

From poetry out loud to thinking out loud: The ESL students' experience

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ABSTRACT

Public speaking apprehension can detrimentally affect academic performance, attendance, participation, and motivation. This study investigates into the formidable challenge of public speaking anxiety (PSA) among students during oral presentations and proposes an innovative solution through the utilisation of Poetry Out Loud activities. Two interventions were executed with ESL learners and the researchers used qualitative methods to deduce the result. The initial phase involved the collective reading of a poetry compilation, fostering a shared experience. Subsequently, students engaged with the "Hello Poetry" website, selecting and practicing poems in pairs to refine expressive delivery. The culmination consisted of creative video presentations of their chosen poems. Once the completed the activities, they were given an open-ended survey. The study uncovers that Poetry Out Loud activities positively influence students' speaking skills. These findings underscore the efficacy of communal poem reading and interactive recitation in bolstering confidence, oral proficiency, and reading fluency. Implications point toward the importance of innovative strategies to mitigate PSA-related challenges and nurture essential public speaking aptitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking in public may be an uncomfortable and distressing experience for college and university students. However, speaking well in public is an indispensable skill for college and university students. Although it may make all of us feel this way, public speaking skills in our daily life are still something that we need throughout our lives and careers. (Mora, Coyle & López, 2020). Moreover, students who speak well tend to excel in extracurricular activities, athletics, and social clubs, and they get better job opportunities (Boyce

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et al., 2017). Nowadays in college and in the workplace, individual and group presentations have become mandatory. One benefit that demonstrates the importance of public speaking among learners is that it helps them face their fears. The repeated practice of speaking in front of a large audience is how to develop confidence in public speaking. In this project, effective public speaking is something the researchers try to prioritize with students, despite their fear. A study shows that 75% of students admitted their fear of public speaking, and 95% of them agreed that if proper counseling, instruction, and coaching are provided, this fear can be overcome (Raja, 2017). In agreement with the research results, Asine (2022) stated that people are often afraid to speak in front of a group, but they can overcome those fears by practicing and getting comfortable with public speaking. Even with much evidence that proves 'practice makes perfect' circumstances, unfortunately, most schools do not teach public speaking to students.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

When it comes to oral presentations, many of our students seem to have public speaking anxiety (PSA), a communication-based agony resulting in physiological arousal (e.g., increased heart rate, trembling, and negative self-esteem). PSA can negatively affect grades and attendance and can have quelling effects on student participation and motivation. The prospect of standing in front of peers and holding forth on an academic topic for longer than two seconds is frightening to many students, especially in English language classrooms. However, while speaking is considered essential, it tends to get ignored in the full-to-overflowing language arts curriculum (Boyce et al. , 2017) Therefore, the purpose of this research was to engage in poetry out-loud activities to develop public speaking skills.

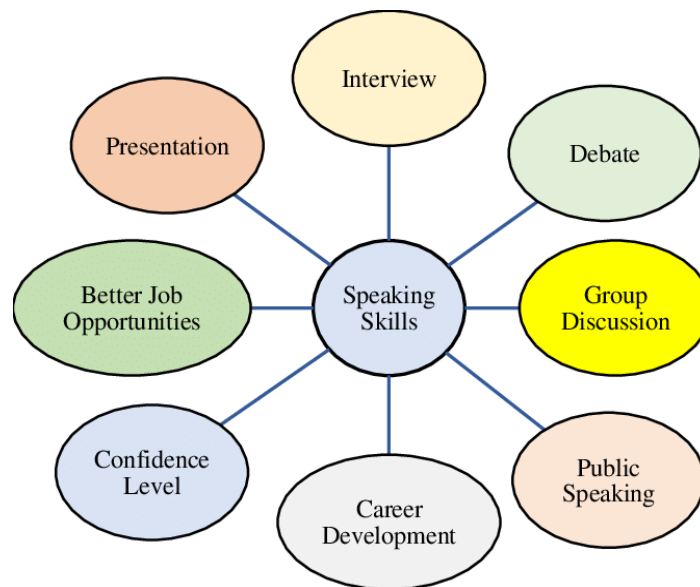


Fig. 1. The importance of speaking skills

Source of Figure 1: Ramalingam, Khasturi, Yeo, and Adnan (2022)

Figure 1 highlights that one can acquire speaking skills, and one can prepare and ace himself for a job interview, debate, group discussion, public speaking, career development, confidence level, better job opportunities, and presentation. By introducing Poetry Out Loud activities in ESL classrooms, researchers

hoped to build on the recent resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as demonstrated by the slam poetry movement and the immense popularity of rap music among our youth. The program encourages students, through the study of poetry, to master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and internalise learners' rich literary heritage. In the current research, the researchers designed an educational programme that encouraged the study of great poetry by offering free educational materials and a dynamic inter-class recitation competition.

This programme helped students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about literary history and contemporary life. While the value and importance of helping adolescents learn the art of public speaking is clear, it can be a difficult subject to teach. However, this study has justified how public speaking skills could be interwoven with poetry analysis by participating in the poetry out-loud programme. In the current research, the researchers introduced poetry-out-loud activities to ESL Diploma students studying a language proficiency course in a public university.

OBJECTIVES OF USING POETRY IN ESL CLASSROOM

The objectives are as the followings:

1. To investigate whether participation in poetry out loud activities contributes to a measurable improvement in participants' speaking skills.
2. To examine whether the poetry-out-loud activities lead to enhanced pronunciation and intonation skills among participants.
3. To analyse whether poetry out loud activities have a positive effect on participants' vocabulary acquisition and their overall speaking confidence.

The study also addressed three Research Questions:

1. Will poetry out loud activity help you to improve your speaking skill?
2. Will poetry out loud activity help you to improve your pronunciation and intonation?
3. Will poetry out loud activity help to improve your vocabulary and build your speaking confidence?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) theory offers a robust framework for investigating the transformative potential of poetry-out-loud activities in bolstering the public speaking skills of ESL learners (Turan, 2015; Alghamdi, 2021; Jaipetch, 2012; Doeur, 2022). At the heart of CLT lies the principle that language learning is most effective when rooted in meaningful communication (Alghamdi, 2021). The pedagogical philosophy of CLT underscores the significance of authentic language use, interaction, and contextually relevant learning experiences (Turan, 2015). This framework seeks to leverage these principles to explore the diverse ways in which ESL learners' responses to poetry-out-loud activities can significantly enhance their public speaking capabilities.

CLT's emphasis on interactive language learning aligns harmoniously with the immersive nature of poetry-out-loud activities (Jaipetch, 2012). Through recitation, performance, and interpretation of poems, learners engage in a genuine communication process that extends beyond the confines of textbooks and exercises (Alghamdi, 2021). The interactive aspect of CLT allows ESL learners to not only refine their spoken language abilities but also cultivate the art of expression and engagement. By participating in the rhythmic cadence, varied intonations, and emotional depth of poetry, learners become active contributors

to the classroom discourse, nurturing a communicative competence that extends beyond language mechanics.

The poetry-out-loud activities, seamlessly woven into the CLT framework, cater to the development of language fluency and accuracy (Doeur, 2022). CLT's recognition of the interplay between these two aspects of language proficiency finds resonance in the deliberate practice of pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation during poetry recitations (Turan, 2015). Moreover, the contextualization of language use within the emotional and cultural tapestry of poetry enhances learners' grasp of nuanced expression and helps overcome barriers often encountered in traditional language instruction. This heightened contextual awareness dovetails with CLT's emphasis on fostering communication skills that transcend rote grammar application.

In line with CLT's collaborative learning ethos, poetry-out-loud activities provide fertile ground for peer-driven engagement (Jaipetch, 2012). The communal exploration of poems, joint analysis of poetic elements, and shared reflections on personal interpretations nurture a collaborative spirit that resonates with CLT's emphasis on interactive and cooperative learning. The dynamic exchange of ideas and feedback mirrors real-life language use, preparing learners not only for confident public speaking but also for effective interpersonal communication. Figure 2 shows that students come to class with speaking anxiety. Later, the researcher introduced poetry-out-loud to reduce their speaking anxiety and promote their speaking skills.

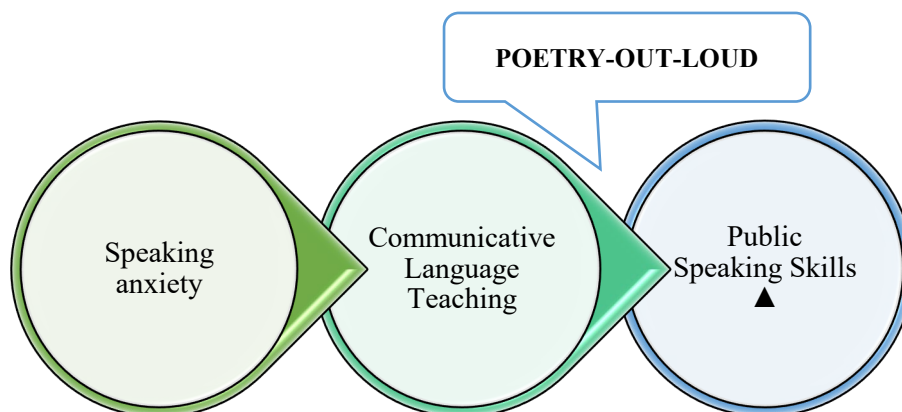


Fig. 2. Theoretical Framework

Source by author's collection

Thus, the symbiotic amalgamation of poetry-out-loud activities and the principles of Communicative Language Teaching propels ESL learners beyond the confines of traditional language instruction (Turan, 2015; Alghamdi, 2021; Jaipetch, 2012; Doeur, 2022). By embracing active engagement, fostering language fluency and accuracy, promoting collaborative learning, and nurturing contextual understanding, this theoretical framework seeks to uncover the transformative potential of poetry recitation in honing the public speaking skills of ESL learners within the dynamic framework of CLT. The figure below is the conceptual framework of the study.

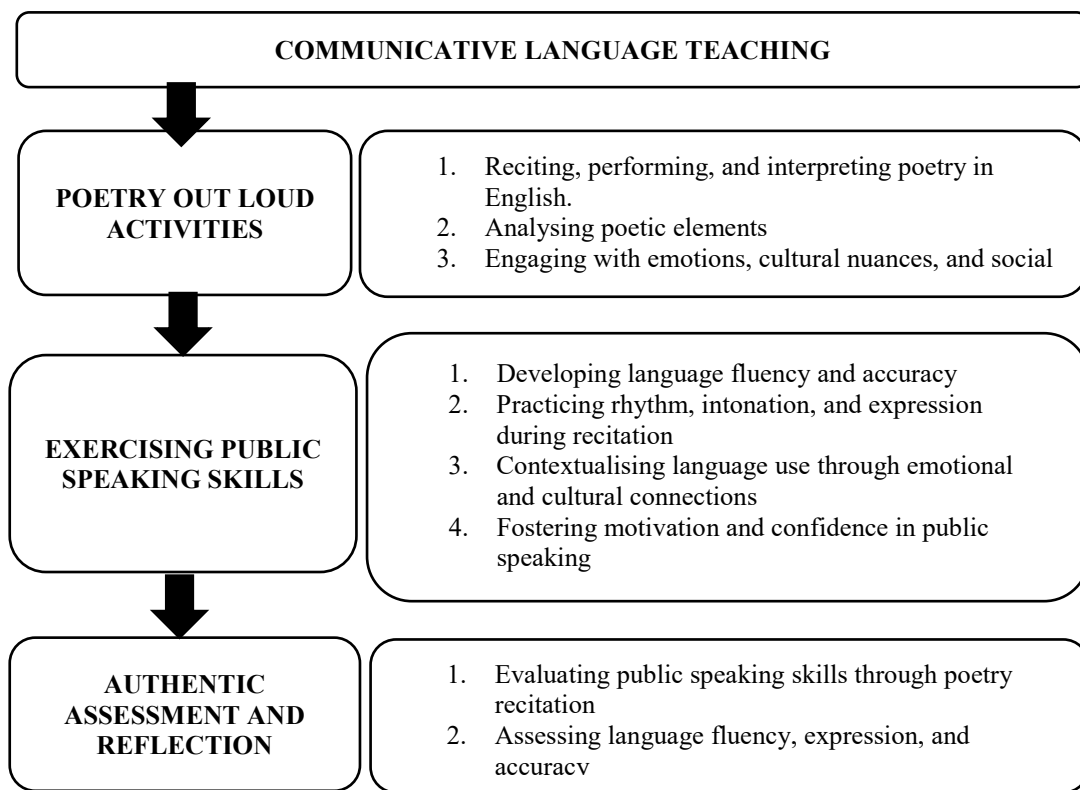


Fig. 3. The Conceptual Framework

Source by author's collection

This conceptual framework visually represents how the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) guide the use of poetry out loud activities to enhance ESL learners' public speaking skills.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Several studies have explored the use of communicative language teaching activities, such as poetry out loud, for enhancing ESL learners' public speaking skills. Turan (2015) examines the effectiveness of task-based learning, a communicative alternative, for EFL teachers and learners. In this study, Turan (2015) found that task-based learning can be an effective approach for promoting communication and public speaking skills in ESL learners. Additionally, Alghamdi (2021) investigated the impact of EFL teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, specifically focusing on communicative language teaching, in a Saudi university context. According to this study, the use of communicative language teaching in the classroom can positively impact ESL learners' public speaking skills. Furthermore, Jaipetch (2012) explores Thai EFL university teachers' beliefs about communicative language teaching. The findings of the study suggest that Thai EFL university teachers hold positive beliefs about communicative language teaching and recognise its potential in developing students' communication skills, including public speaking. In another study by Doeur (2022), the attitudes of Cambodian EFL teachers towards communicative language teaching were

investigated. This study found that Cambodian EFL teachers generally held positive attitudes towards communicative language teaching and recognised its potential in improving students' language.

THE INCLUSION OF LITERATURE COMPONENT IN ESL CLASSROOMS

In Malaysia, literature as a component of the English Language subject was implemented in all government secondary schools in 2000. Accordingly, literature components were also included at tertiary level. The introduction of the literature component aims to inculcate the elements of literature into language teaching and to foster the habit of reading materials and sources in the English Language. The integration of literature in English language teaching does not only make pedagogic exchanges more stimulating and also unlocks opportunities for language acquisition, but it also promotes authentic materials that help upsurge language skills and encompasses linguistic knowledge (Burhanuddin & Kaharuddin, 2019; Rabb Khan & Alasmari, 2018). Furthermore, a study found that literary exploration could be used to improve the effectiveness of language learning programmes and gave some benefits in the classroom (Van, 2009). Thus, literature is as a language enrichment in the classroom which provides learners with a wide range of individual lexical or syntactic items. Students become familiar with many features of the written language, reading a substantial and contextualised body of text.

POETRY IN ESL CLASSROOM

Among the literary genres used in language teaching is poetry. Poetry is one of the main genres of the literature component that uses beauty, strong patterns of sounds, words, and qualities of language, giving delight to the students in a classroom with its rhythm, rhyme scheme, and musicality. Poetry provides a rich, varied repertoire and source of enjoyment for learners (Brumfit & Carter, 2000). In ESL classrooms, poems become favorite tools for language teachers due to their short length, perfectly suitable for a single classroom lesson, their peculiar structure, and their linguistic characteristic features. The meaningful character of poetry, its imagery, its influence on feelings, and personal experience make it very fascinating and entertaining for second/foreign language learners (Llach, 2007). The fact that poetry differs from normal language that has some eccentric ways of ordering words, imaginative meanings to words, or combines sounds in a musical, non-ordinary way and style variation makes poetry significant and beneficial in the language classroom. As language lecturers, researchers have exploited the deviancies of the poetic language to arise the language awareness of the learners towards how language can be adapted or changed to fulfil different communicative purposes and, in this study, to overcome the fear of public speaking and improve public speaking skill.

Poetry has been used in teaching and learning English in the classroom. Many educators have attempted to deal with poetry in the ESL classroom. Reading poetry aloud is a great way for English Language Learners to practice pronunciation and fluency, as well as a chance for students to play with rhymes and language. Through Poetry out Loud activity, oral communication of students can be enhanced effectively. Thus, a teacher can motivate the students by using poems and instill in them the confidence to speak English better.

In addition, the inclusion of poetry in the Malaysian English language curriculum provides the platform for the growth of literature in Malaysian schools thus preparing students for higher-level literary understanding and enabling them to proceed to higher levels of literary appreciation. Gaining literary skills will also assist the students in achieving better results in the English Language prerequisite examination such as the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). Hence, the general aims of teaching literature as a component outlined by the Curriculum Development Centre (2000) are as below:

- To instil and inculcate the reading habit among pupils
- To enrich pupils' vocabulary and language content

- To enhance pupils' thinking skills.
- To promote cultural understanding in the Malaysian context
- To improve language proficiency of pupils
- To provide lively, enjoyable, and high-interest readings

Poems can make wonderful class presentations, whether students read different poems from a collection aloud, act out a longer dramatic poem, or take turns reading a rhyming text. In this study, the researchers introduced a program called Poetry Out Loud in which students presented poems from a Hello Poetry website and a book of poetry called *From the Heart: The Colors of Love* in their English classrooms. The poems which were written by Saad (2011). The book has many poems which are rhythmic and contemporary in genre which are captivating to the students. Students recited the poem of their choice. Simple costumes, music and a backdrop were used for the presentation. This demonstrates that poetry doesn't have to be complicated to be effective and even simple poems can be engaging to the students.

POETRY OUT LOUD ACTIVITIES CAN ENHANCE SPEAKING CONFIDENCE

Poetry as a way to develop students' literacy competence has some benefits in ESL classrooms. According to Panavelli (2011), two essential benefits of poetry in ESL classroom are firstly, it can be used as a valuable resource to introduce and practice the language by exposing students to authentic models, real language in a context which can develop their language skills and secondly, it provides students with an opportunity to enrich their vocabulary in a new way by offering meaningful context which can be used and remembered effectively. Moreover, Rachmatia (2015) indicates two significant advantages of using poetry in the classroom is it brightens and gives vigor and excitement to the classroom atmosphere as it encourages students' communication. In addition, poetry is an abundant source of reading materials and a vibrant example of creative language since it deals with various items in context as well it draws students' attention to intonation, stress, rhyme, rhythm, and pronunciation (Kellem, 2009). Also, through poetry teachers can teach the language areas such as grammar, vocabulary, and intonation. In similar vein, Mittal (2014) suggested that using poetry in the language classroom could enhance interaction and communication among peers or groups of students. While teachers played the role to facilitate the activity with poetry, students interacted about the potential explanations of the poems, which encouraged learners to communicate without fear of making mistakes as well as fosters their fluency and accuracy. Moreover, since poetry consists of unique features like rhyme, rhythm, and pitch, reading poetry aloud fosters students' self-esteem as well as helps them to express their feelings freely. Hence, through poetry out loud activities, students can build a positive attitude and confidence towards the target language.

In this study, in order to increase students' confidence and fluency, students had to start by reading some poems from the prescribed Hello Poetry website and a poetry book together as a class. The rationale for the researchers to use the prescribed poems was to ensure the poems selected were appropriate in length and of the level of students' comprehension. In the activity, the selection of the poems is the most important thing in teaching poetry because it influences the students' reactions, perceptions, and motivation in learning poetry, especially for the ESL learners.

Then students chose a poem that they enjoyed and then practised reading their poems aloud in pairs, experimenting with expression, volume, and speed. After students had had time to practice, teachers listened in and offered some feedback on expression and pronunciation. Once students had one more round of practice, the teacher asked students to share their poems aloud with the class. Reilly (2012) highlighted that poetry has a crucial role in increasing students' pronunciation and vocabulary. She also indicated that reading poetry out loud helped learners to increase their knowledge about other language aspects such as semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. Moreover, poetry can serve as a good tool for teaching and learning vocabulary because learning vocabulary in context helps students to understand the meanings of sentences

and their semantic and linguistic functions. Imagine teaching lists of vocabulary in isolation as in the traditional way will only lead students to be passive learners.

METHODOLOGY

The research employs a qualitative research design. The investigation centres around the "POETRY OUT LOUD" educational initiative, which aims to foster an appreciation for esteemed poetry by providing complimentary educational resources and facilitating vibrant recitations among a cohort of 32 Diploma students within a local university. Employing a convenience sampling method, participants were chosen based on their accessibility and immediate availability within the researcher's academic environment. The intervention encompassed a four-week duration, wherein students were immersed in activities centred around poetry as a component of their English language curriculum. Preceding the "Poetry out Loud" engagement, students received instruction on fundamental aspects of English poetry, including stanzaic structures, rhythmic patterns, rhyme schemes, metrical lines, poetic feet, punctuation, and figurative language. Prior to the intervention, students were briefed on the programme's objectives, which encompassed enhancing public speaking prowess, fostering self-assurance, and nurturing an understanding of both literary heritage and contemporary existence. Once these activities were completed, the students were given an open-ended survey to obtain their responses towards the activities conducted. From these data, researchers have obtained themes based on thematic analysis. Each of the results is based on the research questions. Thus, each theme reflects the research questions accordingly.

THE STAGES TO PUBLIC SPEAKING THROUGH POETRY OUT LOUD ACTIVITIES

In order for the researchers to retrieve the respondents' responses, the students need to have to go through several stages of poetry out loud. It was a class project that required students to read and recite poems. There were a few stages to poetry out loud activities. The stages are displayed in Table 1 below

:

Table 1. Stages for Activities Conducted

STAGES	ACTIVITIES
Stage 1	Students trek down to the lecturer's poetry website called Hello Poetry to have a look at the anthology of poems published online. https://hellopoetry.com/sharina-saad/ to select a poem of at least 100 words that elicits an emotional response.
Stage 2	Students were also given an option to search for a poem from a poetry book written by their lecturer entitled: From the Heart the Colours of Love.
Stage 3	Students generally have two weeks to work on practicing and video recording their poems presentation on their own time.
Stage 4	During these weeks, the in- class curriculum is a mix of poetry analysis and the development of public speaking skills.
Stage 5	The speech lessons require students to work in small groups and to make presentations.
Stage 6	The lecturer offers feedback to students on the quality of their physical presence, voice, pronunciation, rate of speech, and pacing skills.
Stage 7	Top 5 presenters will be announced as best poem recitation award.
Stage 8	Students are encouraged to give feedback on their POL project in a survey form given.

Source by author's collection

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

RQ 1 - Will Poetry out loud activity help you to improve your speaking skill?

At the end of the project, students answered a short survey consisting of three open-ended questions. The themes mined from the survey are:

Table 2. Themes for Research Question 1

THEMES	
Improve speaking skills	Public speaking development
Pronunciation improvement	Sense of emotions and meaning
Intonation practice	Exposure to new words
Vocabulary enhancement	Stepping out of comfort zone
Confidence building	Body language and relaxation
Exploration of vocal range	Public speaking development

Source by author's finding

Based on Table 2, there are 12 themes derived from the thematic analysis. The research question, "Will Poetry Out Loud activity help you improve your speaking skills?" focuses on the potential benefits of participating in poetry out loud activities (Alghamdi, 2021). Engaging in poetry out loud activities can be an effective means of enhancing various aspects of speaking skills and personal growth. This activity encompasses several elements, such as pronunciation improvement, intonation practice, vocabulary enhancement, confidence building, exploration of vocal range, public speaking development, sense of emotions and meaning, exposure to new words, stepping out of comfort zones, and understanding body language and relaxation techniques. By participating in Poetry Out Loud activities, individuals can experience improvements in these areas, leading to a more well-rounded and polished speaking ability. The findings were paralleled with Mittal (2014) who suggested that the activities would encourage students to interact without the fear of making mistakes. This conclusion suggested that Poetry Out Loud can be a valuable tool for individuals seeking to develop and refine their speaking skills.

RQ 2 - Will Poetry out loud activity help you to improve your pronunciation and intonation?

Table 3. Themes for Research Question 2

THEMES
Enjoyable activity
Pronunciation
Intonation
Confidence building

Source by author's data collection.

In Table 3, enjoyable activity, pronunciation, intonation and confidence building are the themes retrieved from the responses. The incorporation of poetry into language learning has been found to offer a comprehensive approach to enhancing pronunciation, intonation, and confidence. These findings collectively suggest that poetry out loud activities provide a valuable tool for learners to refine their pronunciation, intonation, and ultimately build confidence in expressing themselves in the target language. The finding corroborated with Mittal (2014) reading poetry aloud fosters students' self-esteem as well as helps them to express their feelings freely. The result was also in agreement with Reilly (2012) who highlighted that poetry has a crucial role in increasing students' pronunciation and vocabulary.

RQ 3 -Will Poetry Out Loud improve your vocabulary and build your confidence?

Table 4. Themes for Research Question 3

THEMES
Vocabulary Improvement
Confidence Building

Source by author's data collection

Based on the responses provided by the students, it was evident that Poetry Out Loud has a positive impact on both vocabulary improvement and confidence building. These responses collectively demonstrate the correlation between Poetry Out Loud and language skills, as well as the role it plays in fostering self-assurance. By engaging in Poetry Out Loud, students not only expand their vocabulary repertoire but also develop the necessary confidence to communicate effectively in public settings. The findings were aligned with Panavelli (2011), Rachmatia (2015) and Kellem (2009) statements about students' activities with poetry can enhance vocabulary and speaking confidence.

CONCLUSION

The result showed Poetry Out-Loud helped students to acquire self-confidence to express, respond and polish their thinking skills while using the target language (Collie & Slater, 2001). Out loud poetry is the tool to help students achieve their language proficiency and build confidence to face the audience. It allows teachers to use innovative and effective methods and activities, provides an interactive circumstance which can prove communication competence of the learners.

Based on the results, it is evident that engaging in Poetry Out Loud activities can have a profound impact on various aspects of language learning and personal growth. The incorporation of poetry into language learning provides a comprehensive approach to enhancing pronunciation, intonation, and confidence. By reciting and performing poems, learners are actively practising and refining their pronunciation skills, paying close attention to the sounds and rhythms of words. This heightened focus on pronunciation not only improves the clarity of their speech but also helps them develop a more natural and fluent delivery.

Furthermore, Poetry Out Loud activities offer ample opportunities for learners to practice intonation and explore the expressive potential of their voices. By reciting poems with different moods, themes, and tones, learners can experiment with varying intonation patterns, emphasising certain words or phrases to convey emotions and meaning. This practice not only enhances their ability to interpret and convey the intended emotions of a piece of writing but also allows them to develop a deeper understanding of the power of intonation in effective communication.

Moreover, Poetry Out Loud serves as a catalyst for vocabulary enhancement and confidence building. Through exposure to a wide range of poems, learners are introduced to new words, idiomatic expressions, and linguistic nuances. The act of memorising and performing these poems encourages learners to delve into the meanings and contexts of unfamiliar words, expanding their vocabulary repertoire Simemeck & Rumbold (2016). Additionally, the process of standing in front of an audience and delivering a poem helps learners build confidence in public speaking, as they overcome stage fright, develop effective body language, and learn to captivate and engage their listeners.

In conclusion, Poetry Out Loud activities offer a valuable and multifaceted approach to improving speaking skills and fostering personal growth. Through the practice of pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary expansion, and the development of confidence, learners can experience a holistic transformation in their speaking abilities. By actively engaging with poetry, learners are exposed to a rich and expressive language medium, enabling them to refine their pronunciation, understand the power of intonation, expand their vocabulary, and develop the confidence to communicate effectively. Thus, incorporating Poetry Out

Loud activities into language learning can greatly benefit individuals seeking to enhance their speaking skills and overall communication proficiency.

"Everything becomes a little different as soon as it is spoken out loud."

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Sharina Saad carried out the research, wrote, revised the article and corresponded with the editor. Rafidah Amat conceptualised the central research idea and provided the theoretical framework. Razanawati Nordin designed the research, supervised research progress; Alia Nabella Fateha and Asrol Hasan anchored the review, revisions and checked the article's references.

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