

Examining Teacher and Student Beliefs in Poetry Education: A Systematic Review within TESL Contexts

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ABSTRACT

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This systematic review investigates the intersection of teacher and student beliefs in poetry education within TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) programs. It synthesizes studies examining how these beliefs influence pedagogical practices, student engagement, and overall learning outcomes in poetry instruction. Utilizing the PRISMA methodology, the review identifies and analyzes 32 peer-reviewed articles published between 1982 and 2024. Findings indicate that teachers' beliefs about poetry significantly shape instructional approaches, often impacting students' attitudes toward the genre. Teachers who view poetry as an essential tool for fostering creativity and cultural understanding tend to implement it more actively in their curricula, enhancing student engagement. Conversely, students often perceive poetry as challenging due to its linguistic complexity, leading to anxiety and disengagement. The review also highlights discrepancies between teacher expectations and student experiences, particularly in assessment-driven environments where poetry is seen as secondary to core language skills. The study concludes that a more collaborative approach to poetry education—integrating student perspectives—can foster more positive attitudes and better align teaching practices with student needs. This research contributes to the broader discourse on literature education in TESL, offering insights into how poetry can be effectively integrated into language instruction to improve both educational outcomes and cultural literacy.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by exploring teacher and student beliefs regarding poetry education within the context of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), analyzing 32 studies from 1982 to 2024. The findings indicate that while teachers perceive poetry as a valuable tool for fostering

creativity and cultural understanding, students frequently regard it as a challenging subject. A collaborative approach that integrates student perspectives may enhance engagement and align pedagogical practices with the needs of learners.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the significance of genre recognition within literary studies has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Pflugfelder (2020) argues that the ability to recognize genre involves anticipating outcomes and interpreting narrative structures—skills that are applicable across a variety of media, including novels, films, and television programs. Genres are often defined by recurring elements that shape audience expectations (Pflugfelder, 2020), with literature traditionally categorized into fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Each genre possesses distinct structural and stylistic attributes that influence readers' experiences. Poetry, in particular, requires heightened engagement with figurative language, structure, and emotion, presenting both rewarding and challenging aspects for learners, especially within TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) contexts.

The integration of poetry into English language classrooms has long been a subject of scholarly debate. While some researchers argue that poetry complicates the process of language acquisition (Castiglione, 2017; Kasar & Didem, 2015), others emphasize its advantages in promoting cultural understanding and critical thinking skills (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Gonzales & Flores, 2016). Despite these divergent perspectives, literature—especially poetry—remains a fundamental component of TESL education. Proponents of including poetry in language learning environments underscore its potential to enhance language skills while concurrently enriching students' cultural and emotional literacy (Ardhesir & Servat, 2015). Moreover, poetry facilitates deeper engagement with language through its use of metaphor, rhyme, and symbolic imagery, thereby providing a rich medium for language acquisition.

Nevertheless, poetry is often perceived as one of the most complex literary forms to teach, particularly in non-native language contexts. Scholars such as Xerri (2016) assert that many students experience anxiety and disengagement when confronted with poetry due to its interpretive demands and perceived elusiveness. This challenge is further exacerbated by assessment-driven educational systems, wherein instructors often prioritize examination readiness over fostering a genuine appreciation for poetry (Patel & Laud, 2015). In such environments, poetry is frequently reduced to a matter of memorization, thereby constraining its pedagogical potential to inspire critical thinking and creativity.

The role of educators in shaping students' attitudes toward poetry is crucial. Numerous studies indicate that some ESL teachers feel ill-prepared or lack confidence in teaching poetry. This may result from insufficient training in interpreting complex poetic forms or a lack of familiarity with diverse poetic traditions. Furthermore, the pressure to conform to standardized testing frameworks often discourages more creative, student-centered approaches to poetry instruction. Xerri (2016) posits that many teachers adopt a teacher-centered approach, wherein students become passive recipients of predetermined interpretations rather than active participants in the exploration of poetic meaning.

Despite these challenges, the incorporation of poetry into TESL programs is essential,

particularly in contexts where future educators receive training. In Malaysia, TESL programs emphasize literature as a core component of English language instruction, with institutions such as UiTM and UKM integrating literary studies into their curricula to prepare well-rounded ESL educators. However, while extensive research addresses the difficulties students encounter in learning poetry (Xerri, 2016; Patel & Laud, 2015), a notable gap exists in studies focusing on the perceptions of TESL students and lecturers regarding poetry education within the Malaysian context.

1.1. Research Objectives

This systematic review aims to address the existing gap in the literature by examining the intersection of teacher and student beliefs regarding poetry within Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) programs. The study will synthesize existing research to investigate the influence of these beliefs on teaching practices, student engagement, and the overall effectiveness of poetry education. By employing the PRISMA methodology, this review will offer a comprehensive analysis of the current literature, elucidating the challenges and opportunities inherent in poetry education within TESL contexts. The findings will contribute to a more profound understanding of the effective integration of poetry into language instruction, ultimately seeking to foster more positive attitudes toward poetry among both educators and learners.

2. Research Methods

This review adheres to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to ensure transparency and reproducibility in the identification, selection, and evaluation of relevant literature. The search strategy encompassed comprehensive keyword queries across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC. The inclusion criteria were restricted to peer-reviewed articles published between 1982 and 2024 that specifically addressed teacher and student beliefs regarding poetry education within TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) contexts.

PRISMA is widely acknowledged for its efficacy in guiding the systematic review process, particularly in qualitative investigation studies and mixed methods research. Its structured approach facilitates the identification of relevant studies while promoting transparency and reproducibility throughout the review process. By employing PRISMA, researchers can ensure that all pertinent aspects of the research question are thoroughly addressed, thereby minimizing the risk of bias and enhancing the reliability of the findings.

2.1. Identifying Research Questions

This article investigates the tactics, challenges, and applicability of methodologies for exploring opportunities for differentiation between Islamic and conventional accounting standards. In this regard, the following research questions have been formulated to guide the inquiry and ensure the collection of a diverse range of literature pertinent to these areas of interest:

- i. What factors contribute to the challenges faced by TESL students in reading and comprehending poetry?
- ii. What activities do TESL students prefer for learning poetry in the English classroom?

- iii. What are TESL lecturers' perceptions regarding students' interests in the teaching and learning of poetry?
- iv. What strategies do TESL lecturers employ to enhance students' reading and understanding of poetry?

2.2. Identify related studies

A comprehensive search strategy was employed to identify pertinent studies for this systematic review. Databases, including Scopus, were queried utilizing keywords and Boolean operators.

As shown in [Table 1](#), the keywords used for the search included variations of terms such “Poetry Education” AND “TESL”. Additionally, specific terms related to the research objectives, such “*Teacher beliefs*” AND “*student beliefs*” were included to ensure a comprehensive search. The search strategy also involved screening the reference lists of relevant articles and consulting experts in the field to identify additional studies that met the inclusion criteria.

Table 1: The leading search item used to issue a published article

Essential search items used to generate published articles		
“Poetry Education”	AND	“TESL”
“Teacher beliefs”	AND	“Student beliefs”

While [Table 2](#), outlines specific inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to a systematic review. For the period criterion, articles published between 1982 and 2024 were selected, while studies falling outside of this range were excluded, ensuring that the review reflects contemporary and relevant research findings over recent decades. Language criteria were limited to English-only articles, with studies in other languages excluded to maintain consistency in language comprehension and analysis, enabling a more cohesive synthesis of findings. Lastly, the review focused solely on original, peer-reviewed research articles, excluding any studies that had not undergone rigorous peer review. This approach ensures that the data drawn upon meets high academic standards, providing a robust foundation for the systematic analysis of teacher and student beliefs in poetry education within TESL contexts.

Table 2: Comprising and exclusion criteria

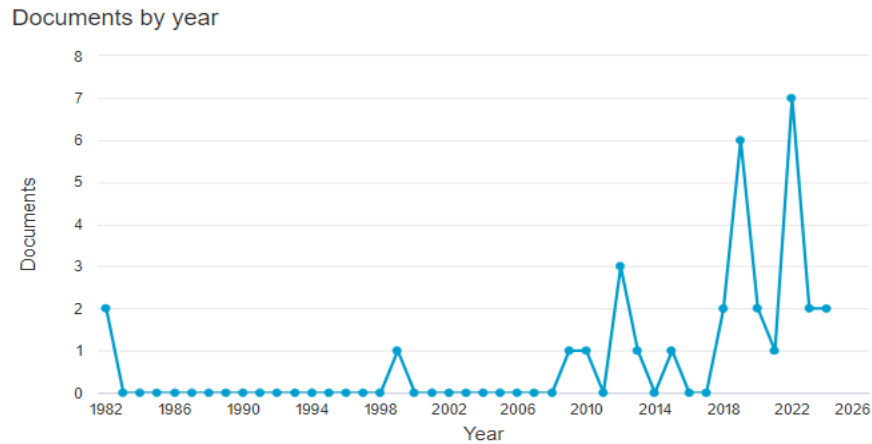
Criterion	Comprising	Exception
Period	1982-2024	Articles outside the year
Language	English only	Other languages
Types of articles	Original and peer-reviewed research	Articles that are not peer-reviewed

3. Results

The systematic review identified 32 studies that met the inclusion criteria, revealing a diversity of findings regarding the intersection of teacher and student beliefs in poetry education ([Figure 1](#)). Several prominent themes emerged, including the influence of teachers' pedagogical beliefs on curriculum choices, the motivational role of poetry in engaging language learners, and students' perceptions of poetry as either an enjoyable or challenging medium for language acquisition. Discrepancies between teacher intentions

and student reception were noted, particularly in contexts where poetry was perceived as a secondary component of language instruction. Furthermore, the review underscored how cultural and contextual factors shape beliefs and attitudes toward poetry in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) settings.

Figure 1: Statistic of article that met the inclusion criteria



4. Discussion

The intersection of teacher and student beliefs in poetry education presents both challenges and opportunities for Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) programs. Educators who regard poetry as a crucial instrument for fostering creativity and cultural awareness are more likely to actively incorporate it into their curricula, which can positively influence student engagement. Conversely, students' preconceived notions about poetry—ranging from anxiety regarding linguistic complexity to appreciation for its artistic merit—affect their educational outcomes. The discrepancies between teacher and student beliefs underscore the necessity for a more collaborative approach to poetry education, wherein student perspectives are integrated into curriculum development and instructional strategies. Furthermore, the review suggests that teacher training programs should place greater emphasis on the pedagogical significance of poetry in language acquisition to better align with students' needs and expectations.

4.1. The place of literature in the English classroom

In examining the role of literature within the English classroom, it becomes evident that educators' instructional approaches significantly influence students' perceptions and engagement with poetry. Some educators exhibit reluctance to teach poetry, primarily due to feelings of inadequate preparation or challenges stemming from their own difficulties in interpreting classical poems. This apprehension is emphasized by [Gönen \(2018\)](#), who assert that English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers frequently encounter difficulties in teaching poetry as a result of their lack of confidence and understanding. However, they also observe that educators possessing greater knowledge and employing effective teaching strategies can lead to positive transformations in students' perceptions of poetry. This discrepancy underscores the vital importance of teacher preparedness in promoting active student engagement with literary texts.

The influence of an assessment-driven culture further complicates the role of poetry in the classroom. As [Xerri \(2016\)](#) notes, the emphasis on examinations often results in

teacher-centered approaches, wherein instructors dominate the interpretation of poems, thereby rendering students as passive recipients of information. This methodology, which prioritizes examination preparation over a deeper appreciation of literature, constrains students' ability to cultivate independent analytical skills. By employing closed-ended questions and directing students toward specific interpretations, educators inadvertently limit students' capacity for critical thinking and creative engagement with poetry. Such practices not only hinder classroom interaction but also discourage students from assuming an active role in comprehending literary texts.

Moreover, [Xerri \(2016\)](#) contends that the examination system exacerbates students' challenges in analyzing poetry. Many students struggle during assessments primarily because they are not accustomed to independently deciphering the meanings of poems within constrained time limits. This issue is rooted in classroom practices that excessively emphasize teacher-provided interpretations, resulting in diminished student autonomy in the construction of meaning. Consequently, students develop negative attitudes toward poetry, perceiving it as a challenging and inaccessible genre, particularly when expected to engage with unseen texts during assessments.

Conversely, research conducted by [Dirgeyasa \(2017\)](#) presents a more optimistic perspective regarding students' engagement with poetry. Their findings indicate that a substantial proportion of students express interest in reading poetry, recognizing its value in enhancing language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. However, despite this interest, many students continue to find poetry challenging, particularly concerning comprehension. The study highlights a disjunction between students' appreciation of poetry's potential benefits and their difficulties in understanding it, suggesting that the pedagogical methods employed may not adequately address students' needs for deeper engagement with the text.

The issue of teaching poetry primarily for examination purposes, rather than for the promotion of meaningful learning, is critically examined by [Vk and Savaedi \(2014\)](#). They contend that educators frequently employ rote memorization techniques to prepare students for assessments, concentrating on anticipated answer patterns instead of fostering critical engagement with the text. This methodology, which emphasizes uniformity in student responses, restricts their capacity to explore multiple interpretations of a poem, thereby undermining their literary experience. Additionally, [Vk and Savaedi \(2014\)](#) highlight that such practices do not cultivate curiosity, creativity, or enjoyment of poetry, all of which are essential components of literary appreciation.

The historical context of literature instruction in Malaysia, as investigated by [Kaur and Mahmor \(2014\)](#), provides further insight into the challenges encountered by both educators and students. Their study delineates the evolution of literature's role within the Malaysian education system, noting variations in its significance over time. The current curriculum aims to cultivate students' language skills, including their capacity to appreciate and engage with literary works. However, the selection of texts, particularly the disproportionate representation of foreign and local literature, raises concerns regarding the cultural relevance of the materials employed in the classroom. [Kaur and Mahmor \(2014\)](#) propose that the inclusion of more local texts could enhance student engagement by offering culturally familiar content, which may be more accessible and relatable for learners.

4.2. The interest of students in English Poetry

The interest of students in English poetry has been a subject of extensive academic discourse, particularly within the framework of English as a Second Language (ESL). It is frequently posited that students' general disinterest in reading English poetry is not indicative of an intrinsic aversion to the genre but rather a consequence of their unfamiliarity with the target language. [Xerri \(2016\)](#) substantiates this assertion, noting that an "assessment-oriented approach to poetry has the potential to undermine students' engagement with the genre for much longer than the duration of their studies." The pressures associated with examinations and rigid pedagogical practices often deter students from cultivating a genuine appreciation for literature, especially poetry. Furthermore, the negative perceptions surrounding poetry are frequently reinforced by instructional strategies that prioritize examination preparation over fostering meaningful engagement with the text. In Southeast Asian educational settings, as cited by [Gonzales and Flores \(2016\)](#), contend that teaching methodologies are predominantly teacher-centered, thereby limiting opportunities for students to explore and interpret poetry independently. This teacher-centered approach, which emphasizes standardized interpretations, constrains students' capacity to engage with poetry in a more personal and reflective manner.

On the other hands, [Xerri \(2016\)](#), observes that students often experience pressure to "learn" poetry in a manner that aligns with assessment expectations, resulting in the mere reproduction of pre-digested notes to achieve higher grades. Consequently, students cultivate a rigid understanding of poetry, associating it with fixed interpretations and developing a fear of deviating from what they perceive as the "correct" answers. [Xerri \(2016\)](#) further indicates that students tend to eschew subjectivity in their poetry essays, regarding personal interpretations as risky and unsafe, particularly in the context of grading. This apprehension regarding the expression of personal viewpoints curtails their engagement with poetry as a dynamic and interpretive genre.

Moreover, [Ardhesir and Servat \(2015\)](#) argue that students' disinterest in English poetry may stem from individual preferences rather than an inherent aversion to the genre. They advocate for educators to address these negative attitudes by cultivating an environment that encourages students to engage with poetry with greater openness and curiosity. [Ardhesir and Servat \(2015\)](#) emphasize that the efficacy of poetry as a pedagogical tool is contingent upon students' positive attitudes toward the genre. Conversely, poetry may hinder language learning if students approach it with negativity or resistance. This perspective highlights the necessity of fostering an environment in which students can explore poetry without the constraints imposed by rigid assessment practices or preconceived notions of difficulty.

Furthermore, research indicates that students frequently encounter challenges in connecting with the themes and messages within poetry, contributing to their lack of enthusiasm. [Patel and Laud \(2015\)](#) assert that students often find poetry unrelatable and anxiety-inducing, leading to its perception as a tedious literary genre. This disconnect is exacerbated by educational systems, particularly in examination-oriented contexts such as Malaysia, where literature is viewed as a subject to be mastered for academic purposes rather than pursued for personal enjoyment. The examination-focused nature of literature courses reinforces the perception of poetry as a complex and challenging genre, further alienating students from its potential to enrich their linguistic and cultural understanding. For younger students, this complexity frequently manifests as frustration,

as they struggle to interpret the deeper meanings embedded in poems, thereby shaping detrimental attitudes toward poetry as a whole.

4.3. Students' Views on Factors Contributing to Difficulties in Reading and Understanding Poetry Texts

The challenges faced by students in reading and comprehending poetry are multifaceted, particularly within second language learning contexts. While literature generally plays a significant role in language acquisition, poetry is frequently identified as the most challenging genre for learners. [Dirgeyasa \(2017\)](#) underscores this issue, asserting that poetry is regarded as more difficult than other literary forms, such as short stories, prose, or drama, due to its complex nature. The distinctive features of poetry, including its mental, linguistic, and physical structures, contribute significantly to students' comprehension difficulties. These structural complexities often result in negative perceptions of poetry, as students grapple with decoding not only the meaning but also the form, which is intrinsically linked to the content. For instance, [Hardman, and A-rahman \(2018\)](#) contend that despite poetry's value as authentic language-learning material, its complexity can overwhelm ESL/EFL students, thereby diminishing their engagement with the medium.

[Sulaiman and Ayub \(2015\)](#) assert that the form of poetry holds unique significance, rendering it impossible to overlook in the analytical process. The aesthetic qualities of poetry, including its musicality, meter, and voice, are central to grasping its meaning. However, these elements present additional challenges for language learners who may struggle to understand the form and its implications for meaning. Furthermore, the translation of poetry, particularly for foreign language students, can complicate the learning process, as it is often difficult to preserve these aesthetic elements in a different language. This difficulty is exacerbated by students' varying levels of language proficiency and cultural disconnection, which frequently lead to feelings of alienation from the text. [Patel and Laud \(2015\)](#) support this view, noting that many students find poetry unrelatable, unengaging, or anxiety-inducing, particularly when contrasted with other literary genres that may appear more accessible or directly relevant to their experiences.

Additionally, students frequently encounter difficulties when studying poetry from diverse cultural or historical contexts. [Naylor \(2013\)](#) emphasizes that readers may lack prior knowledge of the subject matter presented in a poem, complicating their ability to engage with the text. This concern is particularly salient for foreign language students who may not share the cultural background or experiences referenced in the poem. This disconnect can render poetry inaccessible, necessitating additional effort to comprehend, which may dissuade students from engagement. The absence of relevant schemata—prior knowledge or cultural references—exacerbates these challenges. Moreover, students' unfamiliarity with the technical elements of poetry, such as literary devices, introduces an additional layer of difficulty. [Wang \(2018\)](#) elucidates that literary devices are central to defining poetry's distinctive characteristics; however, many students lack the training to identify or appreciate these devices, further contributing to their negative perceptions of poetry.

4.4. Strategies in Teaching Poetry

Teaching poetry presents unique challenges, particularly for students in second language learning environments, due to the complex nature of poetic texts, which often entail

intricate structures, abstract ideas, and cultural nuances. Educators must implement a variety of strategies that accommodate the diverse learning needs of students, acknowledging that there is no singular approach that is universally effective in teaching poetry. As [Dirgeyasa \(2017\)](#) emphasizes, the strategies employed by educators in the instruction of poetry must differ from those utilized for other language skills because of the genre's distinct characteristics, which necessitate a more nuanced instructional approach. In this context, extant research has identified several effective strategies that address various aspects of student learning, focusing not only on language acquisition but also on the cultivation of deeper literary appreciation.

One prominent method for teaching poetry is the stylistic approach, which integrates the study of linguistic features with literary criticism, thereby providing students with a dual framework for analyzing and interpreting poetry. This method is particularly effective as it allows educators to transcend conventional, exam-oriented pedagogies that frequently prevail in Southeast Asian classrooms, including those in Malaysia. In such educational contexts, the system often emphasizes rote learning and examination preparation, which may impede students' capacity to engage creatively with literary texts. The stylistic approach, as discussed by [Gonzales and Flores \(2016\)](#), introduces activities that promote active student participation, such as summarizing poems, conducting syntactical and structural analyses, examining lexical and phonological elements, and exploring thematic content. These activities not only facilitate students' understanding of the technical aspects of poetry but also provide a structured means for them to engage with the text.

Furthermore, the stylistic approach enhances students' academic skills beyond mere language acquisition. It cultivates critical thinking and analytical skills by requiring students to investigate how language choices in poetry shape meaning and emotional responses. This approach also fosters cultural awareness, as students must take into account the social, historical, and cultural contexts from which the poetic text arises. Research by [Shi and Wang \(2013\)](#) indicates that the application of the stylistic approach in ESL/EFL classrooms results in improved language performance and assists students in developing a deeper appreciation for literary works. In this respect, the stylistic approach aligns with broader educational objectives by promoting both linguistic proficiency and literary competence, positioning it as a versatile and effective strategy within the realm of poetry education.

Another highly effective strategy for teaching poetry is the utilization of reading logs, which are grounded in Reader-Response Theory (RRT). This pedagogical approach emphasizes the interaction between the reader and the text, recognizing that students bring their own experiences, emotions, and perspectives to their reading of poetry. As [Dirgeyasa \(2017\)](#) asserts, reading is not a passive activity but a dynamic process in which the reader actively constructs meaning through engagement with the text. In this context, reading logs serve as a tool that enables students to document their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations as they read, thereby facilitating personal connections with the poem. This process fosters a deeper emotional and intellectual engagement with poetry, transforming the learning experience from one focused solely on memorization or textual analysis to one that is more personal and reflective.

Reading logs also afford students the opportunity to explore the poem from various interpretive stances. The efferent stance, in which the reader concentrates on extracting information from the text, aids students in grasping the literal meaning of the poem, while the aesthetic stance allows them to connect more profoundly with the emotional and

imaginative aspects of the work. By encouraging students to engage with poetry on both of these levels, reading logs create a more holistic learning experience. The format of a reading log, as articulated by [Ampofo et al. \(2019\)](#), entails students documenting their stream of consciousness while reading, which includes their questions, emotional responses, predictions about the poem's development, and reflections on the poem's language and structure. This approach encourages students to become active readers who not only absorb content but also engage in critical analysis and relate it to their own lives.

Furthermore, the use of reading logs supports student-centered learning, which is essential in the context of poetry education. As students document their personal responses to poetry, they become more engaged and invested in the learning process, recognizing the relevance of poetry to their own experiences. This active engagement assists students in overcoming any sense of detachment or alienation they might experience regarding poetry, particularly if they find it challenging to relate to the themes or cultural references within the texts. Additionally, reading logs provide teachers with valuable insights into each student's unique interpretive process, fostering a more interactive classroom environment and facilitating discussion. Educators can utilize these logs to guide classroom discourse, allowing students to share their interpretations and learn from one another's perspectives, thereby nurturing a collaborative learning atmosphere.

Furthermore, the process of reasoning through their interpretations, as facilitated by reading logs, constitutes a fundamental skill for students, particularly in the context of preparing them for Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions in examinations and addressing future career challenges. In a 21st-century learning environment, critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical reasoning are indispensable competencies that students must cultivate. Engaging in activities such as justifying interpretations of poetry or elucidating emotional responses to specific lines or stanzas enables students to practice these essential skills. This pedagogical approach aligns with the objectives of contemporary education, which seeks to prepare students not only for academic success but also for the complexities of real-world decision-making and professional environments.

5. Conclusion

The systematic review underscores the complex interplay between teacher and student beliefs in poetry education, revealing both challenges and opportunities for TESL programs. The findings indicate that teachers' pedagogical beliefs significantly influence curriculum choices and the extent to which poetry is integrated into language instruction. Teachers who regard poetry as a valuable tool for fostering creativity and cultural awareness tend to engage students more effectively; however, discrepancies between teacher intentions and student reception persist, particularly when poetry is perceived as secondary to core language skills. Furthermore, the review highlights the substantial role of cultural and contextual factors in shaping both teacher and student attitudes toward poetry, especially in ESL contexts. While some students express anxiety about poetry due to its perceived linguistic and thematic complexity, others recognize its potential for enhancing language acquisition. These divergent attitudes underscore the necessity for a more collaborative approach to poetry instruction, in which students' perspectives are actively considered in curriculum development. Moreover, teacher training programs must emphasize the pedagogical significance of poetry to better align teaching practices with students' needs and expectations. Addressing these factors could mitigate the

challenges associated with poetry education, fostering a more inclusive, engaging, and reflective learning environment for TESL students.

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