



## Ethnographic Research on Attitude to the Nature of Poetry among HEAC Students at Busitema University

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**Abstract:** *The inherent attributes of poetry have been a stumbling block for many over the years. Majority of the language and literature students preferred prose fiction and held an equally overwhelming distaste for poetry. However, there is very little that has been documented on the inherent attributes of poetry and their effect on aversion. Educational ethnography methods were employed including direct observation, face to face interviews, analytic induction, archival research and participatory discussions with HEAC students. The study established that the nature of poetry was intimidating owing to its uniqueness but, on close frequent interactions with it, the students discovered a whole new world in literary form and had attitude change.*

**Keywords:** *Nature of Poetry, HEAC, Learners' Attitude*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Poetry as a genre easily lends itself to the teaching of both Literature and English Language expressed and condensed in words, rhythms and images. The beauty of word in poetry comes from not only its form but from, especially its content. Nevertheless, to benefit from the advantages of poetry learners should have a positive disposition to poetry. Moody argues that “poetry raises, in a concise way, some of the most typical problems in the teaching of Literature” (Moody, 1979). Moody further asserts that the teaching of poetry in developing countries presents special difficulties and many teachers are inclined to avoid it, as long as they can. He commented that poetry was riddled with archaic spellings, words used in unexpected contexts, obscure references, unfamiliar comparisons, nonsensical statements, and chiasmic sentences. He added that the field of poetry was extraordinarily complex with lyrical poems, epic, narrative and satirical poems, containing technical expressions like: symbolism, imagery, hyperbole and metre. This kind of attitude has over the years been the justification for poor student attitude.

### 2. ATTITUDE

Attitude is defined by Oxford language as a settled way of thinking or feeling about something. (Oxfordlanguages, 2021) Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event—this is often referred to as the attitude object (Alan Hirvela, Joseph Boyle, 1988). People can also be conflicted or ambivalent toward an object, meaning that they simultaneously possess both positive and negative attitudes towards the item in question.

(Lazar, 1993) observed that, attitudes were learnt and predisposed one towards actions which were either favourable or unfavourable with respect to a given object. It is believed, that formation of attitudes towards an academic subject develops through an automation of repeated emotional reactions to the subject and the transference of an existing attitude to a new or related task. (Oriko, 2018) . Positive teacher attitude leads to the formation of positive student attitudes to the subject taught.

According Dr. Sweetland’s notes, children students do not like poetry because it makes them struggle with words trying to establish a connection between the image and what it is supposed to represent. (Sweetland, 2020)

### **3. HEAC**

HEAC is an acronym for Higher Education Access Certificate a pre-entry bridging program introduced by Forum for African Women Educationists, Master Card Foundation and the National Council for Higher Education to provide a second chance opportunity to promising students to transition into university degree programs. The HEAC curriculum launched on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019 was designed to build firm foundation in academic knowledge, skills and attitudes of the students through innovative teaching and learning experiences.

This curriculum is currently being implemented at Busitema University, Gulu University and Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

### **4. THE NATURE OF POETRY**

Trying to define poetry is something that has been attempted by many scholars over the years. Among the impressive definitions are:

“..my homely definition of prose and poetry; prose is words in their best order, while poetry is the best words in the best order.” S.T. Coleridge

“the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative, in other words a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” T.S. Elliot

“There are three things that a poem must reach: the eye, the ear, and what we may call the heart or the mind. It is most important of all to reach the heart of the reader.” Robert Frost

“poetry is what in a poem makes you laugh, cry, prickle, be silent, makes your toenails twinkle, makes you want to do this or that or nothing, makes you know that you are not alone in the unknown world, that your bliss and suffering is forever shared and forever all your own” Dylan Thomas (Cameron, 2003-2013)

According to (Literaryterms, 2016) poetry is a type of literature where words are strung together to form sounds, images and ideas that might be too complex or abstract to describe directly. It is an interplay of words and rhythm and often employs rhyme and meter.

The inherent attributes of poetry that distinguish it as a genre include: figures of speech/ figurative language, descriptive imagery, punctuation and format, sound and tone, character of meter.

The tone of a poem is the attitude you feel in it, it is the writer’s attitude towards the subject or audience. The tone in a poem of praise is approval, in satire, you feel irony, in an antiwar poem, and the reader may feel protest or moral indignation. Tone can be playful, humorous, regretful, and it can change in the different stanzas. (Timpane, 2021)

The sounds of poetry include alliteration where multiple consecutive words start with the same letter to create softness with sounds like ‘f’, ‘m’, ‘w’ or hardness/roughness with ‘k’, ‘t’, ‘z’.

The meter of a poem is the rhythm or pattern of speech like iambic meter or free verse, depending on the message he wants to communicate to the reader.

Figurative language refers to the way of describing things in a non-literal manner to produce certain feelings in the reader. Some of these include: metaphors, hyperbole.

Descriptive imagery refers to what the poet sees, hears, smells, touches, feels with a literal image or one that exists in his mind. Visual imagery creates a picture that the reader can see.

Punctuation and format/ structure refers to the arrangement of the poem, whether it has many stanzas, commas or if it is one piece with one full stop at the end. (Ryan, 2017). According to Glatch structure in poetry consists of: line lengths, meters, stanza lengths, rhyme scheme if any, and systems of repetition. (Glatch, 2021).

## 5. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods of educational ethnography were employed through direct observation, face to face interviews, analytic induction, archival research and participating in discussions with HEAC students. Data was collected using both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included: naturalistic observation, observation field notes, one o one interviews. Secondary sources included: documents on poetry as a genre and focus group of HEAC students. Data was coded, classified into themes, interpreted and assertions drawn (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. , 2019)

## 6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to confirm the effect of student attitude to poetry a pre-test was given to enable us establish areas that had improved and which one needed encouragement.

**Table1.** Summary Pre-test on Student Attitude towards Poetry where n=3

Item	Statement to which participants respond	Yes	Not sure	No
1.	. I enjoy learning poetry more than any other genre?	0		3
2.	The greatest challenge in learning poetry is the difficult language of poems	3		0
3.	Poetry should not be tested in examinations?		2	1
4.	I do not like poetry because the content is foreign and irrelevant to me			3
5.	Rhyme and rhythm make poetry difficult			3
6.	Political poems are boring	3		
7.	Examination questions based on language of poetry are difficult.	3		
8.	Poetry should not be integrated with English Language.			3
9.	I have no problem in getting to the deep meaning of poems			3
10.	Poems in free verse are the best		1	2
11.	Imagery makes poems difficult to understand	2	1	
12.	Most African poems have no meaning			3
13.	I am taught at least one poem every week			3
14.	Students have no interest in poetry because it uses difficult language	3		
15.	I enjoy poetry because of the metaphors used	1		2
16.	Alliteration is difficult to comprehend			3
17.	I like poems which tell love stories	3		
18.	Poetry should be an optional part of Literature	3		
19.	To get rhythm scanning is easy		1	2
20.	Poems set for examination should come from specific set books	3		

According to the responses above, the students arrived in the program when their minds had already been programmed to shy away from poetry. It is therefore the challenge for the teacher to change student's opinion on poetry. This is an uphill task but if embarked on can be very rewarding. A post test was given of the very same questions to same group months after a willing teacher had embarked on the task of improving the students' attitudes to poetry with the aim of improving their grades. Below are the responses from the same students.

**Table2.** Summary of Post Test of Student Attitude towards Poetry where n=3

Item	Statement to which participants respond	Yes	Not sure	No
1.	. I enjoyed learning poetry more than any other genre?	2	1	
2.	The greatest challenge in learning poetry is the difficult language of poems	1	1	1
3.	Poetry should not be tested in examinations?			3
4.	I do not like poetry because the content is foreign and irrelevant to me			3
5.	Rhyme and rhythm make poetry difficult			3
6.	Political poems are boring			3
7.	Examination questions based on language of poetry are difficult.		2	1
8.	Poetry should not be integrated with English Language.			3
9.	I have no problem in getting to the deep meaning of poems	1	2	

10.	Poems in free verse are the best	2	1	
11.	Imagery makes poems difficult to understand	1	1	1
12.	Most African poems have no meaning			3
13.	I am taught at least one poem every week	3		
14.	Students have no interest in poetry because it uses difficult language			3
15.	I enjoy poetry because of the metaphors used	3		
16.	Alliteration is difficult to comprehend			3
17.	I like poems which tell love stories	3		
18.	Poetry should be an optional part of Literature			3
19.	To get rhythm scanning is easy	2	1	
20.	Poems set for examination should come from specific set books	3		

This post test after 3 months of interaction with a teacher interested in teaching poetry, the hypothesis that was formulated was that when the teacher makes poetry fun and easy, students will relax and try to understand it was proved correct as by the responses in figure 2 above.

## **7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The nature of poetry presents new aspects of language that appear difficult with the naked eye but on close observation they, are the tools that guide the reader/learner into understanding the subject matter and the content.

Students should be encouraged to put aside all the negative attitudes they have heard over the years regarding poetry and approach it with the attitude of a church goer who goes to church to learn wonderful things. This shift of attitude will enable the students to embrace poetry in all its beauty and enjoy its sublime nature.

There is need for retooling Language and Literature teachers on student centred approaches to teaching poetry that draw students to the genre not away from it. When the teachers' mindsets are changed, they will be able to impart to the learners positive attitudes that change their perception of poetry.

In order to improve the standard of performance in poetry there is need to start deliberately adding poetry to the English language lessons in Primary schools. This will help students familiarise themselves with poetry like they do with the other two genres - prose and plays which have time immemorial been part and parcel of the English Lesson.

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