

Using Poems in Learning English as a Foreign Language at the Secondary Level of Education in Bangladesh

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Abstract - In Bangladesh, English is a compulsory subject at the secondary level, where it is taught and learned as a foreign language. Literary texts have long been used as a tool for it. Generally, two types of textbooks are used in classrooms at the secondary level: compulsory NCTB textbooks and Grammar books of various authors. The purpose of this research was to investigate the use of poetry in NCTB textbooks and its effects on the language learning process at the secondary level of education. This study also tried to find out the range and usability of the poems that are included in the textbook. For this study, data was collected from both the learners and the instructors of Secondary Level education through a set of questionnaires. Then the data was analyzed to find out the appropriateness, usability, understandability, and effectiveness of poems on the overall language learning process. Finally, this study attempted to explore the way out of the existing and probable obstacles to ensure the intended outcome of using poetry in learning English as a foreign language.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Foreign Language, NCTB Textbooks, Poems, Secondary Education

I. INTRODUCTION

English is one of the major subjects included in the syllabus of secondary level education in Bangladesh. It is taught as a foreign language and several textbooks are used to assist the whole learning process. Different types of content help learners understand and get used to the new language, and one of them is poetry. This study intends to identify the use of poetry in secondary level classrooms in Bangladesh and its impact. Bangladesh's National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) is an independent agency under the Ministry of Education that develops curricula and oversees the publication and distribution of textbooks for primary and secondary education (Banglapedia, 2007). These textbooks are commonly named 'English for Today'. Other books published by private publishers are also used to teach and learn English grammar, vocabulary, and so on. This study focused on these textbooks and the poems included in the NCTB textbooks to understand whether the poems are helping the whole learning process.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. English as a Foreign Language in Bangladesh

The use of English by speakers of other native tongues is known as English as a foreign language. English as a second

language (ESL), English as a foreign language (EFL), English as a second language (EAL), English as a new language (ENL), or English for speakers of other languages are all terms used to describe language instruction for those learning English (ESOL). Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages are terms used to describe the method of teaching ESL (TESOL). Technically speaking, TEFL stands for teaching English as a foreign language in countries where it is not the official language (Lee, Paige, 2020). Since there is no official second language in Bangladesh, English is studied and taught as a foreign language. According to Rahman, *et al.*, (2006), English has always been there, demonstrating a "furtive existence" during the period of Bangla's restoration. Additionally, they assert that from the early 1980s, stakeholders have recognized Bangladesh's need for the language on a "global" and "pragmatic" level. English was included in the primary curriculum starting in year one and continuing for the next 10 years. Then, starting in 1992, English was brought back as the primary language of instruction at the tertiary level.

B. Using Poems in EFL

Many academics today contend that literature is an integral component of language instruction. Literature, according to Labo-Papoola (2010), is the cornerstone of language learning and may help people understand various cultures. As stated, language is the foundation of communication, and literature is the means through which cultures are passed down from one generation to the next. "Literature is the portion of a language, which promotes distinct talents," claim Vethamani *et al.*, in 2010. On the other hand, the methods that are now being used in conventional language courses are debatable. Although they appear to be very applicable and established in many ways, they also have several disadvantages, according to Layla S. Essa (1988: 149). Since it forces its rules and facts on the learning process while the pupils are in a complete state of receptivity and compliance, traditional education does not observe young people's experiences or fit their talents and requirements. Therefore, it is clear that including literature into the language education process might be a useful way to provide real content. A learner's loss

of identity may be expressed through studying, memorizing, and using particular linguistic norms, with the focus on how the ability to express oneself is likely to be severely limited or calcified. “This sense of self-loss might be exacerbated by developing a suitable academic voice” (Young, 1988: 24). English literature, which includes the three genres of drama, prose, and poetry, is part of the school curriculum because of the many advantages it provides to both people and the community at large. However, the focus of the current study is on poetry education in classrooms. Poetry, according to Ibitola (2009), is a type of writing that is sparked by emotion and conveys a strong feeling. With the aid of imagination, logic, and the uncontrollable outpouring of strong emotions and feelings, it is an act of fusing pleasure with reality. Poetry is recognized by academics as a way for people to communicate their emotions in a rhythmic manner that comes naturally to them. It symbolizes man’s ambition to transcend the ordinary parts of life and his growing quest to express profound ideas and emotions in forceful, fantastical, and symbolic language. Poetry enlightens, provides readers with knowledge, and makes them happy. It has appeared in songs, legendary tales, rituals, rites, festivals, etc., and spans millennia. Poets convey their experiences and reveal ideas about all aspects of life through their poems.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Tools

To collect data for this study, two sets of Google Form questionnaires were used, one for learners and the other for teachers. Each questionnaire contains ten closed-ended questions with five response choices: “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “neutral,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” The questions focused on poetry’s impact on four major English skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. .

B. Participants

For this study, firstly, data were collected from English language learners who were studying at the secondary level in Bangladesh (Class 06- Class 10). Second, information was gathered from teachers who teach English in those schools. The respondents were from Cambrian School & College, Monno International School & College, B.H Khan School and College, Scholastica, St. Gregory’s High School & College, and BEPZA Public School & College. In total, 11 teachers and 60 students from these institutions participated in the study.

C. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed by following a quantitative method to understand the correlation between the learners’ and teachers’ view on using poetry in EFL classrooms. To reveal the result, uncover the challenges and come up with possible recommendations, the data collected from the learners was compared with that of the teachers. Also, a comparison of the views was made from the responses.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. I enjoy teaching the poems included in textbook more than other texts.

11 responses

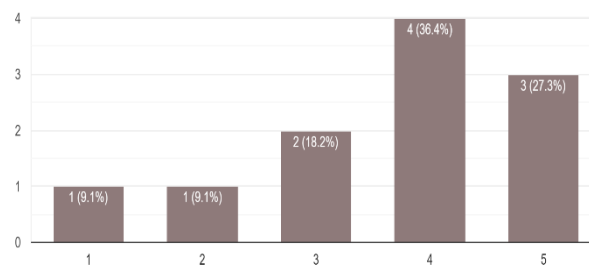


Fig. 1 Enjoying poems (Teacher’s View)

Around 64% of the teachers responded that they enjoy teaching poems more than other texts in the classroom. Only 2 respondents, out of 11, do not enjoy teaching poetry more than other texts.

1. I enjoy the poems included in my textbook more than other texts.

60 responses

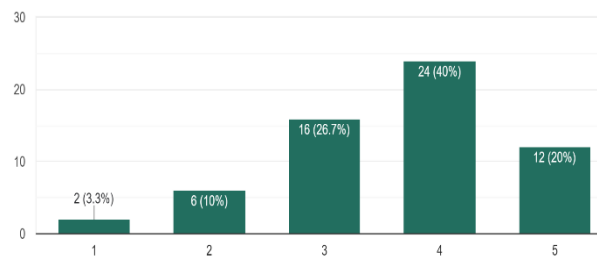


Fig. 2 Enjoying poems (Student’s View)

Students replied almost in a similar manner as 60% of them said they enjoy the poems included in their textbooks. Only 8 respondents, out of 60, do not enjoy poetry more than other texts.

2. Poems make my students feel encouraged to think in English.

11 responses

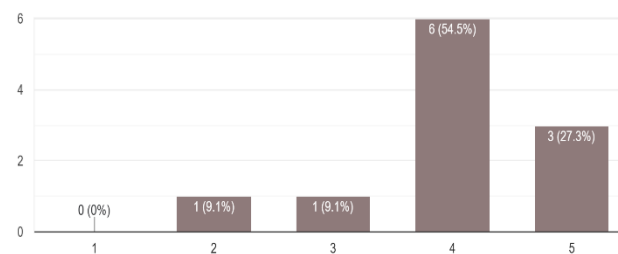


Fig. 3 Encouragement through poems (Teacher’s View)

Around 81% of the teachers think that their students are encouraged to think in English when they use poems in language classrooms. None of the respondents strongly disagreed with the ability of poetry to motivate their students.

2. Poems make me feel encouraged to think in English.

60 responses

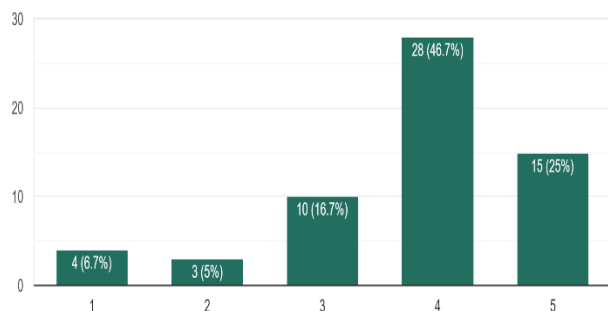


Fig. 4 Encouragement through poems (Student's View)

Around 72% of students feel encouraged to think in English through poems. Only 7 respondents out of 60 disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

3. Poems help my students learn the stress, intonation, and flow of the English text.

9 responses

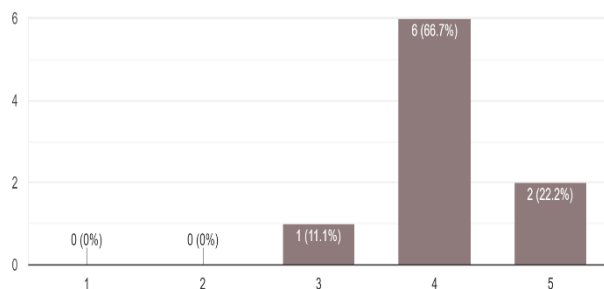


Fig. 5 Learning English text through poems (Teacher's View)

Almost 90% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that poems help students learn the stress, intonation, and flow of the English text used in the poems. Notably, none of them disagreed with it.

3. Poems help me learn the stress, intonation, and flow of the English text.

60 responses

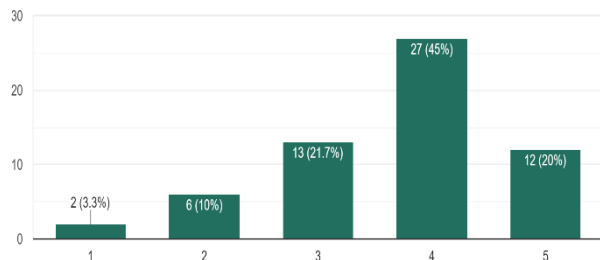


Fig. 6 Learning English text through poems (Student's View)

On the other hand, around 66% of the students agreed or strongly agreed to the fact that they could learn these aspects of English through poetry. Only 8 respondents out of 60 disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Surprisingly, 22% of the students are not sure about it as they responded neutrally.

4. My students can learn new words/ vocabulary from the poems more effectively than other texts.

11 responses

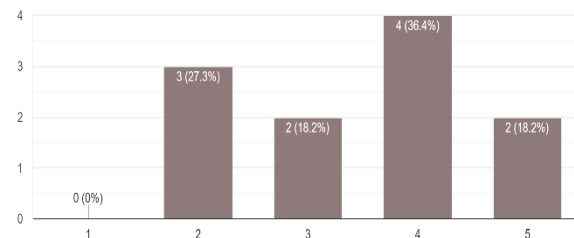


Fig. 7 Learning English vocabulary through poems (Teacher's View)

Poems, according to 55% of teachers, are more effective than other texts for teaching students new vocabulary. Again, none of them strongly disagreed with it. Almost 19% are not sure about it though.

4. I can learn new words/ vocabulary from the poems more effectively than other texts.

60 responses

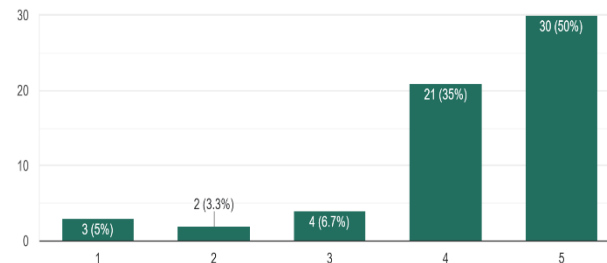


Fig. 8 Learning English vocabulary through poems (Student's View)

1% of the students feel they learn new words better through poetry than other texts in English. Only 5 respondents, out of 60, disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

5. Poems help my students write my thoughts in an organized manner.

11 responses

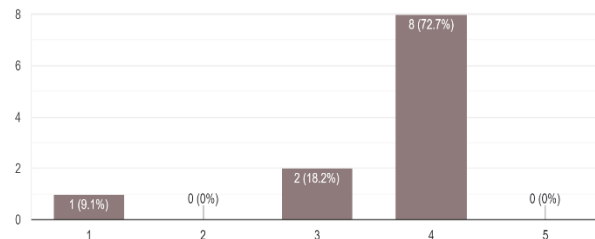


Fig. 9 Improving thinking in English through poems (Teacher's View)

72.7% of teachers agreed that poems help their students organize their thoughts. It is observed that none of them strongly agreed or disagreed with it. 18.2% of them are not quite sure about it either.

5. Poems help me write my thoughts in an organized manner.

60 responses

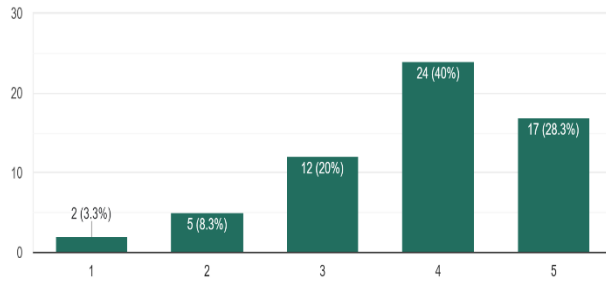


Fig. 10 Improving thinking in English through poems (Student's View)

Almost 69% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that poems help them write in a more organized manner. It is observed that 20% of them are not sure about it while 7 respondents, out of 60, disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

7. While listening to poem recitation, my students can understand the thoughts clearly.

10 responses

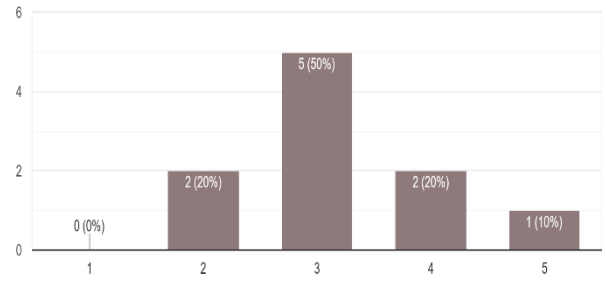


Fig. 13 Understanding English pronunciation (Teacher's View)

50% of the teachers are not sure about whether their students can understand the thoughts when they listen to the poems in classrooms. 30% of them agreed or strongly agreed to this statement while 20% disagreed with it. Notably, none of them strongly disagreed with it.

6. My students can write the new words learnt from poems better than what they learn from other resources.

11 responses

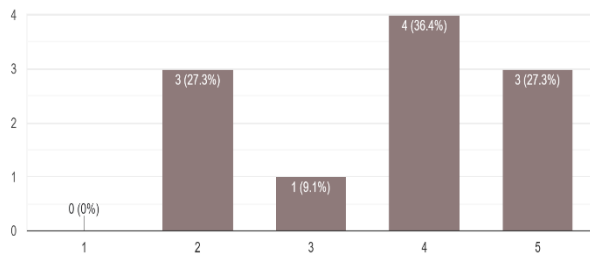


Fig. 11 Implementing newly learnt English words (Teacher's View)

Around 64% of the teachers agreed that their students can use the newly learnt words better than what they have learnt from other types of content used in English language classrooms. It is observed that none of them strongly disagreed though around 28% disagreed with it.

7. While listening to poem recitation, I can understand the thoughts clearly.

60 responses

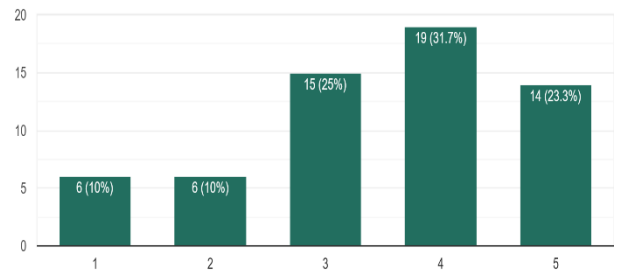


Fig. 14 Understanding English pronunciation (Student's View)

Surprisingly around 55% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that poems help them understand their thoughts better. 20% of them disagreed with it whereas 25% were not exactly sure about it.

6. I can write the new words learnt from poems better than what I learn from other resources.

60 responses

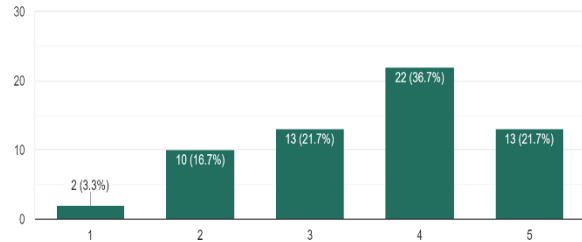


Fig. 12 Implementing newly learnt English words (Student's View)

Around 58% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that poems help them write new words better. It is observed that 21.7% of them are not sure about it while 12 respondents, out of 60, disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

8. Poems make my students more interested in listening to the English class.

11 responses

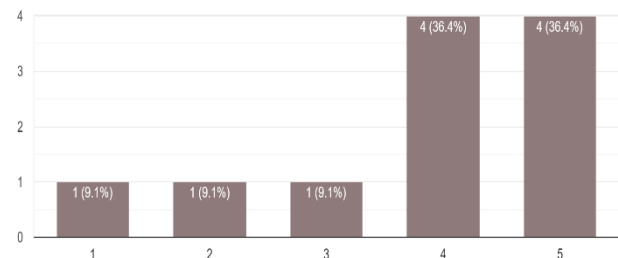


Fig. 15 Poems bringing interest to English Classes (Teacher's View)

Almost 74% of the teachers feel that poems make their students more interested in listening to English class. 9% of them are confused about it, while 18% disagree or strongly disagree with it.

8. Poems make me more interested in listening to the English class.

60 responses

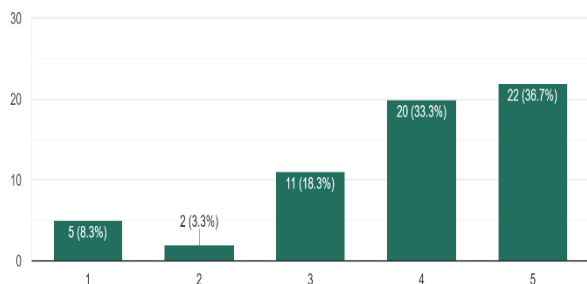


Fig. 16 Poems bringing interest to English Classes (Student’s View)

It is interesting to notice that more than 70-% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that poems make them interested in EFL classrooms. Approximately 11% of them disagreed with it, whereas 19% were not quite sure.

9. Poems improves the English pronunciation of my students .

11 responses

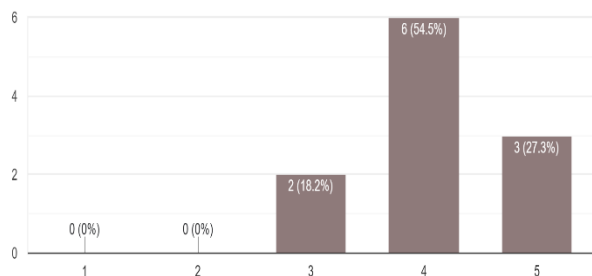


Fig. 17 Poems helping English Pronunciation (Teacher’s View)

Poems, according to the majority of teachers (82%), improve students’ English pronunciation. 18% of them are not sure about it. Interestingly, none of them disagreed or strongly disagreed with it.

9. Poems improves my English pronunciation.

60 responses

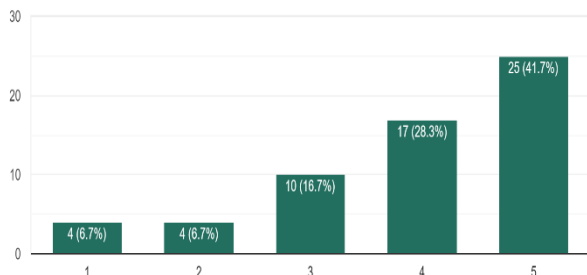


Fig. 18 Poems helping English Pronunciation (Student’s View)

Surprisingly, around 70% of the students also agreed or strongly agreed that poems help with their pronunciation as they can learn and use the English words more accurately. 13% of them disagreed with it, whereas around 17% were not exactly sure about it.

10. My students can use the expressions learnt from poems in real life communication.

11 responses

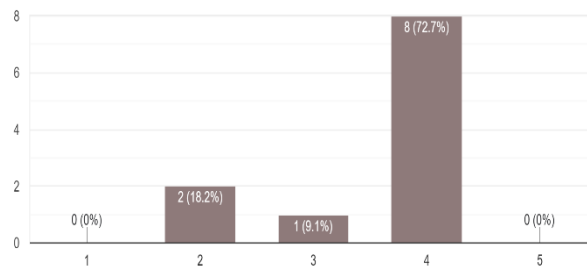


Fig. 19 Poems improving real life communication (Teacher’s View)

Almost 73% of the teachers agreed that their students could use the expressions learned from poems in real life communication. 9% of them are not sure, while 18% disagree with it. Notably, none of them strongly disagreed with it.

10. I can use the expressions learnt from poems in real life communication.

60 responses

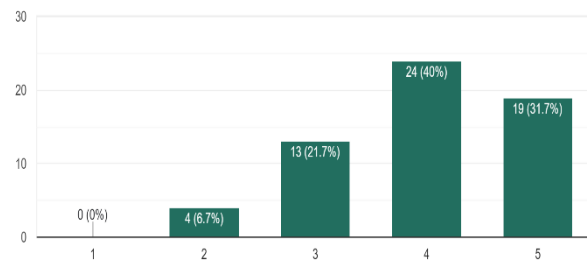


Fig. 20 Poems improving real life communication (Student's View)

Approximately 72% of students agreed or strongly agreed that poems help with expressions in real-life situations. 22 percent of them were not exactly sure about it, but surprisingly, none of them strongly disagreed with it.

All of these data show that teachers and students have similar beliefs about using poems as a literary tool to learn English as a foreign language. The majority of respondents from both groups agreed on the appropriateness, usability, understandability, and effectiveness of poems in the overall language learning process. The percentages show uncanny similarities, as a general understanding holds that students are not much interested in literary texts in English language classrooms. This data gives statistical proof that both the teachers and students are on the same page regarding the impacts of poems in the EFL environment.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from the study, there can be no doubt that a few areas need improvements. Some recommendations are listed herewith.

1. Teachers should incorporate more writing exercises after they introduce the poems to the class so that students can express their thoughts in a more organized way.

2. Students should be encouraged to create their own style when writing a poem or any creative work.
3. Students should be motivated to critically examine their work so that they can improve their writing level.

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