Teachers' Strategies for Teaching Poetry in the Bachelors Level

Krishna Prasad Niroula*

Abstract

This research explores the strategies employed in teaching poetry at the Bachelors level, with a specific focus on comparing different teaching approaches. The study used purposive sampling for teacher selection and simple random sampling for student selection across various university campuses. Data was gathered through questionnaires and classroom observations, and analyzed using both descriptive and statistical methods. The findings indicate that teachers utilize a range of techniques, including translation, explanation, group/pair work, dramatization, and drills. The study concludes that teaching poetry is both engaging and challenging, that students are often motivated by rhyme and rhythm, that student-centered strategies are particularly effective, that critical appreciation is crucial at this level, and that teaching poetry fosters student creativity.

Keywords: Teaching-learning, Strategy, Teaching technique, Challenge, linguistic comprehension

*Teacher, Terhathum Multiple Campus, Terhathum, Krishna.niroula@temc.tu.edu.np

https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8469-7123

Introduction

In Nepal's current educational framework, poetry is an integral part of the curriculum from primary to master's level. The inclusion of English poetry at the Bachelor evel is considered essential for developing students' linguistic comprehension and analytical creativity (Rai, 2004). As Rai (2004) suggests, poetry can enhance our perception of the beauty and deeper meaning within human experiences and the natural world.

In Nepal, English literature is an integral component of university curricula. However, the teaching of poetry often faces challenges due to traditional pedagogical approaches, limited resources, and a lack of teacher training (Awasthi, Bhattarai, & Khaniya, 2010). However, the teaching of poetry in Nepal often does not meet its potential, tending to be largely teacher-centered. Across various educational stages, teachers commonly deliver lectures while students passively take notes, leaving students with minimal active involvement in the teaching and learning process. Rai (2004) observes that teachers frequently rely on practices such as:

- Translating poems into the students' first language (L1).

- Providing line-by-line explanations of the poem's meaning.

- Presenting summaries or themes of the poem.

These methods may hinder students from developing their own interpretations and understandings of poetry, limiting their comprehension to the teacher's perspective. Consequently, students may struggle to analyze and appreciate poems independently. Understanding a poem often requires knowledge of the poet and its socio-cultural context. A poem written within a foreign socio-cultural context may be difficult to grasp without understanding the meanings of individual words. Therefore, familiarity with the poet and the poem's background can significantly enhance students' comprehension. Rather than directly imparting all information about a poem, it is more effective to facilitate students' learning. Teachers should guide students in developing their own interpretations by providing clues and encouraging discussion (Rai, 2004).

Traditionally, poetry instruction has been a teacher-centered endeavor, with teachers dominating classroom discourse through extensive questioning, often focusing more on the text than on student engagement. This approach can reduce poetry study to a series of lectures that dissect the literal and implied meanings of the text. Teachers may overanalyze individual lines, potentially obscuring the overall meaning of the poem and failing to cultivate students' interest in reading and enjoying poetry. A key challenge for teachers, therefore, is to address students' potential resistance to poetry and create an environment that fosters exploration and engagement. Rather than trying to impose poetry on students, teachers should create situations that encourage active participation, drawing students into the world of poetry and enabling them to appreciate it. Active participation, it should be noted, is not solely dependent on high intellect or exceptional memory.

This research focuses on teachers' strategies for teaching poetry at the Bachelors level. Despite the communicative intent of current syllabi, the application of student-centered techniques in poetry instruction remains challenging due to various factors. Traditional, outdated methods persist in many classrooms, with teachers often relying on teacher-centered approaches. A significant issue is the gap between the knowledge, skills, and techniques acquired in teacher training and their practical application in the classroom.

In the current educational landscape of Nepal, the Grammar Translation Method is often favored over communicative approaches in poetry instruction. Teaching techniques tend to be teacher-centered, and the implementation of communicative methods is hindered by large class sizes and limited resources. Many institutions lack adequate computer facilities, internet access, and library resources, and reference materials are often scarce. Additionally, the evaluation of poetry comprehension may not always be effective.

Poetry teaching in Nepal often remains teacher-centered, with lectures and note-taking dominating the learning experience. Students have limited active involvement, and modern theories of poetry instruction are not consistently applied. This context raises several questions about the strategies teachers employ when teaching poetry at the Bachelors level.

Literary texts have the capacity to engage, stimulate, and provoke readers' imaginations. Lazer (1993) argues that "literature is a world of fantasy, horrors feelings, thoughts, visions etc. which puts into words" (p. 14-15). Lazer (1993) identifies several benefits of using literature with language learners:

- It is motivating.
- It stimulates language acquisition.
- It expands students' language awareness.
- It develops students' interpretive abilities.
- It has general educational value.
- It is authentic material.
- It helps students to understand the culture.
- Students enjoy it and it is fun.
- It encourages students to talk about their opinions and feelings.

Poetry instruction can enhance student motivation and stimulate language acquisition. It also broadens students' language awareness, develops their interpretive skills, and promotes interaction. Poetry provides authentic material for teaching vocabulary and cultural understanding. The use of rhyme and rhythm can make learning enjoyable, and students are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings about a poem's central ideas and the poet's background. Poetry is often valued for its ability to teach various aspects of language in a communicative and engaging manner, and it is included in curricula across educational levels in Nepal.

Collie and Slater (1990) view literature as a reflection of the human spirit and history. Literature also offers a rich context for teaching vocabulary, grammar, and language skills.

Effective literature instruction, according to Sharma (2024), involves:

- Focusing on comprehension and critical analysis.
- Utilizing creative possibilities.
- Encouraging students to memorize short poems and texts.

- Promoting discussion, pair work, and group work.
- Assigning relevant tasks.

Literature provides a diverse range of written materials, and its relevance often endures over time. The selection of appropriate literary texts depends on the specific needs, interests, cultural backgrounds, and language levels of the students. It is crucial to choose literary genres that resonate with students' life experiences, emotions, and aspirations.

Teachers may sometimes adopt a traditional role, imparting information about the author, the work's background, and literary conventions. However, alternative approaches, such as role-play, improvisation, creative writing, discussions, questionnaires, and visual aids, can also effectively serve similar purposes in literature instruction. The primary goal of teaching literature is to enable students to benefit from communicative and other activities that enhance language proficiency within the context of literary works.

Teaching poetry can be a particularly enjoyable activity. A positive and engaging atmosphere is essential for both teachers and students to fully appreciate the emotions and ideas conveyed in a poem.

Strategies in Language Teaching

In language teaching, a strategy is a specific technique used in the classroom. Edward Anthony (1963), an American applied linguist, defined a strategy as a "trick, stratagem or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective." Strategies should align with a chosen method and overall approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 19). Strategies are specific classroom procedures that reflect a particular approach to language teaching.

Language teaching employs various strategies, some of which are teacher-centered, emphasizing the teacher's dominant role, while others are student-centered.

Common teaching strategies, as outlined by Rogers and Frieberg (1994, p. 190), include:

- Lecture

- Explanation

- Illustration

- Demonstration

- Recitation

- Dramatization

- Prepared talks

- Individual talks

- Pair work/group work

- Role-play

- Simulation

- Discovery technique

Both teacher-centered and student-centered strategies can be valuable, depending on the specific classroom context. The effectiveness of a strategy depends on factors such as classroom management, available materials, class size, the nature of the learning objective, and students' proficiency levels.

Teaching Poetry

Poetry is a literary genre that explores universal themes and expresses life experiences, observations, and emotions. Poetry often employs non-standard sentence structures, vocabulary, rhyme, rhythm, and tone. It deviates from conventional language norms, manipulating syntax, creating unique vocabulary, and freely mixing registers. Poetic language enhances students' awareness of language's flexibility and develops their interpretive and creative abilities.

Teaching poetry involves helping students understand its language, vocabulary, and encouraging them to read it with expression. A systematic approach to poetry instruction includes activities that stimulate student interest, provide necessary cultural and historical context, guide students in interpreting the poem, and incorporate follow-up activities. Students should develop an understanding of the poem's rhythm, learn to read it effectively, and engage in related activities. They should also be encouraged to write their own poems.

Types of Poetry

According to Awasthi, Bhattarai, and Khaniya (2010, p. 3-10), different types of poetry include:

Epic

A long narrative poem with a serious subject, elevated style, and a heroic or divine central figure. Examples include Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey*, and Devkota's *Sakuntala*.

Lyric

A non-narrative poem, often song-like, that expresses a single character's thoughts or feelings. Examples include Shelley's "To a Skylark" and Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress."

Ballad

A poem that narrates a traditional story, often with a song-like quality. Ballads can be classified as folk ballads, broadside ballads, or literary ballads.

Ode

A long lyrical poem with an elevated style and a specific stanzaic structure, often written in praise of a person or subject.

Elegy

A poem that laments someone's death, expressing mourning or sorrow, such as Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears" and Ghimire's "Gauri."

Sonnet

A fourteen-line poem, typically in iambic pentameter, with a specific rhyming scheme. Sonnets often consist of an octave (first eight lines) and a sestet (last six lines). Different types of sonnets include Petrarchan sonnets and Shakespearean sonnets.

Romance

A narrative verse, popular in the Middle Ages, that was later also written in prose.

Narrative verse

A poem that tells a story.

Approaches and Strategies to Poetry Teaching

This study examines five common approaches to teach literature in ESL/EFL classrooms:

Information-Based Approach/Strategy

This teacher-centered approach focuses on providing students with facts and information about the target culture, the author, and literary movements, including historical and social contexts, author biographies, literary genres, and rhetorical devices (Lazar, 1993, p. 35).

Language-Based Approach/Strategy

This learner-centered, activity-based approach focuses on how language is used in a literary text (Carter & Long, 1988). Common strategies include language activities, rewriting, creative writing, dramatic activities, and reading aloud.

Stylistics Approach/Strategy

This approach uses linguistic analysis to examine how meaning is communicated in a text, focusing on stylistic choices and patterns (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 74).

Moral Philosophical Approach/Strategy

This approach encourages students to discuss the moral values present in a text, promoting self-understanding and exploring how literary works reflect the world (Carter & Long, 1988).

Personal Response-Based Approach/Strategy

This student-centered approach emphasizes eliciting students' personal responses (experiences, feelings, and opinions) to a text. It encourages group work to facilitate intellectual and emotional engagement with the themes and topics in the literary text, connecting them to students' personal experiences (Carter & Long, 1988). Technique

includes brainstorming, class discussions, group work, and free expression of feelings and opinions.

Lazar (1993) proposes a three-stage framework for using poems in the language classroom: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading.

Pre-reading Activities

These activities aim to stimulate students' interest in the poem, provide necessary historical and cultural context, and address language challenges. Activities may include predicting the poem's theme from the title or key words, discussing related pictures, imagining scenarios, providing background information, and pre-teaching key vocabulary.

While-reading Activities

These activities focus on engaging with the poem itself. Examples include arranging jumbled lines, predicting subsequent verses, matching words with meanings, answering comprehension questions, and imitating the teacher's reading.

Post-reading Activities

These activities help students interpret the poem, such as completing true/false exercises, selecting the most appropriate interpretation, role-playing similar situations, and reading the poem aloud with expression.

Further Follow-up Activities

These activities extend learning beyond the classroom and may involve rewriting the poem in a different form, reading other works by the same author, writing original poems, analyzing unusual language, and discussing the poem's values and worldview.

While specific research on teachers' strategies for teaching poetry at the bachelor's level in English education is limited, some studies have explored language teaching and literature instruction more broadly. For example, Devkota (2003) investigated learning strategies used by B.Ed. students when studying literary texts, finding that students often note unknown words, consult dictionaries, and use reference materials and translation.

Methodology

This study employed questionnaires for both English language teachers (teaching in B.Ed. and BBS programs) and students, along with classroom observation forms, as the primary data collection tools. Teacher questionnaires included both open-ended and closed-ended questions, as did the student questionnaires. Classroom observation forms, developed by the researcher, included sections for pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching activities, to identify the teaching strategies used.

Research Design

A mixed-method design was used, combining qualitative classroom observations with quantitative survey data. This allowed for triangulation of findings and a holistic understanding of pedagogical practices.

Population and Sample

The study was conducted in 2025 across five public university campuses affiliated with Tribhuvan University in eastern Nepal for the purposive data collection. The sample comprised 10 English teachers (B.Ed. and BBS levels), selected through purposive sampling and 150 university-level students studying English literature, selected via simple random sampling.

Instruments

- Teacher Questionnaire: Included 20 items (10 open-ended, 10 Likert scale).
- Student Questionnaire: Included 15 items to gauge engagement and perception.
- Classroom Observation Checklist: Focused on pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected over two months. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (v26), employing descriptive statistics (mean, SD) and Ms excel. Qualitative responses were coded thematically.

Results

Teaching Strategies Used

Strategy	Teachers Using (%)
Translation to L1	90%
Line-by-line explanation	100%
Group/Pair work	60%
Dramatization	40%
Critical appreciation	70%
Visual aids	20%
Reading aloud	80%

Key Findings

- All teachers used teacher-centered techniques such as direct explanation and translation.
- Only 40% used dramatization or performance-based methods, despite their proven benefits.
- Students reported active engagement during group/pair work and creative interpretation activities.

Student Perception
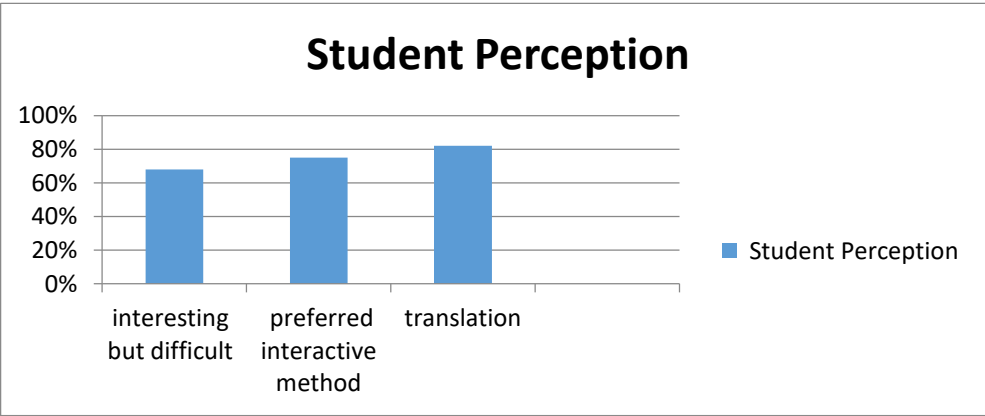
- 68% of students found poetry "interesting but difficult."
- 75% preferred interactive methods like discussion and dramatization.
- 82% reported that translation helped initial comprehension but hindered deeper engagement.

Discussion

The findings confirm that traditional strategies—particularly translation and explanation—still dominate poetry instruction in Nepal, echoing earlier studies by Devkota (2003) and Rai (2004). While these strategies aid basic comprehension, they fall short in fostering critical engagement and literary appreciation. In contrast, student-centered approaches—especially those that include dramatization, group discussion, and contextual exploration—are associated with higher student satisfaction and deeper interpretative engagement (Lazar, 1993; Carter & Long, 1988; McRae, 2021). However, barriers such as large class sizes, lack of materials, and teacher workload continue to obstruct their wider implementation (Sharma, 2024).

The findings of this study reaffirm what has been consistently observed in Nepalese higher education: traditional strategies such as translation into Nepali and line-by-line explanation remain dominant in poetry instruction (Devkota, 2003; Rai, 2004). These methods help students grasp surface-level meanings and vocabulary, which is crucial in contexts where English is a foreign language. However, such approaches often limit deeper literary engagement and critical thinking. For example, when a teacher translates a poem like William Blake's *The Tyger* line by line, students may understand the words but miss the layered symbolism, rhythm, and emotional tone that the poem conveys in its original language.

In contrast, student-centered strategies like group discussion, dramatization, and personal interpretation offer richer educational experiences. These methods not only make poetry more accessible but also increase student motivation and classroom participation (Lazar, 1993; Carter & Long, 1988; McRae, 2021). For instance, having students perform a dramatic reading of Shakespeare's sonnets allows them to feel the rhythm and explore emotional nuances, making the learning process memorable and meaningful. Similarly, group discussions enable students to bring their own perspectives to a poem, fostering collaborative analysis and appreciation.

Despite the benefits, widespread implementation of these techniques is hindered by structural barriers. Many teachers face large class sizes, lack of teaching aids, and an

overwhelming workload that leaves little room for innovation (Sharma, 2024; Basnet, 2022). In a typical public university setting in Nepal, a teacher may handle a class of 60 or more students, making it nearly impossible to facilitate interactive methods like role-play or group work effectively.

Moreover, there is a noticeable disconnect between what is promoted in teacher training programs and what is actually practiced in classrooms. While training sessions often emphasize communicative and interactive models, teachers revert to traditional methods due to institutional constraints and lack of follow-up support (Karki, 2022; Giri, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to bridge this gap by offering continuous professional development, context-sensitive workshops, and regular curriculum reviews that encourage flexible, student-centered teaching. A notable gap exists between teacher training programs, which advocate modern pedagogical strategies, and their real-world classroom application. This study supports calls for continuous professional development, practical workshops, and syllabus revisions to prioritize interactive teaching models.

Conclusion

Poetry teaching at the Bachelors level in Nepal is at a crossroads. While teachers recognize the value of student-centered strategies, systemic and contextual limitations often force reliance on traditional methods. To bridge this gap, teacher training should emphasize practical, context-sensitive approaches that align with modern pedagogical frameworks. Institutional support, resource allocation, and continuous assessment of teaching methods are imperative for meaningful change.

Poetry instruction at the Bachelors level in Nepal stands at a critical juncture. Although many teachers understand the value of student-centered approaches—such as dramatization, group discussion, and interpretive reading—they often find themselves constrained by traditional practices out of necessity rather than choice. Large class sizes, limited access to teaching aids, outdated curricula, and high workloads make it difficult to implement innovative strategies (Sharma, 2024; Basnet, 2022). Moreover, a significant gap remains between the interactive teaching methods advocated during teacher training

and what is feasible in actual classrooms (Giri, 2020; Karki, 2022). Teachers are often left without the tools or institutional support needed to make these strategies a reality.

To address this, teacher training programs must move beyond theory and provide practical, context-sensitive techniques that suit Nepal's diverse classroom environments. Simultaneously, educational institutions should prioritize investing in resources such as teaching materials, classroom technology, and manageable student-teacher ratios. Equally important is the regular assessment and feedback on teaching practices to ensure continuous improvement. With the right support systems in place, poetry can become not just a subject to study, but a transformative experience that nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and linguistic growth among students.

References

Ahmed, S., & Pathan, Z. H. (2020). Exploring poetry teaching practices at the bachelor's level: A qualitative case study. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 16*(2), 760–775.

Ali, R., & Alharbi, F. (2023). Integrating literary texts in ESL classrooms: A strategy for promoting language acquisition. *International Journal of Literature and Language Studies, 3*(1), 24–38.

Awasthi, J. R., Bhattarai, G. R., & Khaniya, T. R. (2010). *English language teaching in Nepal: From policy to practice*. Ministry of Education (MOE).

Basnet, D. (2022). Teaching English poetry through dramatization: Practices and perceptions in Nepal. *NELTA Journal, 27*(1), 31–42.

Bhatt, K. (2021). Use of literature in developing language competence: An analysis of classroom practices. *ELT Chautari, 9*(2), 15–26.

Bidari, S. (2021). Poetry in the language classroom: Humanizing teaching material. *Journal of NELTA, 26*(1–2), 203–206.

Carter, R. (2022). *Language and creativity: The art of common talk*. Routledge.

Carter, R., & Long, M. (1988). *Teaching literature*. Longman.

Collie, J., & Slater, S. (1990). *Literature in the language classroom: A resource book of ideas and activities*. Cambridge University Press.

Devkota, T. R. (2003). Learning strategies in literature. *Journal of NELTA, 8*(1), 23–28.

Dhungana, S. (2023). Challenges in teaching English literature in rural Nepal. *ELT Today, 4*(1), 45–58.

Giri, R. A. (2020). Politics of medium of instruction policy in Nepal: An analysis of stakeholders' perspectives. *Current Issues in Language Planning, 21*(2), 113–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2019.1575831

Habib, A., & Shah, S. A. (2021). Learner autonomy in literary classrooms: An emerging need. *International Journal of Education and Practice, 9*(4), 552–567.

Kafle, H., & Shrestha, M. (2023). Language pedagogy in Nepalese contexts: Practices and reflections. *International Journal of English Education, 12*(3), 50–61.

Karki, B. (2022). Teacher training and its impact on English literature pedagogy. *Nepalese Journal of Language Teaching, 14*(1), 20–33.

Khadka, D. (2021). Integrating creativity in literature classes: Perception of Nepali university teachers. *Journal of Educational Research, 3*(1), 29–40.

Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and language teaching: A guide for teachers and trainers*. Cambridge University Press.

Leech, G., & Short, M. (1981). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to english fictional prose*. Longman.

McRae, J. (2021). *Literature with a small 'l'*. Macmillan Education.

Rahman, M. M., Singh, M. K. M., & Pandian, A. (2022). Creative approaches in ESL literature classrooms. *Asian EFL Journal, 24*(1), 14–33.

Rai, V. S. (2004). English teaching strategies in Nepal. *ELT Journal Nepal, 5*(2), 15–22.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Rogers, C., & Frieberg, H. J. (1994). *Freedom to learn*. Merrill Publishing.

Sharma, M. (2024). Literature teaching at the tertiary level in Nepal. *Nepali Journal of English Language Teaching, 14*(2), 31–44.