

## ATTITUDE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS POETRY IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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### ABSTRACT

*Several factors affect second language learning process including motivation, attitude, intelligence, age, gender and personality. However, attitude towards language teaching text carries vital importance in an ESL classroom (Garinger, 2002). This research paper attempts to measure the attitude of English as a second language (ESL) learners towards the text of poetry and its effect on the English-speaking skill of the learners. This was an experimental study employing a one-group Pretest-posttest research design. The respondents of the study were forty students from the faculty of social sciences, University of Malakand, Pakistan. An attitude questionnaire was circulated amongst the respondents after the intervention. The responses of the learners were analysed through statistical tests to find out their attitude towards poetry as language teaching materials. The results of the questionnaire showed that the students had a positive attitude towards the text of poetry as language teaching materials. The study also attempted to investigate the effect of the students' attitude on their speaking skill while using poetry as teaching materials. To this effect, the scores of the students on the pretest and posttest were analysed through paired samples t-test and the results indicated that the students performed significantly better on the posttest. Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that poetry be utilized in ESL classrooms.*

**Keywords:** Attitude, Poetry, Language teaching text, Traditional teaching materials

### Introduction

Attitude is of vital importance concerning language learning and performance. It has drawn significant attention of both first language and second language researchers. According to Al Mamun, Rahman, Rahman, and Hossain (2012), attitude is the temperament and feeling of people towards a language. It implies a person's predispositions, preconceptions, notions, worries and opinions regarding any topic. It carries an evaluative facet, a temperament and propensity to respond positively or negatively to something. This, in brief, is the way a person thinks or acts (Ghazali, & Jusoff, 2009). According to Abdel-Khalek (2016) attitude involves emotions, feelings and self-relationships in a society. Language learners shall have a positive attitude towards the whole language learning process including the target language, teaching methodology and language teaching text. Attitude can affect the learning process either positively or negatively. Thus, an attitude has an important role in the language learning process. A positive attitude of learners leads to a better language performance by learners, whereas a negative attitude leads to little language learning (Fakeye, 2010). Besides, attitude is closely related to the motivation of second language learners. Positive attitude increases the motivation level of the learners and decreases their anxiety level. Attitudes do not stay unchanged rather they could be transformed through various measures. For instance, a good and dynamic teaching methodology could cause a positive change in the learners' attitude. Similarly, authentic and apposite teaching materials could lead to a positive change in the attitude of the students (Choy, 2002) which in turn increases their language learning performance. The current study in the same vein attempts to determine the attitude of ESL learners toward the text of poetry as language teaching materials and its effect on the subsequent performance of the learners in the English speaking skill.

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## **Literature Review**

According to Ghazali and Jusoff (2009) attitude is a person's predispositions, preconceptions, notions, worries and opinions regarding any topic. It carries an evaluative facet, a temperament and propensity to respond positively or negatively to something. This, in brief, is the way a person thinks or acts. Ajzen (2005) argues that attitude is a hypothetical construct which can be deduced from quantifiable responses of the language learners. According to Akpinar, Yıldız, Tatar, and Ergin (2009) attitude affects the learners' behaviour concerning the selection and reading of books. Besides, attitude also determines the willingness of language learners, whether they want to speak in the target language or not. Additionally, attitude informs us about the capacity of the language learners regarding absorbing the intake of the target language. As such, language learning process is more social and psychological than the academic one. Consequently, negative attitude leads to less learning whereas positive attitude leads to better language learning and performance. Moreover, it is not only the cognitive perspective but also the social and psychological ones that are crucial to the learners' high motivation and positive attitude (Tella, Indoshi, & Othun, 2010). Ajzen (2005) argues that language learning process is facilitated by both mental competence and attitude of the learners. The researcher added that attitude influences the learners' behaviour and feelings towards language, its culture and community thereby, determining their inclination for acquiring a language. Learners' attitude and behaviour towards a language affect the learning process. Thus, if learners have a positive attitude towards a particular language, there will be good language learning. But if learners have a negative attitude towards a particular language, they will not take any interest in the language learning process. Besides, they will not be motivated during language class.

Several research studies have been conducted on language learners' attitude and teaching methodology, language teaching materials, classroom environment and group activities in language classrooms. Some of the studies include a study by Satterwhite (2015) on the attitude of language teachers towards assessing students' needs in a language classroom. Ketabi and Simm (2009) executed a study on the attitude of the learners towards English language learning. Yet another study was conducted by Al Mamun et al. (2012) on the attitude of teachers towards language learners' perceptions and motivation. Similarly, Hashwani (2008) conducted a study investigating students' attitude, motivation and anxiety level towards English language learning. The results of the study indicated that students were motivated and had a positive attitude to English language learning which led to better language learning among the learners. Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) conducted a study on the engineering students' attitude towards English language learning and speaking in the social set-up of the Yamani community. The results displayed a positive approach of the students to English language learning and its use in the society, thereby, causing better learning and grades of the students. Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, and Alzwari (2012) executed a study on the attitude of EFL Libyan students towards English language learning across the behavioural, cognitive and affective domains. The results of the study surprisingly indicated a negative attitude towards learning English language which led to poor language learning on the part of the learners. Hence, the current study investigates the relation between ESL learners' attitude and poetry as language teaching materials and their subsequent performance in the speaking skill. Moreover, the study has the following research questions to answer.

## **Poetry and ESL Learners' Attitude**

This section provides some studies on ESL learners' attitude towards poetry. Khatib (2011) carried out an experimental study having three control groups and three experimental groups of college students. 65 poems were taught to both the control and the experimental group. The difference was in the teaching methodologies of teaching. The control group was taught the poems through the traditional methodology, whereas the experimental group was taught through the proposed methodology which consisted of pre-reading activities while-reading activities, follow-up activities and reading alone. Moreover, the attitude of the students before and after the intervention was tested through an attitude questionnaire. Besides this, a pre-test and post-test were administered before and after the experiment. The result showed that a significant difference in both the attitude and language competence of the learners was found. This paper is a good empirical study, however, the study compares two different methodologies while using the same teaching materials (poetry), but the current study will keep the teaching methodology constant and utilize two different teaching materials in the control group (CG) and experimental group (EG).

Similarly, Çetinavcı and Tütüniş (2012) carried out an experimental study having a control and an experimental group of third year university students. A course by the name of “Poetry Analysis and Teaching” was changed in regard to its content by the researcher in order to adapt it to the level of the students. Then, the control group was taught through traditional method while the experimental group was taught the course through the student-oriented methodology. At the end of the intervention an attitude scale questionnaire was given to both the groups to find out their attitude towards the use of poetry in an English language classroom. The students in the experimental group confirmed that poetry is a multipurpose and multi-functional tool for teaching English language to ESL/EFL learners. The study empirically proved that the learner-oriented teaching was more effective than the traditional teaching methodology. The current study draws support from the above study in regard to engaging the language learners in various group activities. Similarly, the current study, also like the preceding study intends to find out the attitude of the language learners towards poetry as teaching materials and as an integral component of poetry guided speaking (PGS) model.

Moreover, Vk and Savaedi (2014) conducted an experimental study having a control and an experimental group. Each group has 30 students in it. The students like the current study, were randomly selected. 12 poems were selected for both the groups. The control group was taught through traditional methodology, whereas the experimental group was taught through the student-centred pedagogy consisting of group work and peer group activities. The scores of the tests and attitude questionnaire showed a significant improvement in the performance and attitude of the experimental group as compared to the control group. Tehan, Yukse&Inan (2015) conducted an experimental study probing into the perception of the students of different levels. The students were divided into three groups; freshmen, sophomores and juniors. A semi-structured interview was tendered to the participants to record their responses. The results of the study showed that the majority of the students supported the use of poetry in the ELT classroom. The study is a good attempt, but has unlike the current study, used just one tool for data collection. Further, the study is delimited to finding only the perception of the students already involved in literary courses in an English language classroom. In his study, Freyn (2017) attempted to find out the attitude of university language learners towards the use of poetry as teaching materials in an ESL classroom through multimodal approach. 29 students of the university in Quito, Ecuador in a B2 participated in the study. The students were given a Likert scale pre-assessment questionnaire and were then taught through poetry lessons. At the end of the lessons, the same questionnaire was again distributed among the students. Paired samples t-test was applied and the results indicated positive attitude of the learners towards poetry as teaching materials. The researcher concluded that poetry affords real language materials, accelerates the process of language learning, triggers creativity and lends itself to students-oriented teaching methodology. The current study, like the above study proposes that poetry will produce a student-oriented language class. It will provide the learners with an opportunity to express their ideas freely. Moreover, the present study also proposes that the text of poetry will increase the motivation and the confidence level of the learners by involving them in frequent interaction with each other and by appealing to their personal life encouraging them to share their personal and social experiences with their fellow learners hence leading the development of an overall positive attitude in the them.

1. What is the attitude of English as a second language (ESL) learners towards the text of poetry as language teaching materials?
2. What is the effect of the learners' attitude on their performance in the English speaking skill?

## **Methodology**

### **Procedure of the Pre-test and Post-test**

The researcher was helped by one of his colleagues, who was first informed about this research study and was later trained in marking the tests. The help of the colleague as an examiner was sought for the purpose of reliability while marking the students on the pre-test and post-test. The students were informed and guided about the nature of the test one day before the actual test was conducted. They were communicated that the test would be speaking test and they would be asked various questions, which they would answer orally. Consequently, the

students came the next day, mentally quite prepared for the tests, which helped to avoid the waste of time. The researcher and his colleague examiner would call the students according to their roll numbers on the class register and would ask them questions. Every student would be marked according to the rubrics adopted from Torky (2006). The topics and themes of the pre-tests and post-tests were the same, though the questions based on them were slightly different for each test. The maximum time for each student on the test was twenty (20) minutes. In order to find out the maximum time for each student during the speaking test, the test was piloted with a group of six students. The maximum time taken during this pilot test was thirty (30) minutes, whereas the minimum time taken was ten (10) minutes. The time for the actual test was fixed out of the average of the maximum and minimum times on the pilot test. Thus, the average time for the actual test  $(30+10/2=20)$  was twenty (20) minutes.

### **Intervention**

During the intervention, the students would be divided into groups based on their scores on the pre-test. Each group where possible, had two good students, two average and two below average. This formation was according to the marks of students on the pre-test. Further in each group there would be a president, a vice president, a writing person, a dictionary person, a presenter and a co-presenter. The president and the vice president were supposed to monitor the group and ensure that each member of their group was actively involved in the language learning activities. The writer was assigned the task of writing down the ideas of each member of their group about the given topic. The dictionary person was asked to look up any difficult word and its various implications in the dictionary on their cell phone. The presenter and the co-presenter were supposed to finally present the ideas of their group about the topic. In addition, the presenter and the co-presenter were posed different questions by the members of the other groups, of which the presenter and the co-presenter answered with the help of their group members. However, it is worth noting here that the students would switch over their roles in different classes, so that all the students have equal chance of performing every activity. The different names and responsibilities given to each member of a group was to make each member of the groups feel the responsibility and to consider themselves as an important part the language learning process. After this the students would be given sometime for making preparation on the topic from the syllabus. Each group would work like a team on the given task/topic. Finally, as mentioned above, the presenter and co-presenter would present the ideas on behalf of their group. After presentation, the members of other groups would pose questions to the presenter and co-presenter, of which they would answer with the help of their group members.

### **Questionnaire**

As mentioned earlier that this study mainly investigates the attitude of the students towards poetry as language teaching materials and its effect on the English speaking skill of the learners, hence this study used a Likert scale attitude questionnaire. Questionnaire is a tool of data collection about an event, organization, process, perceptions or motivation level of people with regard to a program. This is a convenient source of data collection from comparatively larger population. It increases the validity of the results if it is well developed to produce consistent results. The language of the items in a questionnaire should be up to the comprehension level of the subjects (Best & Kahn, 2006). This research study used a five points Likert scale attitude questionnaire in order to examine the attitude of the students towards the text of poetry in the development of speaking skill. For this purpose, questionnaire was adapted from Phat (2013). In the original questionnaire literature in general was mentioned but in the adapted one it was changed into the term either poetry or the text of poetry. Moreover, several items were added according to the nature of the text of poetry and its effect on the speaking skill. The items added are shown in the following table along with their actual serial number on the adapted questionnaire.

**Table 1**

Items added to the Original questionnaire

11	The text of poetry provides access to other cultures.
12	The text of poetry stimulates language acquisition.
13	The text of poetry develops students' interpretative ability.
14	The text of poetry offers varied authentic language examples.
15	The text of poetry enhances language proficiency.
16	The text of poetry improves grammar.
17	Poetry enriches vocabulary.
18	Reading aloud poetry improves pronunciation.
19	Poetry develops conversational skill through interaction.
20	Poetry enables students to express themselves easily and confidently.

The questionnaire was piloted among thirty (30) students other than the target population for the reliability of its items. For this purpose, Cronbach's Alpha reliability was applied in order to confirm the consistency factor of items on the questionnaire. The table below indicates that the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0.70, which confirms the reliability of this data collection tool.

**Table 2**

Results of the Reliability Test of the Likert Scale Questionnaire

	N	%	Reliability Statistics	
Cases			Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Valid	2	96.7		
Exclude				

d <sup>a</sup>	9		
Total		.827	21
1	3.3		
3	100.		
0	0		

Moreover, this study also attempted to find out the language learning behaviour of the learners during the intervention. To this effect, the researcher along with one of his colleagues utilized observation field notes. The observation field notes were jotted down during the intervention and were later on extended.

### Results of the Study

As mentioned above, the responses of the respondents to the questionnaire were analysed through descriptive statistics to determine the means, percentage as well as frequencies of the responses. Table 3 below indicates the results of the students' responses.

**Table 3**

Analysis of the Learners' Attitude to Poetry through Likert Scale Questionnaire

S. No	Items	S.L (%)	Like (%)	Neutral (%)	D.L (%)	S.D (%)	M	St.D
1	Group discussion	28 (74.9)	10 (24.1)	01 (3.33)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.3306	.44684
2	Personal responses	18 (49.3)	14 (37.5)	3 (7.7)	01 (2.6)	1 (2.6)	1.7411	.83252
3	Making connections with the real life	25 (60.0)	13 (34.9)	1 (2.6)	1 (2.6)	00 (00)	1.4970	.69331
4	Role play	20 (53.8)	12 (33.3)	5 (10.3)	00 (00)	1 (2.6)	1.6411	.87322
5	Oral presentation	25 (69.2)	10 (28.2)	1 (2.6)	01 (2.6)	00 (00)	1.3331	.52980
6	Debate/Discussion	24 (69.2)	11 (25.6)	3 (7.7)	01 (2.6)	00 (00)	1.3591	.58430
7	The text of poetry provides access to other cultures.	16 (38.5)	20 (53.8)	3 (7.7)	2 (5.1)	00 (00)	1.7177	.68626
8	The text of poetry stimulates language acquisition.	23 (69.2)	12 (25.6)	3 (7.7)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.3591	.58430

9	The text of poetry develops students' interpretative ability.	25 (74.4)	12 (25.6)	02 (5.1)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.2562	.44234
10	The text of poetry offers varied authentic language examples.	17 (43.2)	15 (42.6)	5 (11.3)	01 (2.6)	00 (00)	1.6413	.66833
11	The text of poetry enhances language proficiency.	26 (68.2)	8 (23.1)	3 (7.7)	02 (5.1)	00 (00)	1.3843	.63312
12	The text of poetry improves grammar.	26 (66.7)	12 (30.8)	00 (00)	1 (2.6)	00 (00)	1.3844	.63309
13	Poetry enriches vocabulary.	32 (83.6)	6 (13.8)	1 (2.6)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.1792	.45140
14	Reading aloud poetry improves pronunciation.	21 (57.0)	15 (35.3)	3 (7.7)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.4873	.64365
15	Poetry develops conversational skill through interaction.	30 (81.6)	7 (14.8)	2 (5.1)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.1794	.45140
16	Poetry enables students to express themselves easily and confidently.	26 (68.2)	12 (29.2)	1 (2.6)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.3332	.52980
17	The text of poetry enables students how to express themselves in different situations.	20 (52.8)	13 (34.9)	4 (10.3)	02 (5.1)	00 (00)	1.5642	.68034
18	Poetry develops a lively language class.	21 (57.0)	16 (39.5)	1 (2.6)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.4357	.55223
19	Poetry enables students to find meaning on their own.	26 (69.8)	11 (26.6)	2 (5.1)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.3076	.52080
20	The text of poetry makes the students participate actively in activities.	27 (72.4)	19 (24.1)	2 (5.1)	00 (00)	00 (00)	1.2822	.51033



21	Students complete their home assignments on the text of poetry on time.	18 (49.3)	11 (26.6)	6 (15.4)	2 (5.1)	2 (5.1)	1.8464	1.11303
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### Analysis

In the questionnaire, 1 stands for strongly like, 2 for like, 3 for neutral, 4 for dislike and 5 for strongly dislike. The responses of the students for item no 1, are 30 as strongly like (SL), whereas 9 are like (L) with the mean (M) 1.2306. The highest number of responses as 'strongly like' is for the item, no 13 and 15, which are 32 and 30 to a percentage of 83.6 and 81.6 respectively. The means for both the items (13 and 15) are 1.1792 and 1.1794 respectively. The second-highest number of responses as "strongly like" is for the item, no 1, which are 28 to a percentage of 74.9. Moreover, the mean for the item, no 1, is 1.3306. Likewise, the lowest number of responses as "strongly like" recorded on the questionnaire was for the item, no 07, which (responses) are 16 to a percentage of 38.5. The mean for the item (07) is 1.7177. The second-lowest number of responses as "strongly like" is for the item, no 10, which (responses) are 17 to a percentage of 43.2. Further, the mean for the item (10) is 1.6413. Thus, the responses of the entire respondents for all the items fall between the mean score 1 and 2, which shows the highest level of observance. All the items have been marked either "strongly like, or "like" by the learners, which suggests that they have a highly positive attitude to the text poetry as teaching materials for teaching English speaking skill. In order to find out effect of the learners' attitude (positive) towards poetry on their performance of the learners in the speaking skill, the mean scores of the students on the pre-test and post-test were subjected to paired sample t-test. The results are presented in the following table.

**Table 4**

T-test Results of Speaking Skill on Pre-test & Post-test

Experimental Group	N	M	SD	ST.Error. M	T-value	P-Value
Pre-test	40	18.9744	2.33099	.37326	6.088	.000
Post-test	40	22.5000	4.70861	.75398		

Note: p-value $\leq$ 0.05=significant, p-value $>$ 0.05=not significant

Table 4 above indicates that there was a significant difference in the overall speaking skill of the students in favour of post-test. The p-value .000 is smaller than the p-value 0.05, which confirms the effectiveness of the poetry as teaching materials for the development of students' speaking skill.

### Discussion

This study sought to investigate the attitude of a group of learners towards the text of poetry as language teaching materials. For this purpose, an adapted Likert scale attitude questionnaire (Phat, 2013) was used. The questionnaire had 21 items on it. The items were adjusted according to the text of poetry. The questionnaire was



piloted among 30 students other than the EG group. The responses of the students were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha test for reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be .827 (see Table 2), which is greater than .07. Hence, the items of the questionnaire indicated high reliability. Instantly after the treatment, the questionnaire was circulated amongst the students. The responses of the students were examined through descriptive statistics. The results showed that students either ticked "strongly like" or "like" almost all the items which meant that the students' attitude towards the text of poetry was highly positive. The results of this study regarding the attitude of the students are consistent with the study carried out by Freyn (2017) who undertook to investigate the attitude of university language students toward the text of poetry used in an ESL classroom while using a multimodal approach. The results indicated that the students had a positive attitude to the text of poetry. In the conclusion, the researcher argued that the text of poetry leads to interaction among the language learners, guide them towards the creative use of the target language and enables the teacher to use student-oriented teaching methodology. However, the current study is different from the above-cited study, because the current study used the questionnaire only at the end of the intervention.

As mentioned in the methodology section, the study also exploited observation field notes to find out the language learner behaviour of the learners during the treatment. Hence, it was found out that the students showed great interest in the group activities and were ready to help each other in the language learning tasks. This developed cooperative and collaborative language learning environment. Moreover, the students related the text of the poems to their personal lives. They shared their feelings with their class fellows. Additionally, due to the ambiguity in the text of the poems, they freely and fearlessly interpreted the texts according to their understanding and shared it with the fellow learners. Furthermore, the students also learnt about certain cultural elements of the target language as the texts of the poems had them. The text of poetry has authentic and rich language expressions (Khansir, 2012; Khatib, 2011; Nasr, 2001), which helped the learners improve their vocabulary. Besides, the students also related the text of the poems to their real-life-activities. As the students were frequently asked to present in front of the whole class, this increased their confidence and lowered their anxiety and fear of public speaking. Additionally, the subjective nature of the text provided them with the freedom of expressing their interpretations without any hesitation. This practice enhanced their level of motivation

Moreover, the students juxtaposed the text with their social and cultural contexts and constructed new meanings. Furthermore, the learners utilized their previous knowledge and personal experiences to arrive at different interpretations of the text. This practice is consistent with social constructivism as advocated by (Vygotsky, 1978). The more knowledgeable students supported their group members to exploit their potential zone of learning which conforms to the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). According to Khatib, Rezaei, and Derakhshan (2011) and Littlewood (2007), poetry improves equally the functional and structural facets of language due to its linguistic richness. The text of poetry has embedded authenticity regarding language teaching. Consequently, the students were treated with authentic teaching materials in the shape of poetry. The learners were wholly involved in language learning. They showed a good interest in language learning activities. They attempted to surpass members of other groups while presenting in front of their fellow-learners. They helped fellow-presenters throughout the question-answer period. They were daring enough to share their social and personal experiences. They arrived for the class on time, which indicated their keenness on the language learning process. All the aforesaid factors led to the development of a highly positive attitude to poetry as language teaching materials among the learners which consequently improved their speaking skill.

## **Conclusion**

This was a pre-experimental study having just one group of students from the faculty of social sciences, University of Malakand, Pakistan. A speaking type pretest was conducted before the commencement of the treatment. Afterwards, the students were taught English speaking skill through poems instead of traditional language teaching materials. The researcher himself being the teacher also observed the behaviour of the students inside the classroom. At the end of the intervention, a posttest identical to the pretest was administered to the students. A Likert scale attitude questionnaire was also distributed among the learners after the treatment. The responses of the students to the questionnaire were statistically analysed. The results of the analysis indicated that the students had a positive

attitude towards the text of poetry as language teaching materials. Moreover, the scores of the students on the pretest and posttest were employed a paired samples t-test. The mean scores of the students in the tests showed that the students performed significantly better on the posttest. The researcher being the teacher, observed that the learners diligently participated in all the learning activities. They related the text of poetry to their personal, social and cultural contexts. Moreover, the students freely and frequently interacted with one another. Additionally, the ambiguity in the text of poetry allowed the students to exercise autonomy in expressing their individual interpretations of the text. Hence, the students' behaviour in the classroom and the results of the attitude questionnaire proves that they had a positive attitude towards poetry as language teaching materials. The subsequent significant improvement in the speaking skill of the students could be attributed to their positive attitude towards poetry.

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