

## How Poetry Improves EFL Learners' Vocabulary through Curriculum-based Dynamic Assessment

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### Abstract

Literature in English teaching has always been an exciting topic of discussion, explicitly teaching English for speakers of other languages (TESOL) or teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL). This research aims to reveal the improvement of English Education Study Program students' vocabulary by using Poetry as a genre of Literature in TESOL or TEFL learning environment. Delivered using Curriculum-based Dynamic Assessment with the focus on the Mediated Learning Experience process and a simplified Vocabulary Knowledge Scale test, the results of the research show that Poetry as a genre in Literature is applicable in improving students' skills in two aspects; (1) it strengthens students' motivation and creative thinking as it generates and involves students' emotion, and (2) it improves students' vocabulary mastery seen from the improvement of the diction in their writings by 336.25%.

**Keywords:** Curriculum-based Dynamic Assessment, Poetry in English Teaching, Vocabulary Knowledge Scale.

### Introduction

#### *Literature in English Teaching*

Literature in English Teaching could be done in so many ways by using many different tools or materials, one of which is Literature with its genres and elements. The importance of Literature itself has been discussed for decades ago which could be seen from numerous articles from all around the world until today like those done in Ethiopia (Asefa 2017), Iran (Fergows&Farzaneh 2012) India (Choudhary 2016) Sweden (Wilen 2016), Albania (Shtepani 2012), Taiwan (Chen 2014) and many others from other countries including Indonesia. Literature is considered necessary in teaching English for speakers of other languages (TESOL) or teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) by experts for many reasons. It is stated by (Asefa 2017) that Literature plays particular attention to form, and this helps the learners reflect about language, another principle and goal of the communicative method, and



develop their linguistic competence not only by learning how to express meanings in English but also developing their communicative competence.

The importance of Literature in English teaching is also stated by (Ur 1996) in her book entitled *A Course in Language Teaching, Practice, and Theory*, by explaining many critical beneficial aspects of Literature in English teaching, among which are; (1) It is a reasonable basis for vocabulary expansion, (2) It encourages empathetic, critical and creative thinking, and (3) It involves emotions as well as intellect, which adds to motivation and may contribute to self-development. The respective aspects that literature has in relation to language teaching would be so beneficial in TESOL or TEFL learning environment. In the context of this research, literature is taught in the English Language Study Program through Creative Writing subject.

Creative writing is an activity of expressing ideas in written form creatively. It means that creative writing is about generating materials which contain artistic and entertainment values. It is somewhat different from basic writing that communicates information efficiently and objectively or directly promotes products or services. Creative writing includes the business as well. Nevertheless, it takes part in entertaining and enlightening people to make them interested in the business or products. Hence, it becomes necessary for the English Education Department students to learn Creative Writing, which will help them teach English as teachers. The writers believe that Literature is the best tool to teach Creative Writing since Literature can be a powerful and motivating source for writing in EFL, both as a model and as subject matter (Asefa 2017). Poetry provides a very good space and stimulus in terms of richness of language and vocabulary for something very specific because poetry by nature tells a particular experience, with a specific setting, and a certain purpose and messages that are sometimes not literal but implicit. This special nature makes poetry excellent at providing visualizations of various vocabulary registers. By using poetry in Creative Writing subjects, students are invited to experience the process of defining, analysing, synthesizing, and applying their understanding of vocabulary in an appropriate and specific context. From this point, it will be difficult not to relate Literature in the context of vocabulary teaching, especially when we realize that the medium of poetry is words. However, the discussion becomes more interesting since there are still those who do not believe that literature bridges the fundamental concepts of language in English teaching.

### ***Dynamic Assessment***

The writer tries to reveal and prove how Literature plays significant roles in English teaching by conducting a Curriculum-based Dynamic Assessment (henceforth, CBDA) practices in teaching Creative Writing subjects through the use of Poetry as a genre in Literature. CBDA is an extension within the framework of Dynamic Assessment (henceforth, DA).

DA proceeds from an ontological perspective on human abilities developed more than 80 years ago by renowned Russian psychologist, L.S. Vygotsky (Poehner 2008). It focuses on exploring the process of individuals' development, integrated with understanding their learning abilities and instruction, with helping them overcome difficulties and support their ongoing development.

Vygotsky believed that observing individuals' past development is not enough to reveal their best potentials of development. It is stated then by (Poehner 2008) that



DA challenges conventional views on teaching and assessment by arguing that these should not be seen as separate activities but instead should be fully integrated. Furthermore, Resting on the foundations of Vygotsky and Feuerstein, dynamic assessment can be defined as the creation of a zone of proximal development, within which the assessor provides mediation to promote the higher mental functioning of the learner (Lidz 2015) It was initiated by Vygotsky who emphasized that much of learning was mediated through social interactions (Campione 1985) The mediation is also widely known for many as mediated learning experience (henceforth, MLE) which appeared firstly in the work of Feuerstein with the 12 attributes namely; Internationality and reciprocity, transcendence, mediation of meaning, mediation of feelings of competence, mediated regulation and control of behavior, mediated sharing behavior, mediated of individuation and psychological differentiation, mediation of goal-seeking, goal setting, goal planning, and achieving behavior, mediation of challenge, mediation of awareness of human beings as changing entity, and mediation of an optimistic alternatives (Poehner 2008)

### ***Curriculum-based Dynamic Assessment***

One type of DA, as stated by (Haywood 2007), is Curriculum-based Dynamic Assessment. CBDA is a generic approach that can incorporate virtually any specific content or relate to any domain (Haywood 2007). CBDA is used since the objectives of this study are to reveal the effectiveness of Literature in English teaching and students' improvements after being taught Literature for Creative Writing, specifically in improving vocabulary mastery. CBDA begins with selecting relevant curriculum content, which will surely answer whether teaching English using Literature is effective.

In applying CBDA, there are 12 parameters of MLE stated by (Lidz 2015) they are:

1. Intent or Intentional engagement of the learner in the interaction.
2. Mediation of meaning.
3. Mediation of transcendence.
4. Mediation of task regulation.
5. Providing not only encouragement and praise for the learner, but, including feedback in this praise that informs the learner about what worked or didn't work in developing competence with the task.
6. Maintaining psychological differentiation.
7. Joint Regard, or working to communicate to the learner that they are understood.
8. Sharing with the learner thoughts and experiences of the assessor that are relevant to the experience they are sharing.
9. Maintaining the level of challenge of the task and instructions just one step ahead of the learner's level of independent functioning.
10. Providing documentation of the learner's change in development of competence and communicating to the learner how he or she has grown as a result of the learning experience.
11. Interacting with the learner in a contingently responsive way.
12. Interacting with the learner in an affectively warm way.



Furthermore, (Lidz 2015) stated that the 12 parameters above could be simplified into the following four: intent, meaning, transcendence, and task regulation. Intent covers the goal of the lesson and how this will be communicated to the learner. Meaning is about highlighting the lesson's important features and communicating to the learners what is essential to notice. Transcendence is about possible bridges between the lesson and other experiences. Task regulation is about planning the materials used and how they would be set up and presented, including the strategies and principles to communicate.

As explained above, DA, including CBDA, is an integrated treatment with two inseparable components; assessment and process. It is why assessment in the form of scoring will support the treatment results other than just the process.

### ***Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS)***

According to Wesche and Paribakht, and Read (Mukarto 2005) Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS) is a generic instrument, in the sense that it can be used to measure any set of words. It uses five scales to capture certain stages in the initial development of core knowledge of given words. The VKS combines self-report and performance items to elicit the self-perceived and demonstrated knowledge of specific words in written form. It could be used to score the responses with its scale ratings range from 1 representing complete unfamiliarity to 5 representing the ability to use a word with grammatical and semantic accuracy in a sentence for the scale of self-report categories. The writers modified the VKS scale ratings to make it easier to be analyzed using SPSS. The scale ratings given range from 0% to 100% since the purpose of the VKS in the research was to see the respondents' understanding of the words given.

Table 1. VKS Elicitation Scale Self-report Categories

(Wesche & Paribakht, 1996: 30) Self-report Categories
I. I don't remember having seen this word before.
II. I have seen this word before, but I don't know what it means.
III. I have seen this word before, and I <i>think</i> it means _____. (synonym or translation)
IV. I know this word. It means _____. (synonym or translation)
V. I can use the word in a sentence: _____ (If you do this, please also do section IV.)

By considering the statements above, the writer was interested in researching to figure out the effectiveness of Literature in English teaching and how Literature improves students' English skills. In this case, the genre in Literature used is Poetry. It is applied using a Curriculum-based Dynamic Assessment with the parameter used is vocabulary mastery improvement.



## Method

This study used CBDA in Creative Writing subject. It is done during the Poetry sessions. The subjects were 26 students of UNTIDAR English Education Study Program in Semester 4. As stated by (Lidz 2015), the approach to CBDA begins with the selection of relevant curriculum content and construction of an appropriate curriculum-based assessment (henceforth, CBA) to serve as both pre-test and post-test. Hence, as the study focuses on Creative Writing subject as mentioned, the pre-test and post-test were held in the form of writing poems. The scores were evaluated from one of the products of creativity that was vocabulary.

Since the focus is mainly on the process, the study would analyze the MLE using 12, instead of the simplified four parameters. A descriptive qualitative analysis was also used to prove the students' vocabulary improvement after being taught Creative Writing using Poetry and its elements. The data was taken from the modified VKS on 21 respondents from another class of the same background and level. The respondents were given 30 words consisting of 15 words chosen randomly from the first work (regarded as the pre-test), and the other 15 were from the final work as the post-test. It was then statistically processed using SPSS. The chosen words can be seen in the table below:

Table 2. List of Random Words/Phrase/Idioms from Pre-Test and Post-Test

List of Words/Phrase/Idioms Chosen as Pre-Test	List of Words/Phrase/Idioms Chosen as Post-Test
Sunshine	Dew
Eternally	Shatter
Sight	Callously
Gum	Cleaver
Crazy	Shimmering
Realize	Riddle
Whisper	Chuckle
Knight	Solemn
Moonlight	Dimple
Comfort	Drizzle
Snapped	Gulp
Fairy	Phew
Fear	Wrack
Cruel	Gracious
Mind	to The Moon And Back



## Findings and Discussion

As explained before, the assessment is seen mainly on the MLE process using 12 standards (Lidz 2015) This is to see how Poetry as a genre in Literature, improves students' writing skills. The result of each parameter is described as follows:

### *Intent (parameter 1)*

The task (class) goal is to improve students' writing skills by teaching them writing using Poetry and its elements. Before the CBDA, the materials were parts of a mandatory subject taken from the English Education Study Program curriculum of UNTIDAR and were suitable since it was taught after the students had passed the Intensive Course for basic English skills.

### *Mediation of meaning (parameter 2)*

Among all features or elements of Poetry, nine have been chosen and highlighted as the course's focus. Students would pay special attention to these elements during the learning process and practice. The nine elements were; Rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance, hyperbole, simile, personification, and metaphor. These elements were chosen as the best tools to bridge the students' background and the expected results or outcomes.

### *Mediation of transcendence (parameter 3)*

Bridging the initial knowledge of the students and the future (anticipated or expected) understanding about poetry by asking them questions like: "What do you think about poetry or poem?", "what makes writing be regarded or considered as a poem?" "What is the purpose of making a poem?" or "Do you think a poem has rules so that it could be called a poem?"

In this phase, students responded in varied ways. There was a typical answer by almost all of the students that the poem was to express feelings and imaginations using "beautiful language." Interestingly, what has considered a beautiful language was not clear. Based on the answers, the writer concluded that the students' beautiful language was close to the writer's feelings or emotions.

### *Mediation of task regulation and providing not only encouragement and praise for the learner but including feedback in this praise that informs the learner about what worked or did not work in developing competence with the task (parameter 4 and 5)*

Autonomous learning was chosen as the primary method of teaching the materials to the students. Students were introduced to new concepts about poetry with examples and given a space to explore more by looking for additional references. The next step was applying to write. In this phase, the writers found that most students made poems in a simple, easy way they thought based on the criteria (features) given. For example, when the students were asked to write poems which show rhyme as the feature, many students used suffixes to get the pattern of the same sounds (rhyme) like "ful," ness, ly, and the others, or by merely making whatever verbs into gerunds or nouns by adding -ing even though grammatically incorrect. The followings are some excerpts of the students' works:



(1)

...

*But you know I have a powerful  
At least it will going to be wonderful*

(2)

*Love is a willingness  
Love is an awareness*

...

(3)

*When I feel so boring  
My gadget start smiling  
But my book still watching  
And my head still booming*

...

***Maintaining psychological differentiation and joint Regard, or working to communicate to the learner that they are understood (parameter 6 and 7)***

For parameter 6, it is nonverbal and inferred from the total interaction (Lidz 2015) to be seen after all processes have been done. The parameter seven was done by checking the students' works and communicating with the students to show how they were understood. An example could be seen from the work of a student which showed whether the student was unwilling, reluctant, or not knowing what was asked by writing a stanza that was far from the expectation as follows:

(4)

*Silent is quiet  
Quiet is silent  
When silent must be quiet  
Be quiet is must not be silent*

.....

The work implied that the writer knew nothing about the poem; even though the materials about the features had been taught. He simply played with two words, "quiet" and "silent" to get the rhyme and seemingly intended meaningful lines of verses and stanzas. However, it does not show any features of Poetry, as had been explained before.

Reading this, the writer, as the intervener, communicated with the student so that the student felt understood. The communication was also done by adding parameter 5 to keep and support the student's motivation. An example of the sentence used is "well, you are a student of English Education who generally found difficulties creating a literary work. That is normal. At least you have applied on of Poetry features. See? You have got the basic understanding. It is just now to your time to explore more than just reversing these two words.



***Sharing with the learner thoughts and experiences of the assessor that are relevant to the experience they are sharing. (parameter 8)***

In this phase, it was simply done by sharing the experiences of the writer as the intervener. The writer has written several literary works and used many aspects of his experience. An example that was used is, "The most difficult part of being a writer for me was the starting point, when and how to start. When I wrote my first novel, the most difficult part was writing the first chapter. The most difficult part was to write the first paragraph. The most difficult part was writing the first sentence from the first paragraph, which consequently writes the first word! Do not overthink. Just write first and let others give their comments about your work. You will learn more after that. I was not sure about my work until I finished writing it and found how all my friends of mine appreciated it!"

***Maintaining the level of challenge of the task and instructions just one step ahead of the learner's level of independent functioning. Providing documentation of the learner's change in development of competence and communicating to the learner how he or she has grown as a result of the learning experience. (parameter 9 and 10)***

Parameter 9 is nonverbal and inferred from the total interaction. (Lidz 2015) For parameter 10, the writer kept all the students' works from meeting 1 to 5 and gave feedback by combining parameters 5, 7, and 8. There was always a session for discussion after completing every session of teaching the materials.

***Interacting with the learner in a contingently responsive way and an affectively warm way. (parameter 11 and 12)***

Parameter 11 is nonverbal and inferred from the total interaction while parameter 12 could be verbal or nonverbal. (Lidz 2015) For both parameters, what the writer did was pay close attention to the students on their works and their behavior and attitudes. During the implementation of CBDA, the writer found one student (henceforth student A) who found more difficulties than the others, which made her work quiet far from the expectation. Another case happened to two students (henceforth students B and C) who, from their attitudes and gestures, lacked attention to the class, materials, and discussion. The writer then interviewed those students also using the previous parameters and found two different factors. The first factor was that student A had lower competence in understanding the materials compared to the others. She was also a quiet funny girl when responding. For this case, the writer used parameter five more often, combined with parameter 12, to support the student's proximal development. The application worked well, which could be seen from her enthusiasm every time the writer gave instructions and tasks. Moreover, her final work (post-test poem) improved significantly compared to her first work (pre-test poem).

The second factor, which was the cause of student A and B's lack of attention, was the external factor the students were facing. It had something to do with their lives outside the campus. The writer highlighted parameters 1, 6, and 12 for the students to keep them engaged in the learning process to solve this problem. It worked well, which surprised the writer since they have more potentials than the average students' potentials.



After all, MLE processes using CBDA, there was a significant improvement in the students' response, motivation, and enthusiasm in learning the materials, which automatically supports the improvement of the quality of the products resulted. It means that students' skills also improved, which partly could be seen from the analysis of their works using VKS in the next subchapter.

### *The Improvement of Students' Vocabulary*

The results of the VKS application on 21 respondents were processed using SPSS and could be seen in the diagram below:

Table 3. Mean Score of the Pre-Test VKS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
VAR00001	21	51.70	100.00	1712.10	81.5286	12.65824
Valid N (listwise)	21					

From the result of the understanding of respondents to the random words chosen as the pre-test, it could be seen that the maximum score could reach 100 since the students as the participants and respondents are both from the same background with a similar mastery of English vocabulary. It could be assumed that both the participants and the respondents were initially from the same level.

The minimum score of 51.70 could be caused by many factors that could affect students' understanding of a subject, as has been explained by experts of DA. As the results, 81.5286 of the mean score is quite proof of the participants' and respondent's validity of homogeneity, which could validate the study's result since it represents the enormous scale of understanding using VKS.

Table 4. Mean Score of the Post-Test VKS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
VAR00002	21	10.00	60.00	795.70	37.8905	13.23450
Valid N (listwise)	21					

After being taught Creative Writing subject using Poetry and some of its elements, the random words chosen for the post-test VKS resulted in significant changes in the respondents' understanding of the words. From the 21 students of another class, the highest score of the students who had a sophisticated knowledge of the word was only 60, which was only from one student. The mean score is 37.8905, which means that understanding is just from level 2 (having ever seen the words without knowing the meanings) to 3 (having ever seen the words but not sure what the real meanings are). Moreover, three students showed how they knew nothing about the words given since their score is less than 25. More interestingly, from all the post-test words, there is not even one that is known by all respondents.

In this study, the less the respondents understood the post-test chosen words, the more effective teaching English using Poetry could be assumed. From 81.5286 as the mean score of pre-test to 37.8905, there has been a significant improvement in the participant's new vocabulary mastery, as much as 336.25%. This is taken from



the number of unknown words for the respondents from the pre-test 18.4714% to 62.1095% after the post-test.

### Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data findings and proof of the research above, it could be concluded that the implementation of Curriculum-based Dynamic Assessment in teaching Creative Writing subject using Poetry is effective in improving students vocabulary. The results support the statements about the advantages of Literature in English teaching among which are; (1) It is a reasonable basis for vocabulary expansion, (2) It encourages empathetic, critical, and creative thinking; and (3) It involves emotions as well as intellect, which adds to motivation and may contribute to self-development (Ur 1996). Besides, CBDA is an applicable method in teaching English since it focuses not merely on the results but more on the process. Most importantly, Literature has been proven relevant in improving English skills, which in this study is the vocabulary mastery.

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