

Full Length Research Paper

The competency of the post graduate teachers in appreciating English poetry

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The Post Graduate Teachers who teach English as a second language to Higher Secondary Classes that is 11th and 12th grades need to cultivate a good sense of appreciation for poetry. They must have an inherent thirst for reading poetry aloud and competence to elucidate the essential characteristics of poetry. A study was launched to understand the level of appreciation of poetry of the Post Graduate Teachers by giving a test with 25 items for testing their skill of understanding of alliteration, metaphor, simile, personification, repetition, sound-patterning, stress-patterning, imagery, unpatterned rhyme, connotative words and suggestive words. A sample of 90 post graduate teachers of both sex working in State Government Higher Secondary Schools, Private Matriculation Schools and Private CBSE schools in Chennai city answered the test in fifty minutes time. The 't' test was applied. The Post graduate teachers in CBSE schools in Chennai City had the highest mean scores in their competency in appreciating the elements of English poetry. Those in Government Schools and Matriculation Schools came next in the order. But there was no significant difference in their competencies between any two types of schools. They have a high level of appreciation of poetry but with slight difference in mean scores.

Key words: Alliteration, imagery, metaphor, personification, repetition, sound patterning, stress-patterning, symbol, tone.

INTRODUCTION

Poetry in all the languages of the world describes not only the wonderful creations of the universe and the elements like water, land, air, fire and atmosphere abound in it but also the inner and outer conflicts happening in day to day life of the ordinary man. To express human beauties and wonders, the atrocities committed in the life of the people in appealing ways, the poets make use of certain elements like simile, metaphor, alliteration, imagery, personification, sound patterning, stress pattern-

ing and so on in their poetic art.

The teachers of English poetry need to have the knowledge of all these elements of poetry for appreciating poetry themselves and also to pass over these skills to their students. Only a few teachers are said to be inspiring and making their students creative in life. The Post Graduate Teachers of Higher Secondary Schools or Junior Colleges where they are teaching 11th and 12th classes reach this position by pursuing studies in

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regular college or through Open University System or by part time studies. Teachers may acquire qualifications by any channel but only those who study the texts with dedication and hard work will prove to be worthy professionals.

Poetry uses rhyme and relies heavily on figurative language. If the traditional poetry is based on regular rhythms of 'iamb, trochee, anapaest and dactyl', modern free verse poems rely on repetition, sound-patterning and stress-patterning, besides the usual Simile, Alliteration, Metaphor, Assonance, Personification and so on. The English textbooks of schools and colleges in ESL countries contain traditional poetry as well as modern free verse poems. In Chennai City of Tamil Nadu State in India, the education hub of India, there are three kinds of schools popular among the people: The Indian government affiliated Private CBSE schools, the State Government –run Higher Secondary Schools and the State government syllabus adopted Private Matriculation Higher Secondary Schools. The Post graduate teachers of English in these schools are selected and appointed by some rigorous test to state Govt. schools, and by interview to CBSE and Matric schools.

The Plus Two Stage (11th and 12th classes) is in the middle of High School and the College Stages. How the post graduate teachers fare in teaching poetry at this stage is sure to have a bearing on the interest the students evince in reading poetry in colleges. In this study, it was intended to study on the competency of the post graduate teachers of English in appreciating the elements of English poetry in all the three kinds of schools.

Definitions of terms

Alliteration: The repetition of the same letter or syllable or consonant sound (or vowel sound) at the beginning of two or more words in a line. "Glittering through the gloomy glades."

Imagery: The image makes the poem come alive by forcing us to see, feel, hear, touch more vividly than before or makes an unimagined comparison. The image stirs to life the reader's senses, imagination and intellect: "But ye lovers, that bathe in gladness" –Chaucer (Beers, 2012).

Metaphor: It is a figure of speech describing something as if it were something else, without using such terms as "like" or "as" to signal the relationship. Ex: "her eyes were beacons of hope".

Personification: It is a figure of speech in which objects, events, abstract ideas, or animals are given human characteristics. "Water hates fire!"; Melancholy marked him for her own-Thomas Gray.

Repetition: The repetition of words/phrases in a stanza or the poem hold it together and carry the reader firmly to its end. If you can't **be** a muskie, then just **be** a bass- ... Douglas Malloch.

Sound Patterning: There is near rhyme in words used in a line/stanza or poem. "Oh, Jesus Christ! I'm hit, he said; and died;"---

Stress-patterning: Free verse does not rely on a regular metre. Rhythm of free verse comes from stress patterns that are based on meaning. It is a pattern of emphasis.

Being too long at sea **makes** all of us – well, **restless**, (From Ron Pretty's 'Wax')

Front- stressed lines are falling lines and the last stressed line is a rising line. The free verse poet strikes balance with free flowing rising and falling lines.

Symbol: Words become symbols when they represent something other than the object or thing they name. Reader to reader understands the meaning of a symbol differently. Symbols may have a universal meaning or one connected with a particular country or culture. 'Red' symbolises anger.

Tone: The poet's attitude toward a subject – detached, lonely, matter-of-fact, alarmed, ironic, satiric, complaining, overburdened, desperate, melancholy, serious, angry, resigned, straightforward and so on. The tone of a piece of writing is its emotional effect.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Christensen (2009) has stated that while teaching poetry, if the teacher wants to talk about it and wants to match his voice with the voice of the text, great meaning can occur. To explicate poems, D-I-P-F-A-M-M-S method (acronym for dramatic situation-imagery-point of view-form-allusion-metaphor-meter-and symbolism) method is useful and it helps students to remember the various elements a teacher can use.

Nisen and Donelson (2010) have stated that the teachers should not teach poems which they themselves do not understand. The teacher should be a daily reader of poems. Poems deserve to be used frequently but not en masse. It is better to use poems in thematic units where they can be tied in with short stories or drama. Drop a funny poem or a monster poem into class just for the fun of it. Allow students to hear poems again and again. Surround the students with as many beautifully designed poetry books. Teenagers may be amused by humorous poetry. Students must be allowed to choose the poems they want to study.

From the website, "Teaching Topics and Texts" –T3 (CCUE) (2014), the following strategies of teaching poetry can be known. Use digital media (moving image, still image and sound) in teaching poetry. Explore the BBC Motion Gallery, You Tube or Google Video together with students to see motion pictures. Connect reading and analyzing poetry to creative writing. When students read a selection of sonnets, they may be asked to write a sonnet. Ask students to choose a metaphor or simile from a poem and then compose a new poem around it.

On using poems to develop productive skills", the BBC

world service website (2012) says that students enjoy reading and listening to poetry in L1 and in L2.

The teacher can play some background music before reading the poem to create the atmosphere, show some pictures to introduce the topic and then ask students to say their personal experiences related to the topic. Students can be asked to predict endings to the poems. If the teacher reads aloud or plays the record, students identify the stresses and pauses, rehearse and perform a poem. When the teacher recites, the students mumble rhythmically and chant in a whisper, a shout or show a range of emotion. The teacher should reject the poems which are too long, too archaic or too obscure or the students show no zeal to read those poems. The wrong poem is worse than no poem at all. Poems can be used as warmers or fillers and as the catalyst for many different activities. Students find a poem a welcome, and sometimes inspirational, change from a course-book. Rhymes make a sensation for the tongue of children.

The teachers and the departments of education can follow the suggestions for framing a syllabus and implement the method like D-I-P-F-A-M-M-S.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Purpose of the study

To assess the competency of the post graduate teachers in appreciating the elements of English poetry

Objectives

1. To estimate the difference in appreciation of poetry between post graduate teachers working in Government and CBSE Schools in Chennai City.
2. To find out the difference in competencies for the appreciation of poetry between the post graduate teachers in CBSE Schools and Matriculation Schools in Chennai.
3. To assess the differences in competencies for appreciating poetry between the post graduate teachers in Government Schools and the Matriculation Schools.

Hypotheses

If the researcher has a hunch out of his past experience, observations or information, hypotheses are formulated to test the hunch. It is well known in India, that the students who are in CBSE schools (which follow the enriched, vast syllabus framed by the Indian national board, in Delhi) do well in the entrance examinations held for admission to higher education institutes of technology. So their teachers would be more knowledgeable than those in other category of schools. But in poetry clubs, the teachers working in matriculation and State Government schools dominate. To test out their competencies in appreciating poetry, the researcher has to frame certain hypotheses in educational research. If it is purely a research in English literature, the article can be submitted in the form of an essay. But in educational research, the effect of education and learning on the society is tested. So tentative hypotheses are framed and on verification which may be true or not true.

H₁: There is no significant difference in the mean scores in competencies of the post graduate teachers working in State Government and CBSE schools in appreciating the elements of English poetry.

H₂: There is no significant difference in the mean scores in competencies of the post graduate teachers working in CBSE and Matriculation schools in appreciating the elements of English poetry.

H₃: There is no significant difference in the mean scores in competencies of the post graduate teachers working in Government schools and the Matriculation schools in appreciating the elements of English poetry.

Method of research

Under the Survey Method of research, the post graduate teachers in three types of schools were requested to answer the questions of the task/test in 50 min during the lunch break. They were asked not to mention their names or the names of the schools in which they were working. Only the type of school was the detail furnished by the teachers. Most of the questions are application-oriented. The teachers who were willing to take the test alone were given the questionnaires to answer. 30 post graduate teachers from each type of school appeared for the test. Totally 90 post graduate teachers of both sex participated.

Sample

A stratified Sample of 30 post graduate teachers each from three types of higher secondary schools in Chennai City in Tamil Nadu, India.

Tool

An achievement test with 25 items on elements of poetry was prepared and improved by consulting the experts/ experienced post graduate teachers in teaching poetry. Content validity was ensured.

Reliability Coefficient of Test –Retest Method of Parallel forms of the tool on Government School teachers was found to be 0.98. The test was conducted to P.G Teachers of English in three kinds of schools in the last week of November 2014. The same test (tool) was conducted in January last week in all the schools to the same teachers. Product Moment Co-efficient of Correlation was worked out and that gives the reliability of the tool.

Procedure

Skills for appreciating poetry

To appreciate a poem, a teacher needs to analyse it phonologically, structurally and semantically for understanding the meaning, beauty and the rhythm in lines. The phonological analysis helps him to enjoy the sound effect of alliteration, assonance, rhyme and metre. The analysis of the structures of lines helps him to understand the correct meaning, text and arrangement of words. By semantic analysis, he understands the forms and patterns of words in terms of their meanings and use. He understands the denotative and connotative use of words.

Poetry can be caught but never be taught. If one can pick up the rhythm, rhyme and melody of the songs in his mother tongue, one can adopt himself to catch the rhythm of English poetry. In traditional poetry, there may be a dominant iambic or trochaic rhythm but there are also present other feet like spondee, pyrrhic, dactyl, amphibrack and anapaest. Otherwise the lines make the

verse doggerel or monotonous. Variety is said to be the spice of life.

Two lines from Edwin Muir's 'Ann Scott-Moncrieff' contain most of the feet.

1. Dear Ann / where e /ver you are Spondee / Iambic / anapaestic – – / x – / x x –
2. Since you / lately / learnt to die Pyrrhic / Trochaic / Trochaic- Extra Syllable x x / – x / – x –

Skilful variation of structures of lines and modulation of feet make the rhythm move. "Poetic appreciation is an attempt to tell others what we see, hear, feel and understand in and through a poem", says Thaker (1999,) in his introductory page (xi). Only when the teacher catches the feel of the poem, he can convey it to the students. Understanding the sounds and meanings of words, and the structures of lines, a teacher enjoys the poem. He is dutiful to convey his pleasure and enjoyment to the learners of poetry.

The current syllabus of the Special English in B.Ed. course is very comprehensive enabling the teacher trainees to have a detailed study of Phonetics and rhythms in poetry. A look at the first line of a poem will tell the teacher if it has a rising rhythm (iambic/anapaestic feet) or falling rhythm (trochaic/dactylic feet). If the beat/measure/rhythm is rising, he has to adopt a more serious, dignified and energetic tone. If it is a falling measure, he has to make the tone fast and light and at times melancholic. To make the students love English poetry is in the hands of the teacher.

The first four lines of the free verse poem, "A Noiseless, Patient Spider" by Walt Whitman, which is prescribed to 12th Class, bears evidences to the elements of free verse like 'Sound Patterning', 'Stress Patterning' and 'Repetition of words'.

A NOISELESS, patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated, Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,....

The sound patterning in each line is shown in bold letters. The first line, the second and the fourth line begin with a rising rhythm. The first line has three rising feet in succession. The second line has two iambs and three anapaests, five rising feet. So there is stress patterning. The spider symbolises the human soul in this poem. In the fourth line there is alliteration and assonance. The repetition of the word, 'filament' shows how the 'spider' unreels the thread-like material to spin its web untiringly. In these four lines, more than six elements of poetry can be identified and explained to students. The poet spins the image of a noiseless, patient spider.

The melancholy tone of Wordsworth himself can be heard from the voice of 'The Solitary Reaper' which is found in 11th class English Reader.

Alone she cuts and binds the grain And sings a melancholy strain.
Norman Nicholson's poem, "Off to Outer Space Tomorrow", is prescribed to 11th Class students. The following four lines have simile, a strange image of a universe, a scientific metaphor, balance in lines, rhyme and other features:

"When my capsule door is sealed and my space-flight has begun,

With the tea-cups circling round me like the planets round the sun,

I'll be centre of my gravity, a universe of one, Setting off to Outer Space tomorrow morning."

In Lewis Carroll's poem, "Is Life But a Dream?", a metaphor of slow strangulation of July Spring by the Autumn frosts is just terrible. Metaphor, Imagery, Personification and Metonymy can be explained by that line. Autumn stands for severe cold and July stands for a pleasant weather that is spring.

"Autumn frosts have slain July"

Antithesis

Antithesis in Greek means 'setting against'; that is setting one word against another. It is a figure of speech in which irreconcilable opposites or strongly *contrasting* ideas are placed in sharp juxtaposition and sustained tension, as in the following sentence:

"He can bribe, but he cannot seduce; he can buy, but he cannot gain; he can lie, but he cannot deceive".

In antithesis, a striking opposition or contrast of words or sentiments is made in the same sentence. It is employed to secure emphasis.

"To err is human; to forgive, divine"--- Shakespeare.

V.K. Gokak's poem, "English Words", which is found in the 12th Class Reader, has the following lines describing opposite qualities.

You bleached our souls soiled with impurities.

You bathed our hearts amid tempestuous seas of a purer, drearier, delight.

The impure souls of the Indians soiled with ignorance are cleaned white and their cowardly hearts are bathed in furious seas to be inspired with revolutionary ideas for freeing their nation from the clutches of the British Empire.

Polonius' advice to his son, in Shakespeare's Hamlet is given in 11th Class textbook.

The following lines of antithesis can be seen in short Polonius' advice:

'Give thy thoughts no tongue' and 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be.'

A post graduate teacher needs to look into patterns of words such as "parallelism", and other characteristics like "contrasts (oxymoron), simile, metaphor, personification, imagery, and irony". The teachers have to attain the knowledge of understanding the elements of poetry which occur in a poem when they browse poems. They have to keep the practice alive by reading poems often. He is supposed to have the knowledge of forms of poetry as song, sonnet, elegy, ode, and free verse poems. The chorus singing by the pupils stir their blood to beat with the rhythm of the poem. Some amount of knowledge of English tunes will make the teachers sing well. The government has to arrange to give the training necessary during the summer vacation. When a whole or part of a line is repeated regularly, it is a refrain. Alliteration, rhyme and assonance give the poem a spontaneous musical quality. Alliteration and assonance draw attention towards these emphasised words and help create a special mood. Personification is a simile or metaphor that attributes human qualities to non-human objects:

"The tree stood straight and strong and tall, like an old warrior".

"The engine gasped and groaned, protesting against the cold night air".

A student in 12th grade might have read the poetic lines of the earlier classes. When the teacher recollects the lines of poems in earlier classes, the understanding will be better. Some of them may be inspired to write lines in which similes occur. In the same way, the teacher must recall poetic lines of earlier classes and also the lines in other poems of the same class to exemplify the meaning of all other poetic elements like metaphor, personification, antithesis,

Table 1. The questionnaires distributed for the elements of poetry.

Metaphor	Alliteration	Repetition of words/lines	Personification	Sound Patterning	Contrast	Archaic forms	Meaning	Form of poems	Simile	Stress Patterning	Oxymoron.
1	3	2	3	1	2	1	3	2	3	3	1

Table 2. Difference in appreciation of poetry between post graduate teachers in State Government Higher Secondary Schools and CBSE Schools in Chennai City.

Type of school	N	Mean	σ	Calculated 't'	Table 't' at 0.05 level	
Government	30	70	9.12			
CBSE	30	72	9.91	0.81	2.0	NS

oxymoron, and so on. There are a number of poems prescribed to 11th and 12th classes from modern poetry of 19th century, which have the use of repetition of words/phrases/lines, sound patterning and stress-patterning. Free verse poems of 20th and 21st century are not given in the textbooks of these three types of schools. The occurrences of the elements included in the tool may be recalled to students.

The questionnaire copies were taken to schools by the graduate teacher trainees and they conducted the test during their stay for 40 days of teaching practice in those schools. The questions were distributed for the elements of poetry as seen in Table 1.

The questionnaires were corrected immediately. For some questions, under each statement, three choices are given. Only one choice is the correct answer. Each statement carries a single mark. For some questions on repetition, sound and stress patterning, they have to give their answers in one sentence.

Verification of Hypotheses

The post graduate teachers in CBSE Schools in Chennai have slightly better appreciation of poetry but their competency in appreciation is not significant (Table 2).

The post graduate teachers in CBSE schools in Chennai have slightly better appreciation of poetry than that of teachers in Matric schools but it is not significantly different (Table 3).

The post graduate teachers Govt schools have slightly better appreciation than those in Matric Schools in Chennai city. The difference in competency is not significant (Table 4, Figure 1).

RESULTS

1. There is no significant difference in competencies for appreciating poetry between the post graduate Teachers in English working in Government and CBSE Schools.
2. There is no significant difference in competencies for appreciating poetry between the post graduate teachers in English working in CBSE Schools and Matric Schools.
3. There is no significant difference in competencies for appreciating poetry between the post graduate teachers in English working in Govt. Schools and Matric Schools.

DISCUSSION

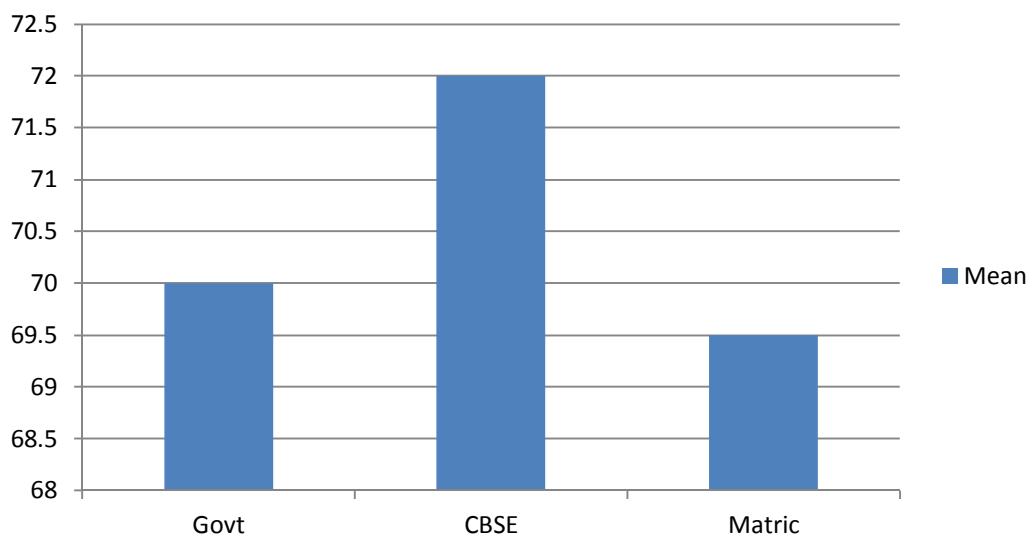
All the teachers working in all types of schools have a high level of appreciating skills of poetry as their mean scores range between 69 and 72. When the questionnaires were corrected, it was found that in commenting on the significance of refrains and repetitions, sound patterning and stress patterning, they need to be clinic in expression. In understanding the *contrasts* made in lines of poems, most of them identify the objects or persons contrasted correctly. When the in-service training is organised, the experts in poetry teaching or the faculties with experience must be invited to demonstrate reading of poetry and to analyse the lines for understanding the essential characteristics of poetry. All those who teach English in schools should be trained in the teaching of poetry. Musical recitation of poetry is rendered by African and West Indian singers in poetry fests arranged by the British Councils. On such occasions, the government and the private

Table 3. Difference in appreciation of poetry between post graduate teachers in CBSE Schools and Private Matriculation Schools in Chennai.

Type of school	N	Mean	σ	Calculated 't'	Table 't' at 0.01 level	
CBSE Schools	30	72	9.91			
Matric School	30	69.5	12.2	0.87	2.0	NS

Table 4. Difference in appreciation of poetry between post graduate teachers in Government Schools and Matriculation Schools in Chennai.

Type of school	N	Mean	σ	Calculated 't'	Table 't' at 0.01 level	
Govt. Schools	30	70	9.12			
Matric Schools	30	69.5	12.2	0.18	2.0	NS

**Figure 1.** Mean scores of competencies of the P.G teachers of English in three types of schools in appreciation of English poetry.

school managements must depute the English teachers to participate. Only the well trained teachers can make their students enjoy poetry. As Nilsen and Donelson (2010) have reported, poems should not be taught en masse. Teenagers are amused by humorous poetry. It is better to use poems in thematic units where they can be tied in with short stories or drama. Students must be allowed to choose the poems they want to study before the syllabus is framed for every higher secondary school class..

The teachers should use digital media (moving image, still image and sound) in teaching poetry. The teachers should connect reading and analyzing poetry to creative writing. Ask students to choose a metaphor or simile from a poem and then compose a new poem around it. The

teacher educators in all the teacher training colleges must be given financial assistance to buy these modern electronic gadgets.

From the BBC World Service website, it is known that the teachers can play some background music to create the atmosphere and show some pictures to introduce the topic. They can play a recording of the poem so that students can identify the stresses and pauses in words and lines. Students can rehearse and perform a poem by taking a chunk (one or two lines). One half of the class claps out the rhythm and the other half beats time and then they swap over. Too long, too archaic, or too obscure poems which do not evoke enthusiasm in students can be rejected. Tried out activities may be arranged and collected to teach poetry. Placing Picture

poems on the wall of the classroom increases the reading of poetry. As Vickie Christensen has said, to explicate poems, the method, D-I-P-F-A-M-M-S can be used. The previous studies give some interesting activities and ideas which can make the poetry teaching class an energetic one.

Conclusion

The Post Graduate Teachers of English in Government/CBSE/Matriculation Higher Secondary Schools have a high level of competencies in appreciating the elements of English poetry.

There is no significant difference in competencies for appreciating poetry between the post graduate teachers working in any two kinds of schools.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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