

Recitation of an English Verse in Rupandehi: Myth and Facts

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Abstract

The study examines the teachers' perspective in reciting English-versified poetry in the context of Nepal. It aims to identify how EFL teachers face the challenges in recitation. Thus, the study explored how and why recitation is a challenging task. This study was conducted under an interpretive paradigm. Similarly, this study's phenomenological methodology has been followed in qualitative research design. Likewise, ten participants were English teachers from government and private schools in the Rupandehi district of Nepal. Semi-structured interviews were used. This study suggested the necessity of prosody and sufficient information about feet, meter, rhyme, rhythm, caesura, and tempo in recitation. The major findings of the study highlight that linguistic complexity and cultural sensitivity created the problem in the rhythmical recitation. Similarly, the present study suggests applying the multimodality method to the recitation act

Keywords- Caesura, interpretive, meter, multimodality, prosody, tempo, rhythm,

Introduction

Poetry demands the artistic touch to decipher the aesthetics of language embedded in the poetry. The literature on English as a foreign language seems to have been challenging (Paudyal, 2020). In Nepal, English and its literature are compulsory and optional for beginners to university-level education. However, the literature on a foreign language has only been a showpiece. The narrative of Rana (2018) reflects that there is no clear-cut space and concrete policy for the English language in the context of Nepal. English has been taught in Nepal as a foreign language and to deal with the aesthetics of language has been a conundrum to English teachers. Most teachers were untrained, unqualified, and incompetent to teach English (Phyak, 2016, p. 204).

There are various genres of literature such as drama, essays, fiction, and story, where poetry is one of them, a verbal art (Pokharel, 2020) and it has been a challenge because of the aesthetic value entailed in the versified poetry (Aldridge, 2019). Similarly, teaching approaches of versified poetry for foreign languages suffer a lot from marginalizing the literature in foreign language curricula (Sigvardsson, 2020) However, the language of poetry incites the learners to acquire the language (Farrah & AL-Bakri, 2022).

Among different genres of literature, poetry is a recitative art (Sapkota, 2020) in which human language is used for its aesthetic qualities in addition to, or instead of, its notional and semantic content. Similarly, it consists of oral or literary works in which language is used in a manner that is felt by its user and audience to differ

from ordinary prose due to metrical patterns (Pokharel, 2020). Indeed, it is gone through and the message is also penetrated but the sound effect should not be underestimated because of its nature and characteristics (Killander, 2011). Thus, this study has explored the perceived experiences of teachers while teaching English-versified poetry in EFL classes. Similarly, it also discloses the challenging factors while dealing with the aesthetic of the poems.

This study focuses on the researcher's own experience in choosing the topic concerning versified poetry reciting activities. Likewise, how the situation has been developed to meet the objective of my research gets a space for explanation. Additionally, it has included poetry teaching practices and strategies in English language teaching activities, about the pedagogic scenario. Likewise, this study has explored the teacher's perceptions of recitation activities. However, teachers revealed that poetry recitation was challenging regardless of perseverance in making students understand the verses.

Past and Present Scenario of Recitation

Beyond the long history of poetry remarked by (Saintsbury, 1913), there was a role of rhythmicity and musicality in poetry because of pneumonic features and it has a stimulant capacity that boosts the competency of the learners. However, as a second and foreign language teacher, teaching verses in a foreign language is challenging because of the lack of appropriate poetry teaching methodology (Mood, 2018).

English literature is taught as a foreign language. However, it has been a debatable issue among educationists whether English is a second or foreign language in Nepal (Shrestha, 2008). English verse is taught from only an exam point of view. Moreover, English is taught as a foreign language and teachers feel fear of reciting poetry metrically based on stressed and unstressed sounds because of its rhythmical nature (Khaleghi et al., 2020). Importantly, there is not any extensive study of English Language Teaching (ELT) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to address the existing problems of English learning in Nepal so that versified poetry could be addressed aptly (Shrestha, 2008). Versified poetry encompasses elliptical dictions with aesthetic varieties which create challenges while dealing with the poetry.

Literature Review

Poetry is an oral art that demands recitation but recitation seems challenging to the L2 language teachers. Therefore, poetry seems to be teaching without following the prosody. L2 language teachers face challenges in depending on the principles of recitation due to insufficient linguistic competency.

Poetry can be bifurcated into verse and non-verse (Fowler & Fowler, 1931). The word "Poetry" stems from the Latin word 'poema' which comes from the Greek

word ‘poēma’ meaning ‘make’ which is considered difficult and peripheral to ELT curricula or L2 teacher education (Boldireff & Bober, 2022). Sigvardsson (2020) reported that poetry is a key element of many literature curricula around the world. The teaching of poetry to EFL students has always been challenging because of the literature of foreign languages (Khatib, 2011). The use of literature within English as a second or foreign language has a long history (Hanauer, 2001). Versified poetry has the longest history in the Eastern and Western literary traditions. It rests on meter and syllables developed from oral tradition (Beum & Shapiro, 2006).

Similarly, poetry is an oral art that demands multiple approaches and strategies to be familiar and to make it familiar to the students (Pokharel, 2020). It encompasses musical quality in the lines and these lines need to be performed rhythmically because of their acoustic aestheticism (Cuddon, 2012) Poetry seems to have been developed from the oral tradition which rests on the rhythmicity of the lines of poetry which often plays with sound and images (Certo et al., 2012). This oral tradition has years of history and the history of versified poetry based on prosody (Saintsbury, 1913). Smith (2015) argued that poetry possesses aesthetic dimensions which make it difficult to penetrate. Among aesthetic qualities, the meter is the indispensable element for the versification of poetry (Adams, 1997).

In versified poetry, the identification of stressed and unstressed syllables plays a pivotal role. Alden et al. (1924) drew the attention of the learners to the stressed and unstressed sounds of the poetry. They mentioned that breve (-) and macron (U) were used to indicate accentuated and un-accentuated syllables in some books and similarly, a small cross (x) for an unstressed syllable, and a stroke (/) for a stressed syllable seemed to denote the syllables in some books. In English literature, there are six dominant feet that have been used mostly in English versified poetry tradition. In addition, while teaching versified poetry the teachers should know about six feet in poetry to teach English versified poetry. Regarding this, Ferguson et al. (2018) noticed that six feet are dominantly used to compose versified poetry. Among six feet, Beum and Shapiro (2006) mentioned that in English versified poetry tradition, di-syllabic feet seemed to have been used. As per Ferguson et al. (2018), they are as follows:

Table 1

Di-syllabic and tri-syllabic feet used in English poetry tradition

Foot	Syllables
Iamb (Two syllabics)	unstressed-stressed
Trochee (Two syllabics)	stressed-stressed
Spondee (Disyllabics)	stressed-stressed
Pyrrhic (Disyllabics)	unstressed-unstressed
Dactyl (Trisyllabics)	stressed-unstressed-unstressed
Aanapestic (Trisyllabics)	unstressed-unstressed-unstressed

Morley (2007) focused on the importance of rhythm which is found at the time of recitation. He pointed out that a rhythm is made of beats that depend on metrical patterns. Moreover, rhythm is the living soul of the verses (Poudel, 2021). Verified poetry has its rhythm and in the lack of it, versified poetry becomes no more poetry. It becomes just a piece of prose. Rhythm is produced based on foot and meter. A meter is a recurrence, in regular units (Howard, 1999). As claimed by Thornborrow and Wareing (1998) meter, rhyme, and sound patterning need to be taken into consideration while dealing with poetry. In addition, the meter is the recurrence, in regular units, of a prominent feature in the sequence of speech sounds of a language (Moran, 1999). Rhythm emerges from listening to the music of language (Morley, 2007). Rhythm pertains to music. Lennard (2006) valued the linguistic aspect of rhyme. Similarly, music and poetry have always been closely linked and English verse has its own music system (O'Donnell, 1995)

Throughout most of its long history, poetry is a performative art that is presented rhythmically (Menninghaus et al., 2018). As a recitative art, it has an auditory effect (Pokharel, 2020). In addition, he emphasized that if versified poetry is not sung, its acoustic aesthetic is not displayed. Acoustic beauty is exposed only after recitation, however, recitation is a complicated task for a foreign language teacher (Zeiss, 2004). Among English as a foreign language literature, poetry has the highest aesthetic value. Therefore, it has been removed from foreign language curricula (Khatib, 2011).

The lines of versified poetry are full of rhyme and if it is not performed orally in a rhythmical way, it becomes unmelodic. To recite it rhythmically and natively is impossible because of the foreign language, and lack of tradition of recitation in Nepal, and the lack of sufficient information on prosody (Blohm et al., 2022). Prosody is related to music and the meter is a science as well as an art, which is scientifically arranged. Hollander (1956) contended that there is an amalgamation between music and poetry. The music of the song and the Music of poetry play a therapeutic role in the distracted and rickety minds of the learners (Marcuse, 1990). A case study done by Lehmann and Klempe (2017) entitled “The Tune without the Words”: Dickinson’s Verses in a Jazz Ensemble-A Case Study on the Poetics of Music and the Musicality of Poetry”-remarked that verses have musical quality and need to be dealt with artistically. In comparison to prosaic poetry, versified poetry has its structural aesthetic which demands a bundle of knowledge to taste the flavor of versified poetry (Lehmann & Klempe, 2017). As an English foreign language, it is often a challenging task, because, poetry consists of structural complexities which create problems (K.C., 2021).

Research carried through under the title “A Study on Teaching Poetry in Higher Secondary Level” in Udyapur district concluded that poetry teachers are teaching only vocabulary from the poems describing the title and explaining the pictures used in the poems (Timsina, 2007). Similarly, research carried out in Sunsari and

Morang districts under the title of “Teachers’ Practice of Using Different Activities for Teaching Poetry” noticed that 83% of teachers only give a summary and the central ideas of the poems (Bishnu, 2016). Similarly, the research done in Secondary Schools in Dang, Nepal, findings suggest that time constraints and mechanic exam pressure make verse classes less effective (Pokharel, 2020). Similarly, Pourkalhor and Tavakoli (2017) noticed that students found interest in singing poems to develop linguistic competency.

Many foreign language learners do not follow this rhythmic perception due to the lack of input as well as output in the target language due to a lack of prosodic knowledge, verse poetry is taught only for language purposes focusing on the exam (Adhikari, 2008; Neupane, 2010; Phudyal, 2010; Pangeni, 2014). Their findings suggested that teachers need to be trained in how to approach poetry. The above arguments and the discussions resonate with the context of my study because they focus on the aesthetic beauty of the poetry. These studies seem to have been focused on only the aesthetic quality of the verses. I have realized that recitation activities regarding versified poetry teaching phenomena in the context of Nepal is an under-researched area and there is relatively little published research. This identifies a gap that requires further study.

Methodology

This study was accomplished using qualitative research design which studied the people’s feelings, opinions, experiences, and complexities in the various areas of life related to my research problem. The qualitative approach focused on the qualities of human beings or participants’ experience and understanding to explore the challenges and problems while reciting English verses (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Therefore, in this qualitative research design, teachers’ experiences of verse recitation and understanding were asked.

In this study, Phenomenology is the methodology in which as a researcher, I attempted to know the lived experiences of the teachers about dealing with versified poetry. More specifically, it is the phenomenological methodology in which teachers’ live experiences are shared (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). However, the research method and methodology seem used interchangeably. It is the theory of how the research will be undertaken (Mayer, 2015). Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) viewed the methodology as the overall approach to the research paradigm or theoretical framework and the phenomenological method has guided me to achieve the objectives of this study.

Finlay (2011) pointed out that there are Edmund Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and Martin Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology. In this study, I applied hermeneutic phenomenology. I focused on the versified poetry teaching experiences of English foreign language teachers. In this research, different experiences of the English-versified poetry teachers’ experience and the

challenges are explored. Challenges may be different and their perception may be divergent. Therefore, the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge, values, techniques, and the way of writing are under both approaches qualitative method and interpretative data analysis along with constructivist world views will be applied in which meaning is constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Subjective interpretation and multiple truths with value-laden axiology were the determining factors of this research. Thus, the ontological position of my study was to explore the teachers' difficulties in teaching versified poetry resting on relativist ontology.

Since this study was a phenomenological research followed by an interpretive paradigm, I gathered the multifaceted ideas of the teachers in a real context and I also prioritized the participants' feelings as well. I have studied that the nature of reality is contextual and subjective. In this regard, I collected many experiences through in-depth interviews, observations, and interactions to my research questions. In this regard, I collected many experiences through in-depth interviews, observations, and interactions to my research questions.

Table.2

Participants Demographics

Pseudo Name	School	Age	Gender	Experience
A	Rupandehi School	29	M	3
B	Durga Devi School	43	M	13
C	Kotihawa Sec. School	27	M	1
D	Manigram Sec. School	34	M	9
E	Mainahiya Sec. School	41	F	17
F	Shining Star Sec. School	39	M	16
G	Gyandeeep Sec. School	37	M	10
H	Aadarsha Sec. School	26	M	2
I	Tamnagar Sec. School	53	F	21
J	Bhairahawa Sec. School	49	M	19

Findings

There were hitches and hurdles in the path of poetry teaching and learning activities in Nepal to teach literature in the classrooms as a Nepali foreign language or L2 teacher. This complication was neither because of the necessity of the theory of "native-speakerism" (Holliday, 2006, p. 385) nor because of the English language itself but because of linguistic incompetency and lack of profound knowledge about prosody.

I have no idea about recitation. I don't think it is possible to recite in a second language. My accent sounds not so good and I can't recite verses. (A)

I have never tried to recite poetry as you are asking. I do not have any idea what to recite. I heard the first time that English poems are recited by Nepali teachers (B)

Participants revealed that they heard the word “recitation” for the first time and they expressed that they were unaware of the structural beauty of the versified poetry. Therefore, they taught only focusing on the message of the poem. Reading in rhythm is directly associated with an accent. Himal’s narrative aligns with the finding of Koirala (2021) which articulates that in the course of language acquisition, second language teachers are facing the accent problem.

I don’t see any information about recitation in the curriculum. How to recite I don’t know. If I try to recite it becomes so funny. I read applying my way. (C)

I taught how I was taught at my colleges and reading rhythmically is tough for us because of our accents. As an L2 language teacher, I focused on only content not recitation. (D)

As reported by the participants, they faced a problem with recitation. They taught the way they were taught at colleges and universities. Similarly, they explored that they tried to keep rhythm in the verses but found a great challenge. As a result, the aesthetic quality of poetry has been marginalized on the one hand and the learning English language has been bandwagon on the other. The participant's accounts align with the findings of Koirala (2021) who reports, “We are on the way to developing ‘our English’ i.e. “Nenglish” or “Nepanglish”(Koirala, 2021, pp. 1-18). This development has unknowingly created challenges in the arena of English poetry teaching classes.

Poetry teaching activities, Like Nepali teachers the way they run the versified poetry teaching classes, I can’t run because of my accent and lacking profound crafts in it. Though I try I can’t recite because it sounds unmelodic. (E)

I have never practiced it to recite. I simply read poems. I don’t know the way to recite poems in rhythm because of our culture. I belong to Madhesi culture and sing poems, I like to recite but I find it challenging (F)

Their experiences illustrate that the L1 language accent created challenges because they could not recite or sing the poems because of the tone. Similarly, they seem to have an interest in reciting but due to the problems of accent, they couldn’t recite. They revealed that there is a cultural barricade in the field of language acquisition which is adversely affected by the accent of L1 language speakers. Their arguments are, at some level, consistent with (Tedick & Walker, 1994) that the acquisition of a second language and culture seems unrelated to the L1 language speakers” (Tedick & Walker, 1994, pp. 1-15). Therefore, recitation seems a problematic task that is adversely influenced by cultural sensitivity. Besides, for the recitation, a reciter needs to have a bundle of knowledge about prosody.

I am unaware of chhanda and laya and it creates challenges in identifying sound patterns. As an English teacher, I have been facing accent problems in my recitation skills. I read “Tyger” poem at my discretion. (G)

I don't go in deep. I just read to make poems understand the poems. I don't think it is necessary and I don't have any idea about chaanda and laya. The poem "Tyger" I read as I read other lessons. I find problems in reading poems in comparison to other lesions (H)

The abovementioned utterances noticed that they faced challenges in identifying the prosodic features while teaching versified poetry. In assent with them, they were unknown about feet and meters. According to them, they attempted to recite the poem "Tiger" but they faced a problem because of the prosodic feature. However, the participant did their best to recite poetry off his own bat. Moreover, they voiced that they taught the "Tyger" poem without basing it on the prosody because of a lack of sufficient information concerning *Chanda* or meter.

Poetry has its approach to be dealt with effectively, such as the poetry box method (Aaron et al., 2021). However, teachers seem to teach English-versified poetry the way they learned at the university level. One of the participants, shared the experience while teaching English poetry, presented here:

I generally emphasize the thematic aspects of the poems and give the background of the poems so that students can understand the general summary of the poem and deal with questions asked in the exams. (I)

Above-stated expression reflected that she couldn't handle the poetry classes lacking up-to-date about the emerging approaches. Similarly, she expressed her experiences that she was deprived of poetry teaching material. Moreover, she practiced the way they were instructed in the training or pedagogical seminars. According to her, the poetry classes that she was teaching seemed to be applying the conventional method of teaching just centralizing on the content. The term "traditional or conventional teaching" relies mainly on a method that utilizes textbooks, lecture notes, memorization, and recitation techniques. In this method of teaching, facilitators become all in all in the classes, and students are expected to be seated in a tranquil position.

I'm from the Madhesi community and I have a problem with the Nepali language but my students prefer the Nepali language in the classes. When I translate poems from English to Nepali my Nepali language doesn't sound good and students chuckle and giggle. (J)

The aforementioned narrative reflects that he found challenges in decoding the cultural meaning the poetry carries on the one hand he is from Madhesi culture and there is a problem reciting and making the students understand the literature of the English language. His accounts, at some level, echo Syed and Wahas (2020) who highlighted, "Moreover, poetry is one of the most useful transmitters of cultural knowledge of different nations (p.190)." However, the inadequacy of multilingual awareness, and teaching poetry has been a threat at present.

I have not seen and found anyone interested in reciting and neither do I because of prevailing practices in the academic institutions of Nepal. (A)

As revealed by the participant, the pedagogical practices that were applied in the EFL were not satisfactory. As explored by her she taught the poems only for the messages that carry the poems. Similarly, she shared that she taught English poetry in Nepal. She meant that she read in English and made her students understand Nepali. Moreover, she taught the poems by applying English in the Nepali Translation method. Similarly, she said that she taught the verses in a louder voice.

The above findings reflect that teaching poetry seems to be a challenge to English as a foreign language teacher in Nepal. Therefore, teaching versified poetry sidelining its aesthetics of languages, seems to be a parochial. Even at university-level education, versified poetry is not dealt with as a separate genre that demands distinct skill because of the recitative characteristic.

On the one hand, there is long established trends in poetry teaching and on the other hand, the practices of teaching verses in EFL classes are insignificant. There are certain boundaries in the pedagogy of reciting English verses. The boundaries are: lacking skills and practices in the classroom.

Based on the above utterances, English teachers, lacking a bundle of knowledge about recitation, feel fear of reciting verses rhythmically. They think it is a matter of prestige. Hence, verses seem to be taught as a piece of prose by reading instead of reciting.

Discussion

Influence of Nepali Accent

While reciting, the sound should be melodious, and as an English foreign language teacher, recitation or singing a verified- poem is highly challenging. According to the participants, they attempted due to the cultural impact and its influences hindered them from performing verses rhythmically. Due to the influence of L1 language and Nepali-ness in the accent, they felt ashamed and it was an awkward task. Reciting means singing and reciting and singing versified poetry, performers sound should be melodious but Nepali teachers lack it as foreign language teachers. The same issue was found in a study done by Koirala (2021) that while teaching English as a foreign language and its literature, teachers attempted through “Nenglish or Nepanglish and Hinglish” (Koirala, 2021, pp. 1-18).

Lack of Recitation Tradition

The study also revealed that teachers are unaware of verse and prose because in the curriculum nothing was suggested. As per them, there was no particular method for dealing with versified poetry. Therefore, for them teaching verified poems became an arduous phenomenon. In addition, they taught poems as a piece

of a manuscript written in the English language as an English foreign language teacher. Some approaches to teaching poetry could be productive and conducive, i.e. Poetry Box Method (Aaron et al., 2021). However, teachers were found teaching poetry at random like another literary genre.

Unaesthetic Approach to Poetry

The study revealed that teachers are teaching poetry as another genre. They conducted their poetry classes just to make their kids understand the theme of the poetry. Thus, their role seemed de-aesthetic regarding classroom literature. Research done by Pokharel (2020) in Secondary Schools in Dang, Nepal, suggested poetry as an oral art needs to be performed rhythmically but teachers were sidelining the aesthetic quality of the poems. In the same vein, research carried out in Sunsari and Morang districts under the title of 'Teachers' Practice of Using Different Activities for Teaching Poetry' revealed 83% of teachers summarized the poems by giving central ideas of the poems (Bishnu, 2016). However, 17% of teachers were found discussing the aesthetic quality of the poetry.

Teachers seem to deal with verses as a prose genre. Verses are associated with music and without reciting verses, the musicality of the poetry can't be produced. However, teachers taught poetry only by going through the lines instead of reciting.

Insufficient Skill in Recitation

The study also showed that teachers were not skilled enough to deal with the poetic language it is because English was their foreign language and they only focused on finding synonyms and antonyms from the poems as per the exam point of view. Research carried out by Giri (2011) reported that lacking proficiency and myriad resources, teachers are not performing poetry teaching activities effectively.

Because of low proficiency in linguistic skills, teachers seem to be applying the traditional approach in their poetry classes. Poetry is a recitative art and it needs to be recited depending on the principle of recitation. However, teachers are lackadaisical in reciting due to lacking recitative tradition concerning English-versed poetry.

Inadequate Information about Feet, Meters, and Syllables

The study disclosed that teachers were less competent in the application of prosody while teaching English-versed poetry due to the foreign language. Comparably, verses rest on prosodic features, and without a bundle of knowledge about prosody or stressed and unstressed syllables, making judgments concerning versified poetry is a challenging and problematic one.

Adams (1997) reflected that meter and rhyme are two of the most important and characteristic features of poetry. However, having no ideas about prosodic features, poetry teaching activities were void of interest. The narrative of Adams

(1997), highlights that poetry entails aesthetic elements which makes poetry complex, and teachers find poetry teaching activities problematic while teaching English as a foreign language

Conclusion

The discussion above shows that Nepali teachers faced problems with recitation due to accent problems. Teachers revealed that verses incorporated sound patterns and to deal with verses aesthetically, teachers found challenges because of linguistic incompetency. In addition, archaic dictions and prosodic features created challenges to deciphering the modern equivalent meaning. Likewise, since there was no tradition of recitation of English verses, verses were taught at random. Our curriculum does not focus on recitation. In comparison to Nepali teachers, English teachers are reluctant to go through the verses rhythmically because of cultural barricades and lack of sufficient training and seminars on recitation. By the same token, Nepali classrooms are heterogeneous and there are multilingual issues that influenced the recitation tradition. Verses are an oral art and in lack of recitation, it becomes merely a piece of prose. The study disclosed that teachers found reading verses instead of reciting and singing. Therefore, teaching English verses has been the only showpiece in the Nepali classroom.

Seemingly, many poetry teachers in Nepal can identify the contextual challenges and skills to bring about improvement in poetry teaching activities. A poetry teacher could do much more than just become a foreign language teacher. I suggest that future attention to dealing with poetry and for the improvement of pedagogy of the foreign language policies should be focused on the aesthetic quality of the verses. Along with linguistic competency, teachers need to have a bundle of knowledge concerning to recitation of verses. The information and ideas presented in this study may be a source of guidance to the English teachers who have been teaching English verses in Nepal.

This study has identified both strengths and limitations. Based on poetry recitation, this study has reported on how a foreign language teacher could identify potential challenges and tackle them to improve the pedagogy of versified poetry as a piece of art. However, it does not include a comparative pedagogy of verse-libre to investigate contextual challenges and practicalities of educational policies. It is based on the interviews. However, the class observation would strengthen the data in much more powerful findings. Future studies can consider these corners as potential areas of leadership research.

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