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ABSTRACT

Problem Statement: This research addresses the gap in understanding the perceptions and challenges of university language instructors regarding the integration of poetry as a tool for enhancing intercultural understanding within language education.

Purpose: This study aims to uncover the perceptions of university instructors on the potential of poetry to serve as a bridge between linguistic competence and cultural competence. By exploring their beliefs, experiences, and challenges in incorporating poetry into language lessons, the study seeks to illuminate the pedagogical opportunities and obstacles that arise.

Research Methods: The research methodology employed in this study aligns with a qualitative approach, which seeks to delve into the complex perceptions and experiences of university language instructors concerning the integration of poetry as a facilitator of intercultural understanding within language education.

Semi-structured interviews, a cornerstone of qualitative research, have been selected as the primary data collection technique. Through these interviews, language instructors are provided with an open yet focused platform to articulate their insights, beliefs, challenges, and experiences related to the incorporation of poetry in language instruction. Upon the completion of the interview phase, the gathered data will undergo a rigorous process of content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic and iterative method that involves the identification, coding, and categorization of themes and patterns present within the transcribed interview data. By meticulously examining the textual content, significant themes will be extracted, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of instructors' perceptions, motivations, apprehensions, and strategies regarding the use of poetry for intercultural understanding. This analysis process will enable the researchers to uncover both explicit and implicit insights within the data, revealing the intricate nuances of the instructors' viewpoints.

Main Results: The findings will shed light on how poetry can effectively be integrated into language instruction and provide a nuanced understanding of instructors' motivations and apprehensions.

The implications of this research extend to both theoretical and practical dimensions of language education.

Keywords: *Perceptions of Poetry, linguistic and cultural competences*

1. Introduction

As the world continuously becomes more interconnected and diverse, having the ability to mind and appreciate different cultures is essential. In this sense, poetry, with its profound potential to comprise cultural aspects, emotions, and linguistic boundaries, serves as an artistic medium for increasing cultural awareness and competence (Hişmanoğlu, 2005). Thanks to its multidimensional perspectives, poetry can contribute to enhancing cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and communication.

At its core, intercultural competence refers to communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds. Its scope ranges from linguistic proficiency to a deep understanding of cultural norms, values, and perspectives. In this vein, poetry plays a unique role in conveying cultural insights and facilitates intercultural engagement. Since poems consist of cultural references, idioms, and metaphors that reflect the ethos of a particular society, learners can get a deep understanding of nuances and insights from various cultures by being exposed to a variety of poems (Khan, 2020).

One of the remarkable aspects of poetry is its distinctive feature offering a window into the psyche of a culture. Learners can get access to a culture's history, beliefs, and emotions by engaging in poems (Lazar, 1996). The more learners engage with lines of poems, the more they will get accustomed to a culture's background. The relationship between intercultural competence and poetry is not restricted to literary exploration alone; it also encompasses language acquisition (Duff & Maley, 2007). Learners can acquire various linguistic structures, idioms, and contexts through delving into lines of poems. Moreover, poetry also allows learners to observe the connection between the language structure and emotions (Stickling et al, 2011). They can engage with the joys, sorrows, and aspirations of diverse individuals from various cultures. Therefore, integrating poems from diverse cultures into language classrooms might open up a space for dialogue, exploration, and reflection. Learners might develop different perspectives and cultural awareness by analyzing poems and this might lead them to develop a deeper understanding of their own culture as well as those of others (Proitsaki, 2019).

However, there are some challenges learners might face throughout the process (Davis, 2008). Poems are imbued with elusive and cultural nuances that cannot be realized by learners at first sight. Nevertheless, these challenges also present opportunities for collaborative learning, encouraging learners to share their views and interpretations. In this regard, the aim of this study is to reveal the perceptions of university instructors on the potential of poetry to serve as a bridge between cultural competence and linguistic competence.

2. Literature review

Literature has long been rejected as a portion of language instructing technique (Carter, 2007) after the Grammar-Translation Method. It is ordinarily seen as an aesthetic vein of study that has no part in improving language learning practice. According to Hişmanoğlu (2005) among language teachers, there has been a discussion about how, when, where, and why literature ought to be combined in ESL/EFL educational modules. According to Collie and Slater (1990), there are four fundamental factors that lead a language instructor to utilize literature within the classroom. These are essential authentic material, cultural enhancement, language improvement, and individual involvement. Hişmanoğlu (2005) includes to these four fundamental reasons, universality, non-triviality, individual relevance, diversity, concern, economy, and suggestive control and uncertainty are a few other factors requiring the utilization of literature as an effective resource within the classroom setting. On the other hand, Stern (1991) states that literature offers potential benefits of a high order for English as a second language. Linguistically, literature can offer assistance to learners in enhancing their vocabulary and consolidating four language abilities. In spite of the fact that poetry can have such value as a portion of increasing literacy abilities and language improvement, the stress is that the other possible advantages are ignored, which affects the way in which poems are utilized within the classroom. To illustrate, Ofsted (2007) report comments that poetry is sometimes utilized 'primarily [as] an educating instrument for language improvement instead of a tool for investigating experience.'

Poetry has long been a crucial topic among authors since it is a crucial component of literature. According to Paz (1999), poetry and revolution are not incompatible because they represent two sides of the same action. Hirshfield (1997) mentions that poetry provides fresh perspectives and new insights into the spiritual, sentimental, and moral worlds. Additionally, Proitsaki (2019) asserts that it may improve the study of the English language and Anglophone cultures in a wide range of aspects besides the demanding analyses of verse in regards to aesthetics because of its concision and open-endedness.

Regarding the use of poetry to improve intercultural understanding, Hanauer (2001) claimed that by assigning poetry reading projects, learners became aware of the cultural differences between their own and the second-language culture of the poems so as to comprehend the potential meanings and applications of the words. It reveals the link between studying poetry and intercultural understanding. It investigates learners' cultural sensitivity.

One of the best and most potent cultural transmitters is poetry. Poetry contains many cultural components that are difficult to adapt into other languages, such as references, terminology, idioms, and tone (Sage, 1987).

Khan (2020) claims that a poem is frequently filled with literary methods by its pure nature. Therefore, introducing pupils to figurative language in a language classroom through the use of poetry is an excellent approach. With such information, students would be fluent in spoken, written, and understanding language. Poetry engages students' both reception and expression, acting as a catalyst in the improvement of learners' language abilities; the author continues, acting not just as an example of language but also as a medium to enhance language abilities, like listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In terms of advantages of poetry in education, Obediat (1997) alleges that literature assists learners in learning a native-like ability in English, share their thoughts in effective English, understand the characteristics of contemporary English, discover how the English linguistic structure is utilized for interactions, observe how idiomatic phrases are used, communicate accurately, and get more competent in English, as well as become innovative, critical, and logical learners.

As for writing skills, Proitsaki (2019) suggests that studying a poem is an excellent place to start when writing creatively. According to Moore (2002), the utilization of poetic units, forming rhyme and rhythmical structures in writing processes enables students of English to participate actively in their language learning and achieve success. Poems may also be utilized to help learners improve their abilities to write by having them translate, report, or revise the poem (Alber-Morgan et al, 2007). Poems expose students to innovative sentence structure, a number of formats, and creative methods to connect ideas (Riverol, 1991).

In terms of oral skills, Mulatsih (2018) observed that poetry, due to its character as a dynamic substance, may be used to assist students not only with speaking skills but also with their teaching abilities, particularly when it comes to transferring information. According to Hadaway et al. (2001), the regular practice of reciting different poems in poetry can help students improve their ability to talk. Aydinoglu (2013) combined poetry with vocabulary instruction. Poems could be used as the subject matter to help students expand their vocabulary.

According to Hedge (2000), poetry serves as realistic reading material and may be utilized to improve reading comprehension. While deepening their minds and creating respect for various languages, it forces them to modify their reading methods and perform them in order to deal with the special aspects of verse (Nasr, 2001).

Related to the opportunities of poetry in education and relationships among cultures, numerous benefits are associated with poetry's value as an extensive source of language data (Duff & Maley, 2007), including poems' capacity to increase vocabulary (Lazar, 1996), promote comprehension of grammar (Kırkgöz, 2008), enhance word pronunciation, and perform linguistic abilities and types (Tomlinson, 1986). Additionally, poetry fosters literary appreciation by raising intercultural understanding (Lazar, 1996), enhancing expressive talents (Iida, 2016), and fostering social relationships among learners (Chanmann-Taylor et al., 2016). Poems can help students get more personally involved in language learning and find a platform to communicate their views within a greater human context (Hess, 2003). Poetry is therefore seen to facilitate the promotion of cultural and linguistic understanding (Hanauer, 2001).

Saraç (2003) outlines the benefits of utilizing poetry in language instruction. The study explains that literature contributes to educational achievements by providing possibilities for focusing on new utilization of syntax, grammatical structures, textual organization, and vocabulary, in addition to contributing to the development of aesthetics among students. Accordingly, poems are a suitable resource for providing supplemental materials for vocabulary, grammar, as well as translation (Khatib et al., 2012). According to Hişmanoğlu (2005), it also introduces students to literary tools in a very natural way. A poem also forces students to use their linguistic abilities to interpret the material. Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2017) add that benefits like self-expression and hybridized identities, creating a crucial postmodern voice, and critically and elaborately analyzing one's native culture and language.

Teachers can use poetry as a real-world text to practice phonetics, phonemic understanding, and language acquisition techniques including rhyme, word sets, and alliteration. With language that is relevant to their interests and levels of learning, poems offer pupils an easier framework in which to develop these abilities (Stickling et al., 2011). Furthermore, Khan (2020) points out that a poem may serve as a useful tool to introduce rhythm, intonation, stress, and meter. A poem's constant repetition makes it possible for children to learn these linguistic patterns.

Regarding challenges, Davis (2008) noted common challenges to the use of the arts in traditional education, including limited time and resources, issues with appropriate evaluations of learning, the level of artistic preparation of all educators, and the notion that the arts are still accessible in informal environments and are thus not required in traditional schools. Proitsaki (2019) also criticizes conflicts over the price of slim volumes and inquiries into the rationale for replacing great novels with poems. Even worse, learners were rarely excited about studying

poetry. As a solution, Haraldsson (2011) discovered that educators who engage with poems utilize appropriate films and recordings of poetry readings in order to connect poetry to the lives of learners. Another solution, according to Gönen (2018), is that studying poetry helps educators transform their negative opinions into positive ones and become more conscious of the benefits of including poetry in language instruction.

Hişmanolu (2005) asserts that works of literature like novels, plays, poems, etc. assist students in comprehending how communication functions in different societies. Even though the story of a book, play, or piece of poetry is fiction, it offers a rich and vivid framework in which characters from various socioeconomic and geographic origins can be represented. A reader can learn about the viewpoints of the characters in these works of literature as well as their ideas, emotions, habits, customs, and belongings as well as what they purchase, hold dear, worry, and appreciate, as well as how they interact with one another in various contexts. Lastly, Nasr (2001) points out that literature gives learners the chance to grow tolerant of others by introducing them to common human experiences via the history of a specific country.

3. Method

The aim of the present study is to uncover the viewpoints of university instructors regarding the potential of poetry as a catalyst between cultural and linguistic competence. In today's globalized educational landscape, where cultural awareness is paramount, exploring the intersection of cultural and linguistic proficiency becomes crucial. Understanding how poetry, as a linguistic form intricately intertwined with cultural expression, can serve as a facilitator in this context is of paramount importance. In this regard, a qualitative research design was adopted to pursue the goal of the study. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (2012), is characterized by a rigorous and systematic process aimed at understanding complex phenomena through in-depth exploration of individual perspectives, experiences, and context. This methodology is particularly apt in our pursuit, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the intricate connections between cultural understanding and linguistic proficiency.

3.1. Data Collection

To ensure rich insights into the issue under investigation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. Semi-structured interviews provide an invaluable means of delving into the nuanced perceptions and experiences of instructors (Cresswell, 2012). By allowing for open-ended questions, participants were granted the space to articulate their perspectives

comprehensively, without the constraints of predefined response categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Therefore, the researchers asked five open-ended questions to participants, recorded their responses, and transcribed them for analysis.

3.2. Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants, ensuring a diverse representation of instructors from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This approach enables us to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives, thus enhancing the depth and breadth of the insights garnered (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The participants of the present study comprised five university instructors from different state universities in Türkiye. The instructors' teaching experience ranges from 5 to 20 years at universities. Among participants, there are one professor, one assistant professor, two lecturers, and one research assistant.

3.3. Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the gathered data through content analysis. All responses given to the interview questions were transcribed and analyzed in-depth by forming codes, categories, and themes to distill patterns and meanings from the collected data.

4. Results

Following the content analysis of the interview questions, the researchers formed several themes for each question. The responses to the interview questions were analyzed qualitatively by grouping similar responses into categories and then illustrating them in tables. The first question and related themes are given in Table 1. below.

Question 1: Could you share your experiences of integrating poetry into language instruction? What prompted you to use poetry as a tool for teaching culture, and what goals did you aim to achieve?

Table 1.

Experiences and Aims in Using Poetry in Language Classrooms

Themes
More motivated students
Cultural enrichment via poetry
Authentic Material
Interesting Context
Enjoyable teaching environment
Enhancing students' abilities

*P=Participant

Table 1 shows the goals of educators in using poetry in their classes. Researchers thematized information gathered from participants as more motivated students, cultural enrichment via poetry, authentic material, interesting context, enjoyable teaching environment, and enhancing students' abilities. With regards to aims, P2 mentioned that "My main aim was to introduce students to some authentic material so that they could be more motivated to learn a foreign language, the experience turned out to be a really good one although students found it a bit challenging at the beginning of the instruction." In the same vein, P4 asserted that "By reading the poetry of a certain country, one can be introduced to history, art, values, and lifestyle of that culture. Therefore, to make the students more familiar with English culture, we can incorporate English poetry into our courses. My primary aim for teaching poetry was to enhance students' ability to read literary forms and thereby appreciate art."

Question 2: In your opinion, what unique attributes of poetry make it an effective medium for teaching cultural nuances in language education?

Table 2.

Unique Attributes of Poetry

Themes
Representation of the target culture
Memorable poems
Revealing Cultural Artifacts
Intensity and poetic license
Emotional effect of poetry

*P=Participant

Table 2 indicates unique attributes of poetry to make it an effective medium for teaching cultural nuances in language education. Researchers created themes related to participants'

responses as the representation of the target culture, memorable poems, revealing cultural artifacts, intensity, and poetic license, and emotional effect of poetry. Regarding the unique attributes of poetry, P4 focuses on the emotional effect of poetry by asserting that “The poetry touches human soul in a universal way. It does not matter whether it is written in your native or second language. In some ways, it is like music, affecting and moving people with different sets of emotions.” In terms of representation of the target culture and memorable poems, P1 put forward that “An important benefit poetry brings to the classroom is the representation of the target culture through the expression of mindset and lifestyle. Besides, various linguistic devices make poems memorable, in this way, poems provide set phrases for students to remember easily and even use as a template for further production.”

Question 3: Can you share any personal anecdotes or reflections on memorable instances where poetry significantly impacted students' cultural understanding or perspectives?

Table 3.

Personal Anecdotes and Reflections of Participants

Themes
Metaphors and similes
Shakespeare's impact on a student
Acting out the scenes in the poem

*P=Participant

Table 3 shows personal anecdotes or reflections of educators after using poetry in their classes. Researchers thematized participants’ responses as metaphors and similes, Shakespeare's impact on a student and acting out the scenes in the poem. Regarding acting out the scenes in the poem, P4 maintained that:

In 2013, I was teaching 19th Century British Literature. The poems I included in the syllabus were mostly romantic poems talking about nature, love and childhood. To make the lesson more enjoyable for students, I had them act out the scenes in the poems. For example, in the poem “Porplehia’s Lover” the obsessed lover (poet) ends up strangling the woman with her own hair. I would be the poet and choose one of the students to be Porphelia. Similarly, for the poem “Lady of Shallot” I would choose one student to act as Lady of Shallot while we read the poem aloud. Many years later, students from that class and I became friends on social media. I was surprised to notice that they had nicknames as Lady of Shallot, Porphelia, Ophelia and so on. They texted

me that they never forgot about the poems. Through poetry, they were able to understand some cultural differences such as knights, ladies, and dukes.

Shakespeare's impact on a student was another anecdotes of educator in terms of using poetry to as a catalyst for cultural learning in language education. To illustrate, P2 stated that “One of the students stated that he hated Shakespeare as he found him hard to understand as a learner of foreign language. But later, he began to sympathize with Shakespeare and his unique poetry since it provided him many ways to analyze a text and learn through it.”

Question 4: What challenges or barriers have you encountered when incorporating poetry into language lessons? How have you addressed these challenges, and what strategies have proven effective?

Table 4.

Challenges of Using Poetry and Solutions

Challenges	Solutions
Matching poems with linguistic needs	Recording poems
Translation of the poem	Pre-study and contextual research
Matching levels of students with poems	Time management and resourceful students
Time-consuming and the course syllabus	Be aware of the differences between poem and prose
Deciding on follow-up activities	Arouse students' attention

*P=Participant

Table 4 indicates challenges of using poetry and related solutions of participants. Researchers thematized information gathered from participants as matching poems with linguistic needs, translation of the poem, matching levels of students with poems, time-consuming and the course syllabus, and deciding on follow-up activities for challenges and recording poems, pre-study and contextual research, time management and resourceful students, be aware of the differences between poem and prose and arouse students' attention for solutions. Most of the participants had problems related to matching levels of students with poems. For example, P2 stated that “The content of the poem was a bit difficult to understand

for a group of B2 learners” and in the same vein P5 noted that “It is not an easy job to choose the best poetry in terms of the language level of students and culture.” P2 found a solution to this problem by asserting that “I made the group to study unfamiliar words before reading the poem and search through the web for the cultural and historical background of the text, which helped them comprehend the content more easily.” According to participants, another challenge is translation of the poem and P4 highlighted that “Turkish students mostly have difficulty in understanding the thematic forms such as rhyming and meters. They tend to look up the Turkish translation of the poem, which obviously does not make the same affect and they even sometimes ask “Why do British poems do not rhyme?”. I answer them saying that it actually rhymes in English but not in the meaning in Turkish.” As a solution for time-consuming and course syllabus, P3 remarked that “In classes with smart students we could overcome these problems easily.”

Question 5 : What recommendations or insights would you offer to fellow educators who are interested in incorporating poetry into their language instruction for cultural learning? Are there any best practices you would suggest?

Table 5.

Recommendations of Participants

Themes
Finding appropriately leveled poems
Pre-class study and background information
Being aware of students’ capacity
Learning by experience

*P=Participant

Table 5 shows several recommendations of participants to other educators who are interested in incorporating poetry into their language instruction for cultural learning. Researchers created themes related to participants’ responses as finding appropriately leveled poems, pre-class study and background information, being aware of students’ capacity, and learning by experience. To illustrate, related to finding appropriately leveled poems, P1 mentioned that “Finding a poem at an appropriate level is significant. If it is too difficult, the students might be discouraged.” In terms of pre-class study, P2 indicated that “An hour of pre-class study would be great for the students to break the ice when they first see the poem. Before

reading the poem, it could be better to talk about cultural and historical background of the text and poet. Highlighting unfamiliar words or puns – if any- may also be useful for a good practice.” With regards to being aware of students’ capacity, P3 asserted that “Don’t let it turn into a mechanical process! Do it according to the intellectual capacity of your students.” P4 focused on learning by experience and noted that “I would firstly suggest that there is no better way to teach something than living it. So, students can read the poems as a passionate lover or a wounded soldier to experience the real emotion narrated in the poem.”

5. Discussion

The results of the study have revealed that the integration of poetry in language instruction is beneficial even though there has been a neglect of literature in this field (Carter, 2007). Moreover, it has been seen that instructors have successfully integrated poetry into language teaching, citing motivations such as providing material, cultural enrichment, and creating an engaging learning environment. The findings also show that poetry serves as a medium for teaching cultural nuances due to its ability to represent the target culture, reveal cultural artifacts, and create a memorable learning experience. Another highlighted point in this study is the impact of poetry on cultural understanding. In parallel with the studies of Hişmanoğlu (2005), Hess (2003), and Hanauer, (2001), the findings of this study support claim that poetry is a medium of cultural transmission by showcasing instances where students experienced transformative learning through poems. Additionally, the importance of experiential learning through poetry has been emphasized both in literature (Hanauer, 2001; Proitsaki, 2019; Sage, 1987) and in the results; instructors highlighted the value of immersing oneself in the emotions and experiences in the poem which leads to a deeper understanding of the cultural and linguistic aspects embedded in the text. As for the challenges in incorporating poetry into language teaching, the study’s results come up with valuable insights into how instructors should address these challenges, including pre-study, contextual research, arousing students’ attention, providing background information, and being aware of students’ capacity. In short, the integration of poetry into the language teaching and learning process seems to be advantageous in terms of enhancing intercultural competence, improving language proficiency, and fostering a deeper appreciation of literature and cultural diversity.

6. Conclusion

6. Conclusion

The present study delves into the perceptions of university instructors regarding the potential of poetry as a catalyst for cultural learning in language education. Through a qualitative research design, insights were gathered from five experienced instructors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The findings reveal several key themes that highlight the multifaceted benefits and challenges associated with integrating poetry into language instruction. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the potential of poetry as a catalyst for cultural learning in language education. The findings underscore the multifaceted benefits of using poetry in language classrooms, from enhancing cultural awareness to fostering a more engaging learning environment. By addressing challenges and adopting best practices, educators can harness the power of poetry to promote intercultural competence and enrich the language learning experience. This research contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for the integration of literature, and specifically poetry, as a vital component of language education in today's interconnected and diverse world.

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