

# Teaching Poetry Enhances Speaking Skills – an Analysis Based on Select Poems

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## Abstract

English has become the medium of all relevant social interactions, discussions in all circumstances globally because of its numerous functions and preferences over several other languages. Language is the primary source of communication. It helps to exchange ideas and thoughts. The language skills, though not in proper way, are acquired at school level through the constituents of English Literature such as poetry, grammar and prose. This paper focuses how teaching poetry enhances the language skills of the students. Reading literature is an interesting area and it is the mirror of society. Poetry is one of the interesting areas in Literature which always awakens the senses and promotes literary things. It serves not only a model of literature but also a model for teaching skills of language such as reading and writing. Poetry is an effective way of language teaching. It helps the people to understand culture and to know the language. It also gives pleasure to the readers and gives them new models in their life to follow. Learning literature provides a platform to improve the communication skills of students. When the students read poetry, it improves their vocabulary, sentence formation, syntax, fluency and the creative skills. The genre poetry not only improves the communication skills but also improves the four skills such as LSRW ie, Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing.

**Keywords:** Communication, poetry, second language teaching, teaching literature, teaching of language skills.

## 1. Introduction

English in India is generally taught as the second language. The growth of English draws a parallel line with the growth of England as an imperial power. Literature in its broadest sense could be the record of the best thoughts of the best minds. Teaching poetry is also interesting as far as the teachers' point of view is concerned.

The knowledge of the students has been improved only through repeated reading of the text. The learning level of the students increases on the basis of the techniques used by the teachers in the language classrooms.

Techniques play a key role in language teaching. Communicative activities comprise several methods that inspire and demand a student to speak out and listen to others including the participants in the activity.

Learning English as a second language and as a result of positive attitude in learners enhances the employment opportunities of the students as well as their social standing. Only a slight change has been there in the last fifty years in the area of teaching language through literature.

### Improving Speaking Skills

The learners have to follow four important skills. They are:

#### a. Accuracy

Accuracy involves skills of using grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation correctly to express different ideas.

#### b. Fluency

Fluency refers to the skill of producing a normal speed of speech which prevents from difficulties in communication such as hesitation.

#### c. Appropriateness

Appropriateness includes the skills of using formal or informal language in order to use it in an appropriate situation.

#### d. Coherence

Coherence contains the skills of producing spoken utterances which are connected to each other such as use of ellipsis, substitutions, pronouns or conjunctions.

## 2. Role of literature in communication skills

As there are many genres in literature like poetry, drama, novels etc., poetry has more chance to develop speaking skills than any other genres. The linguists were against the inclusion of literature in the syllabi for language teaching. They ignored literature as it was not relevant to language curricula and it gave an impression of flying in fancy and imagination. This is regrettable that literature was banished in the language curriculum. Later, the same linguists, gradually, started realizing the use and worth of literature as it could provide a resource for enhancing the ability of language learners to use literature as knowledge for interpretation

as discourse and it is an element of language curriculum. Literature is found to be a genuine discourse available anytime to be taught in the language classroom in many ways not replacing the approaches like 'functional' and 'structural'.

Later, literature has found its place strongly in language curriculum not as a separate or optional entity but an integral part. The followings are the factors supporting literature in language teaching.

1. Literature is an ideal vehicle for developing an awareness of language acquisition by giving enough illustrations as it has rich sources of materials.
2. Literature motivates learners to speak the language by providing attitudinal, affective and experiential factors.
3. Literature is an apt tool for introducing cultural assumptions to the learners.
4. It helps to build the confidence to interact with others.
5. It develops strong communication skills that would increase the chance for successful relationships.

### 3. Innovative methods of teaching literature

Teaching literature in language classes has become the trend of the day. Commonly teachers use literature for the development of the four skills of language as well as for providing knowledge of the world. There are three models in use to teach literature in language classroom. They are as follows:

#### a. Cultural model

In this model, students learn about several cultural and ideologies other than their own. Students can relate and appreciate the content from having their own cultural experiences. This method requires the content relating to the students' past experiences such as reading, societal or global issues.

#### b. Language model

This model helps the students to use language and vocabulary. The most common approach to literature in English as a Foreign Language classroom is what the critics Cater and Long refer to as the language based approach. Such approach enables the learners to access a text in a systematic way in order to exemplify specific linguistic features. For eg. literal and figurative language, direct and indirect speech.

#### c. Personal Growth model

This model attempts to bridge the cultural model and the language model by focusing on the particular use of language in a text, as well as placing it in a specific cultural context. Learners are encouraged to express their opinions, feelings and make connections between their personal and cultural experiences and those expressed in the text. Another aspect of this model is that it helps the learners to develop knowledge of ideas and the language through different themes and topics. Thus, learning takes place when readers are able to interpret texts and construct meaning on the basis of their own experience.

### 4. Teaching poetry

Poetry is a form of literature that uses beauty, strong patterns of sounds, words and qualities of language. It is intimately related to life of all different genres of literature. Poetry gives delight to the students in a classroom with its rhythm, rhyme scheme and musicality. A teacher can motivate the students by teaching poems and instill in them the confidence to speak English better. Through teaching poetry, oral communication of students can be enhanced effectively. The interest of the students can be identified

by the concerned teacher. If the students feel boredom about the style of teaching methods, the teacher will have to use a simple language so as to help the students to capture in an easy manner.

Some of the advantages to improve language acquisition by studying poetry are as follows:

1. Poetry is a soul of literature.
2. It exalts the imaginative talent of the students.
3. It gives pleasure for the readers.
4. It enhances the creative power.
5. It expresses the emotions, feelings and thoughts.
6. It develops the aesthetic sense of the students.

Thus, poetry provides different viewpoints towards language and makes the students know about the rules of grammar, syntax and vocabulary.

#### 4.1. Advantages of learning poetry

Some of the advantages of poetry are as follows:

1. Poetry differs in visual form from prose. It commonly appears as a sequence of sentences with paragraphs.
2. It relies on the sound of the spoken language.
3. It relies on figurative language.
4. It can tell a story, describe an object or situation, narrate an event or simply express feelings. Whatever the substance of the remarks and the ultimate message, poetry is characterized by linguistic elements that go beyond standard sentence structure.
5. Above all, poetry involves aspects of language that appeal to and are communicated by sound and light.

### 5. Activities in language classroom

Teaching of English is quite different from teaching of any other subject in arts, science and commerce. It has to be done consciously and meticulously as well. The teacher can improve the language skills of the students by conducting different activities. Moreover, students can also show a lot of interest to participate in the activities. More activities are useful to enable the caliber of the students. The following are some of the activities. They are; Role Play, Story Telling, Narration, Dramatization, Interview, Extempore, Debate and Conversation.

#### 5.1. Role play

Role Play is a drama like activity in which the students take different roles in a typical situation. This activity is used to give learners practice in using a language in different situations. The teacher has to provide such opportunities of role playing to the students and ask them to speak naturally. There may be role play between two or more students.

Students take immense pleasure while involving into role play. For example, Nissim Ezekiel's Good bye party to Miss. Pushpa. Teacher can give the character sketch from the poem and ask them to perform on the stage.

This activity is beneficial to the students for improving their vocabulary.

#### 5.2. Story telling

The second technique used in the classroom is story telling. It is the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, often with improvisation, theatrics or embellishment. Telling stories is a fun for the teachers as well as the students. By explaining stories, the imaginative and the memory power of students can be improved. The poem The Bailiffs daughter of Islington written by anonymous writer is about the love between squire's son and Bailiff's daughter. The teacher has to give such a poem and ask the students to explain the outline of the story by which the creative power of the students also gets enhanced along with

language proficiency. The students can reproduce the sentence from memory. Such techniques help them to improve their memory power.

### 5.3. Narration

Narrating incidents can do favour in improving the speaking ability of the students. Any incidents or events can be taken from the poem. For eg; Shakespeare's 'Shall I Compare thee to Summer Day?', the theme of the poem is love. The teacher can ask the students to narrate about the theme. Narration should be in such a way that the listeners should feel that they are experiencing the incidents in reality. The incidents of the students are from their own experience, the oral expressions of the students become flawless and clear. The teacher has to supervise that the other students are listening to the speaker about the narration of incidents. If the students listen to the story keenly, it will definitely help them to understand the comprehension quickly. Moreover, there should be complete freedom for the students to narrate any incidents. This activity makes the students speak freely without hesitation.

### 5.4. Dramatization

Dramatization means converting a lesson or poem into living actions. Dramatization involves: a. acting b. gestures c. movements d. facial expressions and e. dialogue delivery. There are plenty of ways in which imagination can be developed. In dramatization, the teacher plays a main role. The students are able to make use of gestures and they can adopt facial expressions. Moreover, the students learn how to act appropriately in the context of feelings and ideals contained in the matter. For dramatization, the teacher can give a poem like The Harp and the King and asks the students to enact on the stage. Through these techniques, the pronunciation, speech habits, articulation can be improved.

### 5.5. Extempore

Extempore as an activity that can be demonstrated to test the capability of students in English. No doubt that students show more interest to participate in extempore. This type of activity brings great scope for the students to enhance their speaking competency. Such techniques help the students to measure the depth of knowledge rather than their resourcefulness and eloquence. In order to make the students well versed in speaking and thus great orators, the teachers have to provide adequate practice. The advantages to participate such extempore are to speak in front of the audience. The teacher has to assign the easiest topic at the beginning and encourage the students to participate. This technique improves their skill of eloquence as well as vocabulary.

### 5.6. Debate

Debate is still prescribed in many schools and colleges. It is the most useful activity for the enhancement of the language skills of the students. It is a formal discussion on a public meeting in which opposing arguments are put forward. It promotes the fluency and helps the students to get rid of the shyness. Debates can be a one-stop formula to succeed at almost everything. Example can be given from the poem Robert Frost's Mending wall and The Road not taken. Students can argue with the themes and conclude with one theme. This really supports the students to speak and think in different dimensions.

### 5.7. Conversation

Conversation is the most natural thing in the world where two people have a conversation on a topic of common interest. It is not at all easy to make the discussion or conversation happen within the framework of a language. A spark of ideas normally occurs when the two parties, speaker and listener are relaxed and confident. The initiatives such as asking questions or expressing disagreement requires less effect of command in a particular language than answering questions and expressing agreement. This learner should be encouraged positively since this technique involves deliberate risk process. It is only the language learning strategy which makes the learners help themselves. Most of the students have the natural instinct of keeping quiet, speaking only when spoken to. So the learners must be given the initiative to start learning as normally as possible.

Teaching of English has now become all the more challenging in this internet era in which too much of knowledge, more than what the learners really need for their young age is thrust upon them. From these activities, it is very clear that how the language teachers manage to direct the learners towards these twin goals of not only making the learners acquire the proficiency in the language, but also imbibe the values of life.

## 6. Analysis of the poems

The researcher has taken two poems by two different authors for analysis. By teaching these poems, the teacher demonstrates how the communication skills of the students can be improved.

### i. Robert Browning's my last duchess

Poetry is an art which can be used to develop vocabulary and also the language skills of students. The poem 'My Last Duchess' written by Robert Browning has been taken for analysis. This poem is an apt example to teach language students and the outcome is also discussed. The original title of the poem was first published in 'Bells and Pomegranates III'. This poem is a dramatic monologue which means the speaker, other than the poet, speaks to an imaginary audience at a decisive moment in his life. The poem is written in 28 rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter. The theme of the poem is egotism and jealousy. Browning's dramatic monologue is the tension they achieve between sympathy and judgement. The poem starts with the line 'That's My Last Duchess painted on the wall, Looking as if she were alive'. The Duke of Ferrara praises the painter that this picture is skillfully painted and the Duchess seems to be alive. His speech reveals both the characters of the Duchess and the Duke himself. By giving or showing pictures to the students, the teacher tests their ability, makes them think differently and asks them to communicate among themselves. The next line starts with 'The depth and passion of its earnest glance, But to myself they turned'. These lines explain that the Duke speaks about his wife's nature. He says that his wife has an earnest look and smiling glance in her eyes. The teacher always motivates the students by giving poetic lines or any stanzas and asks them to discuss in the classroom. The picture has been painted by Fra Pandolf and the picture looks as if the Duchess is alive. The teacher has to give some more pictures and asks them to discuss that after 15 minutes. This type of activities makes the students still bold and confident enough about the topics.

Though the poet knows that the portrait is not real, the poet likes the picture smiling at him. In the next stanza 'No tic Neptune though/Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity/which clause of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!' once again, the thrust of the art object is dominance - the duke desires to be Neptune, God of the sea, taming a small, beautiful sea creature in what would obviously be no contest. In other words, the duke sees himself as a God who has tamed his Duchess.

The poem is a very interesting one. It makes the readers think in different concepts and to share their own interpretations about the poem. The main themes in Robert Browning's poem includes the perception of truth, power, insolence and young love. This poem is narrated by the Duke of Ferrara to an envoy of another nobleman, whose daughter the Duke is soon to marry. These details are revealed throughout the poem, and also help to illustrate the irony that Browning employs. The Duke attempts to be an artist in his life, turning a walk down the hallway into a performance, but he is always hampered by the fact that the ideal that inspires his performance cannot change.

The language skills of students can be improved by asking them questions such as,

1. What is the implication in the Duke's reference to the heart of the Duchess?
2. Does the Duke comment on the Duchess' smiles?
3. Does the Duke say about dowry?
4. Why does the Duke show the messenger the sculpture of Neptune?
5. Give your opinion about the poem?

## ii. The paper boat - Rabindranath Tagore

The second poem which is taken for analysis is Rabindranath Tagore's *The Paper Boat*. He was the popular Indian Poet and the first noble Laureate. He won the Noble Prize for Literature in 1913 for his magnum opus "Gitanjali". His poetry shows his deep love of humanism. Tagore a few years later wrote another poem "Paper Boat". The *Paper Boat* is a simple but thought provoking poem. The poem starts with the line:

I remember a day in my childhood when  
I floated a paper boat on the stream.

It was a wet day of July; I was alone and happy over my play.

I floated my paper boat on the stream.

The poet relives his childhood memories of a particular store. He had been annoyed with the storm and had made accusations against it. This is the nostalgia of the poet to recollect his past days and memories. The poet can use a simple language that can be understood by the common people. Poetry is the beautiful form of art to teach in an expressive manner. It evokes among the listeners at the time of listening poems. The poet enjoyed the month of July because he was alone and he can spend his time for floating the paper boat in the stream.

The poet thinks about his past days and enjoyed his present stage. On the contrary, the poet was disturbed as the boat was washed away by the wind and muddy water. This makes the poet to be sad. Tagore expressed that the storm has spoiled not only his happiness but also it proves the anger against the poet. The poem excites the imagination and kindles the emotions of the listener.

The last stanza ends with;

All this long cloudy day of July I have been musing.  
over those games in life in which I was the loser.  
Just now I am blaming my fate for the many tricks it.

Has played on me, when suddenly I remembered the paper.

Boat that sank in the stream.

Tagore recollects all those days especially the month of July. He feels that he is the loser and blames his life. According to Tagore, life is the mixture of better and bitter experiences and he faces only bitter from his childhood. The poet blames fate in this poem because it spoils every human being in an unexpected manner. The theme in this poem is simple. It can be understood by all people of the rural and urban areas. Furthermore, the poem is an enjoyable piece of literature, where learners can be pleased to read. This context of the poem has to be experienced by all the students. So, this can be taken as an example to ask multiple questions to the students to stimulate their communication skills.

The teacher can give some exercises related to the poem conducted in the classroom. The exercises can be like identifying

the synonyms and antonyms from the given words. The teacher has to give not only the written exercise but also the oral practice such as oral presentation, poem recitation, short speeches, etc. This type of exercises and practices make the students speak English in a better manner.

After teaching this poem *The Paper Boat*, the teacher has to ask the students questions to provoke their language ability. They are:

1. What type of experience have you during rainy season?
2. Share the reminiscences of the childhood experience.
3. How do you conclude if you were in the place of Tagore?
4. Can you name out the other games that the children played during raining seasons?
5. Did you have the experience of floating paper boats in the flowing rain water in your childhood days?

By raising such type of questions, the students are given chances to think and express their own points and suggestions.

## 7. Results and suggestions

In language learning process, speaking skills play an important role. Students can develop their speaking ability only by communicating with others. In every class, the role of teacher is important, the teacher has to pre-plan the way how the poem can be conducted before he/she enters the classroom. The teacher has to make the students visualize the picture in their mind before he/she starts the poem. Literature is an art. Teaching poetry in the classroom is a part of it. The students enrich their vocabulary through poems. They can learn new words which help them to communicate in all situations. Good communication skills make the students not only to seek a better job but also to sustain in that. Without communication skills, it is impossible to select any job because all managerial and administrative activities involve communications. Students can get a good chance to know figures of speech and vocabulary. They need to use all these words for their communication purposes thereby they develop the language capability. Teachers can always motivate and encourage the students to get enough confidence level when they converse with others. Students have to involve in all activities so that they feel free to share their concepts and ideas without any tension and nervousness.

In poetry classroom, students can feel liveliness, pleasure, imagination, knowledge about natural things. They can compare one poem with another in the same context. In order to explain the poems, the teacher has to take more strain and take the students to an imaginary world. Incorporating literature in language classroom can make the students feel lively and motivating. It provides an interactive circumstance which can prove communication competence of the learners.

Teaching poetry makes the students learn diction as it shows or reflects the student's calibre in the language. The students can get more confidence to speak language in public. Poetry increases the power of creativity that is not happened in other two genres like Drama and Prose. No doubt that poetry gives pleasure and it creates thinking power too. Pronunciation can also be improved in poetry classroom. To sum up, poetry is the tool with which the students can achieve their language proficiency. Comparing poetry with other genres, it completely gives cheerfulness to the readers. Through poetry, students can develop the communicative ability. Everything will come to a standstill position if communication is improper. As a result, they can face the audience without any hesitation. Teacher uses innovative and effective methods to teach poetry in the classroom. Thus, by using all methods and activities, the standards of poetry can be improved among the learners.

## 8. Conclusion

Speaking with other people without any hesitation is the target to be attained. In the language classroom, the teacher, understanding the ability of the students, motivate them to participate in all activities. The teacher has to take the role of the counselor and know the strength and weakness of the students and act according to that. In order to develop their talents with vocabulary, the teacher has to use different techniques and activities. The teacher needs to be the passive listener and encourages the students wherever necessary. Poetry can be taken as a tool to develop communication skills through which the listeners learn more dictions. The difficult words in the poetic lines can be identified and used at the time of practicing the language. Thus, using poetry in the language classroom makes the listeners think creatively. The cooperation and coordinated efforts will take the learning process of language through literature from age old teacher-dominated, lecture-oriented system to learner-centred one so as to make the process a relevant, interesting and meaningful one in language acquisition. Poetry enhances the speaking ability of students and make them shine well in their career.

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