

Analyzing the Role of Classroom Activities in Teaching Poetry to ESL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates the activities employed by English teachers in classrooms for the instruction of poetry to ESL learners in Hazara Division, KP, Pakistan. The research is based on a survey design and data were collected through classroom observations in 12 poetry classes across three colleges and one university. Observation checklists, adapted from Hwang & Embi (2007), were used as a research technique to systematically capture and analyze the classroom activities associated with six instructional approaches: Information-Based, Paraphrastic, Stylistic, Language-Based, Personal Response, and Moral-Philosophical. Each approach was characterized by specific teaching activities, such as text explanation, background information sharing, paraphrasing, linguistic analysis, group discussions, role-playing, brainstorming sessions, and moral reflections. These activities played a pivotal role in determining the nature of classroom interaction, the level of student engagement, and the extent of language development and critical thinking. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS to calculate frequencies and percentages of observed activities, followed by Chi-Square tests to identify statistically significant differences between observed practices and teacher-reported activities. The findings revealed a diverse range of teaching activities, with a notable preference for teacher-centered strategies are information-based and paraphrastic approaches, while learner-centered activities, such as group discussions and brainstorming, were less frequently observed. The study highlights the need for a balanced and interactive approach to poetry teaching that fosters deeper student engagement and critical appreciation. The research provides valuable insights and practical recommendations for educators and policymakers to enhance poetry instruction by adopting more learner-centered and participatory teaching activities.

Keywords: Teaching Poetry, Teaching Activities, ESL learners, Classroom Activities

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Introduction

The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is very popular. The mode of delivering the content of literature can be done in various ways. However, not all teachers are aware of the possible best ways of teaching literature. The studies which do exist mostly describe the quality of an educational system or part of the system in terms of 'input' into the teaching process (teachers, equipment, materials, etc.) or look at students' achievement in relation to these inputs. Few reactions have been raised on teaching of Literature into English language class due to grammar and complex structures (Khatib, 2011). There is very little research about what is really happening in the classrooms. It is expected that this study can contribute to the field of study especially teaching literature. Poetry, as a branch of literature, is a powerful tool for enhancing students' appreciation of language and expanding their vocabulary, particularly through its rhythm and structure. Sarac (2003) emphasizes that teaching poetry in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes provides learners with an alternative perspective on language, including sentence structure, punctuation, and vocabulary. Effective poetry instruction depends on four key elements: the students, the poem, the teaching method, and the teacher's personality. However, in many educational settings, including Pakistan, the prevalent teacher-centered approach often limits student participation and active engagement with the text. This study focuses on the role of classroom activities in teaching poetry, aiming to explore the types of activities teachers use to engage students in Hazara Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, at the undergraduate level. Through the observation of classroom activities, the study investigates which methods are most and least frequently used, such as group discussions, creative writing, paraphrasing, and role-playing. The research seeks to assess how these activities influence students' comprehension of poetry and contribute to their linguistic and emotional engagement with the text. The findings aim to offer insights into improving teaching strategies and fostering a more interactive and student-centered approach in the poetry classroom.

Review of the Literature

There are various studies on teaching literature such as Savvidou (2006), Carter & Long (1991) put three models of teaching poetry i.e. The Cultural Model, The Language Model and The Personal Growth Model. Cultural Model presents the social and political background of a country. The Language Model focuses

linguistics features of a text and the Personal Growth Model provides the opportunities to learners to actively participate in the process of learning. Students displayed their enthusiasm and active participation in activities planned during literature lessons (Rashid et al., 2010). Various studies have been conducted by different researchers about literature teaching like, Van (2009) focused on the particular Approaches of teaching English through literature, such as using literary analysis. As claimed by Gore & Begum (2012), the teacher should be able to bring the updated knowledge to the classroom and also should have the expertise to impart it. Here, the teachers function as a role that could facilitate the students' learning and they should maximize their potential to the utmost, considering the fact that they possess the required knowledge in themselves. Teachers are dominant in the process of teaching (Huijie, 2012). Teachers function in planning the course, choosing the materials, preparing the lesson to be taught, systemizing the teaching process and also evaluating the students. In a language class, the teacher tries to promote the students' efficacy, skills in using the language to the maximum by urging students to join him in the learning process (Huijie, 2012). According to Arthur (1968) students show negative attitude towards learning poetry because teachers do not give time and importance to students' learning. Donelson (2010) described very important factor in teaching poem. They said that teachers should be careful while selecting a poem for teaching. They should not teach that poem which they themselves do not know and students must be given options for their choice of selecting poem for reading. Arthur (1968) a passionate promoter of teaching poetry in EFL circumstances trusts that teachers of poetry are responsible of bringing negative attitude of students about poetry. "In the event that literature is to end up an effective part of an ESL program, ways must be found to make literature both helpful and charming". Rashid et al. (2010) conducted a study involving less proficient students from 18 secondary schools in Kelantan. It was found out that the most popular Approach employed by the teachers is the Information Based Approach. This is due to the students' inability to comprehend English language which then forces the teachers to spoon-feed the students, apart from employing mother tongue as the medium of instruction. This may somehow contribute to failure in developing students' language and thinking skills.

Research Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore the classroom activities used by teachers in teaching poetry to ESL learners of Hazara Division, KP. The target population comprises ESL teachers and students from colleges and universities in Hazara

Division, KP, Pakistan. A sample of 12 ESL teachers and 36 classroom sessions is selected through convenience sampling. The data for the desired study were collected through survey method and classroom observation for data collection. When data were collected then Chi-Square test was used to find the statistical differences between observations and survey for the activities employed by teachers in teaching poetry to ESL learners. In Chi-Square test expected value of error was kept ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Carter and Long's (1991) three models for teaching literature Cultural Model, Language Model, and Personal Growth Model to examine classroom activities used in ESL poetry instruction. These models categorize specific teaching approaches and classroom activities, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how teaching strategies influence learning outcomes.

Table:1 Teaching Approaches

| S. No. | Model | Approaches |
|--------|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | Cultural Model | 1) Information Based Approach |
| 2 | The Language Model | 1) Paraphrastic Approach 2) Stylistics Approach 3) Language Based Approach |
| 3 | The Personal Growth Model | 1) Personal Response Approach 2) Moral Philosophical Approach |

Cultural Model is consisted of Information Based Approach. Language Model is identified with Paraphrastic Approach, Stylistic Approach, and Language Based Approach while Personal-growth Model is identified with Personal Response Approach and Moral Philosophical Approach (Rashid, Vethamani, & Rahman, 2010; Hwang, & Embi, 2007). All six Approaches are used according to these three models. Rashid (2010) recommended the following Approaches for teaching literature.

❖ Information Based Approach

Information Based Approach is a way of teaching knowledge about literature whereby literature is seen to offer a source of information to the students.

▪ **Activities of Information Based Approach**

1. Teacher explains text to his students in the class.
2. Provides background information about author, country, culture of that country and text in the class.
3. Asks some questions from the students about the text in order to know their previous knowledge about text.
4. Conducts lecture session.

❖ **Paraphrastic Approach**

Paraphrastic Approach is primarily paraphrasing and rewording the text to simple language or use other language to translate it. Teachers use simple words or less complex sentence structure to make the original text easy to understand. It is teacher-centered and does not contribute much interesting activities towards students (Hwang &Embi,2007).

▪ **Activities of Paraphrastic Approach**

1. Teacher retells text by using simple language.
2. Translates text by using L1.
3. Explains difficult terms so that students come to know that what the story is about?
4. Encourages students to tell story of the text in their own words.

❖ **Stylistics Approach**

Stylistics approaches guide students towards a closer understanding and appreciation of the literary text itself using the combination of linguistic analysis and literary critics (Lazar, 1993). This means students are taught to see how linguistic forms in a literary text function in conveying messages to the reader.

▪ **Activities of Stylistics Approach**

1. Here teacher encourages students to find out the linguistic features of the text for example vocabulary and grammar.
2. Focuses on language of the text.
3. Encourages students to find out the hidden meanings of text.

4. Encourages students to find all those adjectives which describe characters in that text.
5. Urges students to find how the components of literature are used by the author to assemble the story (setting, plot, language use, and so forth.)
6. Uses the apparatus of linguistic description

❖ **Language Based Approach**

In this Approach literary texts are seen as intends to help students to enhance language capability. This is achieved by introducing target language and its elements to students.

▪ **Activities of Language Based Approach**

1. Teacher boosts students' language capability.
2. Concentrates on phonology, graphology, semantics, dialect, register, period and function
3. It is learners-centered, movement based and gives specific consideration regarding the way language is controlled
4. Arranges group discussion in target language
5. Arranges different performance activities like role play, acting etc.
6. Sets language activities
7. Learners-centered

❖ **Personal Response Approach**

This approach is associated with Personal Growth Model proposed by Carter and Long (1991), as its aim is to elicit personal response and foster students' personal development. It focuses on learner's response to the poet's text.

▪ **Activities of Personal Response Approach**

1. Teacher arranges group discussion so that students express their reaction about the text.
2. Students match theme of text to their personal life.
3. Set brainstorming session
4. Involves students both intellectually and emotionally
5. students-centered

❖ **Moral Philosophical Approach**

It has been proclaimed that literature also contains moral values, which are being described by writer in text. These values are like guidelines for learners, for their life. Students' familiarities with these values help them to comprehend subjects. In this way, students would have the capacity to reflect what they have learnt in light of their readings of a specific literary text.

▪ **Activities of Moral Philosophical Approach**

1. Teacher tells learners to discuss moral values which are described in a text.
2. Conducts session of self-understanding and self-realization.
3. Assists learners to see how world in which they live, has been described in text?
4. Discussions on moral problems.
5. Describes moral values in class.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study showed that Information Based Approach was used 91.7% in teaching of poetry by teachers. The below table also showed that Paraphrastic and Stylistics Approaches were second favored Approaches by teachers. It was observed that Moral Philosophical Personal Response and Language Based Approaches were less used by teachers. Second Column showed results of Survey. When Survey was conducted in form of questionnaire, it was concluded that Paraphrastic Approach was used by 91.7%, which is very high than Stylistics with 83.3% and Information Based Approach with 75%.

Table:2 Comparison of Percentage of Approaches between Observation and Survey

| S. No. | Approaches | Observations | Survey |
|--------|----------------------------|--------------|--------|
| 1 | Information Based Approach | 91.7% | 75% |
| 2 | Paraphrastic Approach | 58.3% | 91.7% |
| 3 | Stylistics Approach | 58.3% | 83.3% |
| 4 | Language Based Approach | 25% | 50% |
| 5 | Personal Response Approach | 25% | 58.3% |

| | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----|-----|
| 6 | Moral Philosophical Approach | 41% | 50% |
|---|------------------------------|-----|-----|

But results of classroom observations were different than teachers' perceptions. Though these three Approaches were most used by teachers but which one is greater? For that classroom observations were very important because in class teachers were observed in practical way. What they used and did were observed and wrote by researchers. First class room observations were conducted then questionnaires were given to teachers. Classroom observations were actual data because in class teachers were observed very carefully while teaching poetry. Whatever they practiced was noticed. It was seen that teachers were using mixture of Approaches even in single class. Researchers were very careful in observing them which activity and which Approach they used mostly. It was observed that every teacher was providing background knowledge to students about text, poet and culture of that country. Activities of other approaches were also used but varied from teacher to teacher and class to class.

When survey was conducted teachers said that they use almost every Approach, less or more it depends on mood, class and text. However, they said that they use Paraphrastic Approach most in the class but result from classroom was different from questionnaire. Infact Paraphrastic Approach was mostly used by them but not much than Information Based Approach. One of main activity of this Approach is 'to use first language Urdu' but it was observed that being teachers of English they mostly used English language, though they explained difficult words and terms in Urdu and students also wanted that teachers should use English language than Urdu in class. In case of Stylistics Approach, it was second favored Approach according to teachers in survey. But class room observations showed that this Approach has same percentage of using for teaching poetry like Paraphrastic Approach in class. It was observed that its activities were not fully used by teachers daily in class.

Differences between Teachers' Perceptions and Practices

Now research did find out significant difference between Observations and Survey, for that Chi-Square was used as test for association. In Chi-Square test standard value of probability is taken as 0.05. By using Chi-Square test if the value of probability comes greater than 0.05 then it shows associations between observations and survey and if less than 0.05 then there is difference between observations and survey. Two hypothesis H_0 and H_1 were used in order to find out statistically

significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.05$) between observations and survey, where ($\alpha = 0.05$) is standard value in Chi-Square test for expected error in data. Mixtures of activities of Approaches are used in teaching poetry. So, by using Chi-square if there is association between Observations and Survey then it means that what teachers say, they practiced in class and if it shows no association then it means that what teachers say, they use less or do not practice at all that Approach in class.

❖ Differences between Teachers’ Perceptions and Practices for Information Based Approach

HO: There is association between Observations and Survey.

H1: There is no association between Observations and Survey.

Table:3 Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi Square | 3.273(b) | .070 |

After using Chi-Square test between Observations and Survey value of probability came =.070 which is greater than =0.05. Any value above 0.05 shows associations between Observations and Survey. In Chi-Square value for Information Based Approach came 0.070, which is greater than 0.05 so we can conclude that there is association between Observations and Survey. This shows that what teachers perceive they use in class.

❖ Differences between Teachers’ Perceptions and Practices for Paraphrastic Approach

HO: There is association between Observations and Survey.

H1: There is no association between Observations and Survey.

Table:4 Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi- Square | 0.779(b) | 0.337 |

As from the table above the probability value is =0.337 which is greater than =0.05. In case of Paraphrastic Approach value of probability shows association between Observations and Survey.

❖ Differences between Teachers' Perceptions and Practices for Stylistics Approach

HO: There is association between Observations and Survey.

H1: There is no association between Observations and Survey.

Table:5 Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 3.360(b) | .067 |

In this Approach probability value is =0.067 again greater than =0.05 association exists between Observations and Survey. So, their perceptions match with their practice in the class.

❖ Differences between Teachers' Perceptions and Practices for Language Based Approach

HO: There is association between Observations and Survey.

H1: There is no association between Observations and Survey.

Table:6 Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 4.000(b) | .046 |

The value of probability is =0.046 which is less than =0.05 here it shows no association between Observations and Survey. It shows that what teachers perceive they do not practice in class. When observations were conducted it was seen that only three teachers use this Approach completely and other do not use it completely.

But when survey was conducted six teachers said that they use this Approach mostly. It is only one single Approach which does not have association between teachers' perception and their practice.

❖ **Differences between Teachers' Perceptions and Practices for Personal Response Approach**

HO: There is association between Observations and Survey.

H1: There is no association between Observations and Survey.

Table:7 Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Asymp.Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 2.857(b) | .091 |

Chi-square test shows value of probability =0.91 which is greater than =0.05 it shows association between Observations and Survey. So, first hypothesis HO comes true.

❖ **Differences between Teachers Perceptions' and Practices for Moral Philosophic Approach**

HO: There is association between Observations and Survey.

H1: There is no association between Observations and Survey.

Table: 8 Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | Asymp.Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 3.086(b) | .079 |

For Moral Philosophic Approach the Probability value is =0.079 which is greater than =0.05. So, first hypothesis HO comes true.

The study investigated the alignment between teachers' perceptions and classroom practices regarding various teaching approaches for poetry in ESL contexts. Chi-Square tests revealed that for the Information-Based Approach, Paraphrastic

Approach, Stylistic Approach, Personal Response Approach, and Moral-Philosophical Approach, the probability values (0.070, 0.337, 0.067, 0.091, and 0.079, respectively) were all greater than the threshold of 0.05. This indicates a statistically significant association between teachers' reported perceptions and their classroom practices, suggesting that teachers generally implement what they perceive as effective teaching methods. However, a notable deviation was found with the Language-Based Approach, where the probability value (0.046) was less than 0.05, indicating no association between perceptions and practices. This suggests potential challenges in adopting the Language-Based Approach, possibly due to the complexity of activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and linguistic focus exercises. The findings highlight the need for professional development and training to bridge this gap and enhance the effective use of all teaching approaches in poetry classes.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there is a substantial alignment between teachers' perceptions and their actual classroom practices when teaching poetry to ESL learners, with the notable exception of the Language-Based Approach. The Information-Based, Paraphrastic, Stylistic, Personal Response, and Moral-Philosophical Approaches demonstrated statistically significant associations between teachers' perceptions gathered through surveys and their observed classroom practices. This consistency indicates that teachers largely implement the methods they believe are effective for engaging students and facilitating the comprehension of poetic texts. However, the Language-Based Approach revealed a discrepancy, with teachers claiming its frequent use in surveys but demonstrating limited practical application during observations. This gap suggests several potential challenges, including the complexity of executing language-centric activities, insufficient training in language-focused pedagogies, or the absence of adequate instructional materials that support a linguistic analysis of poetry. Furthermore, this approach requires interactive, learner-centered activities like role-playing and detailed linguistic analysis, which might be difficult to incorporate in traditional classroom settings. The findings highlight the need for professional development initiatives to enhance teachers' competencies in using the Language-Based Approach and integrating it seamlessly into poetry instruction. Such efforts could foster a more balanced teaching strategy that not only focuses on content understanding but also develops students' linguistic competence. By bridging this gap, ESL learners may benefit from a more holistic and linguistically enriched

learning experience, ultimately improving their engagement with and appreciation of poetic text

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Article Information:

| | |
|------------------|-------------|
| <i>Received</i> | 2-Mar-2024 |
| <i>Revised</i> | 22-May-2024 |
| <i>Accepted</i> | 10-Jun-2024 |
| <i>Published</i> | 15-Jun-2024 |

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- **All authors Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions. Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

▪ **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

▪ **Funding Sources:** NIL

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