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THE ROLE OF POETRY IN ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO SPEAK IN AN ENGLISH CONVERSATION CLUB

Fitria Aftinia¹

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

fitria.22001@mhs.unesa.ac.id¹

Abstract: This study aimed to know the students' activities during learning by using poetry and find out the students' perception of using poetry in learning English in the English Conversation Club. To conduct the study, twenty students who joined the English Conversation Club in a private senior high school in Surabaya, Indonesia, participated. The data were obtained from observation and a questionnaire. The result of the observation was explained descriptively, and the questionnaire result was calculated in percentages and categorized. The results showed that the students followed the instruction but had difficulty understanding the content of the poetry because of the figurative language. Besides, students' perception of using poetry is mostly positive, especially for improving their speaking skills. Using poetry as a literary text in English Language Teaching (ELT) could be an alternative way to introduce literature and encourage students to speak.

Keywords: English conversation club, literary text, perception, poetry, students' activities

INTRODUCTION

Studying English in a non-English-speaking country is challenging because of the limited language environment. English is not used in daily activities in Indonesia, so students get less exposure to English-speaking countries (Sakina et al., 2024; Indriani & Sakina, 2022). Besides, the native language can influence English language learning. Local accents and pronunciation patterns may affect English phonetics. For example, in Indonesia, many students tend to pronounce English words based on the spelling system of Bahasa Indonesia, which often leads to errors in pronunciation and stress patterns. Limited access to authentic materials, such as English newspapers, television programs, and conversations with native speakers, further complicates the process. In addition, the lack of consistent opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom means that students rarely build the confidence needed to communicate fluently. Therefore, school leaders need to find a way to overcome this by creating a supportive

environment where students can practice English in meaningful and engaging contexts, both inside and outside the classroom.

To overcome the challenges mentioned above, one way to do this is to provide extracurricular activities at schools to facilitate students. Extracurricular activities are regulated in the regulation, noting that extracurricular activities are held to optimally develop students' potential, talents, interests, abilities, personality, cooperation, and independence to support the achievement of national education goals (Permendikbud, 2014). According to Inriyani et al., (2017), students' ability could be improved both in cognitive and affective sides, and extracurricular activities could accommodate their talent and interest. Nguyen (2022) also stated that students will benefit from joining extracurricular activities in terms of academic skills and soft skills. Therefore, many junior and senior high schools provide English clubs as extracurricular activities that students can choose.

Providing English clubs at schools can be the best option for several reasons. According to Astari and Hadi (2022), the English club creates an environment that allows students to express themselves in their respective English skills. Besides, English clubs are recommended since they could give good models for students (Getie, 2020). These previous studies show that English clubs should be held at schools because they can create an English environment and offer good models for students.

There are many ways to motivate students to speak English in English clubs, and one of which is using literature. The use of literature in English language learning is not only a concern in Indonesia, but also in various other countries. For example, in European countries such as England and Germany, literary texts are often made mandatory material in foreign language curricula because they are considered to be able to train cultural sensitivity and aesthetic appreciation. Similar things are also applied in Japan, where English language learning based on literary texts is introduced since junior high school as one way to increase learning motivation. This approach is considered effective because it provides an authentic context that is rich in meaning and encourages students to think critically about the values contained in the text.

Literature plays an important role in English learning; however, literature is little discussed in this digital era. According to Timothy and Obiekezie (2019), "literature is language in action." Cushing and Giovanelli (2019) did a study that integrated language and literature. Literary texts as literature are usually considered a phantom in English class; therefore, they are not often brought up, especially in the Indonesian context. However, Tevdovska (2016) mentioned some benefits of using literary texts in language teaching, such as motivating, giving cultural knowledge, acting as authentic materials, and arousing personal response. Some examples of literary texts are novels, short stories, and poetry. The literature chosen in this study is poetry because it is usually written in short stanzas and can be read quickly. Although "poetry might be the oldest form of verbal expression" (Amri & Basthomi, 2022), poetry covers many aspects of life.

Regarding fear of using literary texts in the EFL context, Fritscher (2020) stated one type of phobia called Metrophobia, which refers to the fear of poetry. However, literary text, especially poetry, can be an interesting topic in English class. As Timothy and Obiekezie (2019) stated, poetry could promote creativity. Authentic materials like poetry are more beneficial because students learn "real language" rather than artificial language (Arindora et al., 2021). In an English classroom, poetry works as a means to reinforce English language skills (Reazul, 2022).

As one of the extracurricular activities, the English club, which was named the English Conversation Club (ECC), has been offered in a private senior high school in Surabaya since around 2009. This club was expected to facilitate students' English learning, especially improving their speaking skills. As Fitriany et al., (2021) stated, one way to improve students' speaking ability is to create an English club. According to Cheng (2019), one of the important roles of the English club is improving students' English language proficiency. With the availability of the English Conversation Club, the students are expected to improve their language skills, especially speaking skills. Moreover, the members are expected to join any English competitions in Indonesia, such as speech, storytelling, debate, and news reading. Being the winners would be a source of school pride. However, the fact shows that many students in the English Conversation Club are reluctant to speak English and are demotivated. Mostly, they come to the club to sit and listen to get scores for their extracurricular activity. From the gap above, this study aims to (1) explore students' activities during learning by using poetry and (2) find out the students' perception of using poetry in learning English. This study will likely contribute to general English Language Teaching (ELT). Besides, it would benefit language practitioners or teachers who teach English in the English Conversation Club, since teachers are also expected to use strategies or methods that could motivate students, especially in speaking skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In using literary texts in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, some approaches to literary analysis can be chosen based on the learning objectives. Van (2009) suggested six approaches: New Criticism/Formalism, Structuralism, Stylistics, Reader-Response, Language-Based, and Critical Literacy. New criticism analyses a work based only on that work's text. In other words, this approach only analyses what is present in the literature. Structuralism deals with mechanical formal relationships, such as narrative components. Stylistics analyses the features of literary language, including the unconventional structure of literature. Reader-Response emphasizes the two-way relationship between texts and readers in which readers can share their experiences related to the texts. Language-Based is like stylistics, but this approach allows students' responses and experience with literature. Critical literacy analyses language and literature, unfolding the relation between language use and social power, and it may relate to politics. Besides these six approaches, some scholars also introduce the Philosophical approach and the Feminist approach. Febriani et al. (2022) mentioned a philosophical approach as an approach to literary analysis which emphasizes finding moral values in literary works, while the Feminist approach intends to analyze literary works from a gender perspective, especially about women's life experiences and their social roles (Irshad & Yasmin, 2022).

In this study, the Reader-Response approach was selected because it is hoped that it can ease the students' speaking by relating their experience to the poetry content. Besides, Febriani (2019) believed that the Reader-Response approach could promote students' critical thinking towards literary works. If applied well in the classroom, the Reader-Response approach can provide freedom and opportunity for students to deliver their opinions (Iskhak, Mujiyanto, & Hartono 2020). Moreover, this approach supports constructivist theory in which students are believed to construct new ideas based on

past and present language knowledge. Rejina (2021) also believes constructivism is more effective in teaching English literature.

There are some previous studies related to poetry. Amri and Basthomi (2022) reported reflecting on using prosing poem to teach poetry. Syamsia and Ismail (2021) also researched using poetry in the EFL classroom through classroom presentation. Petriciuc (2019) conducted a contrastive-comparative study of Spanish and Moldovan students to determine their perceptions of using literary texts in the foreign language class. Mulatsih (2018) wanted to connect learning poetry and improving students' teaching skills in some teachers' training departments. Another study by Mahmud (2017) is related to using poetry to develop paragraphs in a writing class. These previous studies encourage conducting similar research in an English conversation club.

The benefits of poetry were also discussed in some previous studies. First, research at Aligarh Muslim University, India, shows that integrating poetry in language classes helps improve language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), enrich vocabulary, and also students' enthusiasm for learning (Wahas et al., 2024). Most respondents agreed that poetry increased their motivation and cultural awareness. Second, another study found that writing and reading poetry activities created space for students for personal reflection and creative expression (Mardiningrum & Adriyanthi, 2023). The feedback-supported writing process helped students internalize experiences and increase self-awareness. Third, a study in China on classical Tang poetry showed that an interactive app-based method was able to increase participants' intrinsic motivation (Chen & Jamiat, 2023). This suggests that teaching poetry not only encourages exploration of meaning but also increases students' intrinsic motivation. Compared to these previous studies, this study intends to know the students' activities and perceptions on using poetry by reading, discussing, and delivering group discussion results in the English Conversation Class.

METHOD

This study aims to describe the students' activities and perceptions towards poetry used and their learning of English by using poetry. The data collected was in texts. Therefore, this study can be categorized as a descriptive qualitative study. According to Creswell (2012), one of the characteristics of qualitative research is collecting data from a small number of individuals, and the central phenomenon is the key concept. In qualitative research, the priority is to represent the participants' views and perspectives (Yin, 2018).

The number of participants was twenty students. The students were from two levels: fifteen in tenth grade, and five in eleventh grade. They were the English Conversation Club members in a private senior high school in Surabaya, Indonesia. This English Conversation Club in this school was selected because this club has been established for more than ten years. This school was also one of the prestigious private senior high schools in Surabaya, Indonesia.

To get the data, an observation was conducted, and a questionnaire was given to the students as participants. The activities that occurred during the meeting in two hours were noted on the observation sheet by an observer. The observation result would be explained descriptively. Meanwhile, the questionnaire used in the study was adapted from Robbin & Judge (2013). In the questionnaire, there were twelve items of statements in which the students chose four options: 4 = *strongly agree*, 3 = *agree*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 =

strongly disagree towards the statements. The result of the questionnaire was presented in percentages, and the percentage was categorized as in Table 1. All data is collected taking into account the principle of confidentiality, and no personal data is published.

Table 1. The criteria for the questionnaire response (Riduwan, 2018).

No	Percentage	Category
1.	81%-100%	Very Good
2.	61%-80%	Good
3.	41%-60%	Sufficient
4.	21%-40%	Bad
5.	0%-20%	Very Bad

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results were obtained from the observation and the questionnaires are presented. This section is divided into two sub-sections. The first is students' activities, and the second is students' perception.

Students' Activities

At the beginning of the meeting, the teacher asked a student to volunteer to read aloud a poem entitled *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost. Since no one wanted to do it, the teacher asked a senior (who used to be a member of ECC) to read it aloud and give an example to the students. From this scene, students, as ECC members, were mostly not initially motivated. After that, the teacher tried to read it again to let students hear the rhyme of the poetry. The students are then divided into four groups. Each group was given a different title of poetry taken from the Internet. The teacher selected them based on the theme suitable for the students' level.

The poem title for the first group was *Disappointed* by Paul Laurence Dunbar. *Negro* by Langston Hughes was given for the second group, *Yes* by Dennis Duhamel was for the third group, and *Interview* by Dorothy Parker and *Male Philosophy* by Alice Duer Miller for the fourth group. The fourth group got two short poems because the teacher thought that both were related. The students were asked to read and discuss the content with the group members. The approach used was the Reader-Response Approach, in which the students could share their experiences related to the poetry they read.

During the discussion, the teacher went around and visited each group. The students are the focus of this learning process (Al-Ghazo, 2021). The teacher asked the students in each group whether they understood the poem's content and what they could discuss. She explained in Indonesia that sometimes, if the students still do not understand the content or theme of the poetry, it can be seen that the teacher did code-switching as a conversational strategy (Al-Daher, 2021). Most students had difficulty understanding the poetry and needed to translate some words into Indonesian. It supports a previous study, which concluded that students struggle to understand figurative language, proverbs, and the meaning of poetry (Mastura, 2022).

After being given some times, one representative from each group was asked to deliver the result of their group discussion. All students were hesitant at first. The teacher asked an eleventh grader in the first group to come forward to give their junior an example. The first volunteer, named DS, talked about a poem entitled *Disappointed*. It tells the story of an older man who plants in his orchard but is swept away by rain. DS

related this to his own experience. He once wanted to study in a public school, but his parents wanted him to attend a private school. He felt disappointed, actually, but he chose to obey their parents.

After that, one representative named FND from the second group came forward. The poem entitled *Negro* talks about racism especially a Negro who is usually underestimated because of his race. FND relates this to an experience when coming to a place full of people from different races. Sometimes she and her friends got underestimated. After finishing her presentation, another representative named PAK from the third group delivered the result of their group discussion. The poem entitled *Yes* talks about a culture shock that occurred with an American woman married to a Filipino man. She encounters some problems adapting to her husband's culture. According to PAK, one of his group members also experienced culture shock when moving from Bekasi to Surabaya. He had difficulty in adapting, especially in local language matters. PAK also shared his experience in Australia, and he was surprised by the tap water that could be drunk. The last presenter was NA from the fourth group. The poem entitled *Interview* talks about an ideal woman whom men admire, while *Male Philosophy* talks about what most people think about men, so these two poems are about gender issues. NA shared her experience when she decided to join Taekwondo. People around her said that Taekwondo is a martial art for men. However, she proved that women could succeed in Taekwondo by becoming the second winner in the East Java championship. These results are in line with a previous study by Tevdovska (2016) stating the benefits of using literary texts in language teaching, such as motivating, giving cultural knowledge, acting as authentic materials, and arousing personal response. Since the students could interpret poems based on their experiences and emotions, this result supports a previous study by Rejina (2021) mentioning that constructivism is more effective in teaching English literature.

Students' Perception

The questionnaire was in a Google Form, and the link was shared with the students. The students filled it in after the learning activities were finished. The questionnaire was adapted from Robbins and Judge (2013), and according to them, there are three factors influencing students' perception, namely the perceiver (statements number 1-6), target (statements number 7-11), and situation (statement number 12). To make it easier, the result of the questionnaire is categorized into two categories: positive (strongly agree and agree) and negative (strongly disagree and disagree). The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The result of the questionnaire

No.	Statement	Positive	Negative
1.	After doing the activities (reading, discussing, and delivering the result of the discussion), I understand the content of the poetry learned.	90%	10%
2.	By reading poetry, I know its benefits in learning English skills, especially in speaking skills.	85%	15%
3.	I could deliver the content of poetry learned orally in English.	70%	30%
4.	After reading this poem, I want to read other poems.	35%	65%
5.	I am interested in the content of the poetry I learned.	70%	30%
6.	I hope by understanding the content of this poetry, I could improve my English-speaking skills.	100%	0%

No.	Statement	Positive	Negative
7	This is the first time I learned by using poetry with this method (reading, discussing, and delivering the result of the discussion).	75%	25%
8	The poetry I learned makes me excited to discuss.	65%	35%
9	The poetry I learned makes me active in talking with friends.	80%	20%
10	When the poetry is read, I am interested in poetry in English.	70%	30%
11	I see there is a similarity between the content of the poetry learned with the facts that happened in real life.	85%	15%
12	It is faster for me to understand the content of the poetry with the method (reading, discussing, and delivering the result of the discussion)	65%	35%

From Table 2, it can be seen that 90% of the students understand the content of the poetry they learned. One student named RY stated that he liked it when he knew the content of the poetry. Moreover, 85% of them understand the benefits of poetry, learned in speaking skills. When students understand the benefits of learning something, it can encourage them more, which can be categorized as extrinsic motivation (Parrish & Lanvers, 2019). Besides, 70% of them thought they could deliver the content of the poetry orally in English. However, only 35% of the students admitted that after learning by using poetry, they want to read other poetry. It can be caused by the use of uncommon words in the poetry. IML, NPR, and FND stated that they did not like the use of figurative language, which was difficult to understand. SWM also stated that she was not interested in poetry, especially in English, because figurative language was difficult to translate.

The finding is suitable with Calafato's and Paran's (2019) statement that the use of literature could raise some issues, one of which is related to the complexity of language. It also supports a previous study (Timothy & Obiekezie, 2019), which concluded that teachers fear teaching poetry because of its difficulty, the types of poems selected by examination bodies, the style of language, and pedagogical incompetence. Despite many unfamiliar words in the poetry, AQY thought it could improve students' English vocabulary, as Khan (2020) said in his review study that poetry can be a means to enrich vocabulary items. According to AK, if done individually, it would take more time than group discussion. It showed that group discussion gave them benefits. Working in a group allows the students to learn from and with each other (Ulla & Perales, 2021). When asked about poetry, 70% of students are interested in its content. This means that the content was already well selected to suit the students' level. By understanding the content of the poetry, 100% of students hope they can improve their speaking skills. This could be said as one of the students' expectations in joining ECC. To sum up, five items (the perceiver factor) are categorized into the good and very good categories. Only one statement related to whether the students want to read other poetry or not is categorized as bad.

Learning by using poetry through reading, discussing, and delivering the result of the discussion is considered new by 75% of the students. DS and RY admitted that they had never used poetry in the lesson in English class as a compulsory subject at school; therefore, learning by using poetry through this method was the first time for them. The poetry selected by the teacher made the students excited to discuss, and 65% of students agreed with it. It follows Truong's (2021) statement that tasks are closely related to motivation because teachers should implement tasks that could motivate the students. While 80% of the students think that the poetry they learned makes them active in

talking in English. 70% of students are mostly interested in English poetry when it is read, and 85% of students see the similarity between the content of the poetry and the facts that happened in real life.

To sum up, five items (target factor) are categorized as good and very good. The last item, which is related to the situation factor, is also categorized as good (65%). This means that most students think that the method (reading, discussing, and delivering the result) helped them understand the poetry's content faster. The interaction in the group discussion was fruitful because the students learned and supported one another (Abdullah, Zainal, & Raof, 2021). The result supports constructivist theory since group discussions help students see multiple perspectives (Burhanuddin et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this study has provided additional insights into how poetry can be integrated as an innovative tool to bridge the gap between students' passive knowledge of English and their active use of language. While many students initially showed reluctance or hesitation when they were asked to participate, the gradual process of group work and the opportunity to relate the poetry to their own experiences became an effective catalyst for engagement. This confirms that student-centered learning environments, which emphasize personal connections to content, can gradually build confidence and reduce speaking anxiety. In the context of foreign language learning, where anxiety frequently hinders performance, these approaches are especially beneficial.

It is also worth noting that although figurative language presented significant challenges, it became a topic of collaborative exploration rather than a source of discouragement for most students. When students encountered metaphors or idiomatic expressions they did not understand, the group discussion provided a platform for negotiation of meaning. This interactive process is in line with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which posits that learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolding provided by peers and teachers. In this way, students gradually moved from their understanding towards a shared comprehension, which eventually contributed to higher motivation and a sense of achievement.

Another important observation is that students' willingness to present their interpretations in front of their peers grew as the session progressed. Although some students at first avoided volunteering, after observing their classmates succeed in sharing their thoughts, they became more willing to participate themselves. This demonstrates the role of positive peer modeling in creating a supportive classroom climate. This finding reinforces the statement by Reazul (2022) that poetry can function not only as a linguistic resource but also as a medium to build self-confidence and cooperative spirit among learners.

In addition to promoting linguistic skills, the use of poetry can nurture students' critical and reflective thinking abilities. By analyzing poems with themes of disappointment, racism, culture shock, and gender issues, students were encouraged to discuss sensitive social topics respectfully. Such discussions can develop empathy, broaden cultural awareness, and train students to express opinions using appropriate language. This aligns with the view of Mardiningrum and Adriyanthi (2023), who emphasized that literary texts can create a reflective space for learners to connect language learning with personal development.

These findings have practical implications for English teachers. Teachers should choose poems that are not only appropriate for students' language level but also relevant to their daily lives, to make them easier to understand and more interesting. In

addition, teachers can combine discussion methods with creative activities, such as making simple poems or dramatizing the contents of poems, to make the learning atmosphere more varied and enjoyable.

CONCLUSION

From the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that students followed the instructions from reading, discussing, and delivering the results of group discussions, but had difficulty understanding the poetry's content because of figurative language, which was uncommon for them. Besides, students' perception of using poetry is mostly positive, especially for improving their speaking skills. According to the study of Devi and Rao (2020), if the literature can be used wisely, it could be a great source of education and pleasure for teachers and students. Therefore, using poetry as a literary text in ELT could be an alternative way to introduce literature and encourage students to speak.

This study contributes to the development of theory, especially in supporting the theory of constructivism, which emphasizes the importance of active student involvement and the relationship between personal experiences and learning materials. The results of this study also strengthen the Reader-Response approach as an effective strategy in learning literature in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

In terms of practice, this study can be a reference for English teachers who want to use poetry as a learning medium. Teachers can adapt the reading method, group discussions, and presentation of discussion results as a more communicative and participatory learning strategy. In addition, these findings indicate the importance of selecting literary texts that are appropriate to students' language ability levels to minimize difficulties in understanding figurative meanings.

Moreover, the results of this study suggest that an integrated approach combining reading, discussion, and presentation is preferable to more traditional teacher-centered instruction or solitary reading tasks. When teachers provide structured yet flexible opportunities for students to interact with literary texts, learning becomes more active and meaningful. In addition, combining poetry-based activities with multimedia resources, such as video performances of poems or digital annotation tools, can further enhance engagement and comprehension. These blended methods can address students' different learning preferences and reduce the intimidation sometimes associated with literary language.

In the broader context of English language education in Indonesia, this study highlights the need for varied teaching strategies that are responsive to students' backgrounds and interests. Many students have limited access to authentic English materials and rarely experience learning activities beyond textbook exercises and grammar drills. Introducing poetry and other literary genres offers learners exposure to real language use, diverse cultural perspectives, and opportunities to practice critical thinking. In the long term, this approach can help prepare students for more complex communicative tasks and cultivate a deeper appreciation for language and literature. Finally, these findings underscore the importance of sustained support from school leadership to implement innovative practices in English clubs. Consistent resources, teacher training, and careful material selection are crucial to ensure that extracurricular programs achieve their full potential in supporting students' language development.

Like other studies, this study also has a limitation. This study was limited to students who are members of the English Conversation Club in a private senior high school in Surabaya. Besides, time constraints are also an obstacle because English conversation club activities are only carried out once a week. Further research is suggested to use more variations of literary text types and other learning methods, such as drama approaches or project-based learning. In addition, research with a wider population and different school settings is also needed to strengthen these findings.

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