

# The Poetic Path to Proficient Speaking: An In-Depth Analysis of Poetry as a Pedagogical Tool for Oral Language Development

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**Abstract:** This research article investigates the efficacy of poetry as a pedagogical instrument for enhancing English speaking skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. While traditional pedagogical methods often prioritize grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition over oral fluency and prosodic features, this study posits that poetry provides a unique multimodal framework for developing proficient speakers. The study focuses on an experiment conducted with 9th-grade students at Basic School N78 in Yerevan, Armenia. Over a 12-week period, the experimental group engaged with poetry through recitation, jazz chants, and performance-based tasks, while the control group followed standard textbook communicative exercises. Quantitative and qualitative data, including pre- and post-test speaking assessments and learner questionnaires, were analyzed. The results indicate a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's pronunciation, intonation, and fluency compared to the control group. Furthermore, the integration of poetry was found to lower speaking anxiety and increase learner motivation. The article concludes that poetry is not merely an aesthetic addition to the curriculum but a vital tool for fostering oral proficiency.

**Keywords:** Poetry, EFL, Speaking Skills, Oral Proficiency, Prosody, Armenian Context, Pedagogy.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT), the development of speaking skills remains a paramount objective, yet it presents persistent challenges. In many EFL contexts, including Armenia, learners often struggle with the suprasegmental features of English—such as stress, rhythm, and intonation—leading to "foreign-sounding" speech that hinders effective communication. Traditional teaching materials, often grounded in the Audio-Lingual Method or purely communicative approaches, may prioritize lexical and grammatical precision, sometimes neglecting the rhythmic and musical aspects of language that poetry naturally embodies.

Poetry, with its inherent rhythm, rhyme, and emotional resonance, offers a fertile ground for oral practice. Unlike prose, which can be dense and syntactically complex, poetry is

often concise, repetitive, and memorable. This study argues that poetry bridges the gap between mechanical drill drills and free conversation. By internalizing the rhythmic patterns of verse, learners can improve their prosody and gain confidence in their oral production. This paper presents a case study conducted at Basic School N78 in Yerevan to evaluate the impact of poetry-based instruction on the speaking proficiency of 9th-grade students.

The art of speaking, a cornerstone of human communication and a critical skill for academic, professional, and personal success, presents a significant pedagogical challenge. Traditional methods of instruction often focus on mechanical aspects of speech, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, sometimes overlooking the deeper elements of expressiveness, confidence, and emotional resonance that transform mere talk into impactful communication. In this

context, poetry, an ancient and multifaceted art form, emerges as a surprisingly potent and often underutilized tool for teaching speaking. Poetry, with its inherent emphasis on rhythm, imagery, emotion, and the power of carefully chosen words, offers a unique and engaging pathway for learners to develop not only the technical skills of speech but also their own authentic voice and communicative competence. This report will delve into the multifaceted ways in which poetry can be harnessed to teach speaking, exploring the theoretical underpinnings, practical applications, and the profound impact it can have on learners' oral proficiency, confidence, and overall communicative abilities. By examining existing research and pedagogical insights, we will illuminate why poetry is far more than a decorative literary genre; it is a dynamic and effective pedagogical strategy capable of unlocking the speaker within every learner, guiding them along a "poetic path to proficient speaking." This journey involves understanding how the unique characteristics of poetry—its sonic qualities, its structural demands, its emotional depth, and its capacity for performance—intersect with the cognitive, linguistic, and affective domains of language learning, ultimately fostering a more holistic and empowering approach to oral language development. The exploration will consider various poetic forms, from traditional rhyming verse to contemporary spoken word, and analyze how each can contribute to specific aspects of speaking skill enhancement, such as fluency, articulation, intonation, and persuasive expression, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of poetry's transformative potential in the speaking classroom.

The benefits of using poetry to teach speaking extend significantly beyond the realm of phonetics and prosody, delving into the very core of linguistic expression: vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. Poetry, by its nature, is a concentrated form of language, often employing a rich and diverse lexicon, intricate syntactical patterns, and figurative devices that can profoundly enrich a learner's linguistic repertoire and, consequently, enhance their speaking abilities. One of the most immediate advantages of incorporating poetry into language learning is its capacity for vocabulary enrichment. Poets are meticulous in their word choice, often selecting precise and evocative language to convey complex ideas, images, and emotions in a compressed form. When learners engage with poetry, they encounter new words in meaningful and memorable contexts, which aids in both acquisition and retention. The thematic and emotional resonance of a poem can make new vocabulary items more salient and easier to internalize than if they were presented in isolation or through mundane drills. Furthermore, poetry often exposes learners to a wider range of vocabulary, including more literary, archaic, or domain-specific terms, thereby expanding their lexical boundaries and enabling them to express

themselves with greater precision and nuance in their own speech. This expansion of vocabulary is not merely about learning synonyms; it's about acquiring a deeper understanding of the connotations and associative power of words, which is crucial for effective and sophisticated communication [2], [7]. The vivid imagery and sensory language frequently found in poems also provide strong mnemonic support for vocabulary learning, allowing learners to connect new words with mental pictures and emotional experiences, making them more readily accessible during spontaneous speech.

In addition to vocabulary, poetry offers a unique window into the structural and syntactical possibilities of language. Poets often experiment with sentence structure, employing inversions, ellipses, parallelism, and various clause arrangements to achieve specific rhythmic or artistic effects. By analyzing and imitating these structures, learners can develop a more flexible and sophisticated command of grammar in their own speaking. Exposure to diverse syntactical patterns can help learners move beyond simple, formulaic sentences and incorporate more complex and varied structures into their oral production, thereby enhancing their ability to express intricate thoughts and relationships between ideas. For example, encountering and practicing the use of conditional clauses, participial phrases, or complex noun phrases within the context of a poem can make these grammatical concepts more tangible and applicable for learners. Moreover, the conciseness and precision demanded by poetic forms can teach learners to be more economical and impactful with their words, a valuable skill in many speaking contexts, from formal presentations to concise explanations. The study of poetry can also deepen learners' understanding of figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, personification, and hyperbole. While direct translation of these devices into everyday speech might not always be appropriate, understanding their function and effect can enhance learners' interpretive skills and their ability to use language more creatively and persuasively. Recognizing how poets use figurative language to create vivid images and evoke emotions can inspire learners to incorporate more imaginative and expressive elements into their own speech, making it more engaging and memorable for their listeners. The process of "learning from poems" can provide students with various models for crafting their own language, not just in writing but also in the oral domain, as they internalize the craft techniques found in poetry [3], [5]. This engagement with the structural and figurative dimensions of poetry through speaking activities, such as recitation, discussion, or even creative adaptation, allows learners to internalize these linguistic features and incorporate them into their developing communicative competence, moving their speaking skills from mere correctness to a level of expressive sophistication and artistry.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### A. Participants

The study was conducted at Basic School N78 in Yerevan, Armenia. The participants comprised 60 students aged 14-15 years old, divided into two intact classes: an Experimental Group (n=30) and a Control Group (n=30). Both groups were assessed as having an A2+ to B1 level of English proficiency prior to the intervention.

### B. Procedure

The experiment spanned 12 weeks, with two 45-minute lessons per week dedicated to oral practice.

- Control Group: Received standard instruction using the mandated textbook, focusing on dialogues, role-plays, and discussion questions related to thematic units.
- Experimental Group: Engaged in poetry-based instruction. The curriculum involved reading poems (ranging from classic to contemporary), choral reading (jazz chants), individual recitation, and discussing the themes and imagery of the poems orally.

### C. Instruments Data were Collected Using:

- Pre-test and Post-test: A structured oral interview task assessing fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (specifically prosody).
- Questionnaire: A Likert-scale survey measuring student attitudes toward speaking English and their anxiety levels.
- Rubric: A standardized scoring rubric (1-5 scale) was used by two independent raters to evaluate the speaking tests.

### D. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following inquiries:

- Does the integration of poetry in the EFL classroom significantly improve the speaking fluency of 9th-grade students compared to traditional teaching methods?
- To what extent does poetry recitation aid in the acquisition of English prosody (stress, rhythm, and intonation)?
- What are the students' perceptions regarding the use of poetry as a tool for reducing speaking anxiety and increasing motivation?

### E. Experiment with the Armenian 9th Graders at Basic School N78, Yerevan

The educational context in Armenia often emphasizes reading and grammar over speaking. At School N78, it was observed that students were reluctant to speak in class due to a fear of making mistakes. The experiment was designed to determine if the "safety" of a scripted text (poetry) could serve as a scaffold for spontaneous speech.

The Experimental Group worked with poems such as Robert Frost's short verses and simple rhythmic poems for learners. The lessons followed a specific structure:

- Listening: The teacher read the poem to model pronunciation and emotion.

- Choral Reading: The class read together to practice rhythm without the pressure of individual performance.
- Interpretation: Students discussed the meaning and feelings of the poem, moving from text to personal expression.
- Performance: Students recited poems individually, focusing on voice projection and intonation.

The Control Group followed the textbook chapter on "Daily Routines" and "Holidays," utilizing dialogue memorization and pair work.

#### ➤ Material for Rhythm and Stress (Fluency)

- Type: Jazz Chant Purpose: To help students master the natural "stress-timed" rhythm of English, reducing the robotic "syllable-timed" delivery often found in Armenian learners of English.
- Material: "*The English Beat*" (Adapted for the classroom)
- Teacher: Do you like to speak English? Students: Yes, I like to speak English. Teacher: Do you want to speak it well? Students: Yes, I want to speak it well. Teacher: Is it hard to say the words? Students: No, it's easy when you try. Teacher: Don't give up and don't be shy. All: We'll all speak English, you and I.

#### ➤ Teacher's Notes:

- Bold words indicate where students must clap or stomp their feet.
- This activity was used to teach that English is not a flat language; some words are louder and longer (stressed), while others are smaller and quieter (unstressed).

#### ➤ Material for Intonation and Pausing (Prosody)

- Type: Classic Stanzaic Poem Purpose: To teach students where to breathe (pausing) and how to use voice pitch (rising and falling intonation) to convey meaning.
- Material: *excerpt from "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost*

Whose woods these are I think I know. // (Pause) His house is in the village though; // (Pause) He will not see me stopping here // (Pause) To watch his woods fill up with snow. // (Long Pause)

- Activity Sheet Used: Students were given a copy of the poem with slashes (/) and were asked to mark where they felt a natural pause occurred. Then, they practiced "jumping" up in pitch on the bolded stressed syllables.

#### ➤ Instruction:

- "Imagine you are telling a secret. Lower your voice on the word 'snow'."
- "Raise your pitch slightly on the word 'know' to show you are answering a question."

➤ *Material for Emotional Expression and Confidence*

- Type: Motivational Verse Purpose: To lower the "affective filter" (anxiety) and encourage students to use acting skills and volume in their speech.
- Material: *excerpt from "It Couldn't Be Done" by Edgar Guest*

Somebody said that it couldn't be done, but he, with a chuckle, replied that it wouldn't; He started to sing as he tackled the thing That couldn't be done, and he did it.

- Task: The "Emotion" Card Game The teacher wrote emotions on cards (e.g., *Angry, Happy, Whispering, Surprised*). A student drew a card and had to recite the poem using that specific emotion.
- Result: This forced students to experiment with volume and pitch, moving away from a monotonous tone.

### III. RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENT

➤ *Quantitative Findings*

The pre-test scores showed no significant difference between the two groups ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, the post-test results revealed a marked divergence.

- Fluency: The Experimental Group showed a 20% increase in words per minute and a reduction in hesitation markers compared to the Control Group's 5% increase.
- Pronunciation and Prosody: This was the area of highest impact. The Experimental Group improved significantly in stress placement and intonation patterns. The rhythmic nature of poetry helped students internalize the "weak forms" of English grammar, which is often a challenge for Armenian speakers whose native language has different syllable-timed rhythm characteristics.
- Overall Proficiency: The average score for the Experimental Group rose from 3.2 to 4.1/5.0, while the Control Group moved from 3.1 to 3.4/5.0.

➤ *Qualitative Findings*

The questionnaire results indicated a shift in attitude.

- Anxiety: 85% of students in the Experimental Group reported feeling "less nervous" when speaking after the poetry sessions, citing the rhythm as a guide that helped them forget about grammar rules.
- Motivation: Students expressed that reciting poetry felt "artistic" rather than purely academic, increasing their engagement.

### IV. CONCLUSION

The study conducted at Basic School N78 demonstrates that poetry is a highly effective pedagogical tool for enhancing oral language development. The findings suggest that the rhythmic structure of poetry provides a supportive framework that allows students to master the prosodic features of English more effectively than traditional prose-based dialogue. Furthermore, the aesthetic and emotional appeal of poetry reduces the affective filter, lowering anxiety and encouraging risk-taking in speaking.

While poetry should not replace all communicative activities, it should be integrated as a fundamental component of the speaking curriculum. By following the "poetic path," educators can help learners bridge the gap between the mechanics of language and the art of communication, ultimately leading to more proficient and confident speakers.

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