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USING POETRY, RHYME AND RHYTHM AS AN EFFECTIVE MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

*Farzaneh Aladini, Farzin Farahbod and Masoumeh Arjomandi
Islamic Azad University, Rasht Branch, Rasht, Iran
*Author for Correspondence

ABSTRACT
This study aimed to test the experimental hypothesis, which predicted that when poetry was taught in an EFL classroom, level of self-reported motivation would increase significantly which, in turn, was to affect the level of competence in the learners and control language acquisition processes. The subjects of this study were students majoring in English language at College of English Language and Literature of Islamic Azad University (Rasht Branch). The study groups of the present research consisted of two comparable groups: an experimental group and a control group, but only the experimental group students were exposed to the treatment proposed by the study that is teaching English poetry. With the aim to investigate the extent to which the use of poetry increases the students' motivation and their achievements in English language, a quasi–experimental method was employed with one instrument to gather data, questionnaire (pre- and post-treatment). The pre-test was used to measure students' motivational level at the beginning of the research. The post-test was administered at the end of the research to see if there was any increase in students' motivational level and as well as their level of competence in English. The experimental results supported our hypothesis. In this study we found out how the use of poems in EFL classrooms enhances the students' motivation in learning English. Students learned English through reading and writing poetry. The data collected over a period of 15 weeks give some support to our conclusions, which recommend the use of poetry in college foreign language classes.

Keywords: Poetry in the Language Classroom, EFL Learners, Level of Motivation, Language Proficiency

INTRODUCTION
A wide variety of English reading materials and texts is available to EFL students. They are ranged from fiction and nonfiction book excerpts, journals, newspaper and magazine articles, science news and articles, personal essays, advertisements, different types of letters (application letter, business letter…), memoir, biographies, on-line discussions and so on. However, English poetry is often excluded from these extensive reading materials. Poetry has not been considered as a proper material for English language teaching, so it has been left outside the EFL classroom door. Often teachers consider poetry as one of the most sophisticated literary genres and hence too difficult for EFL learners to grasp. The purpose of this article is to illustrate the potential value of using poetry with EFL classes. This paper tries to describe how poems can effectively be used in English language classes to help students to improve their language skills.

Review of the Literature
Should poetry to be part of an EFL curriculum? The long-standing debate on whether poetry can be employed to enhance language efficiency is quite well-known. Indeed is there any rationale for including poetry in the curriculum? Several views have been expressed about the reason why literature is seen distant to EFL and ESL contexts. Linguists such as Topping (1968) plead for literature exclusion from ESL classroom; he argues that "literature should be excluded from the ESL curriculum because of its structural complexity, lack of conformity to standard grammatical rules and remote cultural perspectives". Cook (1986) makes a similar point when he states that the study of English literature "has little relevance to the learners' aim of understanding and producing more functional forms of the language". Fortunately, thanks to recent research efforts, there has been increasing interest

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in acquiring language proficiency by integrating literature into the language curriculum. However, although literature has occupied a place in some EFL courses, poetry which could help the students more effectively to improve their knowledge of English language, has remained largely neglected (Denman, 1988). There are various factors why poetry has not been considered as proper material for EFL classrooms. Let's first of all examine the most common arguments against employing poetry in EFL classroom.

"Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds" (Percy Bysshe Shelley). To a lot of EFL students, however, reading a poem had proven to be in the end a frustrating and disappointing experience. No doubt, poetic language is different from prosaic language. Compared with prose, poetry depends less on the linguistic units of sentences and paragraphs, and more on units of organization that are purely poetic such as line, couplet, and stanza. So at the beginning it may create tension in the class. But the most critical objections brought against poetry seem to be due to its highly complex, metaphorical language. The specific features of poetry have made it one of the most sophisticated forms of literary genres. Brindley (1980) one of the proponents of this view argues that "Poems often deal with geographical or social settings alien to the students' experience. Perhaps the greatest barrier to understanding poetry, however, is its elliptical, metaphorical, and highly allusive language. Poetry, from this perspective (i.e. as a high-level, individual reading activity), has little to offer the EFL classroom…." (Brindley, 1980). The researches carried out by Hirvela and Boyle (1988), Ghazali (2009), Abdullah *et al.,* (2007), Yilmaz (2012) also supported Brindley's (1980) insights. The investigation of students' attitudes to the use of literature in language courses revealed "an overwhelming preference for prose fiction, with an equally overwhelming distaste for poetry" (Hirvela and Boyle, 1988). Their studies that aimed at investigating the students' attitudes toward studying English literature have shown that 70 to 80% of the students preferred to read short stories and novel rather than poetry. Their findings revealed that students generally feel that comparing with other literary genres poetry contributes very little to their language skills development. Hashim and Nawawi (1994), in using English poetry with Malaysian students, found that their "students have misleading perceptions of poetry and its difficulty. Students seem to think the reading and understanding of poetry require a special kind of knowledge reserved for scholars of literature. We have to challenge these misconceptions". The other common argument against using poetry is that poetry, due to its "structural complexity and its unique use of language", does little to help EFL teachers to achieve one of their main goals, that is to teach grammar (McKay, 1982). The other typical objection of using poetry in language classes is that poetry cannot help our students "to communicate in contemporary colloquial English" or the study of poetry will contribute nothing to helping the teachers" to increase the communicative competence" of the students (Tomlinson, 1986). Zelenkova (2004) supports the same idea arguing that due to its "linguistic abstruseness and cultural vagueness" the study of English literature is often unsuited to the needs of foreign students. Maybe one of the reasons that poetry's role as an ally of language is frequently disputed is due to an "absence of concrete methodological instruction" (Štulajterová, 2010). Indeed, there has been a lot of debate on the content of English language curriculum. However, it seems that more research studies, experimental results and critical analysis are necessary to justify the inclusion of poetry as an essential part of a rich language curriculum. Still, fortunately for us EFL teachers some well-known language experts and scholars proposed the use of poetry as a great teaching tool for language classroom: (Ramsaran, 1983; Moulding, 1985; Tomlinson, 1986; Collie and Slater, 1987; Maley and Duff, 1989; Lazar, 1993; Maley and widdowson, 2000; Hess, 2003; Finch, 2003) and many other scholars and researchers. Some of them have pointed out positive results of using poetry in ESL/EFL classrooms and others have provided reasons to support the use of poetry such as "valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement" (Collie and Slater, 1987).

1. Valuable authentic material:"Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance" (Matthew Arnold). One of the main reasons for using poetry in the classroom is that "it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is

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enduring rather that ephemeral" (Collie and Slater, 1987). It is a valuable complement to EFL course books because in "reading literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode" (Collie and Slater, 1987). Peacock (1997) who has researched about the benefits of using authentic materials in EFL classes, argues that "authentic materials motivate learners because they are intrinsically more interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic materials." Many language researchers such as: Allwright (1979), Freeman and Holden (1986), Little and Singleton (1991), Swaffar (1985), King (1990), and Bacon and Finnemann (1990) (cited in Peacock, 1997) claim that authentic materials are more beneficial for language learners because students learn the "real language" not artificial language learning materials produced specifically for language education, e.g. exercises found in textbooks and supplementary materials. These scholars believe that "authentic texts bring learners closer to the target language culture, making learning more enjoyable and therefore move motivating" (Peacock, 1997).

2. Cultural Enrichment: "Poetry is, at bottom, a criticism of life" (Matthew Arnold). The knowledge of culture has a great impact on learners' language use. Poetry, this deep and meaningful literary genre, can deepen, sharpen and broaden students' cultural awareness. It can add to their understanding of the social, historical, political and religious spheres of the target society. Teaching poetry enables students "to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows" (Carter and Long, 1991). As these scholars point out, poetry opens students' eyes to a whole new world. It can help students to expand their knowledge about the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society. In the literary sphere students see the life through a new pair of eyes which might be fundamentally different from their past experience. But, at the end they feel more satisfied and fulfilled. Poetry can broaden their horizons and make them feel more human. Mackey summarizes this benefit of poetry in the following manner: "literature may work to promote a greater tolerance for cultural differences for both the teacher and the student".

3. Language enrichment: "I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of prose and poetry; that is prose; words in their best order; - poetry; the best words in the best order" (S. T. Coleridge). Poetry is beneficial in helping EFL students develop their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Ramsaran (1983), Lazar (1993), Hess (2003), Hughes (2007), Kellem (2009), Ainy (2011) among others, have all stated that poetry stimulates language acquisition. They emphasize the important role that poetry might play in improving language knowledge, but unfortunately as Hughes (2007) points out: this valuable literary genre "is often marginalized" in the English language classroom. As Kellem (2009) points out: "Poetry is a source of content-rich reading material; a model of creative language in use; a way to introduce vocabulary in context; and a way to focus students' attention on English pronunciation, rhythm, and stress". Tomlinson (1986) summarizes the benefits that poetry offers to EFL classes in the following manner: "poems more than any other type of text can give valuable opportunity for learners to use and develop such important skills as deduction of meaning from linguistic and situational context; prediction; relating text to knowledge and experience of the world; reading creatively; and the recognition and interpretation of assumptions and inferences". Povey (1972, cited in McKay,1982) in summarizing the aims of using literature in ESL classes, argues that "literature will increase all language skills because literature will extend linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage, and complex and exact syntax".

3.1 Listening and speaking skills: Edgar Allan Poe defines poetry as "Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea". Indeed EFL students enjoy listening to the music of poetry made by sound repetition. So, it might be used for rhyme, rhythm and intonation practice which develop students' oral language skill. By asking students to read a simple short poem aloud, "possibly accompanied by gestures or mime, may be an effective way of helping them to internalise vocabulary, grammar patterns or even intonation" (Lazar, 1993). Many language researchers and practitioners suggest choral reading as a wonderful and enjoyable way to develop students' oral language skill. Poetry is beneficial in helping students develop

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their speaking skill too. Discussing poems is an enjoyable way of encouraging students to express their personal feelings. Since poetry often explores universal themes of life, love, birth, death, war and religion, it can stimulate even reluctant students to participate in class discussion.

3.2 Reading and Writing skills: Kırkgöz (2008) suggests using "poetry as a model in an EFL curriculum to reinforce students' grammatical and lexical knowledge, and promote their creative writing skills". Kırkgöz, in using English poetry with Turkish university students who majored in subjects other than literature, found that composing English poems in parallel with the poems that they have discussed in the class, "can not only reinforce their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but also foster their creative writing skills". A collection of carefully selected poems can provide good models for students to write and edit their own poems. It can be very fun for them to share their poems with their classmates. As Maley& Duff (1989) put it: "One of the most important conditions for learning a foreign language ... is the opportunity to play with it, to pull it this way and that, to test its elasticity, to test and explore its limits. Poetry is an excellence medium in which this can be done".

4. Personal Involvement: "If I read a book and it makes my body so cold no fire ever can warm me, I know that is poetry" (Emily Dickinson). As Collie & Slater (1987) point out, "Literature can be helpful in the language learning process because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers". Since poetry deals with universal themes, it appeals to students from different social and cultural backgrounds. Poetry can stimulate students' imagination and lead them to become more personally and emotionally involved. It encourages them to explore their own personal images and provokes emotional responses often due to past memories and associations. Lazar (1993) makes a similar point when she states, "A poem may elicit a powerful emotional response from students. If the materials are carefully chosen, students will feel that what they do in the classroom is relevant and meaningful to their own lives". In summary, using poetry in a foreign language classroom results in numerous advantages. However here I want to focus on the benefit of poetry as a valuable authentic material and an effective motivational strategy. Many language researchers have claimed that poetry can increase student motivation. A remarkable number of EFL teachers do have faith in poetry as a motivator. They believe that poetry is more "interesting" and "stimulating" than exercises found in course books and supplementary materials because poetry "bring learners closer to the target language culture, making learning more enjoyable and therefore move motivating" (Peacock, 1997). However, some language teachers have still serious doubts as to whether poetry would work in an EFL classroom, maybe it is due to the fact that little research has been conducted to verify the success of poetry instruction in EFL settings with statistical evidence. Consequently, I have decided to do a classroom research project to investigate whether poetry increase the classroom motivation of learners.

Research Question and Hypotheses

This study aimed to test the experimental hypotheses, which predicted that when poetry was taught, students' self-reported level of motivation would increase significantly which, in turn, was to affect the level of competence in the EFL and control language acquisition processes. The basic research question in this research scenario is the relationship between teaching poetry and the level of motivation. As a result, the hypotheses of this study are stated in the following manner:

1- Students are more successful in learning English language in the class poetry is taught, than the students in the class in which poetry is not taught.

2- Regarding the students' motivation, Students are more successful in learning English language in the class poetry is taught, than the students in the class in which poetry is not taught.

Research Model

The following conceptual model provides a visual representation of theoretical constructs and variables.
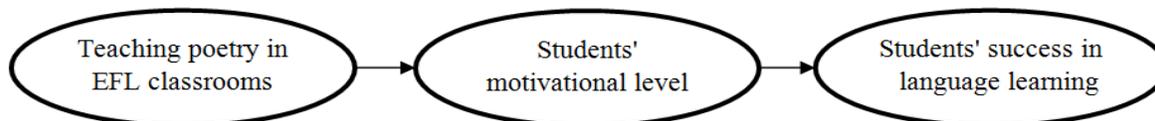

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Research

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In this study the dependent variable is "teaching poetry", the independent variable is "students' success in language learning" and the mediator variable is "students' motivational level".

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Participants
The subjects of this study were students majoring in English Translation and English Literature at College of English Language and Literature of Islamic Azad University (Rasht, Iran). This study was conducted in a bounded system composed of two classes of 80 students and the instructors. The course was offered in the semester of spring, 2014, and the class met on Tuesdays from eight am to twelve pm in the afternoon.

Instrumentation
The instrument employed in this study was a twenty-five-item questionnaire which was a modified version of the questionnaire designed by Davis *et al.,* (1992).The items from1-6 on the questionnaire were developed to obtain background information about the respondents and their attitude toward poetry. The items 7-17 were to determine the student motivational level. The items 18 - 25 on the questionnaire were to measure knowledge and language skills that students expected to have gained in the semester. We constructed survey questions that attempt to measure on both interval and nominal scales. 23 items in the questionnaire were designed for a Likert scale response, 17 items ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), and 6 items from 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor). As for the remaining 2 items, nominal scales were used. Item 3 was made up of four options to choose (Novel, short story…), and item 25 was made up of six options to choose (speaking, listening…). It took students about 30 minutes to finish the questionnaire.

Course Description andMaterials
Reading Comprehension is a reading course intended for students of English. It is a four-hour per week course. According to the syllabus exposing students to a variety of text types and genres helps them develop more effective reading skills. The readings are to represent a wide range of genres (newspapers and magazines, articles, personal essays, textbook chapters, book experts, and …) gathered from well-respected sources. These reading passages are to sharpen the students' reading, vocabulary-building, and language skills. However, poetry is completely excluded from extensive reading materials. Some poems are written in language which includes figures of speech, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and syntax that are too complicated to be included in the syllabus. So the first decision to make was to choose poetry that was at the reading level of our students. We planned for a gradual rise in the complexity of the poems which were selected from the British and American literature. We began by considering what the interests of the students were, and tried to match those interests as well as we could. Consequently, the poems were fully enjoyed and appreciated by students.

Data Collection Procedure
The study groups of the present research consisted of two comparable groups: an experimental group and a control group, but only the experimental group students were exposed to the treatment proposed by the study that is teaching English poetry. Students constituting the experimental and control groups were 33 and 47 respectively, thus their total number was 80. Ideally, the control and experimental groups were selected randomly. The groups experience identical conditions during the study except for their exposure to the independent variable. Thus features of the experimental situation or external events that occur during the experiment were likely to influence the two groups equally and were not confounded with the effect of the independent variable. Therefore, for the present study, only students in the experimental group were exposed to the treatment proposed by the study. The course during which control group and experimental group were observed for fifteen teaching weeks was *Reading Comprehension*. Since the same course was offered to both classes, it provided the researchers with the most suitable research environment. With the aim to investigate the extent to which the use of poetry increases the students' motivation and their achievements in English learning, a quasi – experimental method was employed with one instrument to gather data, questionnaire (the pre- and post-treatment questionnaire). Data obtained from the questionnaires were used as the criteria to determine the experimental group and the control

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group and to make the research more comparable. The pre-test was used to measure students' motivational level at the beginning of the research. The post-test was administered at the end of the research to see if there was any increase in students' motivational level and as well as their level of competence in English.

Data Analysis

In the present study, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was applied to analyze the data. An Independent-Sample T-Test was conducted to compare the means of experimental group with control group in pre-test and post-test. The whole data were gone over for several times by the researchers independently.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the pre-test indicate that the performances of both groups in the pre-test were almost the same and there was no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group (M = 3.1082, SD = 0.597) and the mean score of the control group (M = 3.1170, SD = 0.661) before the treatment sessions. Thus, it can be concluded that both groups of the students participating in this study met the condition of homogeneity. An independent samples t-test was used to compare differences in mean scores between two groups. Table1 shows data related to the participants' performance on the post-test**.**

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of participants' performance on post-test

Groups		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Success	Experimental	30	3.4762	.73068	.13340
	Control	45	3.1063	.66590	.09927

The dependent variable, "success" is reported in Table1. Corroborated by the item-by-item mean differences between the groups in favor of the experimental one, test results indicate that the average mean score of the experimental group issignificantly higher than the average mean score of the control group. As seen in table 1, the experimental group increased their test scores from a pre-test score mean 3.1082 to a post-test score mean 3.4762. An Independent-samples t-test was used to analyze the difference between the students' level of competence in the EFL and their language acquisition processes in the experimental and control group respectively. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2: Independent samples t-test results for participants' performance on post-test

		Levene's Test Equality Variances		fort-test for Equality of Means of						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
Success	Equal variances assumed	.831	.365	2.266	73	.026	.36984	.16319		.04460	.69508
	Equal variances not assumed			2.224	58.238	.030	.36984	.16628		.03702	.70267

As Table 2 illustrates, the p-value is less than 0.05 (t (73) =2.266, P=.026). Therefore, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control group. Consequently, the first hypothesis formulated for this study is proven true. Regarding the first hypothesis

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(Students are more successful in learning English language in the class poetry is taught, than the students in the class in which poetry is not taught), test result indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the average mean score of the experimental group (M = 3.47) and the average mean score of the control group (M = 3.1), which suggests that the former learned English and had more improvement in their language through reading and writing poetry. The mediator variable**,** "motivation" is reported in Table3. Based on the statistical findings, there is no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the experimental group (M= 3.56, SD=0.713) and the mean score of the control group (M= 3.28, SD=0.855) on the pre-test. Thus, it can be concluded that both groups of the students participating in this study met the condition of homogeneity.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of participants' performance on post-test

Groups		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Motivation	Experimental	30	3.7875	.38768	.07078
	Control	45	3.2313	.82686	.12326

Table 4: Independent samples t-test results for participants' performance on post-test

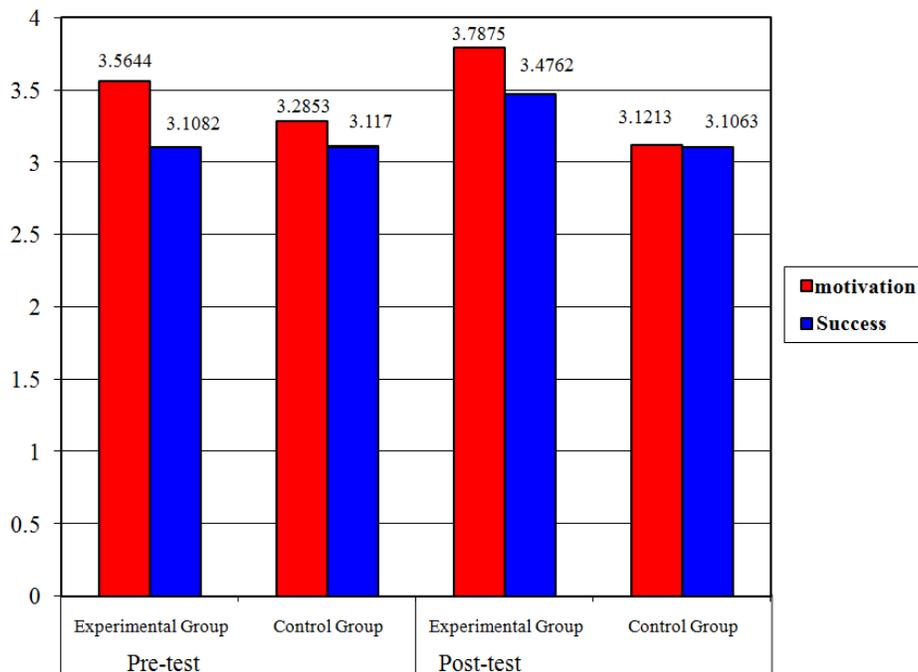|		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
motivation	Equal variances assumed	10.617	.002	3.435	73	.001	.55615	.16190	.23349	.87881
	Equal variances not assumed			3.913	66.784	.000	.55615	.14214	.27242	.83988

Figure 2: Pre and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups

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As table 3 illustrates, the mean score of experimental group (M = 3.78) is higher than the mean score of the control group (M = 3.23). An independent samples t-test was used to see if there was any statistically significant difference between means of the groups. As shown in Table 4, the p-value is less than 0.05 (t (73) = 3.435, P=0.001). Test result indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control group. These findings support our second research hypothesis, so we can conclude that regarding the students' motivation, students are more successful in learning English language in the class poetry is taught, than the students in the class in which poetry is not taught. They indicate that teaching poetry has positively affected students' performance. Poetry has improved students' motivation and consequently it has positive effects on students learning. Figure 2 illustrates how students performed on both pre-test and post-test.

Conclusion

This study aims to throw light on poetry as a teaching strategy that can increase students' motivation and improve their proficiency in English language. Many language researchers and scholars have acknowledged the importance of motivation. Consequently, several theories have attempted to define motivation and explain how it works.The first of them is Krashen's theory**:** "When a student is exposed to a new language, the first internal hurdles are posed by the individual's emotional state and motivations ... filtering sources are the individual anxiety levels, peer identification, and general motivation to learn a language. Together, they make up what we have called the "Affective filter" or simply "Filter". The Filter acts to control entry to further mental processing" (Dulay *et al.,* 1982). Gardner (1985) argues that motivation," refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language". Although these theories may differ on considerable counts, they agree that among other factors, motivation is one of the most critical elements which affect the level of competence in the EFL/ ESL, and control language acquisition processes. Our findings tend to confirm these theories. Major findings for this study can be listed as:

1) Students' attitudes toward poetry changed from negative to positive. At the beginning of this course, most of the students felt anxious about poetry. They regarded reading, writing and speaking about poetry as a very serious challenge. In fact most of them were unfamiliar with this genre and some of them had unpleasant past experience. However, after a few weeks, they no longer took poetry as a difficult genre, which only literary people can enjoy.

2) Poems brought up powerful emotional responses to the classroom. One of the amazing outcomes of this study was the students' ability to write meaningful responses to the poems. Their responses were positive and enthusiastic. Obviously, our students gained pleasure from reading, writing, discussing, and even composing poems. Their works were personal and unique. When they read and wrote poems, they were master of their own domains. Students also were encouraged to share their written responses which led to wonderfully rich and challenging analysis of the poems. Varied classroom activities helped them to bloom. Students' poems and journals mirrored their internal world, their hidden thoughts and feelings. They wrote poems to express their pains, frustrations and worries. *Family, love*, *personal frustrations*, *sense of loneliness, and death of grandmother* were some of the themes they selected for their poems. Furthermore, students could relate their own real lives to the poems they read.

3) Students' motivation increased while reading and writing poetry. For this study, 'motivation' is defined in the terms put forward by Crookes and Schmidt (1991): "interest in and enthusiasm for the materials used inclass; persistence with the learning task, as indicated by levels of attention oraction for an extended duration; and levels of concentration and enjoyment". Many language researchers have claimed that authentic materials (real text which are designed for native speakers, not for language teaching purposes, for example songs and poems) have positive effect on the students because they increase the level of class motivation, thus they are more inspirational and motivational than artificial or non-authentic materials (exercises and activities found in textbooks and supplementary materials especially designed for language learners). As Peacock (1997) puts it, "Many writers claim that authentic materials motivate learners because they are intrinsically more interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic materials." Again Peacock argues that "authentic texts bring learners closer to the target language culture,

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making learning more enjoyable and therefore move motivating." The findings in this study also indicated that, our students reported poetry to be significantly more interesting and motivating than non-literary texts.

4) Reading and writing poetry helped students to improve their English. A remarkable number of studies have explored the connection between student's degree of motivation and their level of competence. They have viewed motivation as one of the most critical factors that determines language learners' success or failure. Our study supported these theories. The students' degree of motivation had a direct effect on their performance.The students were all very motivated and enthusiastic to improve their English, and participated in the class activities and discussions eagerly. Indeed, poetry helped our students to develop their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Students' analytical writing displayed use of new vocabulary, appropriate word choice, and accurate grammar. Poems acted as good stimuli to bring out creativity and originality. Students used their own past experiences, memory and imagination to write their assignments. Listening to the audio recordings of the poems and reading them loudly and led to the improvement of students' speaking and listening skills. Alliterations, assonance, consonance, rhyme and rhythm were enjoyable and rewarding exercises to improve their listening skills.

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