

# 14444

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# English Prospective Teachers' Views on Using Poetry to Enhance Reading Skills

## Abstract

Exploring the role of poetry in language education, this study seeks to understand its impact on reading skills from the perspective of EFL students preparing to become English teachers. With the increasing globalization of English, the techniques for teaching and enhancing its comprehension are evolving. Poetry, with its rhythmic and metaphorical nuances, offers a unique avenue to tap into this development. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research engaged ninety-one English Language Education program participants. The findings reveal multifaceted benefits: a significant majority viewed poetry as an avenue for vocabulary enhancement, emphasizing its rich and varied lexicon. Others associated poetry with improvements in literal comprehension, attributing this to the layered meanings often found in poems. The attributes of critical thinking, interpretation of figurative language, grammar refinement, and reading fluency were also highlighted, reflecting poetry's comprehensive influence on reading dimensions. These insights underscore the pedagogical value of poetry in language development, suggesting that integrating authentic poetic materials not only enriches the language repertoire but also amplifies the depth and relevance of the learning experience for students.

**Keywords:** Reading, poetry, teaching media, students' perceptions

## INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a fundamental medium of communication, playing a pivotal role in students' intellectual, social, and emotional development (Nishihara, 2022; Saleh & Althaqafi, 2022). Of the myriad languages learned globally, English stands out as the predominant second language due to its global relevance and the numerous opportunities it offers across cultural, educational, and professional spectrums (Ashrafuzzaman et al., 2021; Hutapea & Suwastini, 2019). Given the close interrelation of language and literature, immersing in English literature can significantly bolster English language acquisition (Rahimipour, 2020; Suwastini et al., 2022).

Specifically, literature provides an avenue to enhance critical skills, notably reading. Defined as the process of comprehending written text, reading skills encompass various facets, from phonemic awareness to comprehension (Blank, 2006; Lunzer & Garner, 1979; Schumm, 2007). These skills are imperative for holistic language development and boosting digital literacy, expanding knowledge horizons, stimulating creativity, and empowering them to identify individual words and understand their significance in a given context, laying the foundation for fluency. This fluency, or the ability to traverse a text smoothly, sets the stage for deeper comprehension, enabling students to grasp the main ideas and underlying details of a passage. Furthermore, as students delve into English texts, they invariably expand their vocabulary, imbibing new words and expressions that enrich their linguistic arsenal. (Ali et al., 2022; Pustika & Wiedarti, 2019). However, the teaching landscape isn't without challenges, especially in an EFL context. Educators often grapple with students' limited vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension levels (Fahas, 2021; Fitri & Ginting, 2021; Hidayati & Zulaeha, 2018).

Literature, with its rich tapestry of genres, offers a solution. From simple rhymes to intricate poems, literature can provide engaging and enriching reading experiences. Poetry, in particular, stands out with its potent blend of emotive content and linguistic richness (Baharuddin et al., 2022; Beaumont, 2022; Concannon-Gibney, 2021). Its inherent metaphoric nature amplifies learning, offering readers varied linguistic

perspectives, motivation, emotional resonance, and familiarity with figurative language (Kartini et al., 2022; Rahimipour, 2020). Poetry can also elevate speaking skills by accentuating stress, tone, and intonation (Suwastini & Dewi, 2023).

Despite poetry's evident merits in language teaching, there's a paucity of research focusing on prospective teachers' perceptions of its utility. Addressing this gap, this article delves into understanding how future educators perceive the role of poetry in enhancing reading skills, offering insights into its pedagogical implications.

## METHOD

The present study was designed as qualitative research, following the interactive qualitative data analysis model from (Miles et al., 2014). They explain that this model consists of four stages: data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. In this model, the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing happen concurrently. In contrast, the result of the conclusion drawn is continuously compared to the data collection process and results.

This study enrolled ninety-one students of English Language Education who were studying to be English teachers. As prospective English teachers, they took the Introduction to Literature and Literature for Language Teaching courses, preparing them to have the competence to use literature in their English classrooms. Hence, in this research, these subjects would be referred to as prospective English teachers. The research was conducted in 2022 when the respondents took the course Literature and Language Teaching, which continued the course Introduction to Literature. There were 213 students enrolled in this study, but only ninety-one students willingly became respondents.

The data collection was conducted as a document study, where the respondents wrote argumentative paragraphs on the benefits of using poetry for improving reading skills. The essays were analyzed thematically, guided by the theory of reading and reading skills from Blank (2006), Lunzer & Garner (1979), and Schumm (2007). In this data collection, the researchers became the main instrument of the study. A supplemental instrument in the form of a table of data tabulation supported the principal researchers.

Similar to the data collection process, the researchers also became the leading data analysis instrument. As guided by Miles' et al. (2014), the data analysis included the process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. After the data were collected from the respondents' essays, the argued benefits of poetry for improving students' skills were categorized during the data condensation stage using the categories of reading skills argued by Blank (2006), Lunzer & Garner (1979) and Schumm (2007), namely vocabulary repertoire, literal comprehension, critical thinking, interpreting figurative language, grammar, and reading fluency. These categories helped form the table of data categorizations, which aided the main instruments during the data condensation.

The categorized data resulting from the data condensation stage were displayed and elaborated in the data display process. The summarized data were displayed in a table (see Table 1). The data were then elaborated to explain how the prospective English teachers perceive the benefits of poetry for improving students' reading skills in EFL contexts. Simultaneous to the process of data condensation and data display, conclusions are drawn repeatedly. The temporary conclusions are continuously compared with the data collection, data condensation, and the data display until the process was saturated and resulted in a trustworthy conclusion.

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## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below presents the findings of the present study concerning the perceptions of ninety-one prospective English teachers in using poetry to teach reading comprehension.

Table 1: Prospective Teachers' Perceptions of Using Poetry to Teach Reading

No.	Prospective Teachers' Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Poetry can develop students' vocabulary repertoire	60	40.55
2	Poetry can enhance students' literal comprehension	34	22.97
3	Poetry can boost students' critical thinking	20	13.51
4	Poetry can improve the student's ability to interpret figurative language	13	8.78
5	Poetry can advance students' mastery of grammar	12	8.11
6	Poetry can foster students' reading fluency	9	6.08

Table 1 shows six perceptions from ninety-one prospective teachers' essays. They believed that poetry could improve students' vocabulary repertoire ( $f=60$ ), literal comprehension ( $f=34$ ), and critical thinking ( $f=20$ ). Moreover, the prospective teachers also believed that poetry increases students' understanding of figurative language ( $f=13$ ), grammar ( $f=12$ ), critical thinking, and reading fluency ( $f=9$ ).

### Poetry for Developing Students' Vocabulary

It is said that when a person learns how to read, they should begin by understanding the words on the page (Lunzer & Garner, 1979; Schumm, 2007). Students' reading skills will improve if the students know what the word means. Hence, students are more likely to understand the written words that are already a part of their oral language. The number of vocabulary the students must learn will be a significant challenge for them to understand the text. As students' vocabulary improves, so will their reading skills. In this study, sixty prospective English teachers believed that using poetry as media to teach reading skills can enrich the students' vocabularies because poetry can contain new or unfamiliar words, unique uses of familiar words, and the richness of connotative meaning made possible in the composition of poetry.

Traditionally, poetry utilizes sounds and stress patterns to form the poem's musical rhyming and rhythmical sounds (Perrine, 1982). This characteristic of poetry sometimes requires a poem to include words not commonly used in daily conversation. Thus, students may bump into these new words when reading an English poem. As they try to understand the poem, they would need to understand the meanings of the words, including these unfamiliar words. Prospective Teacher 10, for example, states that,

Excerpt 1. *"The most important thing about using poetry as vocabulary material is that poetry contains many unusual words..."*

(Prospective Teacher 10).

Excerpt 1 above shows that Prospective Teacher 10 finds poetry contains "many unusual words," which may mean new words for him/her or words that she/he had never found in other reading materials. Besides, students can also gain new words and new use of familiar words when they have to practice writing poems. Another respondent argues that,



Excerpt 2. *"Poetry is an ideal teaching material ... [for] enriching ... vocabulary knowledge. Through its unique and short composition teacher can use poetry to create many different activities that [focus] on developing students' vocabulary."*

(Prospective Teacher 12).

Excerpt 2 shows Prospective Teacher 12's idea of using poem writing to improve students' vocabulary. Simple instructions like finding rhyming words to end the lines within a stanza can require the students to explore new words with similar final sounds, indirectly exposing them to the meanings of the new words. The composition of words in a line of poetry is not formulaic in the sense that a line does not have to form a sentence. It allows poetry to familiar words in unusual ways. A poem, unlike other forms of literature, has no bounds to its possibilities in terms of content and form. As argued by Alqahtani (2015), Ilyas (2016), and Özen & Mohammadzadeh (2012), poetry can be an ideal teaching material for both teachers and students in vocabulary development since it contains various unusual or rarely-used vocabulary.

Moreover, poetry can be very descriptive while hiding profound meaning beyond what is written (Boynton & Mack, 1965). Poetry can be short, but the words can contain various connotations, providing a more profound message that could be missed in its first reading (Suwastini & Pradnyani, 2023). Prospective Teacher 43 states that,

Excerpt 3 *"Teaching English through poetry is an ideal way to develop an awareness of language acquisition and vocabularies by giving enough illustration as it has rich sources of material."*

(Prospective Teacher 43).

Excerpt 3 above shows how Prospective Teacher 43 saw poetry as an illustrative use of language, where emotion could be emphasized by strong description and allusion to other reading material, such as historical events or previous literature. Repeated reading of such poems, combined with footnotes often provided by books of poetry analysis or anthologies, students could learn how words can carry profound connotative meanings. Hence, students can gain new meanings of familiar words while reading poetry. At the same time, they can also gain insights into history or previous literature that inspires the poem.

Thus, as poetry expose students to new word, new use of words, and connotations of familiar words, students can improve their vocabulary repertoires. The unique compositions of words in a poem can make them memorable. Using poetry allows students to learn vocabulary differently and be interested in a poem's vocabulary (Kellem, 2009). They will remember the new words that exist in the poetry in their memory well. This vocabulary building is further supported with insights into possible connotative meanings of the words. Richer vocabulary repertoires and broad insights help students develop their ability to comprehend a text, making them more fluent readers.

### **Poetry for Enhancing Students' Literal Comprehension**

Reading is an activity to understand a written text (Blank, 2006); (Lunzer & Garner, 1979; Schumm, 2007). It is an interaction between the reader and the text (Schumm, 2007). Students with good reading comprehension will quickly understand the contents of a discourse or written text. Good reading comprehension allows the students

to get more information on the written text that they read. In this study, thirty-four prospective teachers considered poetry a creative way to enhance students' literal comprehension because poems should be read repeatedly, they include many **punctuations**, and they can become quick warming up for initiating reading lessons or as an intermezzo to make reading lessons more varied.

The teachers can apply short, fun, and meaningful poetry to increase the students' literal comprehension. Prospective Teacher 19 mentions that poetry can increase the student's ability to interpret and analyze a text by determining the main idea, finding detailed information, interpreting the word's meaning in context, and drawing a conclusion. Because poems are supposed to be read repeatedly (Mack & Boynton, 1985), students who read poems are trained to find the poem's meaning. **This process is made possible by the nature of poetry as the shortest form of literature, so it takes little time for the students to read the poems several times.**

Another nature of poems that helps students **enhance** their literal comprehension is the intensive use of punctuation in poetry, as exemplified by Emily Dickinson's poems (Trisnawaty et al., 2017). Prospective Teacher 25 views that,

Excerpt 4 *"Understanding punctuation in poetry is very important in reading poetry..."* (Prospective Teacher 25)

According to Prospective Teacher 25, understanding the punctuation marks will allow them to distinguish the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. Poets are wordsmiths who try to cram as much meaning into each word they use in a poem. Punctuation can completely change the meaning of a line or a stanza, even the meaning of the whole poem. It can determine the student's ability to comprehend the poem.

Moreover, poetry reading can also become part of strategies for teaching reading. For example, Prospective Teachers 66, 70, and 83 are optimistic that reading poetry can be made as a pre-reading activity, a while activity, or even a post-reading activity. Even more, Prospective Teacher 66 argues that,

Excerpt 5 *"...in using poetry to improve reading comprehension, it can [be] develop[ed] in stages, steps and activities as long as students carry out activities in reading poetry."* (Prospective Teacher 66).

Excerpt 5 shows that Prospective Teacher 66 thinks he/she can use poetry in all stages of reading lessons. She argues that she can use poetry reading as a pre-activity, where a short poem can be read aloud or sung to build the students' readiness to read the text for the main activity. Further, a poem could also be the reading text during the main activity. As a post activity, a short and catchy poem could be the choice for concluding a specific reading activity.

Thus, using poetry in teaching reading is helpful in teaching to improve reading comprehension among students. Due to the universal topic of poetry, students will try to use their knowledge to understand the idea **in** the poem they are reading. Besides, poetry can also make the students understand the **messages** and implied meanings. Suwastini & Dewi (2023) also found that prospective teachers perceived using poetry as beneficial to improve students' comprehension. The students will undergo the process of understanding the meaning of a written language to get the knowledge and information from what they have read.

### **Poetry for Boosting Students' Critical Thinking**

The readers' understanding and critical thinking are essential for developing students' reading skills since they involve perceptions and thoughts (Aprizani, 2016; Langan, 2013; Lunzer & Garner, 1979). In this study, twenty prospective teachers argue that poetry can be a good, motivating, and addicting medium to enrich the students' critical thinking because poems can be very expressive, and the effort to interpret a poem could be made into a prolific discussion.

Poems can be very expressive (Perrine & Arp, 1982). In the view of the romantics, to understand a poem, we have to get the emotions expressed by the poem through its words (Suwastini & Pradnyani, 2023). Thus, it is understandable that a prospective teacher in this study believes that,

Excerpt 6 *"poetry makes the reader to use their critical thinking to understand the context of the story that told by the poets."*  
(Prospective Teacher 18)

Prospective Teacher 18 believes that to get the emotion expressed in a poem, the reader needs to understand the context of the poem. For Prospective Teacher 18, this process requires critical thinking because words in a poem can carry many connotations. Besides, a poem can be very symbolic in that it can relate to different readers in different ways, depending on the repertoires or background of the readers. Because readers bring their prior knowledge into the interpretation of a text, searching for the emotions expressed in a poem would require a critical thinking process, in which a reader has to connect their prior knowledge with new information. Often, such readings could create an entirely new interpretation of a poem that is very contextual to the moment of the reading. According to Tabačková (2015) connecting a reader's context with a literary work requires critical thinking. Thus, as students try to reflect on the poem by putting the poem in the context of their life, they are doing a reflection that trains their critical thinking (Greenall & Swan, 1986; Langan, 2013; Lunzer & Garner, 1979; Scull, 1987).

Prospective Teacher 19 adds that the search for the emotions or the meaning of a poem can trigger a lively discussion. Prospective Teacher 19 believes that because a poem can mean differently for different readers, the students could have very different opinions about what a poem means. Each student will have to present their arguments about the poem's meaning or emotions by carefully relating words/lines/stanzas with their prior knowledge. Furthermore, Prospective Teachers 25 and 51 argue that if the discussions are formed in small competing groups, they could foster the students' collaborative and critical thinking within the group, while the discussions among the different groups could become a good practice for students' communicative skills (Maley & Duff, 1990; Schmit, 2002; Suwastini et al., 2021).

### **Poetry for Improving Student's Ability to Interpret Figurative Language**

Figurative language is a unique way of using familiar words in new ways, creating new and deeper meanings (Keraf, 2009; Lunzer & Garner, 1979). While many figurative languages can be clichés as they have often been used, new and rich composed figurative languages are possible in poem compositions (Perrine & Arp, 1982). In this study, thirteen prospective teachers believe that poetry can be a very beneficial medium for introducing figurative language to students while improving their ability to interpret it.

Prospective Teacher 40 believes that most poems include figurative language to enhance the imagery in the poems and to give words greater power to the audiences in terms of the descriptions or emotions conveyed by the poem,



Excerpt 7 *"...poetry can also be used as a reference for educators who may want to teach their students about figurative language."*

(Prospective Teacher 40)

Thus, Prospective Teacher 40 believes that educators can teach about figurative language using poetry. Similarly, Prospective Teacher 48 believes that,

Excerpt 8 *"using figurative language as a teaching material is effective because through figurative language, the students can understand the meaning of the poetry that the poets try to imply."*

(Prospective Teacher 48)

As shown in Excerpt 8, Prospective Teacher 48 focused on how understanding figurative language could help students' reading comprehension. In other words, Prospective Teacher 48 stands for the dual benefit of using poetry in EFL classes: improving students' mastery of figurative languages and enhancing students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, Prospective Teacher 82 forwards the idea of using poetry analysis to improve students' understanding of figurative language. This student proposes a guessing game to familiarize students with examples of personification, hyperbole, metaphor, or simile. Similarly, Prospective Teacher 90 states that reading poems assists students in recognizing examples of figurative language, enhancing their ability to categorize things.

#### **Poetry for Advancing Students' Mastery of Grammar**

According to Brown (2001), "grammar is the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in sentences." Although poems are optional to be written in complete and grammatical sentences (Kennedy & Gioia, 1997), the unique phrasing of lines in a poem could present a complicated sentence structure. Lines in a poem could be connected to form a sentence, often with many noun phrases, adjective clauses, and adverbial clauses. In this study, twelve prospective teachers stated that poetry can increase students' mastery of English Grammar by tracing the sentence structure of the lines.

For example, Prospective Teachers 3, 20, 32, 35, 49, 50, and 67 believe that recognizing the poem's structure could familiarize the students with English Grammar. They admit that they often found that a stanza of several lines could form a sentence. They also recognize that some poems end in a period-like sense, like where a sentence ends. Besides, they recognize the use of a period as a punctuation that marks the end of a sentence. Thus, the earliest reading of a poem could train students to find where these periods are. A well-coordinated sentence that spans several lines and builds up to a satisfying conclusion can be highly effective in poetry. A jumble of unrelated phrases or a monotonous string of one-line sentences should be avoided. This participant may mean some sentence or syntax structures the students can learn from the poetry. These include two short sentences linked by a semicolon, actual or implied, a compound sentence ending with an explanatory statement, and balanced pairs. Students must pay attention to organizational competencies, which contain rules for arranging sentences into a single unit (Blank, 2006; Langan, 2013).

More specifically, prospective Teacher 67 mentions that teachers can use a stylistic approach to teach lexical items by differentiating a poem's verbs, nouns,



adjectives, and adverbs. If the students stylistically analyzed poetry in the learning activities, it could provide opportunities to explain formal features of English, including phonological, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse levels, and enhance their comprehension. This idea is very feasible without boring the class because poems are short. Thus, the task should be accomplished quickly before the students feel tired of classifying and counting the members of each lexical group (Ahmad, 2014). Lazar (1993) and Blank (2006) argue that teaching a foreign language through poetry can benefit students to see the language's syntactical and grammatical structures. Students' reading competence will improve with a strong mastery of grammar (Arnold, 1999).

### **Poetry For Fostering Students' Reading Fluency**

While reading fluency is an ability that cannot be obtained naturally, it has been known that a lack of reading fluency can be a significant obstacle to good comprehension skills and overall reading competence (Schumm, 2007). In this study, nine prospective teachers perceive that poetry reading could foster students' reading fluency because while they are naturally short, poems have to be read aloud, and they should be read with the right emotions that the poem conveys.

According to Mack & Boynton (1985), poems should be read aloud so the beauty of the sound pattern and the rhythm of the poem can be heard and felt by both the reader and the audience. This is especially true for English poems, where the words would form the rhythmical sound patterns that form the poem's metrical pattern (Perrine, 1967). Prospective Teacher 68 recognizes the benefit of reading a poem aloud to improve reading fluency. She argues,

Excerpt 9      *"Reading out loud can improve the prosody in reading fluency."*

(Prospective Teacher 68)

Excerpt 9 above shows that Prospective Teacher 68 felt that reading a poem helped her to read the words accurately, at a reasonable rate, with the correct intonation. For Indonesian students, mastering the correct intonation and stress pattern in English is difficult because their mother tongue, Indonesian, is not an accented language (Suwastini et al., 2023). Practicing prosody through poem reading could improve students' fluency in English. Fluency in the pronunciation and rhythm of English will support students' reading fluency because they know where to stop (i.e. in the presence of a period) or take a pause (i.e., in the presence of a comma or semicolon), which eventually supports their reading comprehension.

Furthermore, Prospective Teacher 16 declares that poems, as the shortest form of literature, offer benefits that can improve students' fluency. Poems are usually very short. For example, a sonnet is only 14 lines. Other poems could be 16 or 18 lines, while an epigram can be as short as two lines. Most of these lines are very short on its own. Some poems have a line with one or two words only. For Prospective Teacher 16, reading a short text like a poem aloud is manageable. Thus, students will be motivated to keep practicing correct pronunciation, repeatedly reading the lines from beginning to end. As argued by Rasinski et al. (2016) and Senawati et al. (2021), repeated reading aloud with a good model is crucial for improving students' reading fluency.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings from this study underscore the value that prospective English teachers place on poetry as a medium to enhance various facets of EFL students' reading abilities. This includes enriching vocabulary, bolstering comprehension, fostering

critical thinking, interpreting figurative language, strengthening grammar, and refining reading fluency. Reading, as a multifaceted cognitive activity, requires thoughtful processing to discern a text's intent and meaning. By familiarizing students with the creative and analytical demands of poetry, they are better equipped to navigate other textual formats. The inherent brevity of poems, combined with their use of figurative and connotative language meant for vocal delivery, positions them as ideal learning tools. Moreover, English poems offer an authentic, yet digestible, learning experience especially beneficial for younger students.

This study elucidates that poetry can be a dynamic tool, not just as a source of literary exploration, but also as a pedagogical asset in honing reading skills. It invites students into discussions laden with emotion and meaning, and its rhythmic nature facilitates fluency practice. Moreover, its rich textual nuances offer opportunities for vocabulary and grammar enhancement. It is crucial to note, however, that this study's scope was confined to prospective teachers' perspectives on poetry's role in advancing reading skills. Future investigations could delve into the potential of poetry in bolstering other facets of English proficiency and its practical implementation in EFL classroom settings.

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