

Implementing Poetry as an Integrative Pedagogical Medium for Language and Literary Development: Evidence from Indonesian Elementary Classrooms

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 2026-05-14

Revised 2026-06-10

Accepted 2026-08-31

Keywords:

Elementary School
Language Development
Literacy Education
Literary Development
Poetry Learning

ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of poetry as an integrative pedagogical medium for language and literary development in elementary classrooms, responding to the dominance of technical literacy practices that often limit students' creative and interpretive engagement. Previous studies have primarily focused on poetry as a tool for vocabulary enrichment or literary appreciation separately, while limited research has explored its integrated role in supporting both language and literary development in Indonesian elementary contexts. The study aimed to analyse how poetry-based instruction facilitates students' language expression, literary appreciation, and classroom participation. This research employed a qualitative descriptive design conducted in six elementary schools in Palangka Raya, Indonesia. Participants included six Indonesian language teachers and twelve students from grades four to six, selected purposively. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of students' poetry works and instructional documents. Numerical data presented in the findings functioned only as descriptive indicators to support qualitative interpretation. Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that poetry-based activities encouraged richer vocabulary use, figurative expression, active participation, and greater confidence in oral performance among most students. Students' poems also reflected imaginative themes, emotional awareness, and personal interpretation related to social experiences. The study suggests that poetry can support more meaningful and participatory literacy practices in elementary language learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Basic education plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic foundations, character formation, and social development. At the elementary level, language proficiency is essential not only for communication but also for thinking, interpreting experiences, and expressing ideas creatively [1], [2]. Therefore, language learning should move beyond technical reading and writing skills toward fostering literary appreciation, imagination, creativity, and reflective thinking [3], [4]. Meaningful language experiences enable children to develop expressive abilities, emotional sensitivity, and interpretive understanding from an early age.

In the Indonesian elementary education context, literacy instruction is still largely oriented toward textbook completion, vocabulary memorization, grammar exercises, and examination achievement [5], [6]. The implementation of the curriculum often prioritizes technical literacy competence, while literary learning activities such as poetry reading, interpretation, and creative writing receive relatively limited classroom attention. As a result, students have fewer opportunities to develop imaginative thinking, aesthetic sensitivity, and expressive communication skills through authentic literary experiences [7]. Literature, particularly poetry, is frequently positioned only as supplementary reading material rather than as an active pedagogical medium capable of supporting emotional, imaginative, and reflective learning processes [8].

This study proposes poetry as an integrative pedagogical medium that simultaneously supports language and literary development within authentic classroom practice. Through rhythm, imagery, metaphor, diction, and symbolism, poetry enables children to explore language creatively while engaging emotionally and interpretively with texts [9]. Reading, interpreting, writing, and performing poetry can enhance vocabulary mastery, figurative understanding, expressive fluency, and sensitivity to meaning [10]. Poetry-based activities also encourage imagination, emotional engagement, and personal interpretation, making language learning more meaningful and humanistic [11], [12]. In addition, poetry connects classroom learning with students' lived experiences, allowing them to express feelings, social observations, and cultural identities through aesthetic communication.

Several previous studies have examined poetry learning in elementary education; however, important limitations remain. Paramitha focused primarily on improving students' poetry writing skills through environmental media, while Prawiyogi et al. examined poetry musicalization in relation to reading and writing achievement [13], [14]. Other studies tend to position poetry mainly as an object of literary appreciation or as a tool for vocabulary enrichment. Consequently, research investigating how poetry simultaneously develops language competence, literary sensitivity, creative expression, and interpretive engagement in Indonesian elementary classrooms remains limited.

Another gap lies in the limited exploration of poetry as a holistic medium integrating linguistic and literary dimensions in authentic classroom practice. Previous research commonly separates language instruction as technical skill acquisition from literature as aesthetic appreciation. Few studies demonstrate how poetry bridges these domains

simultaneously through reading, writing, interpretation, discussion, and performance activities in real classroom settings. Therefore, empirical understanding of how poetry contributes not only to vocabulary and writing development but also to imaginative thinking, symbolic interpretation, emotional awareness, and reflective engagement remains insufficient.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in sociocultural literacy, transactional literary theory, and critical literacy perspectives. Contemporary scholars argue that language and literature learning should promote creativity, interpretation, emotional participation, and meaning-making rather than technical correctness alone [15], [16]. Rosenblatt's transactional perspective emphasizes that literary meaning emerges through interaction between readers, texts, and lived experiences, while sociocultural perspectives highlight the importance of dialogue, collaboration, and contextual learning. Poetry supports these orientations through aesthetic, social, and multimodal engagement such as reading aloud, performance, creative writing, and interpretive discussion [17]. Nevertheless, empirical evidence demonstrating these multidimensional functions in elementary classrooms is still scarce.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze how poetry functions as an integrative medium for language and literary development in elementary schools by examining how poetry-based instruction supports students' language development, fosters literary appreciation, creativity, and interpretive engagement, and connects language learning with literary experience within authentic classroom practice. This study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to elementary literacy education. Theoretically, the research expands understanding of poetry as a multidimensional literacy practice integrating linguistic, creative, emotional, and interpretive dimensions simultaneously. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for teachers and curriculum developers regarding more meaningful, participatory, and humanistic approaches to language and literary learning in Indonesian elementary schools.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine how poetry functions as a medium for language and literary development in elementary schools. A qualitative approach was selected to understand authentic classroom practices, teacher perspectives, and students' learning experiences during poetry-based instruction [18], [19]. The research was conducted in six elementary schools in Palangka Raya, Indonesia, selected purposively based on the implementation of poetry activities in language learning and students' active participation in poetry-based instruction [20]. The participants consisted of six Indonesian language teachers and twelve students from grades four to six. The twelve students were selected purposively to represent variation in gender, grade level, classroom participation, and language ability in order to obtain diverse perspectives and learning experiences during poetry instruction. The relatively small number of student participants was considered appropriate for in-depth qualitative exploration emphasizing rich descriptive data rather than statistical generalization.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval and research permission were obtained from the participating schools. Teachers, students, and parents were informed about the research objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation. Written parental consent and school approval were secured before classroom observations and interviews were conducted. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, all participant identities were replaced with pseudonyms in interview transcripts, observation notes, and research reporting.

Data were collected over eight weeks. Each school was observed four times, resulting in 24 classroom observations lasting approximately 70-90 minutes each. The observations were conducted as non-participant and semi-structured observations in which researchers observed classroom interactions without directly intervening in instructional activities. Observation activities focused on poetry reading, writing, discussion, and performance sessions. The observation framework emphasized instructional practices, student participation, language interaction, and teacher scaffolding during poetry learning [21]. Key observation indicators included students' use of descriptive and figurative vocabulary, engagement during poetry discussion, expressive confidence during poetry performance, and interpretive interaction during writing activities.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all teachers and students after the observation period, with interview durations ranging from 30-45 minutes. Interviews explored participants' experiences and perceptions regarding poetry learning [22]. Sample teacher interview questions included: "How does poetry influence students' language expression compared to regular lessons?" and "What changes do you observe in students' participation during poetry activities?" Student interview questions included: "What do you feel when writing or reading poetry?" and "Do poetry activities help you express ideas more easily?"

Documentation included students' poetry works, lesson plans, and learning materials to identify elements of language and literary development such as figurative language, vocabulary use, imagery, and creative expression [9], [23]. The research instruments consisted of observation sheets, interview guides, and documentation checklists developed from theories of language learning, literary pedagogy, and poetry education. Instrument validation involved two qualitative research experts and one Indonesian language education specialist who evaluated the instruments based on relevance, clarity, consistency with research objectives, and suitability for elementary classroom contexts. Revisions were conducted following expert feedback, particularly regarding observation indicators, interview wording, and alignment between analytical categories and research focus areas. Final agreement among validators indicated that the instruments were sufficiently appropriate for qualitative data collection.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. involving data condensation, coding, data display, and conclusion drawing [24]. Thematic coding was conducted through open coding to identify recurring patterns in observation notes, interview transcripts, and student documents. This process was followed by axial coding to categorize codes into broader themes related to language development, literary appreciation, creative expression, and interpretive engagement. Selective coding was subsequently applied to refine relationships among themes and construct the final analytical framework. Coding

procedures were conducted collaboratively by the researchers and cross-checked repeatedly to maintain consistency and minimize interpretive bias. Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across observations, interviews, and documentation, member checking with participating teachers, and peer debriefing following [25]. Data collection was considered sufficient when recurring themes and patterns consistently emerged across schools, and no substantially new findings appeared during the later stages of observation and interviews, indicating data saturation had been achieved.

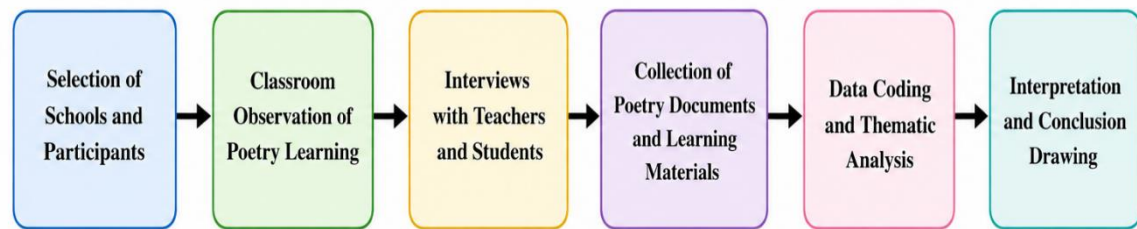


Figure 1. Research Procedure

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3. 1. 1. Poetry as a Medium for Language Development

Across the observed classroom sessions, poetry-based instruction demonstrated clear patterns of language development through students' expressive use of vocabulary, oral participation, and interpretive engagement. During poetry writing activities, students used richer descriptive expressions, emotional vocabulary, and imaginative diction compared to their responses in conventional language exercises, which were generally limited to short factual sentences and mechanically structured answers. In regular lessons, classroom interaction was commonly dominated by textbook reading, grammar correction, and teacher-centered explanation. By contrast, poetry sessions created a more participatory atmosphere in which students actively discussed meanings, experimented with language, and shared personal experiences through writing and performance.

Classroom observations showed that students became more confident in expressing ideas during poetry activities. In one classroom, students who were usually quiet during formal writing tasks voluntarily read their poems aloud and responded to peer interpretations. During a poetry discussion about nature and family themes, one student explained, "The rain is like my mother because it comes softly and makes everything calm." This expression reflected students' emerging ability to connect metaphorical language with emotional experience. Teachers also encouraged students to explore figurative language through guided interpretation and collaborative discussion rather than memorizing definitions mechanically.

The students' poems demonstrated meaningful use of imagery, symbolism, and emotional expression. One student wrote, "The moon follows me home like a silent friend," illustrating personification and emotional symbolism associated with loneliness and comfort. Another student described school life through sensory imagery: "The classroom walls listen to our noisy dreams every morning." These poetic expressions indicated that students were

not merely practicing vocabulary but also constructing imaginative and symbolic meanings through language.

Observation notes further revealed that poetry activities encouraged students to pay closer attention to rhythm, diction, and emotional nuance. During poetry performance sessions, students experimented with voice modulation, pauses, and gestures to emphasize meaning. Compared to conventional reading lessons, poetry learning generated more active classroom interaction and interpretive dialogue. Students frequently responded to each other's poems by asking questions, interpreting symbols, or relating poetic themes to personal experiences.

Teacher interviews reinforced these findings. One teacher explained, "*Students who usually struggle to express ideas in ordinary writing become more confident when writing poetry because they can use their own imagination and feelings*" (Teacher 2). Another teacher noted, "*In regular lessons students often focus only on correct answers, but during poetry activities they become more willing to explore words and meanings creatively*" (Teacher 4).

Student responses also reflected positive engagement with poetry learning. One student stated, "*I like poetry because I can tell stories about my feelings using beautiful words*" (Student 5). Another student explained, "*Reading poems helps me understand different meanings and imagine many things*" (Student 9). These responses suggest that poetry-based learning supported not only language competence but also emotional expression, interpretive thinking, and confidence in communication.

The findings indicate that poetry learning functioned as a meaningful space for creative language use and interpretive interaction. Rather than emphasizing technical correctness alone, poetry activities encouraged students to connect words, emotions, imagination, and personal experiences within authentic classroom communication practices.

Table 2. Language Development Identified in Poetry Learning

Language Aspect	Evidence from Observation
Vocabulary Development	Students used richer descriptive, emotional, and sensory vocabulary in poetry writing activities
Speaking Confidence	Students participated more actively in poetry reading, discussion, and performance sessions
Figurative Understanding	Students applied metaphor, imagery, and personification in their poems and interpretations
Creative Expression	Students expressed personal experiences, emotions, and imagination through poetry
Interpretive Ability	Students connected poetic language with social experiences and personal meanings

3.1.2. Poetry as a Medium for Literary Development

Poetry-based instruction demonstrated meaningful patterns of literary development across the observed elementary classrooms. During poetry reading, interpretation, writing, and performance activities, students engaged actively not only as readers but also as interpreters who connected poetic language with personal experiences, emotions, and social realities. Compared with conventional language lessons that were generally dominated by

textbook exercises and short-answer comprehension tasks, poetry learning created more dialogic and reflective classroom interactions. Students were encouraged to discuss meanings collaboratively, respond emotionally to literary texts, and express imaginative ideas through creative language.

Classroom observations revealed that poetry discussions frequently generated interpretive dialogue among students. In one classroom session focusing on nature-themed poetry, a student interpreted the line “The river carries tired voices to the sea” by explaining, “It means people can feel calm when they tell their problems to nature.” Other students responded by relating the poem to environmental pollution and family experiences near the river. This interaction demonstrated how poetry activities encouraged symbolic interpretation and reflective thinking beyond literal comprehension.

Students’ poetry products also reflected imaginative themes, emotional sensitivity, and symbolic meaning. Many poems explored themes of family, friendship, school life, nature, and environmental awareness through figurative and sensory language. One student wrote, “My mother’s smile is a warm sunrise in the cold morning,” using metaphor and visual imagery to symbolize affection and emotional security. Another student described friendship through the line, “Friends are small lamps when my days become dark,” illustrating symbolic representation of support and comfort. These poetic expressions indicate that students were able to construct emotional and symbolic meanings rather than merely describe events literally.

The poems additionally demonstrated recurring imagery patterns associated with nature and everyday life. Rain, rivers, trees, moonlight, classrooms, and birds frequently appeared as symbolic representations of feelings, hope, loneliness, or happiness. In one poem about environmental concern, a student wrote, “The trees cry quietly when smoke covers the sky,” personifying nature to express sadness and ecological awareness. Such expressions reflected emerging empathy and moral reflection through poetic imagination. Observation notes showed that students became increasingly attentive to rhythm, diction, imagery, and emotional nuance while revising and performing their poems.

Poetry performance activities further strengthened literary engagement. During classroom presentations, students used voice modulation, gestures, pauses, and facial expressions to communicate emotional meaning. In contrast to regular lessons, where students often responded briefly to teacher questions, poetry sessions generated enthusiastic participation and collaborative discussion. Several students who were usually passive during textbook-oriented instruction became more expressive and willing to share interpretations publicly during poetry activities.

Teacher interviews confirmed these observations. One teacher explained, “*Students become more interested in literature when poetry is presented interactively because they enjoy interpreting meanings and expressing emotions*” (Teacher 1). Another teacher stated, “*Poetry makes students think imaginatively and connect texts with their own experiences instead of only searching for correct answers*” (Teacher 6). These responses suggest that poetry learning created a more meaningful literary environment compared with conventional literacy instruction.

Student responses also reflected emotional and imaginative engagement with poetry learning. One student commented, *“I enjoy writing poems about nature and my family because I can imagine many things and express my feelings”* (Student 3). Another student explained, *“Poetry makes learning more fun because we read, write, discuss, and perform together”* (Student 11). These responses indicate that poetry activities fostered participation, creativity, and personal connection to literary learning.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that poetry learning fostered literary appreciation, imaginative thinking, symbolic interpretation, emotional engagement, and reflective expression through active interaction with aesthetic language. Poetry functioned not merely as literary content but as a participatory medium through which students explored meanings, emotions, and social experiences creatively within authentic classroom contexts.

Table 3. Literary Development Identified in Poetry Learning

Literary Aspect	Evidence from Observation
Literary Appreciation	Students actively discussed poem meanings and responded interpretively during classroom dialogue
Imaginative Thinking	Students created poems containing symbolic themes, sensory imagery, and imaginative expression
Emotional Engagement	Students demonstrated expressive performance through voice modulation, gestures, and emotional delivery
Symbolic Interpretation	Students interpreted metaphor, imagery, and emotional meaning connected to personal experiences
Reflective Expression	Poems reflected empathy, environmental awareness, moral reflection, and social concern

3.2. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that poetry functions as an effective pedagogical medium for supporting both language and literary development among elementary school students. However, the findings also indicate that these two dimensions developed through different learning processes. Language development was primarily reflected in students' increasing ability to use expressive vocabulary, construct figurative language, communicate ideas confidently, and experiment with diction during speaking and writing activities. In contrast, literary development appeared through students' sensitivity toward imagery, symbolism, emotional meaning, interpretation, imagination, and reflective engagement with poetic texts. Poetry learning therefore supported not only linguistic competence but also literary sensitivity through students' active interaction with aesthetic language. These findings reinforce the view that literacy learning in elementary education should move beyond technical reading and writing toward more creative and interpretive literacy practices [3], [8].

The findings show that poetry-based learning encouraged students to use language more creatively and contextually compared with conventional textbook-oriented instruction. During regular lessons, students generally focused on grammatical correctness, short-answer responses, vocabulary memorization, and formal writing exercises. By contrast, poetry activities provided opportunities for students to explore words, emotions, rhythm, and imagination simultaneously. Students became more willing to experiment with metaphor,

descriptive vocabulary, and symbolic expression because poetry writing reduced the pressure associated with producing “correct” answers. This finding aligns with Schmitt and Schmitt, who argue that language development becomes more effective when learners interact who argue that language development becomes more effective when learners engage with language creatively and contextually [6]. Similarly, Crystal explains that language play contributes to children’s linguistic flexibility and communicative confidence through creative manipulation of language [26].

The findings further reveal that poetry learning strengthened students’ understanding of figurative language such as metaphor, imagery, and personification. Students were able to connect poetic expressions with personal experiences and social realities rather than merely identifying figurative forms mechanically. This finding supports Winner’s argument that children’s engagement with metaphorical language contributes to cognitive argument that engagement with metaphorical language contributes to interpretive and cognitive development [27]. In several classroom discussions, students interpreted symbolic expressions differently according to their own emotional experiences, indicating that poetry learning facilitated deeper meaning-making processes. Nevertheless, students demonstrated varying levels of interpretive ability. Some students responded confidently during poetry discussion and performance activities, while others initially struggled to move beyond literal description. Several younger students tended to imitate examples provided by teachers before gradually developing more independent symbolic expression. This variation suggests that literary understanding develops progressively and requires continuous pedagogical support.

Similarly, Gentner et al. another important finding concerns the role of poetry in fostering literary appreciation and imaginative engagement [28]. Students became more enthusiastic during poetry reading, discussion, writing, and performance compared with conventional literacy lessons, where literary interaction was often minimal. Poetry activities encouraged students to interpret texts emotionally, relate themes to lived experiences, and express imaginative responses collaboratively. This finding supports Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, which emphasizes that literary meaning emerges through interaction between the reader, the text, and personal experience [29], [30]. In this study, literary learning became more participatory because students actively negotiated meaning through discussion, interpretation, and performance rather than passively receiving explanations from teachers.

The development of imagination and creativity identified in this study is also consistent with Bruner’s perspective that imaginative thinking plays a central role in children’s cognitive development [31]. Students constructed symbolic images, emotional meanings, and reflective narratives through poetry writing activities. This finding reinforces Fitria’s argument that creative writing activities help learners develop originality, self-expression, and communication confidence [32]. Furthermore, Eming emphasizes that writing functions as a mode of learning because learners construct understanding while producing texts [33]. In the present study, poetry writing became not only a linguistic activity but also a reflective and emotional learning process through which students interpreted personal and social experiences.

The findings additionally indicate that poetry learning contributed to emotional awareness and social reflection among students. Many poems explored themes of friendship, parents, environmental issues, loneliness, hope, and everyday social experiences. Students frequently used natural imagery such as rain, rivers, moonlight, and trees symbolically to express emotions and social concerns. This result supports Nikolajeva's argument that literary texts can foster empathy and identity formation among young learners [34]. Likewise, Jack and Illingworth emphasize that poetry supports empathetic engagement because learners interpret emotions and perspectives through aesthetic language [11]. The reflective dimension identified in this study also aligns with Luke's concept of critical literacy, which views literacy as a process of interpreting social realities and constructing meaning critically [35].

From a sociocultural perspective, the findings support Shahini's explanation that language learning develops through social interaction and contextual meaning-making [36]. Poetry activities in this study were collaborative and dialogic, involving discussion, interpretation, oral performance, and peer interaction. An important aspect of the findings concerns the pedagogical role of teachers during poetry instruction. Teachers did not merely provide explanations about poetic structure but acted as facilitators who guided interpretation, encouraged imaginative responses, modeled expressive reading, and supported students during writing activities. Teachers frequently used open-ended questions such as "What feeling do you imagine from this line?" or "Why did you choose this image?" to stimulate reflection and interpretation. This scaffolding process appeared particularly important for students who initially lacked confidence in expressing symbolic meanings or personal emotions. These findings correspond with Faisal and Fadhil, who emphasize that scaffolding plays a crucial role in supporting language acquisition and creative expression [37].

Despite these positive findings, the study also identified several practical classroom constraints influencing the implementation of poetry-based learning. Teachers reported limited instructional time because curriculum demands and assessment systems remained strongly oriented toward textbook completion and measurable academic achievement. Poetry activities such as interpretation, collaborative discussion, drafting, revision, and performance required longer classroom interaction than conventional language exercises. Some teachers also expressed uncertainty regarding strategies for teaching figurative language and evaluating creative work objectively. These findings indicate that although poetry learning has significant pedagogical potential, its implementation requires sufficient instructional flexibility, teacher readiness, and institutional support.

Another important contribution of this study is its emphasis on poetry as an integrated literacy practice in elementary education. Previous studies often examined poetry separately as literary appreciation, vocabulary learning, or creative writing practice [13], [14], [38]. In contrast, this study demonstrates that poetry simultaneously supports expressive language development, interpretive understanding, creativity, emotional engagement, and reflective thinking within authentic classroom interaction. This multidimensional role confirms Barton and Hamilton's perspective that literacy is a social and cultural practice rather than merely a technical skill [39].

The findings also highlight the relevance of culturally responsive and humanistic learning approaches in elementary education. Students appeared more engaged when poetry themes related closely to family, friendship, school experiences, local environments, and familiar social situations. Familiar contexts helped students interpret meanings more confidently and connect poetic language with lived experiences. This finding supports Gay's theory of culturally responsive teaching, which emphasizes the importance of connecting learning materials with students' cultural backgrounds and everyday realities [40]. Poetry therefore becomes not only a language-learning tool but also a medium through which children construct identity, emotion, imagination, and social understanding.

Overall, the study confirms that poetry provides a holistic pedagogical space for elementary language and literary learning. Poetry-based instruction supports linguistic competence through expressive vocabulary use, figurative understanding, speaking confidence, and contextual communication, while simultaneously fostering literary sensitivity through imagination, symbolism, interpretation, empathy, and reflective engagement. However, the effectiveness of poetry learning depends significantly on teacher scaffolding, classroom interaction, curriculum flexibility, instructional time, and opportunities for sustained creative exploration.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that poetry functions as an integrative pedagogical medium that supports both language competence and literary development in elementary classrooms. Findings from classroom observations, interviews, and students' poetry works indicate that poetry-based instruction encourages expressive vocabulary use, figurative understanding, speaking confidence, imaginative thinking, and reflective interpretation. Poetry activities also created participatory and contextual learning environments in which students connected language, emotions, meanings, and personal experiences through creative expression. These findings suggest that poetry should not be positioned merely as supplementary literary material, but as a meaningful bridge between language learning and aesthetic experience in elementary education.

Theoretically, this study supports sociocultural, transactional, and critical literacy perspectives by demonstrating how meaning-making develops through aesthetic engagement, interpretation, and classroom interaction. The study also contributes empirical evidence showing that poetry integrates linguistic, creative, emotional, and interpretive dimensions within authentic classroom practice. However, the findings are context-specific and limited to a small number of Indonesian elementary classrooms, so broader educational contexts may produce different learning dynamics.

Practically, the study recommends stronger integration of poetry into elementary language curricula through reading, writing, interpretation, discussion, and performance activities. Teacher training programs should also provide greater preparation in literary pedagogy, creative literacy instruction, and scaffolding strategies for poetry learning. In addition, school literacy programs may incorporate poetry-based activities as part of participatory and humanistic literacy development. Future research may expand this area

through digital poetry learning, multimodal literacy practices, or comparative studies across different educational contexts and grade levels.

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