

# An Appraisal of Nigeria Certificate in Education Students' Attitudes towards the Value of Poetry

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**Abstract:** This paper is an appraisal of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) students' attitudes towards the value of poetry. It has been observed by the authors that many students of English language dislike poetry as a component of Literature. To ascertain the veracity of this perception, a cohort of fifty (50) NCE II students of the Department of English in the College of Education Gindri responded to the Students' attitudes towards the value of poetry scale (SAVPS). The findings of the study revealed that over 50% of the students did not have interest in poetry, they doubted its relevance to their academics, and they perceived it as a difficult genre. To help change the students' negative attitude, it is recommended that the teachers of poetry should use innovative methods and approaches that are student-centred and interest boosting, and they should emphasise the practicality of the essence of poetry in real life so that students are able to see the relevance of the art in their lives.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Attitude, Value, Poetry, Interest.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Poetry as an art of communication in beautiful and evocative language is not a nascent enterprise. It has always been apparent in the diverse ways man relates his thoughts and feelings in speech, storytelling, singing, and dramatization. Through poetry, poets have engaged with the

secular and spiritual, the transient and immanent. Like a sage, the poet dabbles with the day-to-day activities of humanity with a view to entertain, instruct, guide, and/or dissuade using condensed words yet apt and purposefully effective. As a part of Literature, poetry features in the English language curriculum of Colleges of Education in Nigeria. Right from the secondary school level, students are

exposed to the rudiments of the art of versification during English language lessons. The students are guided to contemplate a gamut of themes such as love, loss, sadness, work, divinity, or even politics (Mohammed, Hadi & Aliyu, 2024).

The goal of teaching poetry so early is to develop in the students the skill to utilise English language competently and proficiently. Knowledge and attitude are hardly separable: the former influences the latter. It is significant to note that people are naturally drawn to other persons and things that they are familiar with while, similarly, they tend to be averse to strangers and strange things. When students perceive poetry as a significant form of personal and transformative expression, they tend to appreciate it as language that is not readily found in other forms of reading and writing (Edwin, 2018). Poetry has value – just as any other area of Literature or course of study in the institutions of higher learning. By value it is suggested here to be the quality that renders poetry desirable and useful to the listener or reader. Poetic value reverberates with the poet's use of imagery and figurative language to furnish realistic ideas and fantastical realities (Ridadi & Sahri, 2024).

The value of poetry is influenced by one's profound understanding of the world and the workings of the human spirit, employing intricate and analogous comparisons which fuse both emotion and reason. How students perceive and relate to poetry is important. If their attitude is positive they stand to benefit from its rich tapestry of emotive lyrics and meaning. Whether students encounter simple rhymes or intricate poems, poetry provides engaging and enriching reading experiences. Poetry stands out with its potent blend of emotive content and linguistic richness. Its inherent metaphoric nature amplifies learning, offering readers varied linguistic perspectives, motivation, emotional resonance, and familiarity with figurative language (Ni Komang, Luh & Farid, (2023). Poetry is noted to also elevate speaking skills by accentuating stress, tone, and intonation.

Despite poetry's evident merits in language learning, many students show a negative attitude towards it. Hence, this paper seeks to appraise Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) students' attitudes towards the value of poetry.

#### ➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The authors of this paper have taught English language courses in the College of Education for about fifteen years. During this time, they observed with very deep concern how many NCE students of the Department of English tend to like other aspects of Literature viz. prose and drama, while they show dislike for poetry. The perceived decline in interest and engagement with poetry may stem from a lack of knowledge of its value or it is due to insufficient exposure to its diverse forms and applications. The underlying reasons for students' positive, negative or indifferent attitude is largely unexplored among students of the Department of English in the College of Education Gindri, Plateau State, Nigeria. Therefore, this study sought to address the gap by investigating the current state of students' knowledge of the value of poetry and their prevailing attitude towards it.

#### ➤ *Aim and Objectives of the Study*

The aim of this study was to appraise NCE II students' knowledge and attitudes towards the value of poetry in College of Education Gindri. The objectives were to

- Find out the level of NCE II students' interest in learning poetry in College of Education Gindri
- Ascertain how NCE II students' perceive the relevance of poetry to their personal lives in College of Education Gindri
- Establish NCE II students' recognition of the importance of poetry in their academic curriculum in College of education Gindri
- Determine NCE II students' rating of the difficulty of understanding poetic language in College of Education Gindri

#### ➤ *Research Questions*

To guide this study, the following research questions were raised:

- How would you describe your interest in learning poetry?
- How would you rate the relevance of poetry to your personal life?
- What is your perception of the importance of poetry in your academic curriculum?
- How would you rate the difficulty of understanding poetic language?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge of poetry refers to the understanding and appreciation of the art. It encompasses familiarity with poetic forms and structures, literary devices, themes and emotions, historical and cultural contexts, and interpretation skills. Attitude on the other hand is a combination of one's feelings and beliefs toward a subject matter. It is the act of feeling or thinking either positively or negatively toward something in the environment. Attitudes are feelings of like or dislike of an object, person, or an event that characterize a human being. Attitude towards poetry refers to an individual's feelings, perspectives, or disposition towards poetry as an art form (Ali, Saddam, & Tariq, 2023). Students' attitude can range from positive, negative to indifferent, and it often evolves over time. Moreover, attitudes are considered outcomes that can be acquired during the learning process. Students' attitudes change in their learning process either directly or indirectly through observation, experiences, and the learning environment. Hence the change in attitude is mostly influenced by teachers, parents, peers' characteristics, and classroom environment (Adegbola, 2019).

Students have always exhibited different levels of attitude towards poetry in various ways. While some of them receive poetry with enthusiasm (positively), others do so with hesitation or even triviality (negatively). A major factor affecting students' interest in poetry is the way their teacher presents the art form to them. Where a teacher also struggles with poetry they are likely to present the art form as an intimidating puzzle to be solved hence engendering

students' disenchantment with it. The perception that poetry is overly abstract or disconnected from everyday life can deter students from engaging with it. Overemphasis on technical analysis and rigid interpretations may overshadow the emotional and creative aspects that make poetry compelling. Regardless of any other factor that informs students' negativity, Ardeshir and Servat (2015: 30) posit that, "learners' attitudes toward poetry can be changed..."

Students' perception of the relevance of poetry to their lives and academics also influences their attitude (David & Bassey, 2020). Poetry explores sundry themes that tend to resonate deeply with listeners and readers alike – it should reflect their experiences and emotions. When students see their realities mirrored in poetry, they may feel more inclined to explore the genre further. For instance, modern Nigerian poets like Niyi Osundare, Romeo Oriogun, Adedayo Agarau (to mention a few of them) have reached a global audience with their evocative and relatable works that address themes such as love, identity, and resilience. Through its use of rhythm, imagery, and metaphors, poetry transcends the limitations of ordinary language and captures the essence of human experiences.

The importance of poetry in language education is apparent. Poetry nurtures creativity and critical thinking in students. By studying and analysing poems, they learn to appreciate and interpret complex ideas. Poetry encourages readers to look beyond the surface, deciphering layers of meaning and symbolism. This practice enhances cognitive skills such as problem-solving and empathy. Composing poetry allows students to channel their thoughts and emotions into a structured yet creative form, fostering self-expression and personal growth (Boldireff & Bober, 2021). Poetry is also important as a tool for social and cultural commentary. Poets like Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou addressed issues of race and inequality, while contemporary poets like Tanure Ojaide, Nnimmo Bassey, and Ojo Taiye tackled topics such as climate change, gender equality, and mental health.

Understanding poetry can be a difficult endeavour for many students. This difficulty arises from its complex language, symbolic nature, and the unique demand for interpretative skills it places on listeners and readers. In stressing the foregoing, Aiswarya (2023) further opines that engaging with poetry may be a difficult task as the meaning (s) conveyed in a poem rise above literal elucidation of the poet's thoughts and intentions. For example, when a poet describes "the sky weeping," they may be using

personification to evoke sadness, rather than referring to rain directly. These devices demand careful analysis and interpretation, requiring readers to delve beneath the surface of the words to uncover deeper meanings. Symbols can vary widely in their interpretation, depending on cultural, historical, or personal contexts (Seth, Maisarah, & Sovann, 2023). The use of a flower in a poem, for example, could imply love, beauty, or even mortality, depending on the perspective of the reader. This vagueness renders poetry both enriching and perplexing.

Unlike prose, which typically follows a clear plot or argument, poetry frequently leaves gaps for the reader to fill. This openness to interpretation both liberates and intimidates a listener or reader (Abidin & Lock, 2020). While the listener/reader is at liberty to actively engage with a text and deduce by reasoning, the dynamics of the original meaning still loom in the background. The emotional intensity of poetry also adds to its complexity. Poems often explore profound and personal themes, such as love, loss, and existential contemplation. This emotional depth can resonate differently with each reader, influenced by their own experiences and feelings. As a result, the same poem may evoke disparate interpretations and reactions, further complicating a shared understanding (Lucero, Alpahando & Estoque, 2021). Finally, the cultural and historical contexts of poetry can act as barriers to comprehension. Poems written in bygone eras or in different cultural settings may contain references, idioms, or beliefs unfamiliar to contemporary readers. Understanding such works may require additional effort to study the poet's background, historical period, or cultural influences.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The design for this study was a descriptive survey. The design describes the characteristics, behaviors, or opinions of a group without manipulating any variables (Leavy, 2017). The population for the study was all the sixty (60) NCE II students of the Department of English in the College of Education, Gindri, Plateau State, Nigeria. Using purposive sampling, a cohort of fifty (50) respondents took the Assessment of Students' attitudes towards the value of poetry scale (SAVPS). NCE II were sampled because they had spent more than one year in the College and were academically stable. For data collection, the SAVPS was designed by the researchers. It consisted of two sections: Section A elicited the bio data of the respondents while Section B consisted 4 questions with Likert scale options.

#### IV. RESULTS

➤ **Question 1:** How would you describe your interest in learning poetry?

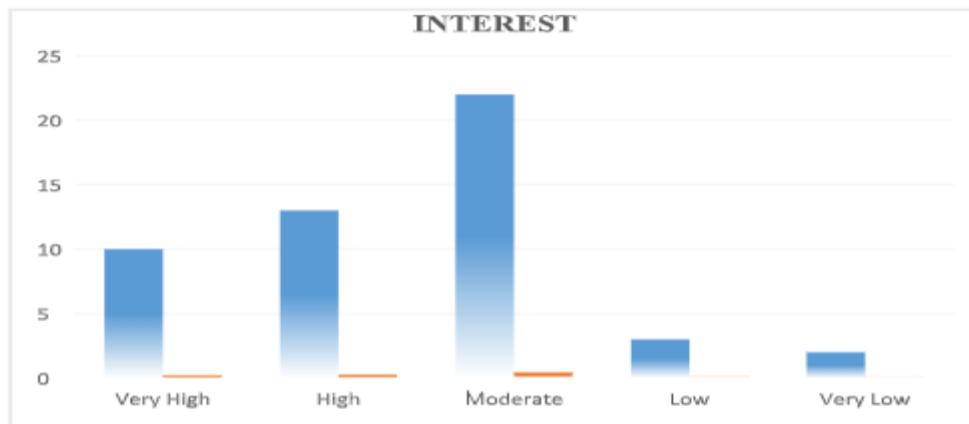


Chart 1

The chart above indicates that 20% of the students had very high interest in poetry, 13% of them had a high interest, while 44% of them had only moderate interest. The others who constituted 6% and 4% had low and very low interest.

➤ **Question 2:** How would you rate the relevance of poetry to your personal life?

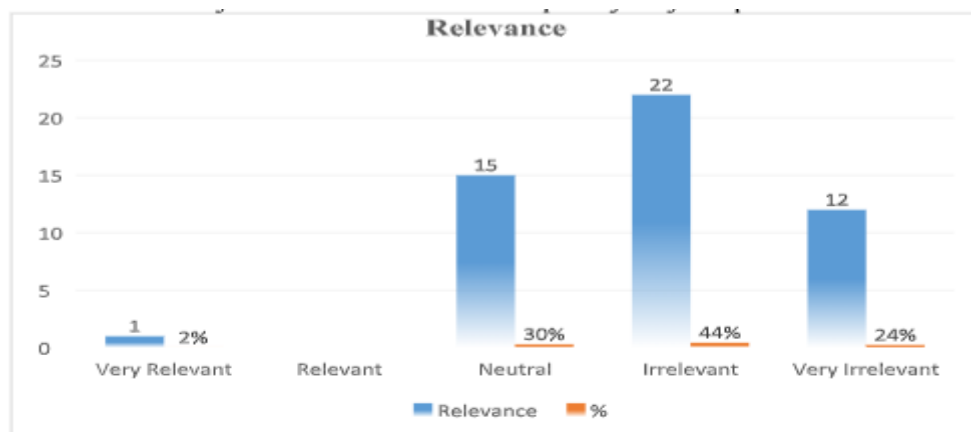


Chart 2

It is obvious from the chart above that only 1% of the students who responded to the SAVPS rated poetry as very relevant while 30% of them were neutral. 44% of the students rated poetry as irrelevant and 24% rated it very irrelevant.

➤ **Question 3:** What is your perception of the importance of poetry in your academic curriculum?

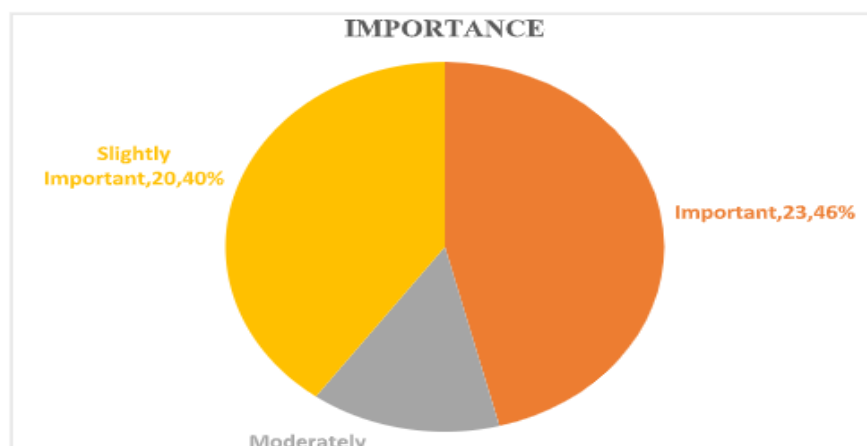


Chart 3

Chart 3 presents 46% of the students' perceiving poetry in the academic curriculum as important, while 14% and 40% perceived it as moderately and slightly important respectively. 0% perceived it as neither very important nor not important.

➤ **Question 4:** *How would you rate the difficulty of understanding poetic language?*

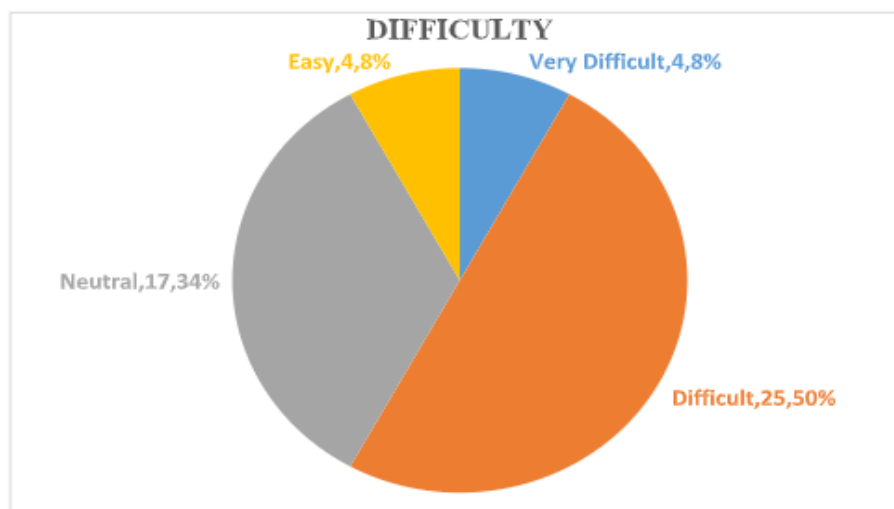


Chart 4

On the question of difficulty, 8% of students rated poetry very difficult to understand, 50% said it was difficult, while 34% were neutral. Only 8% of the students rated poetry as easy to understand.

## V. DISCUSSION

The quantitative analyses of the results indicate that concerning interest in poetry, 54% of the students showed that they had moderate to no interest at all. This agrees with the assertion of Alexander and Obiekezie (2019) that many students of institutions of higher learning show very little interest in poetry because of their negative attitude towards it. It further supports Sigvardsson's (2019) finding that even some teachers of literature entertain a strong aversion to teaching poetry. As touching the relevance of poetry, while 30% of the students chose neutral in their response, 68% did not see the relevance of poetry. It underscores Okonkwo's (2016) opinion that students just study poetry as an aspect of literature to pass exams, to be equipped with the requirement to pursue courses in other areas that interest them. As a result, most students who study poetry as a subject in schools perform poorly at it.

It is curious to note that all the students who responded to SAVPS agreed that poetry is important in the academic curriculum; 46% of the students' said it was important, 14% and 40% said it was moderately and slightly important respectively. This agrees with Babalola and Kolawale (2024: 54) that, "Poetry holds a special place in the study of language and literature, offering a unique medium through which students can explore language's artistic and expressive qualities." However, most of the students (58%) rated poetry as difficult. Their opinion aligned with Namagero' (2021:3) research finding that, "examination questions based on language of poetry are difficult." Besides, Mellgren (2022) corroborates this stance in a

research where the results showed that majority of the participants stated that structural, lexical, and semantic elements of poetry were difficult. In yet another study, Lucero, Alpahando and Estoque (2021) found that the learners had difficulty understanding the essence of poems.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Teaching poetry as a course in a tertiary institution carries with it the import of entertainment and effective instruction. Both teacher and students should enjoy the reading and writing of poetry and the analyses of selected poems to digest the meaning(s) of the contents for aesthetics and pedagogy. However, the findings of this study revealed that the NCE II students of the Department of English in the College of Education Gindri exhibited negative attitudes that need to be adjusted for them to enjoy the benefits of studying poetry.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

- The teachers of poetry should use innovative methods and approaches that are student-centred and interest boosting to teach poetry.
- Teachers of poetry should emphasise the practicality of the essence of poetry in real life so that students are able to see the relevance of the art in their lives.
- Students should be guided to realise the importance poetry as a dynamic tool, not just as a source of literary exploration, but also as a pedagogical asset in honing reading skills.
- Teachers of poetry should teach using the principle of going from simple-to-complex in their presentations of poetry to eliminate the thought of poetry as a difficult aspect of literature.



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