

# Influential Factors Shaping Students' Attitude towards Poetry in Selected Senior Secondary Schols in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State

**Babalola, Boluwatife Zacheaus and Prof. C. O. Kolawole**

*Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of Ibadan*

## Abstract

---

*This study explores the factors influencing students' attitudes towards poetry, with a focus on poetic diction, pedagogy, and understanding of literary devices among senior secondary students. The study employed the survey design. The participants were 270 Senior Secondary II students across 10 schools in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Nigeria. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The results revealed that poetic diction strongly influences students' attitudes, particularly when the language is accessible (mean=3.06). Teaching methods, especially traditional approaches, had a moderate impact, with interactive methods seen as more effective (mea= 2.77). Comprehension difficulties also affected students' engagement, but many students retained confidence in their ability to engage with poetry (mean=2.60).The study recommends adopting more interactive, student-centred teaching strategies, simplifying complex poetic language and providing stronger support for comprehension challenges to improve students' attitudes towards poetry and enhance their overall appreciation of the literary genre.*

**Key words:** Student Attitude, Poetic diction, teaching methods, Poetry Comprehension

---

## Introduction

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 (Amjad et al., 2020). However, the reception of poetry among students, particularly at the secondary school level, often reflects a broad spectrum of attitudes (Symeonaki et al., 2021; Vala et al., 2014). For some, poetry serves as a rich source of personal expression and intellectual engagement (Dahlbäck et al., 2018), while others view it with frustration, finding it inaccessible or overly complex (Inyang, 2009). Understanding the factors that shape these attitudes is crucial for educators seeking to improve students' experiences with poetry (Boldireff & Bober, 2021). This research, carried out among senior secondary school students in Nigeria, aims to explore how specific elements such as poetic diction, teaching methods, and comprehension of literary devices influence students' attitudes towards poetry.

In the Nigerian secondary school system, poetry is an integral part of the literature syllabus (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Students are

expected to analyse a wide range of poems, focusing on themes, structure, language, and the use of figures of speech. However, despite the significant place of poetry in the curriculum, many students struggle to engage with the material in a meaningful way (Nwabueze, 2013; Ogbonnaya, 2022). Previous studies in similar contexts have suggested that several factors, including the choice of language used in poetry, the methods employed by teachers, and the students' understanding of complex literary devices, play a crucial role in shaping their attitudes (Dirgeyasa, 2017; Khoerunisa, 2021; Nwabueze, 2013). In Nigeria, where English is a second language for many students, the challenge of understanding poetic language is often heightened, making it essential to explore how these factors interact to influence student engagement.

Poetic diction, the language and style employed by poets, often presents a barrier to understanding for many students (Khoerunisa, 2021). The tendency for poetry to use metaphorical and sometimes archaic language can alienate students who may be unfamiliar with such forms of expression (Glicksohn &

Goodblatt, 2021). In the Nigerian context, where the English language itself can be a source of difficulty, the challenge is twofold: students must not only grasp the meaning of the poem but also find their way through unfamiliar linguistic choices.

Teaching methods are another significant factor that can either enhance or inhibit students' engagement with poetry. In many Nigerian classrooms, the approach to teaching poetry is often traditional, relying heavily on teacher-centred methods where students are expected to memorise and recite poems or learn their analyses by rote (Amasa & Abdulkadir, 2016; Olagundoye & Owolewa, 2019). While these methods may offer students a structured way to approach poetry, they often fail to foster genuine appreciation or deep understanding. More contemporary, student-centred teaching strategies that encourage active participation and creative interpretation could potentially transform how students engage with poetry (Ugwuozor, 2020).

Additionally, students' comprehension of figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes, and symbolism, plays a vital role in their understanding and appreciation of poetry (Rogti, 2017). Poetry often relies on these devices to convey deeper meanings and emotions, which can be challenging for students, especially when the devices are abstract or culturally distant (Syed & Wahas, 2020). In a multicultural environment like Nigeria, where students come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the ability to comprehend and interpret these figures of speech can greatly influence their overall attitude towards poetry.

Given these complexities, the purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between these influential factors and students' attitudes towards poetry. The findings will provide valuable insights into how teaching approaches, language choices, and comprehension levels can be better aligned to improve students' engagement with poetry in Nigerian secondary schools. Understanding these dynamics could inform more effective pedagogical practices and curriculum adjustments that address the specific challenges

faced by students in this context. Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to a broader understanding of how to foster a more positive attitude towards poetry among students, ensuring that it is not merely a subject to be endured, but one to be appreciated and enjoyed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research explores and analyses the factors that influence students' attitudes towards poetry, with particular focus on the effects of poetic diction, teaching methods, and comprehension of figures of speech among senior secondary school students in Abeokuta South Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria.

### **Objectives:**

#### **The study set out to:**

1. determine the extent to which poetic diction affects students' attitudes towards poetry.
2. investigate the influence of teaching methods on students' attitude towards poetry.
3. evaluate whether students' comprehension of poems affect their attitude towards poetry.

### **Research Questions:**

1. To what extent does poetic diction affect students' attitudes towards poetry?
2. Does the teaching method used influence students' engagement with poetry?
3. Does students' comprehension of poems affect their attitude towards poetry?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted the survey design, which is appropriate for investigating the influential factors shaping students' attitudes toward poetry. The population for this research comprised Senior Secondary School (SSII) students offering Literature-in-English in Abeokuta South Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. From the population, 10 schools in Abeokuta South Local Government Area were randomly selected. The purposive sampling method was used to select 270 students offering

Literature in English in intact classes. The research instrument used for data collection was Questionnaire on Factors Affecting Students' Attitude to Poetry ( $r=0.85$ ). Data collection for the study took place over a period of three weeks. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse data

across the three key sections of the study: poetic diction, teaching methods, and comprehension of figures of speech. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarise the extent to which each factor affects students' attitudes toward poetry.

## Results

Table 1: The Extent to which Diction affects Learner's Attitude towards Poetry.

S/N	ITEMS	Not at all	Little extent	Some extent	Great extent	$\bar{x}$	St.D
1	The language of poetry	15(5.6)	42(15.6)	87(32.2)	126(46.7)	3.20	0.90
2	Use of figures of speech	31(11.5)	47(17.4)	78(28.9)	114(42.2)	3.02	1.03
3	Use of rhymes	29(10.7)	60(22.2)	73(27.0)	108(40.0)	2.96	1.03
<b>Weighted Mean= 3.06 Threshold=2.50</b>							

The data shows that diction significantly impacts students' attitude towards poetry. Specifically, 46.7% of students feel that the language of poetry influences their attitude to a great extent, and 32.2% feel it influences them to some extent. The mean score for this item is 3.20, indicating a generally strong influence, supported by a relatively low standard deviation (0.90). Similarly, 42.2% of students indicate that their understanding of figures of speech affects their attitude to a great extent, with a mean score

of 3.02, showing a considerable influence, albeit with a slightly higher standard deviation (1.03). For poems with rhymes, 40.0% of students report being influenced to a great extent, with a mean score of 2.96, suggesting a moderate influence. The overall weighted mean for diction is 3.06, above the threshold of 2.50, demonstrating that diction, including poetic language, figures of speech, and rhymes, plays a key role in shaping students' attitudes towards poetry?

Table 2: The Influence of Teaching Methods on students' Attitude towards Poetry.

S/N	ITEMS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	$\bar{x}$	St.D
4	My teacher's method of teaching poetry influences my attitude towards poetry.	51(18.9)	40(14.8)	52(19.3)	127(47.0)	2.94	1.17
5	My teacher makes poetry accessible which influences my view towards poetry	41(15.2)	49(18.1)	92(34.1)	88(32.6)	2.84	1.05
6	My teacher's explanation on poetic devices has played a great role in my appreciation of poetry.	45(16.7)	93(34.4)	104(38.5)	28(10.4)	2.43	0.89
7	The learning environment created by my teacher affects my attitude towards poetry.	43(15.9)	57(21.1)	63(23.3)	107(39.6)	2.87	1.11
<b>Weighted Mean= 2.77 Threshold=2.50</b>							

The influence of teaching methods on students' attitude towards poetry appears moderate based on the responses. 47.0% of students strongly disagree that their teacher's method positively affects their attitude, yielding a mean score of 2.94. This suggests that teaching methods do not strongly influence all students, as the standard deviation of 1.17 reflects a wide range of responses. Regarding the accessibility of poetry, 32.6% strongly disagree that it influences their view, while 34.1% disagree, with a mean score

of 2.84 and a standard deviation of 1.05. Interestingly, 38.5% of students disagree that their teacher's explanation of poetic devices has a significant effect on their appreciation, with a lower mean of 2.43 and a standard deviation of 0.89. The weighted mean for teaching methods is 2.77, indicating that while there is some influence, the effect of teaching methods on students' attitudes is not overwhelmingly positive?

**Table 3:** Comprehension of Poems and Attitude towards Poetry

S/N	ITEMS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	$\bar{x}$	St.D
8	I find interpreting poetry difficult, which affects my attitude towards it.	43(15.9)	63(23.3)	98(36.3)	66(24.4)	2.69	1.01
9	Analysing poems gives me a lot of mental stress	68(25.2)	88(32.6)	78(28.9)	36(13.3)	2.30	0.99
10	I have much confidence attempting poetry questions	70(25.9)	97(35.9)	82(30.4)	21(7.8)	2.80	0.92
<b>Weighted Mean= 2.60 Threshold=2.50</b>							

Comprehension also plays a significant role in shaping students' attitudes. 36.3% of students report that they disagree with the statement that difficulty in interpretation affects their attitude towards poetry, with a mean score of 2.69 and a standard deviation of 1.01. When asked if analysing poems causes mental stress, 32.6% agreed, but 28.9% disagreed, producing a mean score of 2.30, which reflects that comprehension may cause moderate stress for some students. The overall weighted mean for comprehension is 2.60, slightly above the threshold, suggesting that comprehension difficulties moderately affect students' attitudes, but do not overwhelmingly discourage them?

### Discussion of Findings

#### Diction and Students' Attitude towards Poetry

The significant role of diction, particularly the complexity and clarity of language in poetry, aligns with prior research. For instance, Mittal (2016) underscores the

importance of linguistic clarity in engaging students. This study similarly found that students are more inclined to enjoy poetry when the language is accessible. Similarly, Inyang (2009) also highlight that the difficulty of poetic diction often alienates students from engaging with poetry, reinforcing the idea that language complexity can hinder positive attitudes.

However, the emphasis on understanding figures of speech diverges from some earlier studies. While the current findings show that students' ability to comprehend figures of speech contributes to their positive attitudes, researchers like Fakeye & Amao (2013) have focused more on thematic clarity in addition to figurative language as a determinant of engagement. Fakeye & Amao (2013) suggests that students are more concerned with the themes of poems, rather than just with their stylistic devices, a perspective that slightly contrasts with the current findings that place considerable emphasis on diction as a whole, including figures of speech.

### **Teaching Methods and Students' Attitude towards Poetry**

The influence of teaching methods on students' engagement with poetry is a topic where the current findings both corroborate and challenge existing literature. Studies such as Hahn & Ortolano (2021) advocate for the use of more interactive, student-centred teaching methods to improve engagement with complex literary forms like poetry. The current study's moderate findings on teaching methods echo their conclusions, suggesting that the more passive, traditional methods currently in use are not as effective in fostering a positive attitude towards poetry.

However, contrasting views arise from research like Yang et al. (2013), which argues that technology-enhanced teaching and multimedia resources significantly improve students' engagement with poetry. While the current study does not delve deeply into technological interventions, it does suggest that even improvements in teacher explanations and classroom environment could enhance student engagement, challenging the notion that only cutting-edge technologies can spark student interest. This supports the argument by Pianta (2019), who emphasised the importance of clear teacher-student interaction over sophisticated teaching tools, highlighting that fundamental improvements in pedagogy can be just as impactful.

### **Comprehension of Poems and Students' Attitude towards Poetry**

Comprehension difficulties emerged as a key factor influencing students' attitudes towards poetry, which is consistent with a broad body of literature. Abidin & Wai (2020) pointed out that the abstract themes and dense language typical of poetry can lead to student frustration, and this study found similar issues. The difficulty of interpreting poems was a significant barrier for students, corroborating Abidin & Wai (2020) view that comprehension challenges often cause students to disengage from the genre.

Contrary perspectives, however, arise from research by Yang (2012), which found that with cross-text annotation sharing mechanism, students could overcome comprehension difficulties and develop a stronger interest in poetry. The current study reflects this to some extent, as many students expressed confidence in engaging with poetry despite interpretation challenges. This contrasts with later findings, such as Faniran and Faniran (2018) work, which suggested that comprehension barriers typically lead to total disengagement. The present study highlights a more resilient approach from students, suggesting that support structures—whether in the form of peer discussions, simplified texts, or teacher guidance—help maintain student interest even when comprehension is difficult.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research has provided valuable insights into the factors that influence students' attitudes towards poetry, with a focus on diction, teaching methods, and comprehension. The findings present the significant role that poetic diction plays in shaping student engagement. When the language of poetry is accessible, students exhibit a more positive attitude, a finding that aligns with much of the existing literature. However, the complexity of poetic devices, such as figures of speech and rhyme schemes, also emerged as key influences, suggesting that students are more likely to appreciate poetry when these elements are taught effectively.

The study also revealed that current teaching methods, particularly traditional, teacher-centred approaches, are not sufficient in fostering widespread positive attitudes towards poetry. This highlights the need for more innovative and interactive teaching strategies that prioritise student engagement and understanding. While technological interventions may enhance learning, this study points to the critical importance of clear explanations and a supportive classroom environment.

Comprehension difficulties remain a notable barrier to student engagement with poetry. However, this research introduces a more optimistic view, as many students expressed confidence in their ability to tackle poetry despite these challenges. This suggests that with appropriate instructional support and scaffolding, students can overcome comprehension barriers and maintain a positive attitude towards poetry.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the need for a multifaceted approach to poetry education—one that balances linguistic accessibility, effective teaching methods, and support for comprehension. By addressing these factors, educators can create a more engaging and positive learning experience for students, fostering a deeper appreciation for poetry.

## References

- Abidin, H.Z., & Wai, L.T. (2020). Learning poetry: Attitudes and challenges faced by ESL students. *LSP International Journal*, 7(2), 55-69. <https://doi.org/10.11113/lspi.v7.16343>
- Amasa, B. S., & Abdulkadir, I. A. (2016). Teaching of poetry to Nigerian ESL learners: A stylistics approach. *Ilorin Journal of Humanities (IJOH)*, 9(14). Retrieved from [https://kwaracails.edu.ng/ijoh/papers/2016/teaching\\_of\\_poetry\\_to\\_nigeria\\_esl\\_learners\\_stylistics\\_approach.pdf](https://kwaracails.edu.ng/ijoh/papers/2016/teaching_of_poetry_to_nigeria_esl_learners_stylistics_approach.pdf) on 9 October 2024.
- Amjad, M., Ajmal, M., Rubab, I., & Naseer, A. (2020). Teaching English poetry through parallelism and deviation for improving students' interpretative skills. *Critical Review*, 7(13), 330. <https://doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.13.330>
- Beach, R. (1993). *A teacher's introduction to reader-response theories*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Boldireff, A., & Bober, C. (2021). Reconsidering poetry's difficulty and value in English as a second language and English as a foreign language education: A systematic review. *Pedagogical Linguistics*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.1075/pl.20012.bol>
- Browne, S., Chen, X., Baroudi, F., & Sevinc, E. (2021). *Reader response theory*. Oxford Bibliographies. <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780190221911-0107>
- Dahlbäck, K., Lyngfelt, A., & Katz, V. (2018). Views of poetry as a competence expressed by students in teacher education. *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum*, 15, 101. <https://doi.org/10.12775/ths.2018.008>
- Dirgeyasa, I. (2017). The effort to increase students' achievement in poetry mastery through the semiotic method. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8, 104. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.1p.104>
- Fakeye, D. O., & Amao, T. A. (2013). Enhancing poetic literature instruction through stylistic and thematic approaches. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 6(2), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320130602.3129>
- Faniran, A. O., & Faniran, O. A. (2018). Lexical abstractness and other factors in the comprehension and appreciation of poetry in English. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 5(4). <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijll.v5n4p24>
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2004). *National Policy on Education (4th ed)*. Lagos. NERDC Press.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is There a Text in This Class?* Harvard University Press.
- Glicksohn, J., & Goodblatt, C. (2021). Empirical studies of poetic metaphor. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110645958-006>
- Hahn, A., & Ortolano, J. (2021). The poetry box: A student-centered constructivist approach to poetry lessons in secondary education. *Journal of Educational Research and Review*, 4(4), 12-25.
- Inyang, G. B. (2009). Linguistic-stylistic technique and the effective teaching and learning of poetry in Nigerian senior secondary schools. *African Research Review*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrr.v3i2.43608>

- Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kamala, R., & Abdul Aziz, A. (2021). The use of collaborative learning to develop students' guided writing and oral performance in poetry. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11, 91-108. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i2/8438>
- Khoerunisa, I. (2021). An analysis of students' difficulties in translating poetry. *English Education and Applied Linguistics Journal (EEAL Journal)*, 4, 71-75. <https://doi.org/10.31980/eealjournal.v4i1.1117>
- Kunjanman, S., & Abdul Aziz, A. (2021). Reader-response theory: A systematic literature review. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 6, 252-260. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v6i4.747>
- Littlemore, J., Chen, P., Koester, A., & Barnden, J. (2011). Difficulties in metaphor comprehension faced by international students whose first language is not English. *Applied Linguistics*, 32, 408-429. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amr009>
- Mart, C. (2019). Reader-response theory and literature discussions: A springboard for exploring literary texts. *The New Educational Review*, 56, 78-87. <https://doi.org/10.15804/ner.19.56.2.06>
- Mittal, R. (2016). Poetry is language at its most distilled and powerful: Bringing poetry in language classes can make language understanding and communication skills better. *Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 4, 52-56. <https://doi.org/10.13189/lls.2016.040108>
- Nwabueze, I. (2013). A critical look at the teacher factor in senior secondary school students' poetic appreciation skills development. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3, 222-232. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.222-232>
- Obasi, J. (2018). Structural irregularities within the English language: Implications for teaching and learning in second language. *Journal of English as International Language*, 13, 1-14. <http://www.eilj.com>
- Ogbonnaya, I. (2022). Senior secondary school students' perception towards the study of poetry in Agbani Education Zone, Enugu State. *African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies*, 6, May-August. <https://ajemates.org>
- Olagundoye, O., & Owolewa, O. (2019). Comparative effects of lyrical, discussion, and traditional methods of teaching poetry in Nigerian secondary schools. *MJALE*, 2, 216-222.
- Pianta, R. C. (2019). Teacher-student interactions: Measurement, impacts, improvement, and policy. *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica*, 75-93. <https://doi.org/10.3280/RIP2019-001005>
- Rahman, N. (2023). Students' problem to interpret metaphor in poems. *Journal of English Teaching and Linguistics Studies (JET Li)*, 5, 84-91. <https://doi.org/10.55215/jetli.v5i2.7224>
- Rogti, M. (2017). Understanding, appreciating and teaching poetry. *Journal of English Language and Literature*, 8, 1-3.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1976). *Literature as exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association of America.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1985). *Viewpoints: Transaction versus interaction: A terminological rescue operation*. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 96-107.
- Syed, A. J. A., & Wahas, Y. M. A. (2020). Challenges and solutions in teaching English through poetry to EFL students at Hajjah University: A case study of William Wordsworth's Lucy and John Donne's Death poems. *rEFLECTIONS*, 27(2), July-December.
- Symeonaki, A., Symeonaki, M., & Kazani, A. (2021). Measuring students' attitude towards poetry. *Addaiyan Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2, 178-188.

- Turner, E. (2020). An investigation into students' attitudes towards the value of poetry and their knowledge of poetry analysis. *Lund Journal of English Studies*, 1, 58-92. <https://doi.org/10.48148/ljes.v1i.22275>
- Ugwuozor, F. (2020). Constructivism as pedagogical framework and poetry learning outcomes among Nigerian students: An experimental study. *Cogent Education*, 7, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1818410>
- Vala, J., Sladová, J., Řeřichová, V., & Fic, I. (2014). The changes in the attitudes towards poetry in the class (14-15 years old) thanks to experimental teaching methods. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 3811-3815. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.846>
- Yang, C.-C & Tseng, S.s & Liang, T. (2012). A cross-text annotation sharing mechanism for enhancing students' comprehension of poetry. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*. 11. 13-24.
- Yang, C.-C., Tseng, S. S., Liao, A., & Liang, T. (2013). Situated poetry learning using multimedia resource sharing approach. *Educational Technology and Society*, 16, 282-295.