

The Journal of DMC

(A Peer-Reviewed Open Access Interdisciplinary Research Journal)

Vol. IV Issue 1 March, pp.67-87

ISSN 2717-4719

e-Journal Site: <https://www.dsmc.edu.np/journal/>**Verses and Voices: Exploring Teachers' Lived Experiences in
ESL Poetry Instruction****Krishna Prasad Parajuli****Article History**

Submitted: 5, June 2025

Reviewed: September, 2025

Accepted: 12 October, 2025

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4.0 International License**Abstract**

Poetry is one of the learning resources for basic-level English students in Nepal. This qualitative phenomenological study explores teachers' experiences of teaching English poetry in basic schools in Nepal. Through semi-structured interviews with five participants, this study investigated teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of poetry in English language learning, their pedagogical practices, challenges, and the expected support required to enhance poetry teaching at the basic level. The data were analyzed thematically, following an inductive coding procedure. This study found that the teachers perceive poetry as beneficial for fostering creativity, enriching vocabulary, enhancing speaking skills, and encouraging active classroom participation. The teachers followed traditional teacher-centered methods, primarily engaging students in analytical activities provided in the textbook. However, teachers encounter significant

barriers in teaching poetry, including students' limited language proficiency, unfamiliar vocabulary, and the figurative language used in poetry. This study indicated that institutional support for using ICT tools in teaching and learning, customized training for poetry teaching, and collaboration among teachers can enhance poetry instruction. These findings are relevant for educators and policymakers aiming to meaningfully integrate literature into ESL classrooms.

Keywords: poetry instruction, ESL, teacher experience, pedagogy, language development, Nepal

Introduction

Poetry has long been recognized as a powerful tool for language learning. Poetry, which is elusive to any definition Ribeiro (2007), is essentially artistic expression crafted with language. Poetry appears in the form of songs, rhymes, and chants within the basic-level English curriculum in Nepal. Despite pedagogical potentials, it often receives minimal attention in English as a Second Language (ESL) curricula (Regmi, 2023). Effective instruction of poetry in an ESL context is a challenging task because of its rich linguistic features, association with a distant culture, and the inadequate preparedness of ESL teachers (Lazar, 1993, 2015). Similarly, Abidin and Wai (2020) argued that text selection, pedagogical approach, and students' attitudes are some of the obstacles in poetry teaching. Despite these challenges, poetry has been accepted as an indispensable resource for language teaching and learning.

Scholars have mentioned multiple benefits of using poetry in ESL courses (Collie & Slater, 1987; Hall, 2005; Lazar, 1993; Maley, 2001; Maley & Duff, 1989). Maley (2001) argued that poetry supports students' vocabulary acquisition, improves speaking fluency, and fosters emotional engagement and creativity with language, while Hadaway et al. (2001) emphasizing that listening to poem rhymes and rhythm is good for ESL learners because they can pick up the sounds of the English language and improve their pronunciation and comprehension skills. In a similar vein, Ebrahimi and Zainal (2018) argued that poetry's emotional appeal deeply engages learners. Thus, poetry can sustain motivation for learners.

Despite the reported benefits, studies highlight the challenges faced by teachers, including students' low English language proficiency levels, unfamiliarity with poetic devices, cultural distance, and lack of appropriate teaching materials (Regmi, 2023). This indicates that teaching English poetry is a challenging task in ESL and EFL contexts.

Although experiences of English language teachers have been well documented in the literature, teachers' experiences of teaching poetry have received nominal attention. Sharma (2019) highlighted the need to familiarize the stanza pattern of poetry with English language students. Similarly, Pokharel (2020) studied poetry teaching strategies in secondary-level schools in the Dang district of Nepal. Recently, Parajuli and Regmi (2025) studied bachelor level students' expectations about poetry instruction found the need for further studies to gain insights into how basic-level English teachers teach poetry in their classrooms.

The current study was conducted to enhance our understanding of poetry instruction as an important aspect of English language teaching at the basic level in Nepal. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences

of teaching basic level English poetry in the Gorkha Municipality of Nepal. The specific purposes were to identify teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of poetry for ESL learners, identify instructional procedures and challenges, and support strategies for enhancing their poetry teaching skills. The following specific research questions guided this study:

1. How do basic-level English language teachers perceive the usefulness of poetry in learning English as a second language?
2. How do teachers present poetry lessons in their classes?
3. What challenges do they face while teaching English poetry at the basic level?
4. What support do these teachers need to make their lessons more effective?

Literature Review

The review of the literature is organized into four themes: the roles of poetry in language acquisition, the challenges of teaching and learning poetry in an ESL context, the pedagogical approaches to teaching poetry, and the theoretical framework for teaching and learning poetry.

Roles of Poetry in Language Acquisition

Poetry provides exposure to rich linguistic and cultural resources for language learners because of its distinctive features. Toolan (2015) lists some of the elements that are more concentrated in poetry. His list includes a representational nature of text with enhanced phonological (rhymes, rhythms, phonological features), syntactic (rearranged syntax, parallel construction, line break for pragmatic purposes), and semantic features (allusion, metaphor, imagery, intertextuality, figures of speech). Similarly, "literary texts have been considered to stimulate language acquisition, expose students to the culture of the target language, and engage the learner cognitively and emotionally" (Lazar, 2015, p. 468). Cruz (2015) found that poetry can motivate learners and promote learners' sense of autonomy in EFL classes. Similarly, (Alvi & Alvi, 2019, p. 155) argued that "poetry is a bite-sized and digestible form that can be easily handled and memorized, unlike fiction and drama." Despite the challenges in teaching and learning, poetry has been considered a useful resource in language teaching in the ESL and EFL context.

Challenges of Teaching and Learning Poetry in the ESL/EFL Context

Poetry's linguistic complexity and cultural association often pose significant challenges for English teachers, particularly in ESL and EFL contexts. Teachers fear teaching poetry to foreign language learners (Mellgren, 2022) because they may be intimidating for language learners as well as to themselves (Alvi & Alvi, 2019). In South Africa, such challenges have been attributed to a lack of professional development opportunities, especially for teachers working in rural schools (Mbambo & Hlabisa, 2024). In a similar vein, Syed and Wahas (2020)

found that university teachers in Yemen face three types of challenges in teaching poetry in EFL classes: low English proficiency, traditional pedagogy, and texts selected without considering complexity, conceptual difficulty, and cultural backgrounds of the learners. Moreover, Cariboni Killander (2011) found that extra thinking time to read poetry, a lack of interest among the students in reading poetry, and teachers' lack of confidence in teaching poetry are other challenges. Nishihara (2022) found that lexically simple poems could be challenging for ESL or EFL learners because of the syntactic complexity and other aspects of the poetry. Similarly, Sigvardsson (2020) found that teaching poetry is an intimidating task for many teachers. Taken together, the multiple challenges for teaching poetry arise from the linguistic and cultural associations of poetry and the lack of professional development for teachers.

Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Poetry

The focus of poetry instruction has gradually shifted from correct interpretation to open explorations of meanings. The key approach to poetry instruction was based on the correct interpretation of a poem (Chambers & Gregory, 2006). The traditional pedagogy of poetry is based on instructor-led interpretation of a poem's meaning. The Grammar Translation Method was used to teach poetry in the 20th century (Homstad & Thorson, 2000), which stresses the translation of text from one language to another. However, the modern concept of poetry teaching and learning demands active participation of readers (Rosenblatt, 1969, 1994). Reader response pedagogical approaches demand readers' active roles in the construction of the meanings of the poems. The communicative approach of a second language teaching demands active participation of students in ESL (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Poetry has a place in ESL class as an authentic resource for language and learning (Lazar, 2015). Krashen (1982) suggests that second language classroom environments should be enjoyable for language acquisition. These evolving concepts of poetry instruction highlight the need for students' active participation in the learning activities.

Scholars suggest different models of poetry instruction which highlight the active participation of the students. Schutzl (2001) suggested that poetry instructional methods should include experiential activities to activate students' schemata, training in the close reading of the textual features, and discussion of the deeper issues of content and themes of poems, and their connection to life and culture. Similarly, Kramsch (1993) mentioned three phases of teaching poetry: focusing on visual and prosodic features, exploring the multiplicity of the meaning, and creative work of rearranging the form of poems. In addition, Gönen (2018) suggested a poetry teaching framework which included activation of prior knowledge and preparation of students' basic comprehension, detailed understanding, and personalization of poetry reading. Thus, students' emotional and cognitive engagement is important for poetry instruction.

Teachers have implemented different strategies to make poetry learning more engaging. Sigvardsson (2020) found that Swedish secondary schools drew on personal experiences of the learners, discussed students' ideas, created a safe learning space, and gradually built upon interpretation for English language learning. Similarly, Ngidi (2020) found that teachers primarily used group work to understand the meaning of poems, whole-class discussions on poetic devices, discussions on poem vocabulary, and contextual questions while teaching poetry in an ESL context. However, Nishihara (2022) argued that teachers need to design an instructional framework that engages learners in poetry and pleases them with reading, thereby realizing the learning benefits of poetry texts. He suggested that instructors guide learners in interpreting poetry and engage them in pair collaboration, supporting them to explore poetic language in an enjoyable reading environment. Furthermore, a second language classroom environment should be an enjoyable and emotionally safe space for language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Taken together, providing agency to the learners can make poetry instruction more engaging.

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by three useful theories which can guide poetry instruction in the ESL context. One of the theories is Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading (Rosenblatt, 1969). This theory assumes that readers are co-creators of meanings rather than passive recipients. According to this theory, students bring their background experiences, negotiate meanings, and derive multiple interpretations. Rosenblatt (1994) suggests that teachers create a classroom environment where aesthetic aspects of reading get priority over the poem's analysis. This indicates that there should be a balance between efferent (extracting information) and aesthetic (reading for pleasure) so that students can enjoy the feelings and ideas expressed in the poem.

The second set of theoretical ideas is drawn from Stephen Krashen. Krashen (1982) suggests that the affective filters of learners should be lowered for more effective language acquisition. He indicates that a second language classroom environment should be psychologically secure and physically enjoyable for language acquisition. The practical implications of Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis are that teachers should create a free environment in the classrooms so that students can interact freely without emotional disturbances.

The third theoretical concept that informed this study is Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge. A teacher needs content knowledge and knowledge of appropriate ways of delivering it to the students. Thus, understanding the ways of presenting content is part of a teacher's professional learning (Shulman, 1987). In an ESL poetry class, we can expect students to be active in the exploration of both form and meaning of the poems in an enjoyable and non-threatening environment, whereas teachers engage the students through guided practice to

reach their interpretation, balancing the tension between appreciation and analysis of the poetry.

Methodology

To explore the lived experiences of teaching poetry in a basic level-ESL class, this study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Godden & Kutsyuruba, 2023; Vagle, 2018; Van Manen, 2016). Qualitative methods explore the perspectives of participants as they experience the real world (Yin, 2015). Phenomenology is appropriate to describe the lived experiences of participants as they describe the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2014). Thus, this study adopted phenomenology as the theoretical framework for the research methodology. Teachers' lived experiences of teaching poetry at the basic level ESL classroom is the phenomenon under study.

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted among English language teachers working in schools in the Gorkha Municipality of the Gorkha District in Nepal. Five participants were purposively selected from three schools. Himalya School is a community school located in a suburban area, whereas Daraudi and Nabin Schools are community schools located in rural areas. Three criteria were specified for participation in the study: being a basic level English teacher, having at least five years teaching experience, and willing to participate in the study. Table 1 presents participants' profiles.

Table 1

Profile of the Participants

| S. N | Pseudonym | School | Gender | Age | Qualification | Exp. |
|------|-----------|----------|--------|-----|---------------|------|
| 1 | Bimala | Himalaya | Female | 39 | M.Ed. | 15 |
| 2 | Dipesh | Himalaya | Male | 35 | M.Ed. | 12 |
| 3 | Kamala | Himalaya | Female | 42 | M.Ed. | 22 |
| 4 | Muna | Daraudi | Female | 29 | B.Ed. | 15 |
| 5 | Nabin | Nabin | Male | 35 | I.ED | 12 |

Data Collection

I visited the schools and telephoned some basic level ESL teachers and asked them if they were willing to participate in this study. I explained the purpose of the study and assured them of anonymity. After receiving their informed consent to participate in the study, I conducted semi-structured interviews to focused on their experiences of teaching poetry in ESL classes. A semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was used to elicit information from the participants. The protocol was flexible to obtain in-depth insights about the participants' experiences. Three participants were interviewed face-to-face in a peaceful environment in the school library during the time allocated for the

interviews. These face-to-face interviews were conducted in English. Telephone interviews with two participants were conducted in Nepali for their convenience after school hours. The average time for the interviews was 35 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

Data Analysis

After listening to the audio several times, I uploaded the English audio recordings on Otter.ai and transcribed the audio and edited them to ensure their correctness. The telephone interviews were transcribed manually. After reading the transcripts, I used NVivo 10 for data analysis, following to provide a thematic analysis of the interviews to identify patterns and recurring themes, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). I described the data set by coding at the semantic level, then moved towards the interpretation level (Sigvardsson, 2020). In the first phase of the data analysis, I read the interview transcripts several times to become familiarized with the data set. In the second phase, I coded the data with initial codes inductively. During the third phase, I searched for recurrent patterns (themes) in the data set. At the fourth phase, I reviewed the themes. At the fifth phase, I defined and named the themes. At the sixth phase, I reported the themes based on the research questions of the study. During the data analysis process, I focused on the subjective experiences of the participants in teaching poetry in an ESL context, aligning the analysis with the principles of phenomenological research.

Ethical Considerations and the Researcher's Positionality

I followed ethical principles for phenomenological research as suggested by Walker (2007). I clearly explained the purpose of the study to the participants and ensured that their participation was voluntary. I also assured them of their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process. Informed consents were sought from the participants before data collection, and pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' personal identity in the report.

In a hermeneutic study, the researchers' preconceptions and experiences are acknowledged (Vagle, 2018). This research is not a value-free endeavor. My experiences as an English learner and an English teacher have shaped how I approached the participants for information about their experiences. Rather than eliminating them, I reflected on how my prior experiences shaped the interpretation of participants' experiences.

Findings

Analysis of the data from the interviews revealed four themes: usefulness of poetry in language learning, instructional methods, challenges of teaching poetry, and expected support for more effective teaching and learning. Each of these themes is discussed as follows.

Theme 1: Usefulness of Poetry in English Language Learning

The participants highlighted that poetry is beneficial for English language learning. Three subthemes were identified under this theme: acquisition of vocabulary and language skills, exposure to rich linguistic features, and emotionally appealing content.

Resources for Language Acquisition

All the participants agreed that poetry is an effective input for English language acquisition in English. Several participants highlighted that learners could acquire new vocabulary items and improve reading and listening skills when they read English poetry. Dipesh asserted, "poetry's rhythmic and structured nature makes it memorable, aiding retention. It is memorable since students can easily recite it. While we are teaching poetry, we can recite it. It is supposed to develop their pronunciation and speaking skills as well." For Dipesh, the development of oral skills is one of the benefits of teaching poetry.

Similarly, Bimala mentioned, "they can develop speaking skills from the picture given there, from the scene, vocabulary, and speaking skills." Other participants also illustrated how the recitation of poetry supports the development of speaking and listening skills, as it allows students to practice pronunciation. For example, Muna asserted that poetry teaching is beneficial for English language learners because students can develop vocabulary, pronunciation, and boost their own oral language confidence. She added that students read similar poems outside of the classroom if they enjoy the poems presented in class. Her comment indicates that poetry can be a motivating resource for language learners.

Taken together, participants' comments indicated that poetry plays a key role in in-language acquisitions. It enhances vocabulary, reading, and speaking skills, along with confidence in speaking activities. The participants perceived that poetry is an effective resource for English language learners.

Exposure to Rich Linguistic Features

The participants consistently described poetry as a powerful linguistic resource that exposes learners to rearranged syntax, less common vocabulary in the poems, and rich phonological patterns. They believed that, unlike other genres, poetry exposes students to the creative and expressive power of language. Several participants highlighted that poetry allows learners to explore unfamiliar syntactic patterns and less common vocabulary. Bimala explained, "poetry encourages students to use their imagination to visualize scenes and connect emotionally with the content. It introduces them to figurative language, like similes and metaphors, and helps expand their vocabulary." While Bimala highlights the figurative language of poetry, Dipesh adds a less common syntactic pattern as the key feature of poems. In his words, "teaching poetry entertains and introduces them to an unusual form of language compared to other forms of literature". For him, the unpredictability of syntactic patterns is entertaining for learners as they are attracted to the novel use of language.

Nabin focused on poetry's usefulness for teaching pronunciation and meaning, citing that his students enjoy the rhyming patterns and other phonological features. He commented, "poetry exposes the students to rich content for teaching pronunciation and meanings. Students can learn about homophones. They enjoy rhyming patterns, and that makes the lesson interesting". His comment indicates that poems can make a lesson engaging.

Collectively, the participants indicated that poetry provides ESL learners with linguistically rich and varied language experiences. Highly concentrated phonological, graphological, syntactic, and semantic features enhance pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and interpretative competence of English language learners.

Joyful Learning

Participants described poetry as a source of enjoyment that energizes classroom teaching and learning. They highlighted that poetry brings fun, particularly when students recite verses aloud. Dipesh mentioned that "*in teaching poetry, students can entertain.*" His perception highlights that poetry creates a lively and engaging learning atmosphere with its musicality.

Similarly, Kamala explained that "*the rhyming patterns in poetry create a musical quality that engages students, often through recitation or singing,*" suggesting that the auditory appeal of poetry invites students to participate more willingly and enthusiastically. For her, the musicality of poetry is not only for aesthetics but to engage students in the lesson. This sense of personal connection to the lesson was echoed by Bimala, who highlighted the role of poetry in encouraging imaginative thinking and language development. She shared that "*students will imagine the scenes themselves, and they can feel themselves,*" highlighting that the imagery in poems inspires students to express their ideas, develop speaking skills, and expand their vocabulary. She emphasized that poetry creates a space for students to share their emotions openly, which strengthens both expressive language and personal engagement.

The participants' accounts show that poetry functions as an engaging and emotionally rich pedagogical tool because it entertains, captures students' attention, and creates a conducive learning environment where they use language for personal meaning construction.

Theme 2: Poetry Instructional Methods

The participants followed traditional methods of teaching poetry. Teaching for task completion, correct interpretation of meaning, and ICT as a peripheral tool for teaching are three subthemes under poetry instruction methods.

Teaching Poetry for Task Completion

All the participants described their poetry lessons as routinized, procedural, and textbook-driven, with exam-oriented activity restricting rather than cultivating students' personal engagement with poems. The participants revealed that they rigidly followed a three-phase, structured approach (pre-reading, while reading,

and post-reading) to complete the given exercises, limiting students' interpretative exploration.

One participant, Bimala, shared that "I start the lesson with a description of the title and author background, followed by recitation practice and vocabulary exercise. Then, I explain the meaning of the poem in plain English and ask the students to write an answer to comprehension questions." Her comment reflects the structure of a traditional pedagogy model, where students have little space to explore a poem's meaning. The teacher explored the meaning, and students became passive recipients. Dipesh followed the same approach. As he described, "I begin the lesson with pre-reading questions, ask the students to read and underline key vocabulary, explain the meaning, followed by a question-answer session based on the textbook." His account reaffirms the task completion model, not the open exploration of the text by the students.

Nabin attempted to bring creativity, but could not free herself from the routinized pedagogical model. He said, "I ask students to write a similar poem after the lesson, but only a few students write." Creative space for his students was only optional rather than an integral component of the lesson structure. Students could not get pedagogical support for writing poems in their class.

Taken together, the participants' comments reflected that their poetry instruction was a textbook and exam-oriented activity which overshadowed students' personal engagement, interpretation, and creativity. Although the participants could recite poetry but still not fully engage with the lessons. Such a structured approach enables students to complete the task requirements but limits the poetry experiences of students.

Focus on Correct Interpretation of the Meaning

The participants consistently revealed that they provided their learners with a summary or interpretation of poems rather than allowing them to explore the meaning. Such pedagogical practice limited students' opportunity to explore the meanings and make their own interpretation. They attempted to justify their pedagogical practices stating that their students' language proficiency was not good enough to allow them to make their own interpretation. One participant, Dipesh, mentioned that he allows students to explore the meaning under his guidance for the correct interpretation of the meaning. His comment indirectly revealed that meaning-making is not students' independent activity. Another participant, Nabin, explicitly justifies his pedagogical practice of providing correct interpretation by stating that students' low language proficiency and the linguistic complexity of the poetry limit students' opportunity to interpret poems. He said, "some of the vocabulary used in poems is used for figurative meaning. It is difficult to teach figurative meaning beyond the literal meaning of those words." His comment indicated that instead of scaffolding students' ability to learn the metaphorical meaning, he followed a more conventional mode of lesson delivery.

The other three participants confirmed that they followed a similar pattern and provided a summary of the poem to the students rather than allowing them to freely explore its meanings. This indicates that teachers were limiting students' free exploration of meaning, thereby impeding the development of their interpretive skills and creativity.

Overall, the teachers' beliefs in the low language proficiency of the students and poetry's linguistic features, such as rearranged syntax and metaphor, limited students' opportunities to experiment with interpretations of poems. Instead of scaffolding students' language abilities, they limited their opportunity to explore meaning by imposing ready-made "correct" interpretations.

ICT as a Peripheral Tool for Teaching Poetry

As stated in the first sub-theme, the participants were under pressure to complete tasks given in the textbook and prepare students for the examinations. Consequently, they rarely used ICT tools to present their lessons in class. The lack of supplementary ICT resources in schools, pressure to complete courses on time, teachers' insufficient technological and pedagogical knowledge, and lack of motivation restricted their use of ICT tools for effective teaching of poetry. As Dipesh admitted, he rarely used ICT, although his school had good ICT equipment. His admission indicated that ICT was not an essential pedagogical tool but rather a decorative add-on for his pedagogical practices

Bimala mentioned similar experiences: "sometimes, I use ICT tools for teaching poetry, but I cannot recall a specific example right now." Her comment indicated that she was not using ICT as an integral part of her pedagogical practice. Kamla commented that she remembered "using a video from the NCED about a poem in grade 8". However, Muna and Nabin reported that their school did not have adequate ICT equipment for teaching poetry. They occasionally used their smartphones to present a poem, as Muna said, "But occasionally I use my smartphone for playing the audio of the poem in the class."

The use of ICT was restricted by the lack of a school policy on using ICT resources. For instance, Narayan said, "I use my smartphone reluctantly, fearing that I will be accused of misusing my smartphone for entertainment in school." He highlighted that his school did not have policies and plans for using ICT in teaching and failed to harness the potential of available ICT tools for teaching poetry. Taken together, the participants' comments highlight the underuse of ICT tools and underscore the need to supply these tools to the schools and train the teachers to integrate ICT for teaching and learning poetry, to enhance students' engagement with poems by using extra audio, visual, and textual resources. Other participants did not have the appropriate environment and supplementary equipment to teach poetry in their classrooms.

Theme 3: Challenges of Teaching English Poetry in Basic Level

Three subthemes, lack of students' participation in classroom, discussion of unfamiliar vocabulary, and deciphering the meaning of figurative language in poems, were included in this theme.

Lack of Students' Participation in Classroom Discussion

Participants consistently described that they had limited interactions with their students in their English poetry class. Students' lack of engagement in lessons stemmed from traditional information-delivery models of instruction and students' low English proficiency, as discussed earlier. Unless students fully engage in lessons, they cannot appreciate the full the potential of poems and thereby develop their English language proficiency. Kamala highlighted her main challenges regarding more fulsome classroom interactions as "language barriers, and students' limited capacity to speak English." Her comment indicates that classroom interactions can be both a means and an end of understanding poetry, and that students' inadequate language proficiency impeded their language learning opportunities.

The participants also revealed that they often used a bilingual approach to compensate for the low language proficiency of the students to create an environment for interaction in the classroom. One of the participants, Nabin, used a bilingual medium. He said:

Although I exclusively used English in my previous school, I use both English and Nepali language in my class to meet the expectations of my students. Most of them are from Nepali medium schools. They have low English proficiency so, they do not pay attention to their study. They do not do homework and do not ask questions in class.

Nabin's comment indicated that he used students' mother tongue (Nepali) to make his class more interactive. However, the use of students' mother tongue did not necessarily make the class interactive. This suggests that students' inability to participate in classroom discussions lies in low language proficiency and on the teachers' reliance on less interactive instructional methods.

In summary, students' active engagement in poetry lessons is a challenge encountered by basic level teachers. This can be attributed to low language proficiency and less effective pedagogical approaches to teaching English poetry.

Unfamiliar Vocabulary Limits Exploration of Meaning

Participants consistently reported that they were unable to engage their students in poetry lessons due to the high frequency of unfamiliar vocabulary embedded in poems. This shared concern situates vocabulary as a significant hurdle in teaching poetry in ESL classrooms. As Nabin explained, "my students stumble on new vocabulary items because they cannot pronounce longer words or decipher their meanings." Here, Nabin links pronunciation difficulties with semantic decoding problems, indicating that breakdowns occur at both the oral and interpretive levels. He continued, "as a result, it is difficult to see how they can

move beyond literal comprehension. Teaching correct pronunciation and clarifying meanings are the primary hurdles in my class.” Taken together, his remarks frame vocabulary work as groundwork that must be completed before any movement toward figurative or inferential reading becomes possible.

Despite the constraint, the participants attempted to address this central challenge. Bimala highlighted her strategies of teaching vocabulary as she asserted “vocabulary can also be difficult, but I address this by using a dictionary and explaining meanings clearly.” Here, she indicates explicit teaching of pronunciation and meanings of the vocabulary items can prepare students to move beyond literal meanings of the poems. Similarly, Kumar stated, “students struggle to understand even simple sentences due to the unusual language and unfamiliar vocabulary in poetry.” Kumar’s comment suggests that these challenges in teaching highlight gaps in students’ linguistic proficiency.

Having knowledge of vocabulary works as a foundation for higher order thinking. Insufficient vocabulary constrains students’ oral performance (e.g., reading aloud, fluency) and limits their exploration of meaning in the poems discussed in class. When time and attention are directed towards decoding and pronunciation, less time remains for higher order interpretive processes. Consequently, moving beyond literal comprehension to figurative and interpretive understanding becomes even more challenging.

This finding further implies that teachers struggle to implement creative, interpretive activities because instructional time is absorbed by vocabulary scaffolding. In turn, this constrains teachers’ capacity to foster students’ interpretive abilities with poetic texts, limiting students’ access to the aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of poetry.

Deciphering Meaning of Figurative Language in Poetry

One of the consistent challenges for the participants was teaching figurative meanings in poetry. Densely embedded similes, metaphors, and other linguistic devices to assist with the exploration of the meanings among her ESL students. Bimala stated “one major challenge I encounter is that students struggle to understand the hidden or metaphorical meanings in poems.” Here Bimala indicates that teaching “metaphorical” meaning more challenging because it lies in the hidden cultural context of a second language, which is significantly different from the context of their mother tongue. Similarly, Muna highlighted the challenges in teaching connotative aspects of vocabulary; “teaching figurative (indirect) meaning is a demanding task.” By “demanding” she indicates the pedagogical scaffolding required to impart the connotative meanings of text. In the same context, Nabin asserted “it is difficult to teach figurative meaning going beyond the literal meaning of those vocabularies.” Nabin implies teaching semantic extension of meaning is a challenging task to those students who struggle to grasp the basic meaning of the vocabulary embedded in poems.

Together, the participants' comments demonstrate limited linguistic proficiency, and that gaps in cultural understanding hamper the ESL students' ability to interpret the symbolic meanings of poems. Unless students understand the figurative meanings of poems, they cannot enjoy the inherent aesthetic and semantic dimensions of the texts. The participants' comments imply that teachers should integrate the cultural contexts of poems during each lesson so that students can better understand the figurative meanings.

Theme 4: Expected Support for Effective Poetry Teaching

Three subthemes were identified under this theme: specifically designed training on teaching poetry, support for ICT- integration, and collaboration with fellow teachers.

Specifically Designed Training on Teaching Poetry

Participants were dissatisfied with existing models of professional development which did not address their professional needs. They expressed varying degrees of satisfaction with the generic professional development training, but this did not pay sufficient attention to teaching poetry. For example, Muna stated, "so far, I have not had any training to teach poetry. I expect refresher training which will give me innovative ideas for teaching and learning English poetry emulating traditional methodology." Muna's comment indicates that she is aware of her professional needs and eager to learn the skills required to teach poetry effectively. Similarly, Kamla added, "I teach based on what I learned in college, but I need to update my knowledge of poetry teaching. I expect teacher training." Her comment indicates that what she learned from her preservice teacher education courses was not sufficient to address the challenges of the real classroom. She demanded continuous professional development training.

Narayan echoed similar concerns; "I have not got specific training to teach poetry. I am a temporary teacher. I do not get priority for teacher training at school. I expect some specifically designed workshops for teaching poetry. If I get training opportunities, it will help me to teach deeper or hidden meaning of poetry to the students.

Instead of demanding generic refresher training, Narayan specifically expected training for teaching figurative meaning of the poetic texts. His comment suggests that he is not only able to articulate his professional need but also to identify the specific support of teachers for effective delivery of ESL poetry lessons.

These narrative accounts of the participants revealed the inadequacy of existing generic pedagogical training and the need for specific pedagogical training, focused on poetry instruction. The participants believed that such training might equip them for the teaching challenges they encounter in their classrooms and for making their classes more engaging.

Support for ICT-based Teaching and Learning

The participants had shared a desire to enhance their pedagogical practices by harnessing the potential of ICT tools. They identified ICT as a toolkit to solve problems they encounter while teaching pronunciation, meaning of vocabulary, context, and cultural referents. For example, Dipesh stated, “if I receive support to access authentic materials for teaching and learning, that will help me teach the pronunciation of words and the meaning of poems.” Here, by “authentic materials” Dipesh refers to resources developed by the native speaker teachers for language learners. Additionally, his comment suggests that ICT tools can be used to develop language by optimizing inputs for language acquisition.

Despite the participants’ interest in using ICT as pedagogical resources, the actual use of ICT was constrained by limited infrastructure, lack of schools’ policies and plans to integrate ICT in poetry teaching learning, and teachers’ lack of appropriate technological and pedagogical frameworks. Narayan said “if the school manages ICT tools in school, I could use them for teaching and learning. I do not need to depend on my smartphone to use ICT.” His comments demonstrate that institutional support is essential for establishing ICT as central tools for teaching poetry. ICT integration in poetry instruction, however, depends on the available infrastructure and teachers’ pedagogical practices.

In short, the participants’ comments indicated that structural constraints limit the ICT use in poetry teaching and learning. The participants underscored the need for ICT tools to make their teaching and learning more effective. Their comments indicate that they believe that effectiveness in teaching English poetry can be enhanced by utilizing ICT tools.

Collaboration with Fellow Teachers

The participants revealed that they sought support from their colleagues in teaching poetry. However, such support was not consistent. Bimala explained, “I try to stay updated and improve my teaching methods. I sometimes discuss challenges with fellow teachers, and we prepare lessons together to solve my immediate problems.” Her comment suggests that despite the mutual benefits for colleagues, a robust teamwork culture is not firmly established among the teachers yet. This can be attributed to the prevailing concept that teaching is independent rather than a collaborative endeavor.

Not all the participants had colleagues in their schools to support them, except for support from teachers’ professional networks. As Nabin expressed: “I do not get support from the other teachers at the school. So, I want to collaborate with NELTA and take initiatives from them for my professional development.” Nabin’s comment reflects his awareness and desire to collaborate with other colleagues beyond his school as well as his commitment to continuous learning. Muna echoed Nabin’s view: “I am grateful for the basic level teacher training provided by NELTA a few months ago. I expect similar support in the future.” Her account also suggests that she expects networking and collaboration for her

professional development so that she can effectively present poetry lessons in her English class.

Together, their comments demonstrate they are eager to collaborate with other English teachers for their professional development. Their self-initiated collaboration is evident from the bottom-up approach of teacher development and commitment to situated learning. This indicates that the participants are motivated to increase their pedagogical efficiency.

Discussion

The present study explored the poetry teaching experiences of basic-level English teachers. The study found that teachers perceived poetry as a useful resource for English language acquisition, as poetry exposes the language learners to semantically, lexically, phonologically, and syntactically rich language. Despite the perceived value of poetry in language acquisition, teachers reported that their traditional, correct-interpretation-based instructional approach was not suitable for fostering the creative and interpretive abilities of their learners. Their poetry teaching was emotionally detached, mainly focused on textual analysis without enjoying the aesthetic pleasure and open explorations of meaning. The study also found that students' low linguistic proficiency and the complexity of the poetic genre posed significant challenges to both teachers and students. Although teachers attempted to enhance their knowledge and skills in poetry teaching, the support they received in training, networking, and ICT use was insufficient to equip them with the tools and techniques to teach English poems effectively.

The findings of this study are similar to the findings of previous studies, which indicate the linguistic and pedagogical values of poetry in English language classrooms. For example, Chen et al. (2024) argued that poetry exposes learners to authentic, stylistically varied, and culturally loaded language. Recently, Al-Bakri (2019) reported that poetry has a positive effect on vocabulary development, pronunciation, and cultural understanding. This is consistent with earlier claims made by Lazar (1993) and (Maley & Duff, 1989). The participants were aware of poetry's richness, however, their reliance on traditional interpretation-based poetry instruction methods limited opportunities for learners to engage creatively. This contrast highlights a persistent gap between theoretical recognition of poetry's value and its practical classroom application as reported in the literature, even in higher education (Simecek & Ellis, 2017).

Poetry teaching demands a balanced approach that includes textual analysis and readers' response exploration (Kellem, 2009). However, the participants in this study used a more structured approach similar to the findings reported by Ngidi (2020), limiting students' learning opportunities. Approaches such as reader-response pedagogy, recitation, group discussion, and creative writing could foster interpretative skills and emotional engagement in addition to textual analysis. Teachers could help learners overcome their perception of poetry as an inaccessible

or linguistically complex text form by encouraging them to connect poetry with their personal experiences (Teachers Institute, 2024). Moreover, integrating multimodal inputs with audio recordings, video, pictures, and textual resources can scaffold comprehension for learners with lower linguistic proficiency, while preserving the aesthetic dimension of poetry (Xerri, 2012). Limited use of ICT in poetry lessons by the participants of this study indicated the possibility of enhancing poetry teaching and learning by integrating modern digital tools in poetry lessons.

The challenges reported by teachers, particularly the low proficiency of students, resonate with the earlier findings by Khatib (2011). He reported that nonnative speakers struggle to comprehend the literal meaning of poems because of the inherent complexity of many poetic texts. Consequently, teachers exclude explorations of the figurative meanings in their classrooms. Similarly, teachers' awareness of customized training programs reflects the need for enhancing their literary knowledge, which can also equip them with practical techniques for scaffolding meaning, facilitating discussion, and using ICT tools. Networking opportunities among teachers could support the sharing of innovative practices and solve many of the problems they face while teaching (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Similarly, institutional investment in digital resources would strengthen teachers' confidence in adopting creative methodologies.

There was little evidence that teachers attempted to create anxiety free environments in their classrooms to facilitate optimum processing of language input, as suggested by Krashen (1982), although they allowed some time for poetry recitation. Consequently, the teachers could not lower the affective filter (anxiety and low self confidence) of the learners. Similarly, the findings indicated a focus on a correct interpretation-based approach to teaching poetry underestimated the roles of learners. This focus is in contrast to the suggestion of Rosenblatt (1969), who emphasized the importance of learners playing an active role in interpreting meanings by using personal experiences and going beyond the efferent mode of reading (extracting information) to the aesthetic mode of reading. However, the findings indicated that the teachers valued the role of the text, but not the role of the background knowledge of learners. The findings also contradict the suggestion of Shulman (1987), who suggested that teachers need not only content knowledge but also pedagogical content knowledge for effective delivery of lessons.

There are some implications of the study. The existing teachers' education model needs revision to include customized training for teaching poetry. The government should invest in enhancing ICT infrastructure in schools and disseminate ICT integration policy to the stakeholders. Similarly, teachers need to relearn instructional strategies to make poetry teaching more engaging. The course designers need to pay attention to the criteria of text selection while including poetry in English language courses.

This study had some limitations. Only five purposively selected basic-level teachers working in the Gorkha Municipality participated in the study. The findings of this study are not generalizable to other contexts. Similarly, the participants' self-reported experiences alone may not fully represent the practices in poetry lessons. I suggest further research with multiple data collection methods, such as classroom observations, lesson plans, and students' assignments. Further study with more participants in different contexts may provide a more comprehensive understanding of poetry teaching and learning.

Conclusion

This study explored teachers' experiences of teaching English poetry at basic-level schools in the Gorkha Municipality, Nepal. The teachers appreciated poetry as an authentic and linguistically rich resource for English language learners. However, they agreed that their traditional pedagogical approach limited students' opportunities to explore the meanings of the poems and experience their aesthetic aspects. Consequently, they requested systemic intervention to address these challenges, such as pre-service and in-service teacher training and ICT infrastructure development in schools. Furthermore, to harness the full potential of poetry, teachers wanted to upgrade their pedagogical skills to balance the linguistic and creative aspects of teaching and learning.

In the ESL context, integration of poetry into classrooms is successful when teachers scaffold students' linguistic abilities, engage them emotionally, and allow them to explore the meanings of the poems. Theoretically informed and contextually grounded pedagogical practices enhance the effectiveness of poetry teaching and learning, and foster learners' linguistic and interpretative abilities. Therefore, teachers should redesign poetry lessons so that poetry functions as a useful springboard for ESL learning activities rather than a decorative add-on in their textbooks.

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