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A STUDY OF CHALLENGES FACED BY ENGLISH TEACHERS WHEN TEACHING POETRY AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL IN DELHI GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Poetry, as a component of literature, provides for rich resource for language learning. As a part of the school curriculum, poetry teaching serves an academic purpose enhancing expression in language use, introducing to poetic devices, enabling abstract thinking. But, apart from serving this academic purpose, poetry can purge, offer emotional relief, sensitise to harmony and beauty in life's lived experiences of joy and pain. This, however, is only possible if the students are provided with an opportunity to engage with poetry at a more personal level letting them explore the power of poetry.

To realise fully the value of teaching poetry as a potent resource for language teaching and personal growth of students, it is imperative that it be taught in a way that allows for engaging deeply with the poem. This implies that the teacher plays a crucial role in the poetry classroom from which students can extract the maximum. However, any teacher who seeks to realise the efficacy of teaching poetry in a language classroom is likely to face challenges in the classroom situation. At the middle school level the learners are at a stage when they are still in the process of familiarising themselves with the English language. Poetry deviates from the regularities of language use, allowing for poetic licence to the poet. This can make poetry difficult to be understood by young learners for whom English is a second language.

The purpose of this research was to study the nature of challenges faced by English teachers while teaching poetry at the middle school level in Delhi government schools. The sample for this study comprised teachers from three Sarvodaya Vidyalayas, three Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas and three Government Senior Secondary Schools. Three different types of government schools run by Delhi Government were studied because these schools typify a cross section of Delhi school system providing a gradient in terms of the differential in learners.

Questionnaire and interview were the tools used to collect data about how teachers teach poetry, their purpose of teaching poetry and the challenges they face while teaching poetry.

The findings of the research suggest that poetry is taught essentially through the traditional method. Teachers in all the three kinds of government schools follow the exam centric approach to teach poetry. The challenges that impede effective poetry teaching are the lack of infrastructural facilities in schools, lack of in-service workshops on how to teach poetry, non-academic work load on teachers, and no exposure of English language to the learners beyond classroom. For certain challenges to be resolved, changes at the systemic level would be required.

The study has implications for teachers and their classroom pedagogy, school Principals and policy makers. The research indicates that teachers also need to upgrade their ways of teaching poetry in order to make it more effective for their learners.

Key Terms

Poetry: For the present study, this means the poems prescribed in the English language textbooks for the middle school stage in the government schools in Delhi, along with English poetry other than the prescribed poetry, which is appropriate for middle school level.

Middle School Level

This comprises the grades VI, VII, VIII in the Indian school system.

Government Schools

For the present study, this means the three types of government schools i.e. Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas, Sarvodaya Vidyalayas, and Government Senior Secondary Schools.

Background and Rationale

Literature constitutes a significant component of language teaching in schools. Its purposes in a language classroom are manifold. Literature illustrates language usage in different styles and registers in authentic situations as presented in literary texts. Literature texts are open to interpretation and offer ample opportunities for students' interaction and discussion in a language classroom. In addition to the above, literature provides emotional relief, helps in achieving aesthetic and efferent purpose and develops creative thinking.