



RESEARCH PAPER

Teaching Intercultural Literary Genres in Pakistani Universities: The Undergraduate Students' Perspective on the Poetry of Rumi and Blake

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is a multicultural country and people are divided across political and religious values. The major objective of this study is to investigate pedagogical relevance of the poetry of Rumi and Blake for culturally diverse undergraduate classes in Pakistani universities in Lahore. The study was based on survey research design. A closed ended questionnaire was developed for data collection from 100 students purposively selected from two universities in Lahore. Findings of the study indicate that intercultural poetry with the theme of Love written by poets like Rumi and Blake needs to be taught at the undergraduate level. The study has implications for students, teachers, and genre based syllabus designers associated with teaching of English Literature in Pakistani universities.

KEYWORDS Intercultural Poetry; Jalal-Ud-Din Rumi, Teaching of Genres, Undergraduate Students, William Blake

Introduction

This study aimed to explore pedagogical potential of intercultural genre of poetry written by Rumi and Blake for undergraduate students of English in Pakistani universities. Religion has been part of every culture, regardless of its relative role in social practices. Anyone interested in knowing the myth of the clash of civilizations will focus on the representative cultural artifacts of the divergent cultures. One such domain of clashes or convergence is the discourse of Sufism (Islamic view of spiritual experiences) and Christian beliefs about otherworldly affairs represented by Rumi William Blake. Spiritual love is not a subject of religious studies per se.

The possible reason is that spiritual love cannot be explained with any exactness, which implies that the subject is hard to draw in with top to bottom utilizing exclusively objective and scholastically sound measures (Hook, 2013). The closest way to deal with this issue is to analyze the discourse of the prototypical ideologues. However, Love is one of the most significant and focal aspects of spiritual conviction and experience. Without it, all religions and spiritualities would fall. The spiritual love (Love onwards) is the key to conviction and gives it a concrete shape (Anna, 2019). It follows from Anna's views that cross-cultural representative works may be helpful to probe the nature of Love.

A representative view of Love comes from Rumi who attributes importance to Love more than anything else in his mystical philosophy. To Rumi, love seems to be multi-faceted. It is pain of heart, something Man cannot describe appropriately. When Love manifests itself, there is no room for reason. True love does not lose its power with the

passage of time. It seems to be very difficult to interpret Love. If one tries to define it, he would hardly be able to do so. Its strength cannot be normally measured because Love possesses such a power that may enable an ordinary man to do great things in life.

From Western point of view Blake's ideas may be helpful to understand Love. His way of communicating Love is by all accounts comparable with the regular style of any Man's appearance of strong affections for other human being (Christ). What has made Blake so confident in his dealings with Christ is, maybe, his own adoration for the Savior of Humankind. Like a genuine disciple, Blake gives up his spirit to Christ for its improvement through Christ's affection. He puts stock in the sanitization and advancement of soul through adoration. But this state of Love is attained when the Body (actual part of human existence) is subdued through the image of the Savior.

One common strand emerges from these mystical dimensions of Love defined in abstraction by the two representatives of divergent civilizations and faiths. The commonality lies in the fact that an ordinary Man can get unparalleled association with God through Love of his fellow beings. It is this theme of intercultural literature such as produced by Rumi and Blake that should be taught to undergraduate students in Pakistani universities.

Literature Review

If students of universities study such works, it will improve their knowledge of cultural norms, beliefs, and behaviors as well as comprehension of their own and other cultures. Also, such reflective study enables the learners to recognize and confidently explain cultural differences. This is the same effect that leads sojourners to adapt themselves to new cultural environments through socialization (Burke, 2015).

Every facet of intercultural literature and interpersonal interactions is influenced by cross-cultural learning. It immediately affects strategies about how well students adapt to a different educational, social, and cultural setting. Students get a general sense of self, understanding of their own culture, and appreciation for other cultural mores. Students can offer themselves in ways that show respect, confidence in one's identity and friendship thanks to the resulting self-efficacy (Brain, 2018).

But all this is possible only when the teachers are attentive, aware, and skillful in their responses to the various cultural presumptions, expectations, demands, and surprises that can befuddle a student's first contact with other cultures. As a result, students are equally eager, humble, and committed to learning about other cultures. The teaching of cross-cultural literature turns classrooms into places for unpacking cultural barriers (Douglas, 2021).

Rosenblatt (2013) explains how students develop a greater level of empathy through interactions with literary texts: "The students can develop heightened sensitivity to the needs and problems of others who are distant from them in temperament, space, or social environment as they vicariously share the emotions and aspirations of other humans through literature (p. 250)". Cross-cultural literature generates and exchange meaning among individuals with various cultural origins. There is main focus on the contact with various cultures that leads to cultural comparisons through intercultural communication.

In order to teach undergraduates about intercultural literature, students should be exposed to works of literature from various cultures and encouraged to analyze and interpret the texts through a multicultural lens. Literature from a wide range of cultures

and ethnicities may be used to teach intercultural literature. Teaching Intercultural literature fosters collaboration with students through pedagogical communication. This confirms previous research finding that intercultural literature plays an important role in globalization (Carole, 2021).

Several studies have been conducted worldwide on the theme of Love as perceived by Rumi and Blake but very limited research is found in the cultural perspective of Pakistan. Pakistan is a multicultural country and people are divided across political and religious values. There has been constant demand for accommodating cultural diversity through teaching of literature, media and education that can minimize such schisms in Pakistani society. This research will be significant in its socio-educational implications at international and regional levels.

Material and Methods

Survey design grounded in the positivist paradigm was used to explore perceptions of the undergraduate students about teaching of intercultural poetry. A closed ended questionnaire with 40 Likert type items was developed. The items were derived from the review of literature conducted for this study. First part of the questionnaire consisted of 20 items on need of teaching poetry of Rumi and Blake and second part of the questionnaire had 20 items on the teaching strategies that were appropriate for teaching poetry of Rumi and Blake (see the Appendix). A purposeful sample of the size 100 was selected from two universities located in Lahore city (50 students from each university, one from private and one from public). The questionnaire was validated by two research experts and its reliability was assessed by Cronbach Alpha co-efficient. The overall value of the co-efficient was (.74). Taking care of ethical requirements, the researchers collected data themselves and got a 94% response rate.

Procedures of Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS (version 23) for estimating mean scores and standard deviations of the responses of the participants. Means were required to give a group score and standard deviation was needed to measure the degree of distance among individual responses within the sample to questionnaire items. The results of the descriptive analysis along with the interpretations are given in the following section.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Responses about Need of Teaching inter-cultural Poetry of Rumi and Blake

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD
1	Teaching of intercultural poetry of Rumi and Blake tells the students about other cultures.	0	0	7	12	47	34	5.08	0.86
2	Teaching of intercultural poetry develops understanding of universal values.	0	0	5	8	42	45	5.27	0.82
3	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to cope with the conflicts caused by cultural differences.	0	2	22	2	49	25	4.73	1.13
4	Teaching of intercultural poetry allows students to learn how to interact in a diverse and challenging world.	0	0	2	6	55	37	5.27	0.66
5	Textbooks should have adequate content on intercultural poetry.	5	0	0	4	65	27	5.03	1.06

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD
6	Textbooks must have one section on intercultural poetry.	5	7	2	2	59	25	4.78	1.32
7	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to know about developments of various civilizations.	5	7	2	2	60	25	4.78	1.32
8	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to know about the customs of different cultures.	10	0	5	6	64	15	4.59	1.36
9	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to know the taboos in other cultures.	5	0	9	4	65	18	4.76	1.16
10	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to know the life style of different cultures.	10	5	17	4	45	19	4.26	1.56
11	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to know the moral ideals of different cultures.	5	0	2	4	61	29	5.01	1.11
12	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to know the ideology [belief about truth] of people.	0	2	15	2	54	27	4.89	1.03
13	Teaching of intercultural poetry develops competence of intercultural communication.	5	0	2	4	71	19	4.91	1.06
14	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to understand role of religion in different cultures.	2	10	12	2	60	14	4.50	1.28
15	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to enhance tolerance and love for humanity.	7	10	0	6	67	10	4.46	1.38
16	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to develop their comprehension well when it demonstrates through the foreign culture.	2	2	5	4	42	45	5.17	1.08
17	Teaching of intercultural poetry leads the students to innovation and creativity in thought and actions.	0	5	24	2	55	12	4.46	1.14
18	Teaching of intercultural poetry through visual resources promotes students' knowledge about cultural heritage.	0	0	12	4	75	9	4.81	0.76
19	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps syllabus designers in understanding cultural needs of the students.	10	0	5	4	55	26	4.72	1.43
20	Teaching of intercultural poetry helps the students to improve their literary competence.	0	0	7	2	54	37	5.21	0.80

Table 1 shows the responses of participants about the need of teaching intercultural poetry of Rumi and Blake. Majority of the respondents (87%) tend to agree that teaching of intercultural literature develops understanding of universal values and allows students to learn how to interact in a diverse and challenging world. A considerable number of respondents (64%) appear to agree that teaching of intercultural literature helps the students to know the life style of different cultures,

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Responses about Method of Teaching Intercultural Poetry of Rumi and Blake

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD
1	The method of teaching should be related with ethnic background.	2	10	15	10	52	11	4.33	1.26
2	The method of teaching should be task-based activities.	0	10	15	2	44	29	4.67	1.31
3	The material of teaching should have an intercultural section for the students.	0	5	0	6	80	9	4.88	0.77
4	The method of teaching should include interactive strategies.	0	5	22	2	44	27	4.66	1.23
5	The pedagogy should include field trips and study projects.	0	0	27	2	36	30	4.73	1.19
6	Students should be provided with handouts regarding intercultural poetry of Rumi and Blake in classroom.	0	7	0	6	85	2	4.75	0.81
7	The pedagogy should engage students with creative writing skills.	0	0	5	2	54	39	5.27	0.74
8	Teacher should teach the students how to self-assess while learning new information.	5	5	15	2	60	14	4.47	1.32
9	There should be "inclusive" curriculum that teaches respect for difference of color, creed, and gender.	0	10	0	4	75	11	4.77	1.00
10	Teachers should encourage students to write research assignments in the perspective of other cultures.	0	0	5	2	59	34	5.22	0.72
11	There should be think-pair-share activities in small groups in classroom.	0	0	5	4	52	39	5.25	0.76
12	Students feel comfortable while reading the elements related to other cultures.	0	0	7	4	52	37	5.19	0.81
13	Teachers incorporate activities about social relations among students of different cultures and languages.	0	0	7	4	47	42	5.24	0.83
14	There should be various techniques or strategies for teaching intercultural poetry of Rumi and Blake.	0	0	5	6	49	40	5.24	0.78
15	Students should be engaged with collaborative tasks.	0	5	15	6	39	35	4.84	1.20
16	Teachers should raise awareness of cultural accommodation in classroom.	0	5	5	4	70	16	4.87	0.92
17	Teachers should be able to integrate various intercultural genres (e.g., poetry with prose anecdotes) in classroom.	0	5	0	2	79	14	4.97	0.78
18	There should be panel discussions on the intercultural poetry of Rumi and Blake in classrooms.	0	0	5	4	59	32	5.18	0.73
19	Teacher should apply integrated approach to teaching intercultural poetry of Rumi and Blake in classroom.	0	10	0	6	72	12	4.76	1.02
20	Teacher should exploit poems by various poets for promoting intercultural and intracultural harmony.	0	0	2	2	79	17	5.11	0.51

Table 2 indicates that most of the respondents (93%) agree that the pedagogy should engage students with creative writing skills. Majority of the respondents (91%) think that

pair-share activities should be in small groups in classroom. The same number of respondents (91%) agree that teachers should incorporate activities about social relations among students of different cultures and languages, and that there should be various strategies for teaching intercultural literature. A moderate number (64%) agree that the method of teaching should be related with ethnic background.

Discussion

Rumi represents the characteristics of spiritual experiences in his Love poems. The majority of the spiritual interpretations that are presented in Rumi's poetry provide the researchers with additional information about genuine transcultural values. Besides, as Rumi is considered to be a Sufi poet of Islam, fundamental characteristics of Sufism are illustrated in his poems through a variety of stories and models from the Quran. Rumi points out that Sufis model their down-to-earth lifestyles after those of the prophets, remaining humble like the prophets and never giving in to pride like Satan. Because of their deep devotion to God and the prophets, Sufis avoid common pleasures. They treat each living being, even animals and trees, with reverence. Further, their poetic discourse rouses an excitement to meet God in the world of eternity. Following paragraphs give question wise discussion on the results.

How do teachers of English Literature perceive the need for Teaching Inter-Cultural Literature to undergraduate students?

Teachers of English Literature are aware of the need for teaching inter-cultural literature to undergraduate students in Pakistan. The teachers encourage the students who belong to a variety of cultural groups to investigate these connections in their classroom. In this way, students would be able to explore other cultures like, culinary culture, digital culture etc. Teachers can help students to connect with these communities in person or online by asking them about places and communities where they feel like cultural "insiders." Students and teachers alike benefit from this practice because it helps them comprehend the variety of affiliations and the intricate nature of intercultural studies at undergraduate level. The scope of what it means to teach intercultural literature is substantially supported by the respondents. Culture, like teaching, is complicated. However, teachers may be able to see and comprehend their students' languages, literacies, and cultural practices in deeper and more meaningful ways if we approach our practices with this cultural complexity in mind.

Teachers may exploit texts of various genres, such as novels, short stories, poems, plays, or memoirs. In addition to analyzing the literary works themselves, students may also explore the historical, social, and political contexts that influenced the texts. This may involve discussion of the impact of colonization, immigration, globalization, and other socio-cultural factors on the literature. To facilitate effective learning, instructors may use various teaching strategies, such as group discussions, critical analysis, creative writing assignments, and multimedia presentations.

Instructors may also encourage students to draw connections between literature and their personal experiences and perspectives. Overall, teaching intercultural literature to undergraduate students provides an opportunity to foster intercultural awareness, empathy, and understanding, which are essential skills for navigating a diverse and complex global society. These findings were also suggested by other research (e.g., John, 2019; Larsen, & Litz, 2012).

What are appropriate strategies for teaching intercultural poetry of Rumi and Blake to the undergraduate students?

In order to teach undergraduates about intercultural literature, students should be exposed to works of literature from various cultures and encouraged to analyze and interpret the texts through a multicultural lens. Literature from a wide range of cultures and ethnicities may be used to teach intercultural literature. Teaching Intercultural literature fosters collaboration among students through intercultural communication. This confirms previous research findings that intercultural literature plays an important role in globalization (Weifang, 2018).

The students responded favorably to the inclusion of intercultural literature studies in the curriculum from Rumi and Blake. The majority of students agree that Cross-cultural studies in the classroom should receive effective support from the teachers. Students benefit from teachers' support for teaching intercultural literature in their literary learning, as demonstrated by the findings of this study. These findings are similar to other studies such as (Waxman, 2015; Segan & Levin, 2022).

Conclusion

The analysis and discussion on the results indicate that undergraduate students tend to believe that intercultural poetry of Rumi and Blake should be taught. Such literature is needed to enhance students' knowledge of other cultures and sensitivity to the norms, beliefs, and behaviors of people from diverse cultures and creeds. Undergraduate students appear to agree that cross-cultural poetry of Rumi and Blake generates and exchanges meanings of human relations with their creator and among themselves.

The findings suggest that intercultural utility of studying poetry of Rumi and Blake depends on adoption of a genre based pedagogy. The teachers should encourage the students who belong to a variety of cultural groups to investigate cultural connotations of mystical discourse in their classroom. The study of intercultural poetry demands use of digital resources to widen the connectivity across cultures. Teachers can help students to connect with these communities in person or online by asking them about places and communities where they feel themselves as cultural "insiders."

Undergraduate students and their teachers alike benefit from this interactive pedagogy because it helps them comprehend the variety of affiliations and the intricate nature of intercultural relations. However, the study never claims to cover all aspects of intercultural study and teaching of poetry written by Rumi and Blake. For in-depth understanding of this issue, more studies with larger samples and qualitative analysis are strongly recommended by Pakistani teachers of English at undergraduate level.

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