

**THE USE OF PICTURES IN ENHANCING THE UNDERSTANDING
OF POEMS AMONG LOWER SECONDARY STUDENTS**

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UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini adalah bertujuan untuk menyelidik sejauhmana penggunaan gambar dapat membantu pelajar dalam memahami sajak yang merupakan salah satu komponen dalam kesusasteraan Bahasa Inggeris Tingkatan Satu. Kajian berbentuk Quasi Experimental digunakan dalam kajian ini. Pelajar-pelajar yang terlibat terdiri daripada seramai 58 pelajar dari Sekolah Menengah Perempuan China, Pulau Pinang. Gambar akan digunakan sebagai alat bantu mengajar dan pelajar juga dikehendaki membuat ilustrasi sendiri apabila membaca sajak tersebut. Data yang dikumpulkan melalui ujian pemahaman akan diproses dengan menggunakan Ancova dan soalan-soalan persepsi berdasarkan Skala Likert. Melalui kajian ini, didapati pelajar-pelajar dari kumpulan Experimental memperoleh keputusan yang lebih baik. Penggunaan gambar dan ilustrasi pelajar dapat membantu pemahaman dalam pembelajaran sajak. Oleh yang demikian, adalah dicadangkan para guru mengaplikasikan kaedah ini bukan sahaja dalam pembelajaran sajak malah mungkin dalam genre sastera yang lain.

ABSTRACT

Literature, which once played a prominent role in language studies was excluded from the English subject syllabus when English is established as the second language. Recently, due to the decline in English among students, its inclusion was necessary and it was then implemented as a component in the English subject in March 2000. The intent of this study was to gain a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between the use of pictures and the learning of poems, which is a genre in literature. A quasi experimental research was adopted in the investigation . The subjects involved were fifty eight form one students. They were students of SMJK Perempuan China. Pulau Pinang. Pictures were used as an aid and students also illustrated pictures on their own when asked to read the poems. Data analysis involved the use of Ancova and analysis in percentage on the perception questions based on the Likert Scale. The results of the study indicated that the Experimental Group performed better than the Control Group. These findings and implications were discussed and it is believed that using pictures can indeed enhance the learning of poems. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that teachers should use pictures to improve students' understanding of poems and perhaps in other genres of literature.

TABLE OF CONTENT

CONTENT

TITLE PAGE	
DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRAK	iv
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	x
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	
1.1 Background of the study	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	3
1.2.1 Importance of Poetry in Language Teaching	5
1.3 Purpose of the study	8
1.4 Rationale	9
1.5 Significance of the study	9
1.6 Research Questions	10
1.7 Limitations of the study	10
1.8 Definition of terms	10
1.9 Summary	11

CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Theoretical framework	12
2.3 Types of visuals	14
2.4 Definition of pictures	15
2.5 The Role of pictures in ESL classroom	17
2.6 Rationale for using pictures	19
2.7 Teaching with pictures	20
2.7.1 Talking from pictures	21
2.8 Principles for selecting pictures	22
2.9 Getting teachers to draw	26
2.10 How to teach with pictures	26
2.11 The use of pictures in enhancing the learning and understanding of poems	29
2.12 Limitation of pictures	33
2.13 Summary	35

CHAPTER 3 : METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction	37
3.2 Sample	37
3.3 Research design	38
3.4 Tests	38
3.5 Procedures in Treatment Group	39
3.6 Procedures in Control Group	41

3.7 Research instrument	42
3.8 Analysis of data	42
3.9 Summary	42

CHAPTER 4 : RESULTS

4.1 Introduction	45
4.2 Results	46
4.2.1 Research Question 1	47
4..2.2 Research Question 2- Analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires	49
4.4 Summary	52

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction	53
5.2 Conclusions	53
5.3 Discussion	54
5.4 Limitations of the study	55
5.5 Implications for teachers	56
5.6 Recommendations	58
5.6.1 Recommendations for further research	58
5.7 Summary	59
5.8 Conclusion	60
REFERENCES	62
APPENDICES	

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Title	Page
4.1	Descriptive statistics for Experimental and Comparison Groups At Pretest and Posttest	46
4.2	Analysis of Covariance of Comprehension Test on the Poems	47
4.3	Students' perceptions towards the use of pictures in the learning of poems	48

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Reading literature is a process of meaning- getting as well as meaning- making. The reader brings about his or her experiences and this give him insights into perception of the events, characters and situations portrayed. They allow him or her to understand, enjoy and appreciate the piece of literature before him or her. Reading literature is more than understanding the plain sense of the text. In reading it, the student creates an imaginary world with the products of two imaginations-the reader's and the writer's. One of the components of literature which fulfills this is the learning of poetry or poems which was implemented in March 2000 for the first formers in Malaysian secondary schools.

Poetry has many benefits in English language learning and it can enhance student learning styles. Introducing poetry in the language classroom can touch our second language learners aesthetically and emotionally. Based on personal observation and interaction with teachers, teachers sometimes present teaching poetry in schools in a dull way especially as the teachers themselves may not like poetry. But

whether they like it or not, the teachers have to teach and the students have to learn as stated by Rodrigues and Badaczewski (1978:45.), *“Poetry is hard or strange or something only scholars or weird people enjoy. But I have to teach it, so let’s make the best of it”*. If teachers have this kind of attitude, poetry will always remain as one of the most difficult genres to the students in language learning. However, as educators, teachers should always find ways and means of helping their students enjoy learning poetry. Appropriate teaching aids will help students to enhance their interest in learning poetry and at the same time will enhance their positive attitude towards poetry.

We should be aware of what poetry can offer in language learning. Poetry can be an assistance to put aside the negative attitudes towards learning English through its uniqueness. Through poetry, learners will be able to see how language is manipulated and composed in order to achieve or to convey the intended meanings. Simultaneously, learners will be able to acquire the language through the context while learning poetry.

In teaching poetry, effective teaching through clear presentation of materials is very much required in order for the pupils to understand better. As a result of this, it is obvious that teachers should adopt approaches or resources that can enhance a very motivating atmosphere in the teaching of poems, so that students will be able to learn more effectively.

According to Wright (1989), it is important to have as wide a range of resources as possible in the classroom so that the students can have a rich base and stimulus for learning development. Thus, teachers should equip themselves with knowledge in teaching the subject, meaning that teachers must always be prepared to do more than just trying ordinary or traditional methods in teaching (chalk and talk).

Hence, teachers must play a more significant role to ensure that teaching and learning take place effectively in the classroom.

An ancient Chinese proverb states that 'one picture is worth a thousand words.' In relation to this, pictorial aids seem to be the most favourable among all kinds of learning aids due to their almost unlimited advantages and potentials among all kinds of teaching aids. They have been widely used in the field of education for a long time as they can stimulate interactions which are very crucial in the teaching and learning process in the classrooms.

Poems and short stories are offered as part of the literature component in form one literature. The researcher chose the study of poems as the language in poems are more difficult to understand compared to that in short stories. Succinct language is used by poets and students may not understand it well. Therefore, the researcher chose the study of poems using pictures to help the students. This study is carried out to investigate whether pictorial aids are effective to enhance poetry compared to the traditional method among the selected subjects. Pictorial aids seem to be the most favourable among all kinds of teaching aids due to their unlimited advantages and potential and are able to stimulate interactions, which are very important in the teaching and learning process.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Although the literature component was introduced in 2000, the importance of learning literature is sometimes still ignored by the students. Literature was incorporated in the present syllabus with the hope that it will bring improvement to the learning of the language. However, many people and even educators are still apprehensive about the

decision to incorporate literature into the English language subject in secondary schools. Many students also refuse to accept the vital role that literature plays in helping them to see themselves in the broader context of their society, their culture and world. In this study the researcher will focus on one component of literature, that is poem.

Today, in the new syllabus, teaching of literature component is being implemented in stages. For a start, the students in Form One and Form Four have been exposed to literature in March 2000. The time allocated for the literature component is 40 minutes weekly for all the English classes. Even though students have to learn literature, teachers still lack teaching methodology to teach poetry to the students. Teachers are still using the traditional ways of teaching which deal only with the use of chalkboard and teachers' explanation. Using this traditional method is not wrong but it does not help much in the learning process, as most of the time, the teacher dominates the lessons. This is supported by Devi Semanjalan(1997) in her paper, 'Implementation of the Literature Component in the English Language Curriculum for Secondary Schools in the State of Kedah'.

Thus, the researcher attempts to adopt a technique which could help to overcome this problem and pictorial aids are believed to enhance students' interest in learning poems which is one of the components in literature. Pictorial aids can also motivate students and make the lesson more lively and interesting. Therefore, the prime concern of this study is to find out the effect of using the pictorial aids in teaching poetry in an ESL classroom.

1.2.1 Importance of Poetry in Language Teaching

Despite the many advantages that are to be gained by using poetry in language teaching, there are also inherent problems to be faced. One of the most prominent is that poetry often subverts the normal usage of language use (Lazar, 1989:3). One other difficulty in using poetry is the “unexpected use of some poetic vocabulary. Often times the poet coins new words which are highly charged with meaning. The meanings of these newly-coined words are not easily available to the language student because much of their meanings depend on the context and the poet’s own experience. A student would not be able to find the meanings of words like “cat-headed bird” in a dictionary.

McConochie highlights another reason why teachers are hesitant about using poetry in language teaching. This is because poetry is a highly condensed form of language that often uses esoteric or archaic vocabulary and strange sentence patterns (McConochie, 1979:6)

Poetry compared to other forms of writing is relatively short, but is nonetheless full of meaning. The meaning is often packed into carefully chosen words that are sometimes too difficult for the average learner to understand because these words may be esoteric, have deep and secret meanings shown only to a few or make use of words that are archaic, that is words that are no longer in use or are outdated.

Although there are problems to be faced in using poetry in language, the benefits to be gained with the inclusion of poetry in language learning far outweigh these problems. McConochie (1979) is one who feels that not understanding everything that is read will not jeopardise the learning process in the child. To her, “*confusion – linguistic and otherwise – is part of growing up...*” (McConochie 1979: 7)

Poetry is essential to the teaching and learning of English. McConochie (1982) states that without poetry, a student's English language diet is incomplete; that is, he cannot have a strong command of the language.

Culturally, poetry exposes learners to the culture of its speakers. Through poetry, learners are able to acquaint themselves with "... *ways of looking at the world which characterizes the cultures of the English speaking peoples...*" (Widdowson 1975:77). This means that poetry can help learners to understand, empathies with and vicariously participate in the English culture. Students will learn to respect for literary and cultural tradition of various countries.

To understand and speak the English Language well, learners must possess in their linguistic repertoire a knowledge of idiomatic expressions. These expressions are usually related to the English culture and in order to understand them, learners have to be acquainted with the culture. The content of poems also reflect the culture of its writer. This being so, learners have the added advantage of learning various cultures from poems translated into English. For example, reading a translated Japanese poem will indirectly expose the learners to the culture of the Japanese people. In this research, the learners of form one will have the chance to study about the poems regarding other cultures too such as 'Lake of Innisfree'.

Thus, the cultural value implicit in poetry is one of the reasons why poetry should be employed in the teaching of English (Sage, 1987). Poems reflect the culture of the poets and this aspect should be exploited in the teaching of English.

According to Wilga Rivers (1987) students need literature, poetry, music, and other artistic manifestations, not only of literate elite, but also of the common people in oral traditions, folklore, the arts of the people, the history and stories that make

small pockets of cultural identity unique. Through this content, they can share the culture and the concerns of many times and many people, faraway and close at home. Our students will be able to share other people's culture and understand them better. It is also true that traveling is one of the best way to learn about culture. However, since traveling is expensive students can learn about other peoples' traditions and values of the different cultures of the world. Learning literature enables one to understand and appreciate universal values, which may be quite different compared to the students own values.

This literary experience develops the learners' abilities to make mature and critical judgements based on the experience shared by the poet. One example that the subjects of this research can think critically about is the poem entitled 'The Dead Crow' whereby the students will be able to realize the bad effects that the world can face if there were pollution in our environment.

Tomlinson (1986) maintains that the average language learners are most motivated, most open to language intake and most eager to use language when their emotions, feelings and attitudes are engaged.

According to Tomlinson, (1986) the development of the reading skill for successful reading comprehension can be enhanced through poetries. This is because poetries give valuable opportunity for learners to use and develop such important skills as deduction of meaning for linguistics and situational context, prediction, relating text to the knowledge that they have and experience of the world. Students also have the opportunity to read creatively, and the recognition and interpretation of assumptions and inferences.

Lazar (1989) remarks that poetry is perhaps one literary genre that is underexploited in language-learning classrooms - largely because of its linguistic complexity, and its apparent irrelevance to the needs and interests of the average learner.

To prevent this situation from worsening in schools, Lazar remarks that the teacher is the most important person who will be responsible for instilling the interest in the students.

Be that as it may, she believes that a creative teacher can exploit these shortcomings to the benefit of her students. For instance, if a poem ingeniously invents its own vocabulary, it can perhaps be used to encourage the students to think about word-building in general.

Therefore, poetry is seldom chosen as material for the teaching of English. This downplay of the importance of poetry in LITESL is regrettable because poetry is language at its best. To deny learners poetry is to deny them aesthetic pleasure.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out if the use of pictures can aid the learning of poems among lower secondary students of Sekolah Menengah Jenis Kebangsaan Perempuan China, Penang. It is to determine whether or not the use of pictorial aids will mark any improvement in the students' test scores based on the poems. Hence, this study is to see whether there are any significant differences in students' learning poems using pictorial aids compared to those who do not.

1.4 Rationale

Poems in teaching literature is chosen because teachers are using it as the selected text in form one. It is hoped that using pictures to teach will enhance the teaching of literature in form one. It is therefore worth the while for the researcher to undertake this study in the light of current innovations in the teaching of literature in Malaysia. Literature study can provide a range of texts and an introduction to the many varieties of English.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study seeks to see how using pictures can benefit in the learning of poems. It is also hoped that students will learn to love poems and appreciate them not only in the reading text but also in their life. Students are able to use this as one of their learning strategies in the leaning of poems. The findings of the study will provide teachers alternative to enhance the learning of poems. The researcher will be able to give suggestions based on the results of the study.

Besides that, improving the teaching of literature will also help in promoting language development. Literature can be an instrument for use in connection with the teaching of specific vocabulary or for language manipulation. Students' personal growth will be encouraged as students learn to respond and participate imaginatively in the literature classroom. The findings of the study will also provide teachers with an alternative to improve students' comprehension in reading poems. By experimenting the effectiveness of using pictures, hopefully this study will give necessary insights to teachers in their attempts to provide interesting lessons to their students. These insights will enable teachers to select, identify and modify appropriate

pictures which can be used in lessons to arouse the interest of the students. In addition, the findings of this study may be helpful in giving support to other English language teachers in providing effective lessons.

1.6 Research Questions

1. Is there any significant difference in students' achievement in the learning of poems by using pictures?
2. What are the perceptions of students towards using pictures to learn poems?

1.7 Limitations of the study

Results of the research for the group of students selected in this study may not be generalized to the whole population. This study is only limited to only one particular group comprising of fifty eight form one students from Sekolah Menengah Jenis Kebangsaan Perempuan China, Pulau Pinang. Thus the results of the study will therefore not be representative of the country's population sample.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Pictures

According to the Collins Cobuild Advanced Learners Dictionary, a picture consists of lines and shapes which are drawn, painted, or printed on a surface and show a person, thing or a scene.

Enhancing

According to the Collins Cobuild Advanced Learners Dictionary, enhancing is to improve its value, quality, or attractiveness.

Understanding

Means understanding meaning and nature of something

Poem

Donna E. Norton (1992) states that a poem is a personal form of literature that allows poets and readers to experience, see, hear and feel the world in new ways.

1.9 Summary

Literature has once again been made as a vital component of English Language teaching. It is believed that language skills would be cultivated and developed through learning literature. The inclusion of poems, which is a personal form of literature should be applauded but there are teachers who still lack in terms of methodology when teaching poems to the students. In view of this situation, this study is to find out the effectiveness of using pictures in teaching poems. It is also the intention of the researcher to see to what extend the use of pictures are able to assist the learning of poems among the form one students in her school. It is hoped that the use of pictures will be able to trigger students' interest.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of related literature that would help to build a theoretical and methodological framework for this study. The review is based on recent studies which are of interest in this study. Firstly, it discusses the definition of pictures. This is followed by the role of pictures used in ESL classroom. Then, it discusses the rationales, principles, and keys to effective use of pictures and also types of pictures. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the methodology of teaching and learning in ESL classroom.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Constructivist learning theory contends that learning occurs when people actively construct their own knowledge and think reflectively about what is being presented (Lee,1997). In such a theoretical framework, educators advocate that students should be encouraged to generate their own visual representations to knowledge instead of passively receiving ready made illustrations in textbooks or from instructors (Cifuentes 1992). The literature on the influence of illustrations on learning from reading

suggests that illustrations can be powerful aids in learning new material (e.g. Dean & Kulhavy, 1981; Levie & Lentz, 1982; Schallert, 1980). In this particular study, student generated visualization refers to the student-created graphical or pictorial representations of sequential, causal, comparative chronological, oppositional, categorical and hierarchical relationships among concepts. Students' study notes are visualizations if the information is presented in the form of pictures, tables, graphs, pyramids, causal chains, timelines, and so forth. These student-generated visualization had a positive impact on the students and yielded mean scores which were higher than those in the control group.

One of the studies that has investigated exclusively the effects of pictures on first language comprehension is that of Anglin (1986). Anglin looked into the possible contribution of prose-relevant visuals to the recall and retention of information presented in written prose materials. Graduate students were assigned to one of two groups-(a) prose-plus-visual and (b) prose-only. Three human stories, each with a representational visual (line drawing), were used in the prose-plus-visual condition. For each passage, five short-answer paraphrase questions were constructed. The analysis of the results indicated that subjects' average recall in the prose-plus-visual condition was 11% to 15% higher than that of subjects in the prose only condition.

According to A.D.C. Peterson (1963) providing pictures helps to enhance one's teaching but teachers have to be careful before they introduce this particular kind of visual aid that we are not deadening the imagination by letting the eye do what the author was really expecting the reader's imagination to do. According to Meredith (1963) the use of pictures in the classroom helps in conscious learning and sub-conscious learning too. However, contrary to all these, according to Diamanto