren & Martin (2006) High School English grammar and Composition and provided a passage from the same book. (pg.346)

Activities are based on these major aspects:

- § The ability of comprehension: understand the meaning of the passage.
- § The language theories: understand the structural view, functional and interactional view of the language.
- § The ability in expressing the language by reflecting the knowledge gained: the communicative language learning.

Post-test Activity

The participants completed the pre-test activities and were given the poem 'Acquainted with the Night' by Robert Frost.

Activities are based on these major aspects:

- § The ability of comprehension: understand the meaning .
- § The language theories: understand the structural view, functional and interactional view of the language.
- § The attitudes and the interaction between the learner and the teacher when using poetry in the ESL classroom

§ The ability in expressing the language by reflecting the knowledge gained: the communicative language learning

(5) Findings and Discussion

The graph below shows how the students have scored for each test. The participants' learning is tested through a non-literature source in the pre-test and in the post test the participants are tested after learning the lesson through poetry.

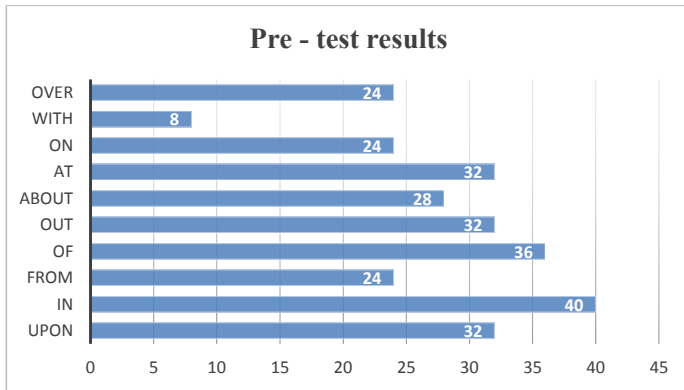


Figure 01: Prepositions found in non-literature

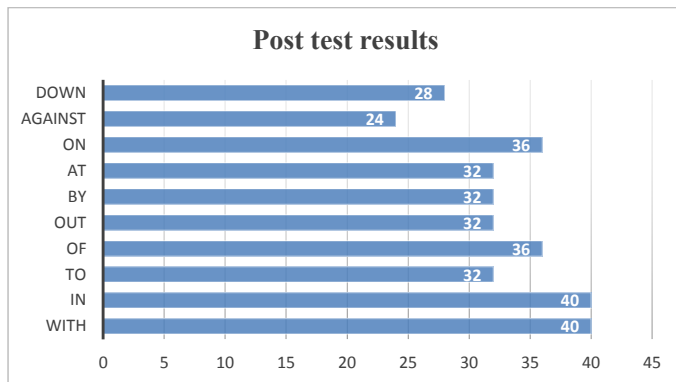


Figure 02: Prepositions found in poetry

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In comparing the two graphs it is seen that participants of the pre-test have made more errors than participants of the post-test. For example, the preposition with, on, and were used properly by post-test participants than the pre-test participants. Majority of the participants have scored high in the post test than in the pre-test.

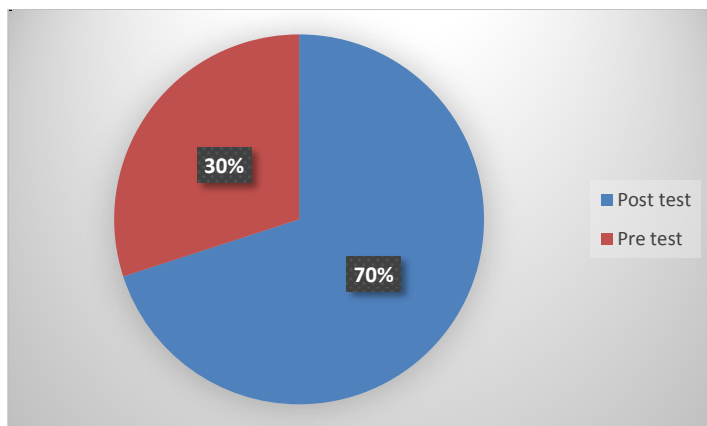


Figure 03: Comparison of the pre-test and post test to find the effectiveness of using poetry.

Above graph shows that the students have improved their knowledge in post-test, as participants have used the prepositions appropriately in their second language. Mainly this can be related to the objectives of the study, according to the pre-test, the participants have not correctly understood the use of prepositions in a sentence. This shows that both student centered learning and teacher centered learning have been used in measuring the effectiveness of using poetry in second language learning and teaching. As Brumfit and Carter (1986) suggested, the teacher has to be careful in selecting authentic materials like poetry in developing the language skills, language models and sentence patterns in the language class room. The post-test shows an improvement of the

scores as students have focused on communicative language learning, approaches of teaching literature and the theory of language.

The findings of the research mainly show that poetry in ESL classroom is an effective source in language teaching and learning. This shows several negative and positive results, as presented below,

Positive

The participants were able to grasp the pronunciation, stresses, rhythm in poetry and were interested in presenting their ideas to the classroom.

The participants were interested in developing their spoken language by interacting with the teacher and other participants

The participants found language learning more interesting with literature material (poetry) rather than non-literature material.

Negative

The participants had difficulties in the use of grammar in the sentences as poetry did not aid in such.

The participants found that the use of poetry in the ESL classroom is both teacher-centered and learner-centered , as many participants were not able to comprehend the poem

The participants were not able to memorise the structures of the language, as they have created their own structures

The participants have found learning language through poetry is complex as poetry cannot be comprehended very easily during the time.

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(6) Recommendations

In considering the findings of this research study, the use of poetry can be recommended as an authentic method in developing language skills, especially in improving the oral competency of the ESL learners. In fact, poetry needs to be familiar to the learner. For example, simple poetry would be very effective for language learner, as such would be easy to comprehend.

Teachers need to consider several factors when selecting poetry for the language learner, such as poetry that would motivate the language learners to grasp the language and even to practice the language. This mainly recommends to choose poems with rhymes and rhythm which make the learner read out loud and practice the language. However, the teachers need to be creative when selecting poetry as it would be authentic material when sharing the experience with the learner.

(7) Conclusion

The outcome of the research shows that the use of poetry in ESL learning and teaching is effective. It creates a positive learning experience in order to help the learners improve their English language and use English flawlessly.

According to the researchers conducted in other countries, as mentioned in the literature review, the research study done by Ahmad (2014) the stylistic approach and communicative based approaches seemed encouraging as it has created motivation and opportunity for learners to develop their learning process. This would be appropriate for Sri Lankan ESL learners as they have found that communicative learning is suitable in language learning while the learners need both learner centered and teacher centered methods when learning the language.

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