

The Effect of Eclectic Teaching Strategies Utilizing British Poetry in Developing Students' Reading Proficiencies in English Language

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Abstract

In Iraq, students learn English as a foreign language, and most of the Iraqi syllabi at schools and universities are borrowed from British syllabi (with some modification to fit the Iraqi culture). Literary classes, as a part of this intention to develop learners' proficiency in English, have an important role to improve the learners' competence and performance in using English.

As instructors of literature, we do believe that poetry, if properly used in teaching, can enlarge learners' vocabulary, raise learners' reading comprehension skills side by side with cultural and intercultural awareness.

The aim of this paper is to reveal the effect of eclectic reading strategies in developing students' reading proficiencies via poetic texts. The participants of the study are from first grade at the Faculty of Education for Humanities at the University of Anbar, Iraq. The first grade consists of two classes (A and B). Group A is taught via traditional method, and group B is taught via the eclectic method.

Since English is a foreign language, the researcher used the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, which identify stages of proficiency, as opposed to achievement. Also, because they assess what individuals can and cannot do. This is regardless of where, when, or how the language was learned or acquired. These guidelines are not based on a particular linguistic theory or pedagogical method, and are intended for global assessment, for all these reasons the researcher used ACTFL to assess his students' reading proficiencies.

The results revealed that utilizing eclectic reading strategies via poetry, with its aesthetic values, have developed the students reading proficiencies and the poems' texts have developed students' vocabularies as well.

Background of the Study

Although dramatic changes have taken place in foreign language teaching methodology, what we notice is that most of the Iraqi teachers have no interest of these recent changes. They still following traditional approaches and methods (chalk and talk) in which the teacher is the only speaker and the students have practically got nothing to do other than listen to what the teacher says, no matter whether they enjoy it or not.

On the other hand, when learners are taught English poems, they just listen to the teacher who helps learners solve linguistic puzzles. Many teachers still focus too much on lexical and grammatical points and pay less attention to practice in various reading skills and strategies so as to develop the learners' creativity of reading and other skills.

Poetry plays a powerful role in increasing students' literacy skills wherever it is taught. According to the best definitions, poetry may be defined as the embodiment of beautiful or elevated thought, imagination, or feeling, in language adapted to stir the imagination and emotion, by the connections of words. Poetry often uses particular forms and conventions to suggest alternative meanings in the words, or to evoke emotional and sensual responses as well.

As a form of literary art, poetry has sustained and nourished us for thousands of years. Throughout recorded history, people from all cultures used poems to share the full range of human experience. By associating poetry with pleasure we allow young people to make a connection with the minds of these thinkers and continue this tradition (Coe, 2013). Poetry plays a very important role in our lives. For example, it awakens our senses, connects us with ourselves and others, and leads us to think in synthesizing ways, as required by its use of the language of metaphor (Hoogland, 2011).

The purpose of using poetry in the adult EFL classrooms is to create a learning environment by increasing vocabulary; building listening comprehension, enhancing speaking, reading, and writing skills and expanding cultural knowledge.

Significance of the Study

Many methods and strategies have been implemented by English foreign language teachers to teach English language in Iraqi. For the researcher best knowledge, none of them have utilized poetry as a way to teach the reading skill. Since the researcher is following the ACTFL proficiency guide lines to measure his students' reading proficiency which demand the implementation of the 4 Cs (Communication, Culture, Connection, Comparison): Communication in language other than English; Culture is to gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures; Connection refers to other disciplines and how to acquire information; Comparison means developing insight into of language and culture; and the 5th C, we may add, the Communities that lead to participate in multilingual contexts at home and around the world.

Based on the above criteria, the researcher chooses five types of poetry: Descriptive (Winter); Reflective (An Irish Airman Foresees his death); Narrative (Lord Randal);

Lyric (To —); and Sonnet (Time). These types hope to meet the criteria (4 Cs) of the ACTFL proficiency guide lines. Concerning *Culture*: the researcher used five types of poetry which represent different types of thinking and cultures. For *Connection*: the researcher used poetry as a means to teach reading skills. Concerning the *Comparison*: the researcher asked students to compare and to have an insight look of the themes and the types of the five different poems. Concerning the communities: the researcher asked students to read and pronounce some words in Standard English which may have a connection to the society. Also, to take in consideration the place, time, and the social background of each poem.

Thus the significance of this study is to prove the effectiveness of implementing ACTFL proficiency guide lines and its bodies (4 Cs) in teaching English language in general and reading skills in particular, and the results of this study may be a starting point for other researches in the given field.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is stemmed from the fact that there is a lack of empirical research papers in Iraq using poetry in foreign language teaching especially in teaching English language in general and reading skills in particular. Thus, there is a critical need for such type of studies to be conducted in order to measure specific benefits of teaching poetry that may affect the prevailing attitude in the foreign language community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to reveal the effect of selected reading strategies in developing first year students' reading proficiencies via poetry texts at the Department of English, Faculty of Education for Humanities at the University of Anbar, Iraq.

Questions of the Study

The study is trying to answer the following questions:

- 1- Are there any statistical significance differences ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) in the first year students' reading proficiencies due to the teaching strategies?
- 2- Do the students' reading achievements meet the criteria of the Advanced Low/Mid level of the ACTFL proficiency Guide lines?

Literature Review

Harwayne (2001) emphasizes that carefully selected poetry enables very young learners to believe they can read and inspires older learners to want to read for the rest of their life.

Routman (2003) mentions the types of texts often used in this particular instructional activity. She states "shared/choral reading involves the teacher and combines reading aloud with interactive reading and shared reading. That is, using one copy of an engaging text, such as a poem, the teacher leads the class in reading aloud and, thus, allows for an engaging context to model all aspects of the reading process.

Pinnell and Scharer (2003) state that poetry in shared/choral reading and language immersion are mentioned regularly as ways of improving facility and comprehension in reading. Poems, like scripts and speeches, are meant to be read aloud, and their meaning is carried in the oral interpretation, as well as in the words. The rhyme, rhythm, and repetition that pervade poetry serve to build fluency.

Walter (2006) incorporated poetry as part of her first grade reading instruction. She believed that the use of poetry with first graders made sense since her students had had many experiences with chants, rhymes, and jump rope songs. Poetry, she believed before starting her study would build on their experiences and language play. She also led her students in discussion about each poem's vocabulary, use of poetic language, perspective, and even line breaks. Eventually, Walter's students shared poems they had found, as well as ones they had written.

Teaching Reading Via Poetry

A part from the chosen reading methods to teach students to read, implementing poetry with English foreign language students is suggested by many educators as a means to improve reading proficiency. Vardell, Hadaway, and Young (2002) believe that poetry read aloud encourages oral fluency and is the basis for reading in a new language. As students participate in shared reading, they practice their word calling and pronunciation. In addition poetry is useful with all ages and grade levels, which a definite benefit is given that ESL students enter school at any age or grade level. Poetry can cover all grades because of its form and use of language, and can offer background and cultural knowledge into the culture as well. The combination of form, language, and information, which poetry provides, can help students to learn words and concepts, stay motivated and interested, and even participate as equals.

Fahola et al (1996) found that "poems, with their rhythm and repetition, are easily memorized and can be used to teach phonemic awareness and print concepts to English language learners.

Hadaway et al (2001) determined that for English language learners, teacher-guided choral reading of poetry satisfies many of the ingredients essential in developing oral language proficiency.

Gasparro and Falletta (2004) found that the use of poetry in the ESL classroom enables students to explore the linguistic and conceptual aspects of the written text without concentrating on the mechanism of language.

Hancock (2009) examines the effectiveness of an instructional method using daily poetry reading and weekly poetry writing in improving first grade students' literacy. While the reading and writing achievement of all the study's first graders were examined, English as a second Language students, or Limited English Proficiency students were investigated as a subgroup. The results of the study revealed that the poetry and non-poetry groups are not different significantly in their scores, nor did the Limited English Proficiency students from the two groups differ in posttest. Poetry did have an effect on the oral test scores between the two groups, with the poetry group as a whole scoring significantly high assessments than their non-poetry counterparts. Lastly, there was no difference in writing scores between the poetry and

non-poetry groups, either for the students as a whole class, or for the subgroup of Limited English Proficiency students.

Design and Methodology

This part presents the procedures the researcher used to conduct the study. It contains the description of the participants, sample, instrument, procedures and the statistical analyses.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were from first grade at department of English at the Faculty of Education for Humanities at the University of Anbar- Iraq.

The first grade consists of 109 students who are divided into two classes (A and B). Group A consists of 55 students and was taught via traditional method (CLTA), and group B consists of 54 students and was taught via the eclectic method.

Instruments of the Study

The researcher used the **Directed Reading Thinking Activity** as an instrument to teach reading skill. The strategy engages students in a step by step process that guides them through informational text. It is designed to move students through the process of reading text.

DIRECTING. The teacher directs and activates the students' thinking prior to reading a passage by scanning the title, chapter headings, illustrations, and other materials. Teachers should use open-ended questions to direct students as they make predictions about the content or perspective of the text (e.g., "Given this title, what do you think the poem will be about?").

READING. Students read up to the first pre-selected stopping point. The teacher then prompts the students with questions about specific information and asks them to evaluate their predictions and refine them if necessary. This process should be continued until students have read each stanza of the poem.

THINKING. At the end of each section, students go back through the text and think about their predictions. Students should verify or modify their predictions by finding supporting statements in the text. The teacher asks questions such as:

- What do you think about your predictions now?
- What did you find in the text to prove your predictions?
- What did you we read in the text that made you change your predictions?

In addition, the researcher design reading achievement post test.

Procedures of the Study

The researcher taught group A via traditional method (not eclectic), while group B was taught via the Directed Reading Thinking Activities and as following:

1. Selection of the poem. The researcher selected five styles of poems.
2. the researcher prepared a **DRTA** by marking breaks at thought-provoking stopping points in the poems texts, points where students can form and justify their predictions in response to questions similar to ‘What do you think will happen next?’ and ‘Why do you say that?’
3. Explaining the purpose of **DRTA** and the procedure involved. The researcher explained to students how the stops at different points when the teacher read the poem, perhaps when finish reading a verse of the poem, to check if the students understood what the teacher had read so far. The researcher explained to the students how he refocus on students' purposes for reading, form new predictions, read, stop and reflect, and repeat the cycle.
4. The researcher explained that thoughtful readers always think about what they know about the poem and use this knowledge to form predictions about what the poem might be about. The researcher informed students that there is no right or wrong prediction, as long as it is relevant to the topic of the poem and its style.
5. Introducing the text to students. The researcher read the title and asked students to read the title of the poem and its style, and asked them to predict what the poem might be about. The researcher encouraged students to use their relevant background knowledge of the topic in reference to its style, available text features, and their knowledge of genres to predict and justify their predictions. The researcher listed students' predictions on the whiteboard to refer to throughout the **DRTA** process.
6. Reading with students, stopping at the first marked break. The researcher asked students to confirm, reject or modify their predictions in light of what they learned. The researcher asked students to explain their decisions. Was the information explicitly stated, and in the text, or did they make inferences.
7. Then the researcher asked students to form and justify new predictions before he reads the next stopping point. The researcher asked students to evaluate their predictions after each section of text is read and refer back to the text to compare their predictions with the text.
8. The researcher continued the cycle of reading, predicting, confirming, and revising, until the poem had been read.
9. The researcher asked students to explain how they used their background knowledge, and predicting, justifying, confirming, rejecting, and revising their predictions, which helped them when they were reading independently.
10. The researcher helped students assess how well they predict, justify, confirm, reject and modify predictions when they read. He helped them set personal goals about what they would like to do better in relation to these strategies and recorded their comments. He referred back to these notes during individual reading conferences with students. He reused all the steps above with each type of the selected poem.

Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the test reliability, the researcher followed test/retest technique. The researcher applied it to a sample of (20) students who were excluded from the study with a two-week period between the test and the re-test. The reliability of the test was

calculated using correlation coefficient and found to be 0.89. This seems appropriate for conducting such a study according to the criteria adopted by statisticians.

Instructional Material

The instructional material is the first year introduction to poetry course which includes more than 20 poems, but the researcher covers only five poems during the application period.

Statistical Analyses

To answer the study question, descriptive methods (means and standard deviations) were used for post test for English language reading test for both the experimental and control groups.

In addition to a Two-Way ANOVA (Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a collection of statistical models used to analyze the differences between group means and their associated procedures (such as "variation" among and between groups), the statistics used T- test to show equivalence, and Two- Way ANOVA to answer the research question.

Findings and Discussion of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of using poetry for teaching reading on first year students' achievements at the University of Anbar. The researcher followed the equivalent post test two group designs. Therefore, the means, standard deviations and one-Way ANOVA analysis of variance were used to analyze data. The results are displayed based on the questions of the research.

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experimental	89.78	7.894
Control	78.79	11.121

Table 1: Shows the means and standard deviations of the achievement of groups on the posttest.

The researcher also conducted a one-way analysis of variance to analyze the posttest achievement scores of the two groups. Table 2 shows the results.

Source	Sum	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group	1911.224	1	1911.224	21.199	.000
Error	10398.442	116	89.642		
Total	12309.66	117			

Table 2: Summary of the one-way analysis of variance of the achievement of the control and the experimental groups on the post-test

To answer the first question: Are there any statistical significance differences ($\alpha \leq 0, 05$) in the first year students' reading proficiencies due to the teaching strategies? Table 2 shows that the level of significance is .000 which is statistically significant at $\alpha \leq 0, 05$ on favor of the experimental group.

To sum up, the researcher believes that the difference in the achievement of the first year students was attributed to the using of DRTA for teaching English reading via poetry. The experimental group subjects managed to significantly improve English reading. The improvement achieved by the control group subjects, however, was not statistically significant. By comparing the results achieved by the two groups, the researcher concluded that the improvement achieved by the experimental group may have been attributed to the way they rendered instruction; teaching reading accompanied with poetry. This result consists with the study of Harwayne (2001); Routman (2003); Gasparro and Falletta (2004); and Walter (2006) who prove that teaching reading via poetry has a significance effect on developing reading proficiency.

To Answer the second question of the study " Do the students' reading achievements meet the criteria of the Advanced Low/Mid level of the ACTFL proficiency Guide lines? ". The findings of the study revealed that the experimental group has reached the criteria of Advanced Low/Mid level and students are able to: meet basic work, social and academic communication needs. Able to read somewhat longer prose of several paragraphs in length, particularly when presented with a clear underlying structure. The prose is predominantly in familiar sentence patterns. Reader gets the main ideas and facts and misses some details. Comprehension derives not only from situational and subject matter knowledge but from increasing control of the language. Texts at this level include descriptions and narrations such as simple short stories, bibliographical information, social notices, personal correspondence, and simple technical material written for the general reader.

Conclusion

Learning English via poetry is not easy for students who are studying English as a foreign language since native speakers of English language themselves face some difficulties in learning in the same way. So, it was found that using poetry may help students comprehend a text and enjoy analyzing it. The final outcome and the production of the testee show that DRTA via poetry for teaching reading enhances students to study reading with entertainment. Moreover, it improves their level in literature as they gain the skills of analysis and criticism in general.

On other hand, while there is an agreement that teaching poetry is important at any level in learning English, some students view poetry and other literary classes as an optional part of curriculum in the Faculty of Education for Humanities; more as a supplement to the curriculum rather than an essential component. They believe that it does not address content standards. The study showed that the opposite is more accurate. Poetry is an excellent tool for implementing standards, as well as providing ample opportunity to promote higher level of thinking.

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