Using Poem to Teach English Language to EFL Students

Nawal Hussein Lafta

Department of English/College of Arts/University of Thi-Qar, Nasiriyah, Iraq

Email:nawal1967@gmail.com

Abstract:

This study seeks to investigate the efficacy of using poetry to improve EFL Iraqi students' English grammar and vocabulary using adjectives, synonyms, and antonyms. The authors employed a quantitative approach to acquire the necessary data. The authors administered pre- and post-tests to investigate the students' perspectives on using poetry in the language classroom. The participants in the study attended Thi-Qar University. The research sample included nineteen female and two male second-year students from the Department of English, College of the Arts. The analysis of the two exams' scores revealed a significant improvement in all test topics. This result demonstrates that the students have favorable attitudes toward using poetry to teach the English language in the classroom. Poetry has a positive impact on the development of English grammar and vocabulary.

Keywords: (poem, Teaching English, EFL students).

1. Introduction

English grammar is an essential component of language learning for EFL (English as a Foreign Language). It lays the foundation for effective communication and comprehension of the English language. However, teaching grammar can be challenging for educators, as it often involves complex rules and structures that may be challenging for students to grasp. One approach that has gained popularity in recent years is using poems as a teaching tool for English grammar. Poems can be an effective and engaging way to teach grammar to EFL students. They offer a range of benefits, including improved comprehension of grammar rules, increased vocabulary, and enhanced cultural understanding. When teaching grammar through poetry, EFL instructors can choose poems focusing on specific grammar structures or language skills, such as identifying adjectives, recognizing verb tenses and vocabulary, or understanding complex

sentence structures. By analyzing the language and structure of poems, students can develop a deeper understanding of English grammar and its rules while also improving their reading, writing, and listening skills.

Moreover, poetry allows EFL students to appreciate and enjoy the English language's beauty while expanding their vocabulary and cultural knowledge. Poems can expose students to different cultures, historical periods, and literary movements, helping them develop their language proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills.

According to Finch (2003), using poetry in writing class can provide an effective and collaborative means of language learning and personal expression. Simple forms give students a framework for expressing ideas that are meaningful to them without the constraints of grammatical accuracy. Saraç (2003) investigated the educational benefits of poetry in providing readers with a different viewpoint towards language use by going beyond the general usages and rules of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, and triggers unmotivated readers owing to being so open to explorations and different interpretations, evokes feelings and thoughts in heart and in mind, also makes students familiar with figures of speech.

Vk and Savaed (2014) argued that poetry has opted to teach English since it is considered a valuable, authentic material for cultural enrichment, language enrichment, literary enjoyment, and personal involvement. Antika (2017) considered literature a promotion tool for language learning. It can be used to foster students' motivation to read and write to achieve academic proficiency.

In summary, poetry can be an effective and enjoyable way to teach English grammar to EFL students. By using poems to explore different grammar structures, verb tenses, and adjectives, instructors can engage students in the learning process and help them develop a deeper understanding of the English language while also fostering an appreciation for the beauty of poetry and the richness of English literature.

2- Literature Review

Many authors have addressed the issue of using poetry in teaching grammar. Islam (2022) suggested that poetry in EFL/ESL classrooms can empower the teaching pedagogy with its stylistic and pragmatic features. To focus on the pedagogical dimension of poetry in second language classrooms and how a poem can relate to and integrate to enhance the English language and cover the four core language skills, grammar, and vocabulary through interactive classroom activities. Syed and Wahas (2020) proposed to explore the advantages of teaching English through poetry and its challenges at Hajjah University in Yemen, from which suggestions for choosing poetries to teach English will be given with special reference to "Death, be not Proud" and "Lucy," as well as other suggested teaching methods for students. Alabi (2015) investigated the use of literature, which has become an invaluable subject that has added great value and contributed greatly to the teaching of English language and the discovery of many other developed ideas. Literature produces an exhilarating impulse that imprints a lasting picture on the mind of a learner. Saraç (2003) clarifies a number of advantages of using poetry for language teaching. The author explains that besides assisting the advancement of aesthetics among the learners, literature contributes to educational benefits as well by providing opportunities for considering novel usage of grammar, syntax, text organization as well as vocabulary. It also familiarizes learners with literary devices in a very casual manner. Mittal (2014) suggests that poetry has an integral role in the teaching and learning process as it enhances interaction and communication among peers or groups of students. Moreover, poetry has unique features like rhyme, rhythm and pitch. Thango (2017) discussed the benefits of using poetry in teaching English grammar to EFL learners and clarified that poems can provide a context that makes grammar more meaningful and learn how the language works. Also, from poems, students can speak properly and spell words correctly. Susikiran, (2013) investigated how simple poems and related activities might enhance grammar learning at school level and suggested that while focusing on the beauty of the words, students are simultaneously trained in the usage of grammatical contexts also. Ainy (2008) argued the use of poetry in teaching can well be used to invite learners to make use of their experience and knowledge of the world. Khatib and Derakhshan (2011) believe that literature, despite some weak points it might have, as any language teaching material might possess, provides a

motivating drive for language learning and teaching due to its spectacular features not readily found in any other texts. Kong (2010) showed that English poetry would be very helpful in fulfilling all the ultimate goals of extensive reading teaching, which aims at enhancing learners" aesthetic consciousness, creativity, and self-cultivation if it is properly used in extensive reading teaching.

2. The Poem taught in the class

In the present study, the researcher selected John Keats's poem "Ode to Autumn." This poem praises the splendor and bounty of autumn. It contains many descriptive adjectives that can help EFL students practice identifying and employing adjectives such as "mellow" fruitfulness, "full-grown" calves, "plump" hazel shells, "swollen", etc. This poem is also an excellent method to expose students to new vocabulary words in context, thereby facilitating their comprehension of the meaning and application of words. Details of the poem are as follows:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,

   Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

Conspiring with him how to load and bless

   With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;

To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,

   And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

      To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

   With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

And still more, later flowers for the bees,

Until they think warm days will never cease,

      For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

   Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

   Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,

   Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

     Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

   Steady thy laden head across a brook;

   Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,

     Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?

   Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—

While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

   And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

   Among the river sallows, borne aloft

     Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

   Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft

   The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

     And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

3. Purpose of the study

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This section describes the methods considered for data collection and analysis. It also describes the selected sample and the research instruments used to achieve the study's goals. Moreover, we present the pretest and posttest used to investigate the performance on grammar concepts, such as the participants' adjectives, synonyms, and antonyms. The quantitative method is adopted to achieve the goals of the study. Finally, we report data collection and statistical analysis for the findings.

4.1 Participants

The study participants consisted of 21 second-year students studying in the Department of English/College of Arts/University of Thi-Qar in the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023. The students included two males and nineteen females, and the range of ages varied from 20 to 23. The students were all non-native English speakers from various districts in Thi-Qar province.

4.2 The Selected Poetry

A poem was selected from internet resources according to its major themes to conduct the study. The researchers tried to ensure the chosen poetry was suitable for the participants' age, cultural background, and English levels.

4.3 Pre-test

In the first phase of the study, the pre-test was administered by selecting 25 multiple-choice questions to determine students' levels in adjectives, synonyms, and antonyms. The test was divided into three sections. Section one included eight multiple-choice questions in adjectives, Section two contained nine multiple-choice questions in synonyms, and Section three included eight multiple-choice questions in antonyms. Each section question is worth one point. Examples from each test section can be seen in the appendix section of this paper.

First, the teacher gave subjects clear instructions and examples demonstrating how each test section would be completed. Ninety minutes were allotted to take the test. At the end of the session, tests were taken up by the instructor.

4.4 Post-test

After the pretest and three lectures on the proposed poem, a posttest was conducted to examine the improvement of the students' levels in adjectives, synonyms, and antonyms. The posttest format was the same as the pretest, including the same amount and type of sections, questions, and question point values. Pretest and posttest were designed to assess the student's understanding and proficiency in the target grammar concepts of participants of this study. Similarly, the procedure for the posttest was the same as that of the pretest.

4.5 Validity of the Test

Three experts from the University of Thi-Qar were chosen to review the first draft, and based on their comments and suggestions, the second draft was adopted.

4.6 Reliability of the Test

A measuring instrument's level of consistency, precision, or accuracy is considered its level of reliability. According to the reliability, the outcomes would essentially be the same if the test were conducted twice under the same circumstances. The researcher administered the test to a sample of ten students, all of whom were in the department's third stage, in order to evaluate the test's dependability. The test was repeated for the same students after two weeks. The Pearson correlation between the combined scores from the two tests, as calculated by the researcher, was 0.90. This indicates that the test's outcomes were reliable and consistent.

4.2 Data Collection

A pre-test was administered at the start of the session to determine the subject's prior knowledge of the subject. The content provided by the instructor was covered in a post-test that the students took at the conclusion of the instruction. The purpose of the test was to ascertain whether teaching English grammar to EFL students through the use of poetry is beneficial.

3.6 Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher used some statistics to analyze the data as follows:

1. Frequencies, mean, standard deviation, bar diagrams, and histograms were used to describe and depicted the scores of the pretest and posttest.
2. Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used to test the normality of the two scores.
3. Person correlation was used after conducting the pre-test and post-test to examine the reliability of the test.
4. Paired sample T-test was used to analyze the differences between the scores of pretest and posttest.

4.5 **FINDINGS**

Figure 1 shows the pre-test and post-test scores where The y_axis shows the score while the x_axis shows the student number. Moreover, Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution of pre-test and post-test scores where the x_axis shows the interval of scores and y-axis shows how many subjects their scores lies in the given interval. According to Figure 1, all the participated students except one (StudNo=13) show higher scores of the posttest than that the pretest. From this result we can gather that there was an overall increase in the scores of the participants. In addition, Figure 2, which presents the frequency distribution of the difference between the two scores, reported that the highest difference appears in the interval 7-8 while the lowest one appears in the interval 9-10.

Student number	Gender	Pretest	Posttest	Posttest-Pretest
1	F	11	13	2
2	M	12	13	1
3	F	7	14	7
4	F	6	10	4
5	F	6	14	8
6	F	4	14	10
7	F	8	12	4
8	F	5	14	9
9	F	4	12	8
10	F	8	12	4

11	F	6	11	5
12	F	3	9	6
13	M	12	12	-1
14	F	10	10	0
15	F	12	12	0
16	F	3	10	7
17	F	11	12	1
18	F	9	10	1
19	F	7	11	4
20	F	6	14	8
21	F	8	14	6
mean		7.52	12.05	4.524
sd		2.96	1.627	3.234

The mean and standard deviation of the differences between posttest and pretest scores are 4.524 and 3.234, respectively. Prior to embarking the statistical analysis of the data, we need first, to investigate the normality of the differences between the two scores. The importance of this step is to determine which type of statistical test will be used whether it is a parametric test when the data is normally distributed or a non-parametric test otherwise. Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test is utilized and the results reveal that the K-S statistic is 0.148 with p-value=0.2. Therefore, the data is normally distributed. In order to perform a parametric test, we implement paired t-test for the score differences. As the results of the paired t-test show, that the test static is 6.409 with p-value<0.05 which indicates a significant difference was observed between the two scores in favor of the posttest with a significance level 0.05. Further, the 95% confidence interval is (3.051,5.996) which is the difference between the two scores is noted more than 6 and not less than 3. Clearly, the confidence interval does not contain the value 0 backing up our conclusion about the significance of the differences.
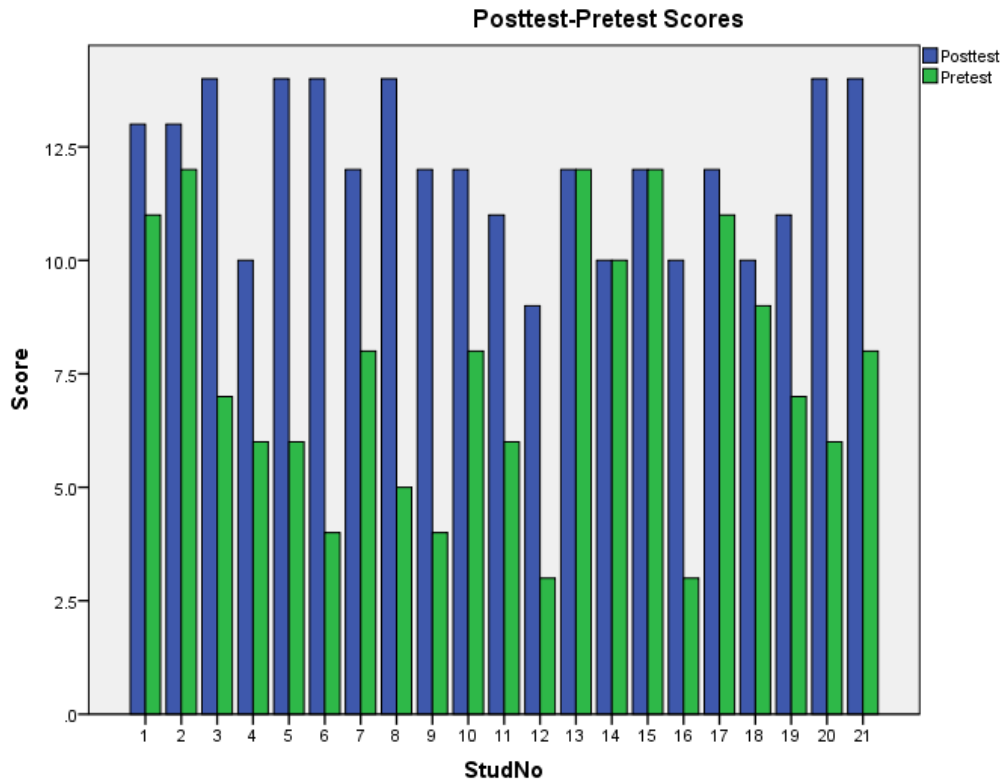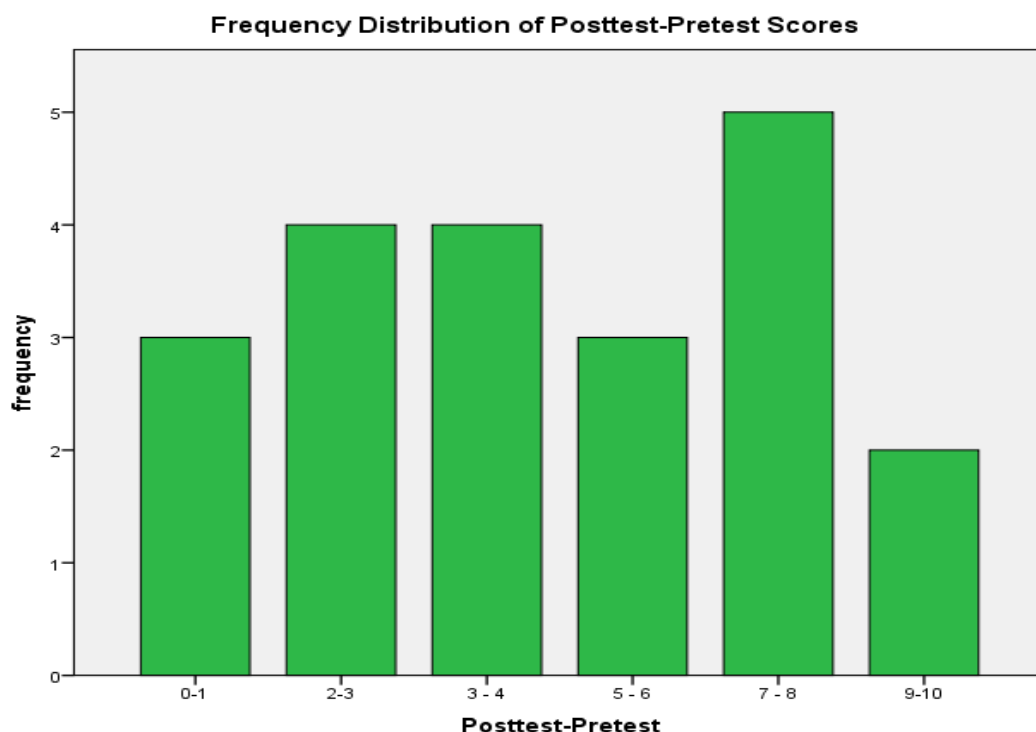
Figure 1 Posttest-Pretest Scores

Figure 2 Frequency Distribution of Posttest-Pretest Scores

5. CONCLUSION

Using poetry to teach EFL students the English language is an effective and appropriate method for language acquisition. Poems provide a complex context for vocabulary acquisition, grammar instruction, and cultural awareness while also aiding in developing essential skills such as reading comprehension and critical thinking. By incorporating poetry into language instruction, teachers can assist EFL students in developing a greater appreciation for the English language and its cultural significance, making the learning process more pleasurable and efficient. Finally, the researcher discovered through this study that there is a significant increase in the level of students during this effective method of teaching English grammar to

EFL students through poetry. It can enhance their English language comprehension practically and enjoyably.

References

1- Finch, Andrew. (2003) "Using Poems to Teach English. English Language Teaching. 15 (2), pp.29–45." English Language Teaching 15.2 :29-45.

2- Saraç, S. 2003. "A Suggested Syllabus for the Teaching of Poetry Course in ELT Departments of Turkey" Unpublished M.A Thesis. Ankara: Hacettepe University

3- Antika, Rindilla. "Poetry in EFL classroom." Tell-us journal 2.2 (2017): 20-35.

4- Syed, A. J. A., & Wahas, Y. M. A. (2020). Challenges and Solutions in Teaching English through Poetry to EFL Students at Hajjah University: A Case Study of William Wordsworth's Lucy and John Donne's Death Poems. rEFLections, 27(2), 189-198.

5- Vk, Pushpa., & Savaedi, S. Y. (2014). Teaching poetry in autonomous ELT classes. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 98, 1919-1925.

6- Islam, M. R. (2022). Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom: Integrating Conventional Poetry as Authentic Material. International Journal of Language and Literary Studies, 4(3), 312–328. https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v4i3.1052

7- Alabi, A. M. (2015). Teaching vocabulary through poetry in an EFL classroom. International Journal of New Trends in Arts, Sports & Science Education (IJTASE), 4(4).

8- Mittal, R. (2014). Teaching English through Poetry: A Powerful Medium for Learning Second Language. IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science, Volume 19, Issue 5, Ver. III, PP 21-23

9- Thango, M. Z. 2017 USING POETRY TO TEACH LANGUAGE AND GRAMMAR IN ISIZULU L1 e-Journal of the 5th Global Summit on Education 2017

10- Susikaran, R. S. A. (2013). Teaching grammar with playful poems. International Journal on Studies in Language and Literature (IJSELL), 1(4), 17-21.

11- Ainy, S. (2008). Poetry in the language classroom to assist in development of speaking skill. ESL Journal. Available at: http://www. esljournal. org/289047413. html. Available at: http://www.esljournal.org/289047413.html

12- Khatib, M., Rezaei, S., & Derakhshan, A. (2011). Literature in EFL/ESL Classroom. English language teaching, 4(1), 201-208.

13- Kong, F. (2010). On the Effectiveness of Applying English Poetry to Extensive Reading Teaching. Journal of Language Teaching & Research, 1(6).

Appendix

Q1/ **Choose the best option based on "Ode to   Autumn" by John Keats !**

1. Which adjective is used to describe the fruitfulness of autumn?
   a) ripe   b) mellow   c) juicy   d) sweet

2. Which adjective is used to describe the sun in the second stanza?
   a) bright   b) hot   c) gentle   d) soft

3. Which adjective is used to describe the clouds in the third stanza?
   a) fluffy   b) white   c) high   d) calm

4. Which adjective is used to describe the "half-reaped furrow" in the fourth stanza?
   a) long   b) deep   c) rich   d) brown

5. Which adjective is used to describe the "new-mown" mead in the fifth stanza?
   a) fresh   b) green   c) tall   d) wild

6. Which adjective is used to describe the "hedge-crickets" in the sixth stanza?
   a) noisy   b) small   c) brown   d) shy

7. Which adjective is used to describe the "plump" hazel shells in the seventh stanza? a) hard   b) round   c) dry   d) tough

8. Which adjective is used to describe the "swollen" kernel in the eighth stanza?
   a) big   b) ripe   c) juicy   d) sweet

Q2/ **Choose the best option based on "Ode to Autumn" by John Keats !**

1. What is a synonym for "mellow" in the first stanza?
   a) Rotten　　　b) Softened　　　c) Bitter
2. What is a synonym for "thatch-eves" in the second stanza?
   a) Roofs　　　b) Walls　　　c) Chimneys
3. What is a synonym for "bend" in the third stanza?
   a) Bow　　b) Straighten　　　c) Twist
4. What is a synonym for "swath" in the fourth stanza?
   a) Row　　b) Stack　　c) Field
5. What is a synonym for "winnowing" in the fifth stanza?
   a) Blowing　　b) Collecting　　　c) Distributing
6. What is a synonym for "treble" in the sixth stanza?
   a) High　　　b) Low　　　c) Monotonous
7. What is a synonym for "laden" in the seventh stanza?
   a) Heavy　　　b) Empty　　c) Balanced
8. What is a synonym for "barred" in the ninth stanza?
   a) Closed　　　b) Open　　　c) Locked
9. What is a synonym for "gathering" in the last stanza?
   a) Collecting　　b) Dispersing　　c) Ignoring

Q3/ **Choose the best option based on "Ode to Autumn" by John Keats !**

1. What is an antonym for "ripening" in the second stanza?
   a) Decaying　　　b) Spoiling　　　c) Withering
2. What is an antonym for "bloom" in the third stanza?
   a) Wilt　　　b) Blossom　　　c) Flourish
3. What is an antonym for "stored" in the third stanza?
   a) Given away　　　b) Hidden　　c) Released
4. What is an antonym for "happy" in the fifth stanza?
   a) Sad　　　b) Joyful　　　c) Elated
5. What is an antonym for "budding" in the sixth stanza?
   a) Wilting　　　b) Blooming　　　c) Blossoming
6. What is an antonym for "teeming" in the seventh stanza?
   a) Scant　　　b) Abundant　　c) Plentiful
7. What is an antonym for "wailful" in the twelfth stanza?
   a) Cheerful　　b) Joyful　　　c) Hopeful
8. What is an antonym for "ripeness" in the last stanza?
   a) Immaturity　　　b) Freshness　　　c) Greenness