Challenges and Expectations in Reading English Poetry: A Study of Nepali Undergraduates

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Abstract

This study explores challenges faced by undergraduate students in reading English poetry in an ESL context. Nine purposively selected students from a community campus in Nepal were interviewed. Findings reveal major difficulties including poor reading habits, limited vocabulary, unfamiliar poetic devices, and lack of contextual understanding. These challenges were identified as linguistic, cultural, and cognitive. Participants expected teachers to provide explanations of context, clarify poetic devices, and create opportunities for aesthetic appreciation. The study emphasizes the importance of student-centered, interactive approaches to poetry instruction—encouraging deeper engagement through improved reading strategies, contextual interpretation, and poetic analysis.

Keywords: Challenges, expectations, implied meaning, poetry, reading habits

Background of the Study

Using literature in teaching English as a second language is a historically contested issue (Ebrahimi & Zainal, 2018; Regmi, 2022a). However, literature has been widely accepted as an important teaching-learning resource in English language curricula. The use of literature, particularly, poetry in English Language Teaching (ELT) courses is often contested because of the structural complexity of the poems, cultural remoteness, unfamiliar context, and limited time available for teaching and learning (Maley, 2001; Regmi, 2023). Poetry, one of the forms of literature, has often received the least priority, even if it is a part of English courses nowadays. It has been a less focused genre in language teaching courses.

Scholars have argued for using poetry as a potential resource for language teaching and learning because it is linguistically and culturally rich, motivating, authentic, and pleasant for the readers (Collie & Slater, 1987; Hall, 2005; Lazar, 1993). Literature, with the advent of the content language integrated teaching and learning, has a prominent place in the English language teaching syllabus today (Regmi, 2023). Using literature in language teaching includes various literary genres such as poetry, fiction, drama, and essay. Poetry in language classroom engages students in different activities, develops their reading comprehension, and fosters their communicative competence. Moreover, it promotes students' criticality and make them acquainted with multiple use of language patterns (Kilog et al., 2023). This article focuses the use of poetry as a teaching-learning material.

Although poetry has been included in English language courses, it is often regarded as a burden by teachers (Aladini & Farahbod, 2020; Maley & Duff, 1989; Rejina, 2021). Despite the potential of offering rich resources for language learning, the rearranged patterns of language, figurative meaning, cultural connotation, and contextual differences can pose additional challenges for second language learners (Lazar, 1993; Maley & Duff, 1989). The teaching of poetry has been often neglected in English as a second language classes because of the challenging nature of the poetry.

Researchers have studied poetry teaching in the ESL context in Nepal. Recent studies include teachers' strategies for teaching poetry at the secondary and undergraduate levels (Karki, 2021), teachers' reflections (Poudel, 2019; K.C, 2021). However, students' poetry reading challenges and their expectations in ESL classes have received little research attention. There is a need for research on students' perspectives on the challenges and expectations for engaging in poetry as part of ESL study.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purposes of this study were to explore the challenges faced by undergraduates in poetry reading and the kinds of support they expect from their teachers in colleges located in semi-urban areas in Nepal. This study has two research questions: What are the challenges faced by undergraduate students while reading English poetry? What types of support do they seek from their teachers while reading English poetry?

Review of the Related Literature

Reasons for Reading Poetry

Poetry exists in its own form and is written using stanzas. The prosodic features such as alliteration, rhyme, foot, and rhythm occur regularly in the metrical poems but they do not appear regularly in the free verse. In teaching learning, poetry is viewed as enjoyable material and is treated as an avenue for motivating learners (Edwards, 2014). In line with this view, Hall (2005, p. 48) concludes that poems are pleasurable, motivating and personalizing. In addition, reading poetry develops students' cultural awareness, interpretative skills along with providing them with memorable phrases for language learning. Likewise, poems are relatively shorter than fiction and drama in length. A single poem can be appropriate to read at a single attempt. The syntax of poetry offers students with opportunities to be acquainted with multiple models of language use. Lazar (1993) puts forward the argument that reading poems promotes students' engagement in different learning activities such as finding factual information, identifying the unusual language features, exploring the context, discussing different cultural issues exist in the text. The rearranged syntax and the use of figures of speech prevents teachers from using it for structural practice and communicative purposes. Maley and Duff (1989) suggest that reading poetry develops students understanding to the formal features of poetry, social and aphoristic issues, substantial information, and provides ample opportunities for their engagement to learning activities.

Knowledge and Skills Required for Reading Poetry

Poetry cannot be fully interpreted without understanding the style of poetry. Jago et al. (2011) argue that readers should be familiar with the style such as diction (denotation, connotation, formality), figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, paradox, irony), imagery, syntax (marked and inverted) and tone and mood. They suggest the additional considerations for reading poetry such as rhyme scheme, types such as free or metrical verse and form (sonnet, lyric, ode). The poem is more complex than other literary genres. Thus, reading poetry needs additional skills of the readers.

Poetry reading is a highly skilled and intellectual activity for the readers because they need to negotiate meanings by considering several elements at multiple levels. Roetzheim (2006) opines that poetry should be understood at four levels which are: denotative level, connotative level, deeper

level, and symbolic level. The denotative level focuses on the surface message of the text, the connotative level explores meaning with the help of word choice, imagery, and figures of speech. The deeper level explores the implied meaning that can be interpreted, assimilated relating with the life experiences of the readers. The complex structure of the poetry suggests that readers need to develop the appropriate set of skills for reading poetry.

Difficulties of Reading Poetry in ESL Context

Scholars have identified several challenges in reading poetry in the context of second language learning because not all poetry is instantly accessible to readers and often needs to be re-read (Maley & Duff, 1989; Mays, 2015; Sage, 1987). Vocabulary as well as other structural features can challenge learners. For example, Nishihara (2022) says that poems are difficult to read because of the use of the unmarked syntax. The language of poetry is different from the usual patterns because poetry "reorganizes syntax, invents its own vocabulary, freely mixes registers and creates its own punctuation… vivid new metaphors" (Lazar, 1993, p. 98). These features make poetry more difficult for second language learners, so teachers often hesitate to teach poetry, especially to learners with low language proficiency (Mart, 2021). Similarly, Ebrahimi and Zainal (2016) and Aladini and Farahbod (2020) argue that teaching poetry has become more challenging because teachers focus more on correctly interpreting the poem rather than unfolding the poetry reading strategies among readers. Besides this, the teachers in ESL/EFL context have negative attitude to the teaching and learning of poetry.

Maley and Duff (1989) have mentioned two extreme attitudes towards teaching poetry:' a rare flower," something to be admired but not to touch, and "a thorn in the flesh," a bothersome text that slows down teaching and learning. Sage (1987) states the assumption that poetry is a difficult text is unfounded. He further argues that poetry teaching is beneficial and worth overcoming the challenges because of poetry's educational, emotional, linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic values.

Suggestions for Teaching Poetry

Gönen (2018) proposes a six-step poetry teaching framework for teaching poetry to prospective teachers. The first four steps of the framework are relevant for teaching poetry. The first step of the framework is tune-in. In this step, teachers activate the prior knowledge of the readers by giving the background information and preparing them to explore the stylistic features of the text. The second step of the framework is basic comprehension. Various comprehension strategies are used to help readers understand the overall meaning of the text. The third step is detailed analysis in which the reader explores the poem's linguistic and poetic devices. The fourth step is cultivation in which the reader personalizes the meaning of the texts.

Review of Related Theories

Reading is a process of decoding the meaning of the written or printed text. Reading poetry is not a bookish task but it requires a skill to find out specific as well as general information. Reading poetry is even more challenging because of the extension of the texts' meaning by using figures of speech. Ebrahimi and Zainal (2018) have proposed Schema Theory, Reader Response Theory, and Transactional Theory for outlining strategies for reading poetry. Similarly, the Constructional Integration model can be used as a theoretical framework to negotiate the complexity of poetry reading by combining a top-down and a bottom-up approach.

Schema Theory

Schema theory proposes that comprehension of a text is guided by the mental framework (schema) readers have in their minds. This theory assumes a top-down approach to comprehension in which schema works as a regulating mechanism to process the relevant information and block irrelevant information (Kintsch, 1998). It fills the gap found in the input by inference from the preexisting schema.

Construction Integration Model

Kintsch (1998) proposed this model to overcome the limitation of the top-down comprehension model. Since this model emerged against schema theory, he criticized the top-down model for not accommodating human comprehension's stages in a regular flow from conceptualizing to interpreting. This model proposes the bottom-up model of reading comprehension, in which readers first focus on the smallest elements of the text and gradually progress to higher levels involving interpretation.

Reader's Response Theory

Rosenblatt (1994) argued that a literary text functions as a stimulus that draws the reader's attention and activates the reader's prior experiences. Similarly, the reader constructs a hypothesis that guides the selection, filter, and structure of the upcoming meaning of the text. Thus, a literary text such as a poem "presupposes a reader actively involved with text and refers to what s/he makes of his responses to the particular set of verbal symbols" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 12). Thus, the Reader's Response Theory assumes readers can determine the text's meaning.

Transactional Theory of Reading

Rosenblatt (1969) proposed the Transactional Theory of Reading. She argued that a reader does not consume a pre-codified message but instead is actively involved in reconstructing the poem from a given text. She further argues that readers constantly go back and forth between the lines of the poetry and reinterpret the earlier part of the poetry with the later part of the poetry for full comprehension. Full comprehension of the earlier part is possible only after reading the final part. This theory negates the existence of a fixed meaning in the text; instead, it gives equal importance to the text and reader for meaning making. It specifically assumes that the reader negotiates for the meaning and at a certain point s/he deciphers the meaning of the literary text (here poem) through transaction.

Social Constructivist Approach

The Social Constructivist Approach developed by Vygotsky assumes that the society and the interaction among the stakeholders is also the source of building knowledge. Jubran (2016) stated that knowledge is constructed through active participation in the learning process following the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Interaction with more knowledgeable others (MKO) facilitates learners to learn more. Thus, from Vygotskian theory, it can be inferred that readers benefit from interacting with more knowledgeable peers or teachers or with any support materials for assisting with understanding the poetry they read.

Empirical Findings

Peskin (1998) reported that expert students focus more on productive aspects of reading poetry, while novice students struggle to understand poetry. Řeřichová et al. (2014) found that feelings of success and a creative and friendly classroom environment support students to make challenging poetry more accessible. Nishihara (2022) found that lexically accessible poems might be challenging because of the deviated syntax of poems. In a systematic review, Papantoni and Anastasiadou (2023) found that using poetry contributes to significant vocabulary growth. Creely (2019) stated that newer pedagogy is needed to make poetry learning more engaging for students. Khatib (2011) and Aladini and Farahbod (2020) found that students learn poetry when they get opportunities to engage with poems to develop their own interpretation rather than memorize the interpretation given to them by their teachers.

The study of Sugandi (2015) explored the challenges of teaching poetry in EFL/ ESL classroom. The study reported that teachers and students should have to face the challenges, for example, the adoption of extra thinking to make the meaning of a poem, the use of complex language patterns, and students' negative attitude to the reading of poetry, and teachers' limited knowledge and confidence to the text of poetry. Islam (2022) affirmed that poems are stimulating, appealing and are used as authentic materials to teach language skills and elements through a series of interactive classroom activities. Likewise, the study of Joseph and Ali (2020) synthesized the advantages and disadvantages of using poetry in language classroom. It further reported that the challenges of teaching poetry are the low proficiency of students, teachers' use of inadequate and ineffective methods, and haphazardly chosen texts. Highlighting teachers' lack of skills for teaching poetry, the study of Moea (2021) reported that some teachers avoid teaching poetry because they are less confident in the contents of poetry, and they do not have adequate pedagogic skills of handling poetry in the ESL/ EFL context. Young (2016) found that many high school teachers do not have adequate background knowledge and pedagogical knowledge to teach poetry.

Gap in Literature

The use of literature in teaching English as a second language has been studied by several Nepali scholars (Regmi, 2022a, 2022 b). However, they mostly focus on teaching literature in general without explicitly referencing to reading poetry. The researchers such as Sugandi (2015); Syed and Wahas (2020) have studied about the challenges faced by teachers in teaching poetry in EFL/ ESL context. Some of the aforementioned studies have focused teachers' strategies for teaching poetry at the secondary and undergraduate levels (Karki, 2021). There are some articles with teachers' reflections on poetry teaching and learning (Poudel, 2019; K.C, 2021). Other scholars studied the reasons and techniques for using literature in ESL classes (Regmi, 2023). They all showed that poetry has been widely used in language teaching courses but the status of poetry in language teaching is still unsatisfactory. The available literature does not explicitly address the challenges of poetry reading among undergraduate ESL learners in Nepal and their expectations in poetry classes. Accordingly, this study is an attempt to fulfil this gap.

Methods

Research Design

This exploratory study used a qualitative case study approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain comprehensive data on participants' practices and expectations of reading poetry.

Participants

Nine purposively selected students from the B. Ed and B.A programs participated in this study. Major subjects, programs, English proficiency, and genders of the participants were used as the criteria for participants' selection.

Table 1

Profile of the Participant

S. No	Participants	Gender	Age	Subjects	Program	Year
1	Nabina	Female	23	English	B.Ed.	Fourth
2	Bhabana	Female	22	English	B. Ed	Second
3	Diya	Female	22	English	B.Ed.	Second
4	Bina	Female	21	English	B.Ed.	Second
5	Rita	Female	21	English	B.Ed.	Second
6	Maya	Female	22	English	B.A	Third
7	Tina	Female	21	Sociology	BA	Third
8	Dipak	Male	22	English	B. Ed	Second
9	Asmit	Male	23	English	B. Ed	Second

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face to collect in-depth data from the participants. The participants were invited to voluntarily participate in the study after assuring their privacy and right to withdraw from the study. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. The participants used both English and Nepali languages in the interviews. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed by following the six steps suggested by Braun et al. (2019). The transcripts were reread and coded. The codes were grouped to generate themes. The themes were revised to ensure they included the meaning expressed by the participants. NVivo 10 was used to organize the transcript of semi-structured interviews and analyze them more systematically.

Findings of the Study

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis: challenges experienced by the undergraduates in reading poetry and their expectations in teaching-learning.

Challenges Experienced by Undergraduates in Reading English Poetry

Five subthemes emerged under challenges experienced by undergraduates while reading English poetry. These subthemes are developing poetry reading habits, difficulty in understanding the context of the poetry, inadequate knowledge of poetic devices, insufficient vocabulary, and inadequate knowledge of poetic syntax

Developing Poetry Reading Habits

Participants' comments in the interview reflected that they did not have an interest in reading English

poetry. They preferred to read English short stories or English drama instead of English poetry. The participants spent little time in reading English poetry. The majority of them admitted that they did not read any English poetry on their own. The following comments from the participants show their poor poetry reading habits.

I do not have an interest in reading them. They do not have immediate practical values. They are challenging to read (Diya).

I have not read poetry which is not included in the course books. But I sometimes read poems that are included in the novel. (Nabina)

No, I do not read any English poems which are not given in the courses.

I do not read English poetry before the teachers teach us, but I read Nepali poetry for enjoyment. (Bina)

I do not read poetry before the teacher teaches because I do not find poetry reading enjoyable. I read when the poems are taught in the class. (Rita)

I do not read poems which are not included in the courses. (Maya)

The participants' comments indicated their lack of interest in reading English poetry as they did not have the habit of reading poetry in their daily lives. They just studied the poems that were included in the course when their teacher taught them in class.

Difficulty in Understanding Context

In the interviews, participants revealed their difficulty in understanding the historical, cultural, and literary contexts in which English poems were composed. They shared that their lack of understanding of the context hindered their ability to fully comprehend the meaning and significance of the poems. They admitted they had difficulty in contextualizing English poetry. During the interviews, the participants expressed their inability to comprehend the context of English poetry.

I enjoy Nepali poetry, but I do not enjoy English poetry because Nepali poems are easier to understand, and I love the musical quality of these poems. However, English poems are difficult to read and understand. (Bhabana).

I can understand the metaphors and similes used in the Nepali language because they are based on our context, but English poetry is difficult because I cannot understand some vocabulary used in the poem. It is difficult to relate the context of the poetry. (Nabina)

Similarly, it is difficult to understand the context in which the poetry is written. (Bina)

Understanding the context of poetry is essential for deciphering its meaning. However, the comments of the participants showed that understanding the context of English poetry is a challenge.

Inadequate Knowledge of Poetic Devices

Poetry is a compact form of writing in which the poet uses various poetic devices to make the message more expressive. The participants struggled to move beyond the literal meaning of the poems. Only one participant admitted that she had some knowledge of poetic devices.

I know metaphor which is the way of comparing things. I am a bit confused about the simile. It is used for showing similarity. Rhyme and rhythm are about the musical quality of the poetry. (Nabina)

However, the other participants struggled with identifying and understanding the use of various poetic devices such as imagery, metaphor, simile, and symbolism in a poem. This lack of familiarity with poetic techniques impeded their interpretation and appreciation of poetry.

I have little knowledge about the poetic devices used by the poet. I am confused about how and why poets use these devices (Bhabana).

I do not know those terms. I know rhyme and rhythm only (Bina)

I have little knowledge of rhyme and rhythm but not of simile and metaphor (Rita)

I have little knowledge of rhyme and rhythm but not of simile and metaphor. (Tina)

The participants' voices indicated that they did not have adequate knowledge of the figure of speech the poets use to make poetry more expressive. This indicated that it was difficult for the participants to go beyond the literal meaning of the poetry to explore deeper or the implied meaning of the poetry to fully explore it.

Insufficient Vocabulary

All the participants agreed that insufficient vocabulary was a major barrier to their understanding complex meaning of English poetry. They shared that the use of less common vocabulary hindered their ability to discern shades of meaning and appreciate the richness of poetic language. Their limited vocabulary challenged them to understand the figurative meaning of the poetry.

English poetry is difficult because I cannot understand some vocabulary used in the poem. It is difficult to relate the context of the poetry. (Nabina).

I find poetry difficult because I cannot find the exact meaning of the poetry. The vocabulary used in the poetry might have multiple meanings, and I cannot find its exact meaning. (Bhavana).

They are short but the vocabulary has ambiguous (double) meanings. (Diya).

I find poetry more challenging to read because the meanings are indirectly expressed in the poetry. (Rita)

I can explore the meaning of some easier poems. However, I cannot explore the meaning of some texts because they have difficult vocabulary. (Tina).

The participants had trouble reading poetry because they did not have adequate vocabulary to decipher the meaning of poems. Their comments showed that without developing a good vocabulary, and without understanding the nuances typically in poems, it is challenging to fully appreciate poetry.

Inadequate Knowledge of Poetic Syntax

Many participants found the syntax of English poetry challenging, particularly the unusual word order commonly employed by poets. This difficulty in navigating poetic syntax hindered their comprehension and interpretation of poems. In the interviews, they shared that they had difficulty in understanding the sentence structure of the poetry.

I find English poetry quite difficult. The language is much more figurative. There are deviated syntaxes. A sentence runs into another line. (Tina).

The poet uses distinct types of vocabulary and syntax in the text (Rita).

Short stories are easier for me than poetry because short stories have normal syntax, but poetry has deviated syntax. They usually have short lines with incomplete sentences. (Bina).

The poetry does not have normal syntax because the poet attempts to follow a rhyme pattern. Poetry also has incomplete sentences. (Diya).

The comments from the participants indicated that the participants had difficulty reading the poetry because of the poet's creative use of word order and the arrangement of the lines in the poems for different aesthetic purposes. Other genres of literature occasionally use deviated syntax; poets extensively use deviated syntax. Lack of habit of reading poetry makes it difficult to read the poems because of their little experience of reading poetry.

Expectations of Undergraduates in Poetry Classes

Three subthemes were derived from analyzing the participants' expectations from their teachers while teaching poetry. They are teaching the context of the poems and explaining the vocabulary, providing explicit instructions of the poetic devices used in the poem, and drawing attention to the aesthetics of the poems through recitations in the class.

Explanation of Context of Poems and Vocabulary

Students emphasized the significance of understanding the historical and cultural context surrounding poems. They suggested that teachers need to provide background information about the poet, the era in which the poem was written, and any relevant socio-political factors that provide them with sufficient background knowledge for understanding the context of the poetry.

I think the poetry written in our context will be easier than written in entirely different contexts. Reading poetry would be easier for us if we could select a text that has a simple and unambiguous vocabulary. The teacher needs to translate the unfamiliar vocabulary into Nepali so that it would be easier for us to understand. If direct translation is not possible, sense translation will help us to understand the text. (Bhabana).

It is difficult to understand the context of the poems. If I find a picture given in the poem. It will be easier to understand the poem. Otherwise, it is difficult to identify the context of the poem. The vocabulary given in the poetry is challenging to decipher because the poet uses a wide range of vocabulary. I find it easier to understand Nepali poems because Nepali is my mother tongue. So, I can understand the meaning of larger vocabulary. English is not our Native language (Asmit).

The teacher needs to translate into Nepali so that it would be easier for us to understand. If direct translation is not possible, sense translation will help us to understand the text (Diya).

The participants' comments reflected that they could not decipher the meaning of the poetry without focusing on teaching of the vocabulary.

Explicit Instruction of Poetic Devices

Participants emphasized the importance of explicit instruction of poetic devices such as metaphor, simile, imagery, and symbol. They admitted that they were unable to explore the poetry's deeper meaning because of their lack of knowledge of poetic devices used by the poet to express the nuances of different meanings. Most of the participants were familiar with rhymes and rhythms and were less

confident about how similes and metaphors function in poems.

Although we have poetry lessons, the teacher focuses on learning the summary rather than going to the details. So, I do not have the skills to explore the deeper meaning. The teachers need to teach the ways of exploring the meaning of figurative language and the various poetic devices used by the poet (Dipak).

I wish the teacher taught us more tools to analyze poetry (Tina).

The participants' comments showed that the teachers were not teaching them sufficient knowledge and skills needed to explore the deeper meaning of poetry. They were preparing the students for exam without encouraging them to fully understand the details of the poetic device employed by the poets.

Opportunities for Reciting the Poetry in the Class

The participants were dissatisfied with poetry teaching in their classes because they could not enjoy the poetry recitation as they enjoyed in lower classes. They felt that poetry teaching at their undergraduate classes had become uninspiring activities of note taking and summarizing for securing marks in the exam. Students emphasized the importance of cultivating a positive attitude towards poetry recitation. They suggested that educators incorporate activities that foster confidence and creativity in the oral delivery of poems, such as dramatic readings and poetry performance sessions in the class.

I wish the teacher focused not only on the meaning and recitation of the poem with the rhythm and rhymes. It will help us to remember the poetry and understand it. I wish the poetry lesson would be more enjoyable. I wish teachers would make the poetry class more enjoyable by focusing on the aesthetic property of the poetry not only the meaning of the poetry. (Nabina)

I understand that teachers have individual styles. But I suggest the college teacher ask the students to read the poem in the class. They need to read the poem as a recitation model themselves because reading poetry is also an important skill. After the model recitation, the teacher must describe the poem's sentence pattern so that students learn how they are arranged in a poem (Diya).

Participants expressed that they had a desire for opportunities to explore distinctive styles of recitation and experiment with voice modulation, gestures, and facial expressions to convey the poem's mood and tone effectively.

Discussion

Poetry is widely used as an important language-learning resource in ELT courses. The purpose of this study was to investigate how a sample of nine undergraduate students in Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts programmes at a community campus in a rural area of Nepal experienced English poetry reading for their language development. The next purpose of the study was to explore the kind of support they expected from their teachers in teaching-learning of English poetry in the class. Two research questions provided the focus for the study. The first research question was: what are the challenges faced by undergraduate students while reading English poetry? And the second was: what types of support do students seek from their teachers when studying English poetry?

The results showed that participants faced multifaceted challenges while reading poetry for English language development. The major challenges include reading habits development, inability to understand the context of the poem and the meaning of the vocabulary used in poems, inability to identify poetic devices used by the poet to explore the deeper meaning of a poem and untangling the deviated syntax of poems. Most of the students study in rural schools/ colleges which often lack a good academic environment. So, they do not develop regular reading habits. Besides, most of the poems included in the courses are from foreign contexts, as a result, the students have difficulty understanding the context. One example of the poems included in the General English course for B.Ed. is "Composed upon Westminster Bridge." This poem is written in the context of nineteenth century England, and another is "Do Not Say" which is written in the Malaysian context with several Malaysian words. Without understanding the context, students cannot understand the text. The poems have sophisticated language because of less common vocabulary, use of the figures of speech, and rearranged syntax.

The challenges faced by the participants of these studies are not unique because the studies conducted in other countries have reported similar challenges. The finding of this study is consistent with that of Syed and Wahas (2020) who reported that ESL students in Yemen face challenges because of low English language proficiency, traditional teaching methods, and text selection for teaching learning. The poetry teaching situations in Nepal and Yemen are similar because many students come to the university from rural areas. There is a similar gap between school-level and university curricula in both countries. The students feel deep dissatisfaction as they become unable to decipher the meaning of the culturally distant and stylistically complex text of the poetry.

Regarding the second research question, the participants suggested that teachers need to not only provide them with the summary of the poems but also empower them to explore and interpret their meanings by teaching them to understand the context, figurative meaning, deviated syntax, and a wide range of poetic devices used by the poets. Moreover, they suggested that teachers need to provide them opportunities not only to explore the meaning of poems but also to enjoy the aesthetics of poems by reciting them in class. Thus, the traditional poetry teaching method is another challenge for the learners. Teachers tend to focus more on providing exam-oriented readymade explanations and students are happy to copy the summary provided by the teachers. Such practice limits students' opportunity to explore poetry. As a result, the students become passive learners and they are not given the opportunities to develop an appreciation of poetry. This finding aligns with recent findings by Syed and Wahas (2020) in Yeman who reported that university teachers use traditional teaching methods in teaching poetry by providing readymade explanations which hinder the students' active learning. This finding also resonates with the earlier finding by Khatib (2011) who reported that students do not find the traditional approach of teaching poetry engaging. He suggested a new approach to teaching poetry which allows the readers to experiment with the multiple meanings of the text based on their experiences.

The problem of university-level students reading poetry can be attributed to their experiences of reading poems in high school. The students' lack of interest in reading poetry can be related to the teachers' inadequate preparation to teach poetry in high school classes. Scholars have reported that teachers lack good skills to teach poetry and suffer from negative attitudes toward teaching poetry both in developing and developed countries (Moea, 2021; Young, 2016). Similarly, the challenges faced by students in reading poems can be attributed to the pedagogical practices which fail to take a broader look at poetry teaching as suggested by Gönen (2018).

Different theories provide guidelines for teaching poetry. For example, readers' response theory highlights the role of readers in reading poems and comes with the meaning of the poem (Rosenblatt,

1994). Similarly, transactional theory addresses the importance of active learning. Schema theory suggests that teachers need to activate the preexisting schema of the readers and Social Constructionist theory suggests that interaction with the stakeholders supports learning (Jubran, 2016). However, the participants of this study depended on their teacher for understanding the meaning of the poems they read. This indicates that the teachers do not encourage the active exploration of the meaning in the existing pedagogical practices and minimize the active roles of the students. The uncritical acceptance of meaning explained by the teachers in the class minimizes the students' roles and inhibits their joy of reading poems.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be argued that teachers' exam-orientated pedagogy and low expectations from their students in teaching activities are responsible for making poetry teaching mechanical. Students cannot fully benefit from poetry unless teachers set high expectations for students and engage them in a wide range of learning activities utilizing the richness of poetry to enhance learning.

This study was an attempt to contribute to literature pedagogy by exploring the practices and expectations of undergraduate students in reading English poetry. The findings are significant because teachers cannot use effective teaching strategies unless they address the students' challenges and meet their expectations of teachers. Similarly, they can identify areas to focus on in teaching poetry and can design context-specific activities for teaching by identifying the challenges students encounter while reading English poems.

Implications of the Study

We can draw several implications from this study. Since students have poor habits of reading English poems, teachers need to focus on developing good reading habits by selecting appropriate text to arouse the interest of the students and to make poetry more accessible. For this, students can form poetry reading circle among them and have additional practices of reading poetry. Poetry text needs to be higher than the current level of the learners. But if texts are too difficult, students may become demotivated; if they are too easy, they might feel bored. Teachers also need to teach poetic devices to fully identify the deeper meaning of poems. Additionally, teachers need to teach ways of identifying the meaning of poems by understanding the context of the poems and the poet's background. Reading poetry is not only an intellectual exercise but also one for enjoyment. So, teachers need to allocate some time for poetry performances in class to encourage students to learn about the aesthetic elements of poems. Likewise, teachers should encourage students to consult with the reference materials/sources of related poems so that students can be facilitated and feel comfortable in reading poetry in classroom.

Limitations

This research was conducted as an exploratory study at a community campus by taking a sample of nine undergraduate students from the faculty of education and the faculty of humanities. The sample did not have a balance of female and male participants in the study because the female students outnumbered the male students at the research site. The first-year students were not included in the study and data were collected from semi-structured interviews only. Including students from different faculties and adding data from the class observations would help produce more detailed information about poetry teaching and learning practices. Further studies can analyze students' poetry teaching strategies by collecting data from class observations and surveys along with interviews.

Conclusion

Teaching poetry has been an indispensable part of English as a Second Language programs throughout the world. Several university-level programs have included poetry in the English curriculum. However, poetry teaching receives inadequate attention among teachers. Teachers tend to follow traditional lecture-based instruction which is seldom adequate for exploring the richness inherent in most poems. As a result, students have limited interest in reading poems. Teaching activities should be re-designed in order to provide students with better skills for reading, understanding, and enjoying poetry. Students' parts in text selection, text exploration, and discussion should be reevaluated to make poetry teaching more engaging.

English teachers can gain deeper insights into the challenges of English poetry reading and their students' expectations of poetry teaching. The findings of the present study contribute to teachers designing appropriate teaching and learning activities and materials, identifying areas for further research, and providing insights to course developers for selecting appropriate poetry texts for undergraduates.

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