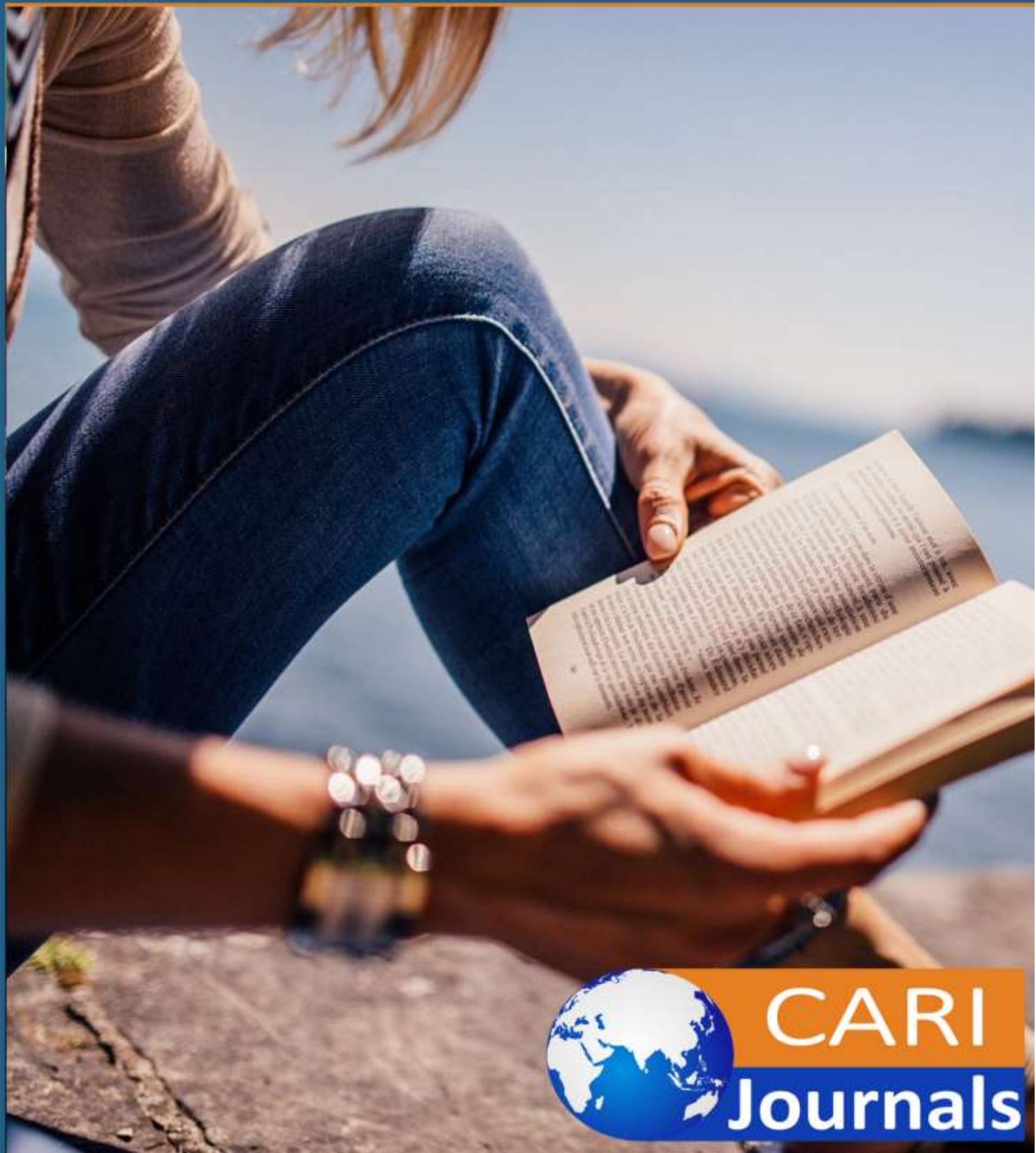


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An Attempt to Design Didactic Strategies to Enhance the Teaching of Poetry in Higher Education: Case of Some Teacher Training Colleges in South Kivu Province



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The study objective is to design didactic strategies that can help teachers of literature improve the teaching of poetry in first and second years at some teacher training colleges in South- Kivu province.

Methodology: The study adopted a descriptive survey research design using a mixed-methods approach: qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were collected from thirty (30) students and eight (8) literature teachers through structured questionnaires containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring instructional practices, learners' experiences and teachers' pedagogical challenges.

Findings: The findings revealed that poetry teaching was largely teacher-centred in which teachers frequently imposed their own interpretations on students instead of engaging them in collaborative meaning-making. Most students reported that teachers paid insufficient attention to their understanding of poems and that they experienced difficulties due to unfamiliar poetic language, difficult vocabulary and inadequate interpretation strategies. The majority of students indicated that they were unable to understand poems satisfactorily and did not have opportunities to express their own views during poetry lessons. Although teachers reported using various instructional techniques and believed that most students understood poetry, students' responses indicated otherwise by revealing a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions and learners' actual experiences. The study also established that teachers faced numerous challenges including inadequate instructional resources, insufficient training in literary interpretation, difficulty of poetic language, limited instructional time and students' weak literary background.

Unique contribution to theory, policy and practice: This study enriches the literature on poetry pedagogy by demonstrating that learner-centred and interactive approaches are more effective than teacher-centred approach in promoting students' interpretation, participation and appreciation of poetry in EFL contexts. It provides empirical evidence from Teacher Training Colleges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where research on poetry pedagogy remains limited. The findings underscore the need for teacher education institutions and curriculum designers to strengthen poetry instruction through learner-centred methodologies, explicit teaching of literary interpretation strategies, continuous professional development for literature teachers, improved instructional resources and curriculum reforms that promote active learner engagement, critical thinking and communicative competence.

Keywords: *Poetry, Understanding Poetry, Analyzing Poetry, Teaching Poetry, Didactic Strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Poetry occupies an important place in English language teaching because it contributes to the development of learners' language proficiency, critical thinking, creativity, cultural awareness and communicative competence. It enables learners to engage with authentic language while developing their ability to interpret figurative expressions, appreciate literary aesthetics and express personal ideas. Consequently, poetry forms an integral component of English literature curricula in many universities and teacher training colleges around the world.

In recent years, educational practice has increasingly emphasized learner-centred approaches to literature teaching. Rather than viewing learners as passive recipients of knowledge, modern strategies encourage active participation, discussion, collaboration and independent interpretation of literary texts. Nevertheless, in many English as a Foreign Language classrooms, poetry continues to be taught mainly through teacher explanation and translation, limiting students' opportunities to construct meaning independently.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), English is taught primarily as a foreign language, while French serves as the official language of instruction in most educational institutions. Teacher Training Colleges prepare future teachers of English who are expected to teach both English language and literature at the secondary schools, including poetry. Consequently, effective poetry instruction is essential because it equips prospective teachers with the pedagogical knowledge, interpretive skills and communicative competence required for their future profession. However, observations and previous studies suggest that poetry instruction in many Congolese Teacher Training Colleges remains largely teacher-centred, characterized by lecture methods, translation and teacher-dominated interpretations with limited opportunities for learners to construct their own understanding of literary texts.

In South Kivu province especially at ISP Baraka, ISP Kamituga and ISP Walungu; poetry constitutes an important component of Anglo-American literature and African literature courses in first and second years which is concerned with works written by American, British and African poets. However, after completing the courses in literature, students complain that they face difficulties to understand poetry. They also face difficulties to read, analyze, interpret, appreciate and produce poetry. Their teachers of literature do not introduce or initiate them to poetry reading, poetry understanding, poetry analysis, poetry interpretation, poetry appreciation and poetry writing. They also do not know what to teach (materials to teach) and how to teach it (methodology).

What is observed on the ground is that students borrow teachers' ideas. This means that students work with ideas collected from their teachers and make them theirs since they do not make their personal opinions about poems. In other words, literature courses consist of pre-digested interpretations and ready-made judgements for learning in which teachers of literature seem to consider students like little children who need to be spoon-fed by their interpretations. The interaction between the teachers and their students does not exist at all. The only interaction between them consists of asking students to write down and re-produce the correct answers

given by the teachers. Teachers ignore that meaning is created by what all participants bring to the text and forget, ipso facto, about the students' presence in the classroom.

What is also observed on the ground is that students acquire the English language rather than the acquisition of interpretive techniques. This means that teachers of literature mainly focus on the study of the English language instead of guiding students on the methods that are essential to interpreting literary texts. They often confuse the teaching of literature with intensive reading class, extensive reading class, grammar, phonetics and phonology whereas students tend to treat literature not only as the extension of grammar in which they memorize rules but also the extension of phonetics and phonology in which they study speech sounds and how they are produced.

This study was therefore conducted to investigate the strategies used by literature teachers to teach poetry in Anglo-American literature and African literature courses in first and second years of the Teacher Training Colleges of Baraka, Kamituga and Walungu. By examining both students and teachers' experiences, this study sought to generate empirical evidence that could contribute to improving poetry pedagogy through more learner-centred approach, interactive and effective instructional practices in English.

Research problem

The problem is that first and second year students face difficulties in understanding poems after completing the courses of Anglo-American literature and African literature. They lack competences in reading, understanding, interpreting, analyzing, appreciating and producing poetry. Their teachers frequently rely on explanation of new words, translation and teacher-dominated instruction instead of interactive and learner-centred approaches. Their teachers also lack or ignore didactic strategies, codes and conventions that can help them teach appropriately poetry in the courses of literature. Besides, they do not interact with students in the classroom since they think that the understanding of a poem depends on their own orientations. The consequence is that teachers who impose their interpretations of poems on students become producers of meaning and students become consumers of meaning. Students probably develop negative attitudes towards the strategies used by their literature teachers to teach poetry. In the light of all this, something goes wrong with the teaching and learning of poetry in the three colleges mentioned above; and it deserves to receive more attention for the improvement of the teaching of poetry with modern teaching methods.

Research questions

This study explores the following main question: Why are first and second year students from ISP Baraka, ISP Kamituga and ISP Walungu unable to understand poetic texts after completing literature courses ?

This study also explores the following three secondary questions:

1. What strategies do literature teachers use to teach poetry in first and second years?
2. What difficulties do these students face when studying poetry?

3. How do they feel about the teaching strategies used by literature teachers?

Research hypotheses

Main hypothesis

H1: First and second year students are unable to understand poetry after completing literature classes because their teachers of literature used strategies that consist of imposing on them their interpretation of poems and preventing them from the opportunities to express their own feelings about the poem in written or oral language.

Secondary hypotheses

H1a: The teaching strategy used in first and second years English is the traditional or conservative strategy which consists of the transmission of ready-made interpretations in which teachers impose on students their interpretation of literary texts and which considers the teachers of literature as responsible for classroom dynamics and unique possessor of knowledge.

H1b: First and second year students face a number of difficulties while dealing with poetry such as difficulty in understanding language used in poetry, difficulty in understanding the global content of the work, lack of techniques to interpret poems and unfamiliarity with the interpretive techniques.

H1c: Students do not like the teaching strategies used by their literature teachers and lack self-esteem and self-confidence since the teachers do not give them the opportunity to express their opinions about poems.

Research objectives

General objective

Generally, this study aims at designing didactic strategies to enhance the teaching of poetry in first and second years at some Teacher Training colleges in South- Kivu province.

Specific objectives

Specifically, this study aims at:

1. finding out the reasons why first and second year students are unable to understand poetry in their literature courses.
2. identifying the teaching strategies used by literature teachers to teach poetry.
3. determining the students' attitudes towards the teaching strategies used by literature teachers in the teaching of poetry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Poetry has long been recognized as an effective pedagogical resource in English language teaching because of its contribution to learners' linguistic, communicative, cognitive and affective development.

According to Beton and Fox (1987) quoted by Ruba (2019:12), the principal objective of using poetry in language teaching is to engage learners actively and creatively in the use of language, thereby promoting the development of communicative competence.

Likewise, Panaveli (2015) quoted by Buhendwa (2023:34), argues that poetry constitutes authentic language material that facilitates the development of the four language skills while enriching learners' vocabulary, stimulating creativity, promoting intercultural awareness, and encouraging emotional engagement with language. He underlines the importance of poetry in EFL classroom as follows: (1) Poetry is an authentic material offering students a real context that can be a beneficial source to develop and reinforce learners' knowledge of the language skills. (2) It gives learners the chance to improve and widen their repertoire of vocabulary in a more real way in which learners can retain and recall easily. (3) It enhances learners' creativity. It elicits students' attention to the beautiful and challenging ideas which students can exploit for creative writing. (4) Poetry based activities stimulate learners' emotional reactions. (5) Poetry offers learners the opportunity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of other cultures which can facilitate their fluency of the target language. (6) It deals with some themes common to all human issues where learners can consolidate their sensation and passion.

Similarly, Ruba (2015), quoted by Buhendwa (2023:34-36), maintains that poetry creates a motivating classroom environment by promoting learner interaction, imagination, confidence, and critical thinking while simultaneously supporting grammar, vocabulary, reading, speaking, listening and writing instruction. He claims that poetry has an integral role in the teaching and learning process for several causes: using poetry in the language classroom enhances interaction among peers or groups of students since poetry is fictional and has different and potential explanations, this encourages learners to interact without the fear of making mistakes as well as it fosters their fluency and accuracy. In addition to that, he claims that since poetry has unique features like rhyme, rhythm and pitch, reading poetry aloud fosters students' self-esteem as well as whelps them express their feelings freely.

These pedagogical benefits are further supported by Kong (2010), quoted by Buhendwa (2023:36), who explains that the musicality, imagery and aesthetic qualities of poetry stimulate learners' interest in English, enrich their imagination, broaden their life experiences and contribute to their personal development. She goes on saying that reading English poetry promotes learners' imagination and using poetry in the classroom can reinforce students' creativity as it stirs their senses and comprehension and it enriches students' imagination with aesthetic forms.

Similarly, Reilly (2012), quoted by Buhendwa (2023:36), argues that poetry improves learners' pronunciation, vocabulary, semantics, syntax, pragmatics, cultural awareness, motivation, and self-expression.

In the Congolese context, Mbokani (2018:1) emphasizes that poetry develops learners' critical thinking, democratic values, cooperation and speaking skills because interpreting poetry requires students to negotiate different perspectives before reaching shared meanings. Likewise, Muzalia (2020:ix) considers poetry a rich didactic resource owing to its lexical and

syntactic richness although he acknowledges that its interpretation presents considerable challenges because poetic language often conceals meaning beneath figurative and symbolic expressions that require systematic linguistic analysis.

The importance of appropriate teaching methodology has also been highlighted by Vaikunda et al. (2008:220-222) who argue that poetry is best taught through oral presentation, expressive reading, guided discussion and repeated interaction with the text. They propose a three-stage instructional process consisting of preparation, presentation and discussion in which teachers gradually scaffold learners' understanding without explaining every line of the poem. This learner-oriented approach is consistent with Lazar's (1993:17-19) argument that literature teaching should encourage learners to construct textual meaning actively rather than passively receiving teachers' explanations.

Similarly, Carter (2007:7-11) contends that effective literature instruction requires discussion, interpretation and personal response so that learners become active participants in meaning-making instead of passive recipients of knowledge. Recent empirical research continues to support these classical perspectives.

Efendi et al. (2024:365–370) concluded that learner-centred approaches to poetry instruction significantly improve vocabulary acquisition, grammatical competence, critical thinking, aesthetic appreciation and learner engagement.

Likewise, Hashim et al. (2024) found that students achieve deeper understanding of poetry when teachers encourage collaborative interpretation, discussion and learner participation rather than imposing predetermined meanings.

Similarly, Wati and Kurniasy (2024) reported that poetry-based instruction enhances classroom participation, motivation and willingness to communicate while Adzani and Rohmana (2024) demonstrated that collaborative engagement with poetry improves learners' reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

Finally, Kabinawa and Santosa (2024) observed that although poetry promotes vocabulary development, students continue to experience comprehension difficulties when teachers fail to provide explicit guidance in interpreting figurative language and poetic expressions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Research design

This study used the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach is appropriate to this study because it focuses on the descriptions of what students and teachers experienced when learning/ teaching poetry. As for the quantitative approach, it gathers empirical evidence, i.e. evidence that is rooted in objective reality and gathered directly or indirectly through the senses rather than through personal beliefs. Such a design was selected to bring attention to a particular challenge or difficulty that students and teachers experience at ISP Baraka, ISP Kamituga and ISP Walungu.

Sampling

Sampling can be seen as a process of selecting subjects, events, behaviours or elements for participation in a study. A convenience sample was used for the selection of students and teachers in this study because they were available at the colleges when the data were collected.

For the sake of getting the size of the sample, I resorted to neither the Stoker's formula nor the Slovin's one but I referred to the universal sampling formula which stipulates that when a researcher has a sample whose size is small as it is the case here, he/she has to take all the participants. The sample in this study consisted of thirty (30) students and eight (8) teachers.

Techniques of data collection

The research instrument used to collect the relevant data of this study was the questionnaire. I went to ISP Baraka, ISP Kamituga and ISP Walungu for data collection and I submitted a questionnaire to first and second year students in order to find out the way their teachers of literature taught poetry. I also submitted another questionnaire to literature teachers in order to find out the strategies they used to teach poetry in first and second years in their literature courses. For the students' questionnaire, thirty (30) copies were distributed to 1st and 2nd year students whereas for the teachers' questionnaire, eight (8) copies were submitted to them.

Techniques of data analysis

Data analysis was conducted by adopting the quantitative and qualitative research methods. The choice of these approaches was motivated by the fact that using more than one type of analysis is believed to provide more reliable research findings since the latter are not compressed into single dimension of measurement.

Qualitative research method requires collecting information about personal experiences to be described and analyzed in their natural context. Merriam (1998) qualifies qualitative research as understanding the meaning people have constructed in which the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. It commonly involves fieldwork as primarily employing an inductive research strategy focusing on meaning and understanding. A qualitative data analysis was done to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings teachers and students bring to them.

Quantitative research method is an inquiry into an identified problem, measured with numbers and analyzed using statistical techniques for the analysis of data. A quantitative data analysis was done with the assistance of a statistician who used a statistical software package, namely SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), to obtain both a descriptive and a statistical summarization of data. This tool helped me encode and analyzing the data: the questions had been introduced in a database as variables and the assertions as the value determining these variables.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section examines first and second year students' difficulties to understand poetry in their literature courses at ISP Baraka, ISP Kamituga and ISP Walungu after completing two years of literature courses.

Data from the students' questionnaire

To start with, the first question was concerned with the strategies used by teachers to teach poetry. The aim behind this question was to know the strategies teachers used when they taught literary texts especially poems in Anglo-American literature I and II; and African Literature in English I and II in their literature classes. That was why I formulated this question as follows:

What strategies did your teachers of literature use to teach poetry?

The data are presented in the table below:

Table 1: The Teaching Strategies

		%
Frequency		
The teachers brought their interpretations of literary texts to students	14	46.7
They read the text silently. At first, they ask a volunteer in the class to tell a short story. They asked us to look for subsidiary characters and the main character	1	3.3
The did it very well	2	6.6
They asked us to read the poem at home	2	6.6
The teacher could read the text and explained difficult words.	1	3.3
They asked us to read the poem silently. After that, we analyzed the tone and mood of the poem.	1	3.3
They brought some texts that we read together after explaining aspects in the book	1	3.3
They brought some texts that we read either in the class or at home. After reading, they taught us the literary aspects found in the text.	1	3.3
They explained the whole poem.	1	3.3
They gave only text and vocabulary translation	1	3.3
They simply told stories	1	3.3
They taught the way they wanted	2	6.7
They taught fifty (50) words and asked students to master them.	1	3.3
They taught literature, composition, ELTM, cursory reading	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

Source: Primary data (2024)

From the data in this table, one can notice that fourteen (14) students representing 46, 7% said that their teachers of literature brought them their interpretations of literary texts especially poems. One can also notice that a (1) student representing 3, 3% said that his teachers of literature asked students to read the text silently. After that, they asked the volunteer to tell a short story and they also asked students to look for the main characters and the subsidiary characters existing in the poems. One can also notice that two (2) students representing 6, 6% said that they teachers of literature taught well and two (2) other students declared that their teachers gave them assignments and asked them to come back with their ideas. One can also notice that a (1) student representing 3, 3% declared that his teachers of literature read the text and asked students to follow them. If there was a difficult word, he could explain it to students. One can also notice that a (1) student representing 3, 3% declared that his teachers of literature asked students to read the poems silently. After reading them, they asked them to give the tone and the mood.

One can notice that a (1) student representing 3.3 % said that their teachers of literature brought books and read them with the students. Another student representing 3,3% declared that his teachers of literature brought books in the class and asked students to read them either in the class or at home after teaching them aspects found in literature. Another student representing 3, 3% said that their teachers of literature gave them some explanations and the understanding of the whole poem. Another student representing 3, 3% declared that their teachers of literature only gave them the text and vocabulary translation. Another student representing 3, 3% said that their teachers of literature taught poetry the way they wanted. Another student representing 3, 3% declared that their teachers of literature taught them fifty words and obliged students to master them. Finally, a student representing 3, 3 % declared that his teachers of literature taught literature, composition and cursory reading in literature classes at the same time.

The results above prove that teachers of literature used different strategies to teach poetry in first and second years at ISP Baraka, ISP Kamituga and ISP Walungu. Students gave different ways teachers taught poetry in the course of AAL and AL. This situation tried to confirm that strategies used by literature teachers to teach poetry were not appropriate since they lacked clear strategies to integrate poetry in language classroom.

The second question dealt with the students' understanding of poems. This question sought to know whether teachers of literature focused on the students' understanding of poems. That was why I formulated this question in the following way:

Did they focus on your understanding of poems?

- a. If yes, why? b. If no, why not?***

The data are presented in the following table:

Table 2: Focus on students' understanding of poems

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, why?	12	40.0
If no, why not?	18	60.0
Total	30	100.0

Source: Primary data (2024)

From the data presented in the table above, one can notice that eighteen (18) students representing 60% declared that their teachers of literature did not focus on their understanding. Among these students, some said that their teachers gave their own answers. Others said that their teachers were quick and had no time to focus on their understanding. One can also notice that twelve (12) students representing 40% declared that their teachers of literature focus on their understanding because he tried to translate in French words whose meanings were difficult and which could not be found in the dictionary. With regard to this result, many students asserted that teachers forgot about the students' understanding when they taught poetry. This might probably be due to the fact that they forgot the top priority when they taught poetry in their Anglo-American and African literature courses.

The third question was about problems students faced to understand poetry. This question sought to know if students faced problem to understand poetry. This was why I formulated the question in the following way:

Did you face problems to understand poetry?

- a. If yes, what are they? b. If no, why not?*

The following table presents the data:

Table 3: Students' problems to understand poems

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, why?	16	53.3
If no, why not?	14	46.7
Total	30	100.0

Source: Primary data (2024)

From the above table, one can notice that sixteen (16) students representing 53, 3% declared that they faced problems to understand poetry because the poems were full of difficult words, lack of techniques to interpret literary texts, lack of techniques to interpret poems, lack of methods and techniques to interpret poems, unfamiliarity with the interpretation of poems and unfamiliarity with literary texts and unfamiliarity with poetic language. One can also notice

that fourteen (14) students representing 46, 7% said that they did not face problems to understand poetry but they did not give arguments to prove it.

The results above assert that students had serious difficulties to understand poetry. This can be justified by the fact that the language of the poem is difficult (poetic language), complex, condensed, archaic and full of difficult words.

The fourth question concerned the students' ability to understand poetry. The aim behind this question was to know if students were able to understand poems in their literature classes. That was why I formulated this question in the following way: *Were you able to understand poems in your literature classes?*

- a. If yes, why? b. If no, why not?*

The data are presented in the table as follows:

Table 4: Students' ability to understand poetry

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, why?	11	36,7
If no, why not?	19	63,3
Total	30	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

From the data presented in this table, one can notice that eleven (11) students representing 36, 7% declared that they were able to understand poems while nineteen (19) students declared that they were not able to understand them because the meaning the author wanted to convey were difficult to grasp, they lacked time and dictionaries, they lacked methods and techniques to interpret poems and they lacked strategies to interpret poems.

The results assert that students were not able to understand poetry in literature classes. This might be due to the fact that teachers did not help students understand them when they taught poetry. This alarming situation denotes that the strategies used by literature teachers to teach poetry were not efficient.

The fifth question inquired whether students were happy when teachers imposed their interpretations of poems on them. The aim behind this question was to inquire whether students were happy when their teachers of literature imposed on them their interpretations of poems. This was why I formulated this question as follows:

Were you happy when teachers of literature impose on you their interpretations of poems?

- a. If yes, why? b. If no, why not?*

The data are presented in the following table:

Table 5: Students' attitudes towards teachers' interpretations of poems imposed on them

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, why?	11	36,7
If no, why not?	19	63,3
Total	30	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

As we can see from this table, eleven (11) students representing 36, 7% declared that they were happy when teachers of literature imposed on them their interpretations of poems on them. Nineteen (19) students representing 63, 3% declared that they were not happy when teachers of literature imposed on them their interpretations of poems because they did not participate to the course since they did not give their opinions and views about a text.

The results assert that students who studied poetry in first and second years were fed-up like little children by their teachers' interpretation of poems in the courses of AAL and AL.

The sixth question focused on the students' opportunity to express their opinions about a poem. This question inquired whether teachers gave students opportunity to express their views about a poem in the courses of AAL and AL. This was why I formulated this question in the following way: *Did your teachers of literature give you the opportunity to express your opinions about a poem?*

a. If yes, why?

b. If no, why not?

The data are presented as follows:

Table 6: Students' opportunity to express their opinions about a poem

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, why?	13	43,3
If no, why not?	17	56,7
Total	30	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

From the data presented in this table above, one can notice that thirteen (13) students representing 43, 3% declared that their teachers of literature gave them the opportunity to express their opinions about a poem because they made oral presentation on the texts they read at home, teachers asked some questions on the texts and wanted students to answer them to make sure if they understood the text, they wanted to know if students were able to interpret poems. One can also notice that seventeen (17) students representing 56, 7% declared that their teachers of literature did not give them the opportunity to express their opinions about a text because the teachers of literature imposed their interpretations of literary texts on students, they

were in a hurry, they had not time to listen to the students' opinions and they imposed the materials on students.

The results assert that teachers of literature did not give their students the opportunity to express their views and opinions about literary texts, in general and poetry, in particular in literature courses. Instead of using the student- centred approach to teach poetry, teachers of literature used the teacher- centred approach.

Data from the teachers' questionnaire

To start with, the first question was about the teaching techniques. The aim behind this question was to know the strategies the teachers used to teach poetry. This was why I formulated this question in the following way: *What strategies did you use to teach poetry?*

The data are presented in the table as follows:

Table 7: Teaching strategies

	Frequency	Percentage
	1	12,5
After introducing the course, I taught them how to analyze and interpret literature	1	12,5
I taught literature by reading and explaining the text.	1	12,5
We analyzed poems in terms of form and meaning. In the form, we looked at rhyme scheme, stanzas, etc.	1	12,5
I defined first new items such as verbal music sounds rhythm, rhyme stanza, imagery, symbolism, etc.	1	12,5
I tried to read the text and explained it to students. After teaching, I gave them exercises.	1	12,5
I asked students to read silently and carefully the poems so as to discover some literary elements.	1	12,5
I proceeded in the following way: I read the poem loudly. I identified and explained the difficult words. I explored and analyzed the poem. I focused on characterization and characters' development. I identified the elements of the poem (verse, stanza, rhyme scheme, figurative language, rhythm, imagery, point of view, tone and theme.	1	12,5
Total	8	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

From the data presented in this table, one can notice that the first teacher of literature did not tell us how he taught poems. The second teacher said that after introducing the course, he taught students how to analyze and interpret poems. The third teacher said that he taught literature by reading and explaining. The fourth teacher said that he analyzed poems in terms of form and

meaning. In the form, he looks for rhyme scheme, stanzas, etc. In addition, he talked about literary devices (figures of speech). The fifth teacher said that he defined first new items such as verbal music sounds rhythm, rhyme stanza, imagery, symbolism, etc. The sixth teacher said that he tried to read the texts and explained them to students and. Later on, they practiced. The seventh teacher said that he asked students to read silently and carefully the text so as to discover some literary elements. The eighth teacher said that he proceeded in the following way: he read the poem loudly. He identified and explained the difficult words. After that, he explored and analyzed the poem. He also focuses on characterization and characters' development. Finally, he identified the elements of the poem (verse, stanza, rhyme scheme, figurative language, rhythm, imagery, point of view, tone and theme). The results asserted that every teacher of literature from the three TTCs had its own teaching methodologies of poetry in first and second years.

The second question focused on the students' capacity to understand poetry. This question asked teachers of literature whether their students were able to understand poems. This was why I formulated this question in the following way: *Were your students able to understand poems?*

a. If yes, why?

B. If no, why not?

The data are presented in the table as follows:

Table 8: Students' ability to understand poetry

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, why?	6	75,0
If no, why not?	2	25,0
Total	8	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

As indicated in the table above, it is revealed that six (6) teachers representing 75% declared that their students were able to understand poems. The first teacher said that they were able to understand poems because they learnt the fundamentals of literary theory. The second teacher said that they analyzed poems during the course. The third teacher said that they tried to understand some poems in order to be aware of the author's experience. The fourth teacher said that they were prepared in advance in the theory of interpretation. The fifth teacher said that every student understood a text in his own way. The sixth teacher said that students had strategies for reading literature. It is also revealed that two (2) teachers representing 25%

declared that their students were unable to interpret literary texts because they lacked literary theories to interpret literature, they had the tendency of doing superficial analysis and forgot to think of doing things deeply, they had difficulties in understanding language and they had difficulties in understanding the content of the work.

The results assert that teachers of literature claimed that their students were able to understand poetry. But when one looks at the strategies used in teaching poetry, it is obvious that they are not convincing

The third question concerned the interpretation process of poems between teachers and students. The aim behind this question was to ask teachers of literature the way in which they arrived at an interpretation of poems with their students. That was why I formulated this question in the following way:

How did you come to an interpretation of poems with your students?

The data are presented in the table as follows:

Table 9: Interpretation process between teachers and students

	Frequency	Percentage
We examined the text in details in order to interpret it thoroughly	1	12,5
I selected a text and we read it	1	12,5
I explained the text and I contextualized it	1	12,5
I often asked them to start by the discovery of characters, narrator themes, plot, setting, etc.	1	12,5
I collected some books for them and asked them to read and explained the content.	1	12,5
I put the students some questions about the poem and they answered them.	1	12,5
We lacked the strategies for reading and interpreting literature.	1	12,5
we read the literary work line after another and made comments with my students	1	12,5
Total	8	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

As illustrated in the table above, it is revealed that every teacher of literature showed how he came to an interpretation of poems with his students in one way or another. The first teachers said that he examined the text with the students in details in order to interpret it thoroughly. The second one said that he selected a text and read it with the students. The third one said that

he explained the text and contextualized it. The fourth one said that he asked students to start by discovering the characters, narrator themes, plot, setting, etc. The fifth one said that he collected some books for them and asked them to read and explain the content. The sixth one said that he came to an interpretation of literary texts with his students through questions and answers. The seventh teacher said that he lacked the strategies for reading and interpreting literature. The eighth and last teacher said he read literary works line after another and made comments on them with his students.

The results assert that the way teachers of literature came to an interpretation with their students depended from one teacher to another.

The fourth question focused on the strategies teachers gave students to understand poetry. This question inquired whether teachers of literature gave their students strategies to help them understand poems. This pushed me to formulate this question as follows: ***Did you give students strategies in order to help them understand poems?***

- a. If yes, what are they? b. If no, why not?***

The data are presented in the table as follows:

Table 10: Strategies to understand poetry

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, what were they?	7	87,5
If no, why not?	1	12,5
Total	8	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

As shown in this table, it is revealed that seven (7) teachers of literature representing 87, 5% declared that they gave students techniques to help them interpret poems but they did not say exactly what these strategies consisted of. A teacher of literature representing 12, 5% declared that he did not give his students the techniques to interpret poems because he did not know them.

The fifth question dealt with the students' ability to express views about poems in literature classes. The aim of this question was to ask teachers of literature if their students had the capacity to express their opinions about them. This was why I formulated this question as follows: ***Were your students able to express their views and feelings about poems in literature courses?***

- a. If yes, why? b. If no, why not?***

The table below presents the data as follows:

Table 11: Students' ability to express their opinions about poems

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, why?	6	75
If no, why not?	2	25
Total	8	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

As indicated in the table above, it is revealed that six (6) teachers of literature representing 75% declared that their students were able to express their views and feelings about poems. When I wanted to know why these students were able to express their views and feelings about poems in literature courses, they said that they have taught and equipped them with techniques to read, understand and interpret texts. It is also revealed that two (2) teachers representing 25% declared that their students were not able to express their views and feelings about a text because they did not grasp the message the poet wanted to convey.

The sixth question concerned the teachers' difficulties to teach poetry. The aim of this question was to know whether teachers of literature faced difficulties in the teaching of poetry. This was why I formulated this question as follows:

Did you face difficulties in teaching poetry?

a. If yes, what were they? b. If no, why?

The table below presents the data as follows:

Table 12: Teachers' difficulties to teach poetry

	Frequency	Percentage
If yes, what are they?	8	100,0

Source: Primary data (2024)

As seen in this table, it is revealed that all the teachers of literature (8) representing 100% declared that they faced difficulties in the teaching of poems. In order to know the difficulties teachers faced in the teaching of poetry, the first teacher said that he lacked books related to literature and techniques to interpret literary texts. The second teacher said that the language used in poems was challenging. The third teacher said that chapters on interpretation of literary works were not sufficient during his academic career at ISP and books on interpretation of text did not exist at the library. The fourth teacher said that he had difficulties to rhyme long poems and he lacked techniques to interpret literary texts. The fifth teacher said that he had difficulties to define literary concepts like poetry, literature, etc. The sixth teacher said that his students were not familiar with literary background from the secondary school. The seventh teacher said

that he lacked books related to literature in the library and the eighth teacher said that time devoted to the course was not sufficient.

RESULTS

Result 1: The findings revealed that the majority of students experienced difficulties understanding poetry. As shown in Table 4, nineteen (19) students (63.3%) reported that they were unable to understand poems during literature classes, whereas eleven (11 students) (36.7%) indicated that they were able to understand them. Students attributed their difficulties to the complexity of poetic language, lack of dictionaries, insufficient time and inadequate strategies for interpreting poems.

Result 2: The findings showed that poetry was taught using various instructional strategies. However, the strategy most frequently reported by students was that teachers provided their own interpretations of poems. As presented in Table 1, fourteen (14) students (46.7%) indicated that teachers imposed their interpretations of literary texts. Other strategies included silent reading, reading aloud, vocabulary explanation, translation, homework assignments, and explanation of literary elements. Furthermore, Table 2 indicates that eighteen (18) students (60%) reported that teachers did not sufficiently focus on helping them understand poems, whereas twelve (12) students (40%) believed that teachers attempted to facilitate their understanding.

Result 3: The findings indicate that both students and teachers experienced challenges during poetry instruction. As shown in Table 3, sixteen (16) students (53.3%) acknowledged experiencing difficulties understanding poems because of difficult vocabulary, unfamiliar poetic language, and lack of interpretation techniques. Similarly, Table 12 shows that all eight teachers (100%) reported encountering difficulties in teaching poetry. The challenges mentioned included inadequate instructional materials, insufficient training in literary interpretation, difficult poetic language, limited instructional time, and students' weak literary background.

Result 4: The findings further revealed that students were generally dissatisfied with the teaching approaches employed during poetry instruction. As shown in Table 5, nineteen (19) students (63.3%) reported that they were not happy when teachers imposed their own interpretations of poems, while eleven (11) students (36.7%) expressed satisfaction with this practice. In addition, Table 6 indicates that seventeen (17) students (56.7%) stated that teachers rarely gave them opportunities to express their own opinions about poems, whereas thirteen (13) students (43.3%) reported having such opportunities.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The main question of this research sought to identify the reasons why first- and second-year students were unable to understand poetry in their literature courses. The findings revealed that most students (63.3%) were unable to understand poems while 53.3% acknowledged experiencing difficulties in interpreting poetry. Kabinawa and Santosa (2024) found that unfamiliar vocabulary and figurative language remain among the principal obstacles

preventing EFL learners from understanding poetry. Likewise, Hashim et al. (2024) concluded that students experience greater comprehension when teachers provide adequate scaffolding, collaborative interpretation and opportunities to negotiate meaning rather than merely explaining the text. Therefore, the present findings suggest that students' inability to understand poetry resulted not only from the inherent complexity of poetic language but also from insufficient pedagogical support and inadequate interpretation strategies.

The first secondary question sought to identify the teaching strategies employed by literature teachers in poetry instruction. The findings revealed that teachers used various instructional techniques, including reading aloud, silent reading, explanation of vocabulary, translation, explanation of literary devices, question-and-answer sessions and homework assignments. However, the dominant practice reported by students was that teachers imposed their own interpretations of poems (46.7%), while 60% of students stated that teachers did not sufficiently focus on ensuring their understanding. Although teachers believed that they provided students with interpretation strategies, many were unable to specify those strategies clearly, and one teacher admitted lacking techniques for teaching poetry. These findings indicate that poetry instruction remained predominantly teacher-centred. Rather than facilitating learners' active construction of meaning, teachers frequently assumed the role of the principal interpreters of literary texts. The findings corroborate Lazar (1993:17-19), who argues that effective literature teaching should encourage learners to construct meaning independently through interaction with literary texts instead of receiving ready-made interpretations from teachers. Similarly, Carter (2007:7–11) maintains that literature teaching should promote discussion, personal response, and critical engagement because these approaches develop learners' interpretive competence more effectively than lecture-based instruction. The findings are also consistent with Vaikunda et al. (2008:220-222), who recommend that poetry instruction should proceed through preparation, expressive oral presentation, guided discussion, and learner participation. According to these authors, teachers should facilitate learners' discovery of poetic meaning rather than explain every line of a poem. From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Vygotsky's (1978:84-91) constructivist view that learning occurs through guided interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development. Likewise, Rosenblatt (1978:24-32; 136-139) argues that literary meaning is constructed through the transaction between readers and texts rather than transmitted directly by teachers. Recent research reinforces these conclusions. Efendi et al. (2024) demonstrated that learner-centred poetry instruction significantly improves vocabulary development, grammatical competence, literary appreciation, and critical thinking. Similarly, Hashim et al. (2024) reported that collaborative interpretation and learner participation produce deeper literary understanding than teacher-dominated approaches. Consequently, the findings of the present study indicate that although literature teachers employed several instructional techniques, these strategies were insufficiently learner-centred to facilitate effective interpretation of poetry.

The second secondary question sought to determine the students' difficulties and the teachers' difficulties in the teaching and learning of poetry. The findings indicated that both students and teachers experienced challenges during poetry instruction. As shown in Table 3, sixteen (16)

students (53.3%) acknowledged experiencing difficulties understanding poems because of difficult vocabulary, unfamiliar poetic language, and lack of interpretation techniques. Similarly, Table 12 shows that all eight teachers (100%) reported encountering difficulties in teaching poetry. The challenges mentioned included inadequate instructional materials, insufficient training in literary interpretation, difficult poetic language, limited instructional time, and students' weak literary background. Students attributed these difficulties to unfamiliar poetic language, difficult vocabulary, lack of interpretation techniques, insufficient dictionaries, and inadequate instructional support from teachers. Similarly, all the literature teachers (100%) admitted experiencing challenges in teaching poetry, including inadequate instructional materials, insufficient training in literary interpretation, difficult poetic language, limited instructional time, and students' weak literary background. These findings corroborate the work of Collie and Slater (1987:5–8), who argue that poetry presents considerable challenges for second-language learners because it contains figurative language, symbolism, imagery, and condensed expressions that require higher levels of interpretation than ordinary prose. Likewise, Nation (2013:13–18) maintains that vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension, implying that learners with limited lexical knowledge are more likely to experience difficulties interpreting literary texts. The findings also support Muzalia (2020:ix), who argues that poetry possesses lexical and syntactic richness that makes it an invaluable educational resource while simultaneously presenting interpretive difficulties because poetic meaning is often concealed beneath figurative language and symbolic expressions. Similarly, Mbokani (2018:1) observes that learners require systematic guidance to analyse and interpret poetry critically rather than relying on superficial reading. Recent empirical studies further confirm these findings.

The third secondary question sought to determine students' attitudes towards the teaching strategies employed by literature teachers. The findings revealed that most students (63.3%) were dissatisfied when teachers imposed predetermined interpretations of poems, while 56.7% reported that they were rarely given opportunities to express their own opinions during poetry lessons. Students explained that teachers dominated classroom interaction, leaving little room for discussion, independent interpretation, or personal response. These findings indicate that students preferred participatory and interactive learning environments where they could contribute actively to the interpretation of literary texts. Such preferences are consistent with learner-centred approaches that emphasise dialogue, collaboration, and critical thinking. The findings corroborate Rosenblatt's (1978:136-139) reader-response theory, which argues that literary understanding emerges through readers' personal engagement with texts and that multiple interpretations should be encouraged provided they are supported by textual evidence. Likewise, Long (1986:42–48) maintains that classroom discussion and collaborative interpretation deepen learners' literary appreciation and language development. Similarly, Ruba (2015), quoted by Buhendwa (2023:34–36), argues that poetry instruction should stimulate learners' creativity, interaction, imagination, and confidence by encouraging them to interpret literary texts independently rather than memorising teachers' explanations. Panaveli (2015), also cited in Buhendwa (2023:34), further explains that poetry motivates learners

because it promotes authentic communication, creativity, and emotional engagement. Recent empirical evidence also supports these findings. Wati and Kurniasy (2024) found that poetry-based instruction increases learners' motivation, classroom participation, and willingness to communicate when students actively discuss and interpret poems. Likewise, Adzani and Rohmana (2024) concluded that collaborative poetry instruction enhances learners' speaking, reading, writing and listening skills because students become active participants in the learning process. The findings therefore suggest that students rejected teacher-dominated poetry instruction because it limited their opportunities to develop critical thinking, interpretive competence, and communicative skills. Their preferences strongly support the adoption of learner-centred pedagogical approaches in poetry teaching.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that first- and second-year students at ISP Baraka, ISP Kamituga and ISP Walungu experienced considerable difficulties in understanding poetry despite completing literature courses. These difficulties were associated with complex poetic language, limited interpretation skills, teacher-centred instructional approaches and inadequate opportunities for students to participate actively in literary interpretation. The findings further revealed that teachers frequently imposed their own interpretations of poems, thereby limiting learners' critical thinking and independent meaning-making. To address these challenges, the study proposed a learner-centred didactic framework comprising six didactic strategies (step 1. ask students to read and re-read the poem silently, step 2. ask them to select difficult words from the poem and check their meanings in the dictionary, step 3. made a model reading of the poem with a correct stress, modulation of voice and attention to the rhythm, and next, ask students to read the poem aloud, step 4. ask students to describe the formal organization of the poem, step 5 . ask students to describe the semantic organization of the poem and step. 6 initiate students to poetry writing and later on, ask them to write their own poems) that can promote vocabulary development, guided reading, collaborative interpretation, literary analysis, oral performance, creative writing and active learner participation. The implementation of these strategies is expected to improve students' comprehension, interpretation, appreciation and production of poetry in Teacher Training Colleges.

Recommendations

The study recommends literature teachers to adopt learner-centred instructional approaches by promoting presentations, group discussions, collaborative learning and active classroom participation to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of poetry. Students should actively engage in poetry lessons through discussion, interpretation and cooperative learning to develop greater autonomy and critical thinking. English departments should organize continuous professional development seminars to equip literature teachers with new approaches to teaching poetry. Finally, the Ministry of Higher Education should revise the national curriculum by introducing courses on literary text interpretation techniques to

strengthen both teachers' and students' competencies in analyzing and interpreting poetry effectively.

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