

Prospects and Challenges of Teaching and Learning of Literature -In -English in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The place of literature in oral and written communication of secondary school students in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is a tool subject in that the three layers of learning emphasized by the Blooms' Taxonomy of Educational objective, that is, the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains are indirectly engaged in, in any literature teaching/ learning situation. The writers of this paper engage in the discussion of the dichotomy between Literature- in- English and English Literature. A panoramic view of Literature in English curriculum in both the junior and senior secondary schools and the relevance of Literature -in -English to boost performance in English Language examinations are critically examined. They stress the fact that the challenges being currently experienced by most schools can be curtailed or reduced to the barest minimum provided necessary proactive measures suggested in the paper are utilized.

Key words: literature, English literature, Literature -in -English, performance, syllabus, students.

Introduction

An attempt to give a concise definition of the concept of literature is like counting the number of strands contained in man's hair. The reason is that scholars have defined literature using various terms. Nonetheless, many clear distinct and forms abound all over. Thus, we need to state clearly whether literature is being looked at as a form of written document expressing the history associated with a given human society like the American Literature, European Literature or African Literature to mention just a few. Or, we consider the compendium of prose writing where the norms, values, ethics, beliefs, religions etc of a given human and non-human societies are clearly specified or, that we are interested in looking at literature as a piece of "work of art" with its tripartite genres- prose, poetry and drama. This is the main crux of the study.

The Concept, scope and importance of Literature

A survey into the world of some definitions of Literature as perceived in the latter exposition is necessary at this juncture. The word, literature, derives its name from a Latin word known as *littera*, which simply connotes 'a letter of the alphabet' that is, anything written with the letters of the alphabets. Since most of the things we read in this part of the world are written not in Hebrew, otherwise known as Semitic language or Mandarin, the language spoken by Chinese people and the other regions within her suburb, it therefore means that every printed text is qualified to be literature. Thus, information on

certain recipe, tracts or pamphlets, documented news items, textbooks, and a host of varieties of documented items are literature. Hornby (2006), on the other hand, however, defines Literature as "pieces of writing that are valued as works of arts especially novels, plays and poems or printed information on a particular subject" (p.863). Trident International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary (2004) citation, perceives literature thus:

- Written works which deal with themes of permanence and universal interest, characterized by creativeness and grace of expression, drama, fiction and poetry.
- The written or printed productions of the human mind collectively.
- The writing that pertains to particular epoch, country, language, subject or branch of learning (p.744).

From the cited references, one major attribute peculiar to literature is documentation, that is, a work of art compressed into writing for the purpose of record keeping. The documented stuff however must attain a high level of literary canon before being regarded as worthy of any artistic scholarly attention and investigation otherwise it would be taken for history.

Owoeye (2003) defines literature as "writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards life" (p.104). The concluded assertion simply means that, literature is a

crucial telescope for revealing life and the intricacies associated with it. Another way of interpreting this is that the goal of literature is to showcase life as it really is through writing. Ogunnaike, in his own view of literature, states that literature is a “written or spoken communication deriving from or mirroring a society and historical experience of that society” (Ogunnaike, 2002, p. 335). Based on Welleck and Warren's (1992) views, literary language thrives in ambiguities. This remark connotes that literary words are often given to several interpretations- a literary artist would prefer to manipulate word or statement to make something happen. For instance, a lot of humour depends on ambiguous manipulation of words, which is not done deliberately to create only humorous effects by any would - be literary writer. The purpose of ambiguity in language of literature among others could be to entertain, inform or effect a change in an individual, a group of people or a society in general.

The writer of any of the genres of literature whether prose, poetry or drama, unlike the historians or scientists or economist, is not tied to fact based on what has actually happened, or on what actually does happen in the world of reality. Adeniyi (2002) succinctly highlights this further by submitting that it deals with “artistic and imaginative recreation of experience” (p.15).

From the foregoing, it is clearly evident that literature connotes different things to a number of scholars but one thing central to the concept of literature highlighted is that a piece of artistic expression whether prose, poetry or drama does not exist in a vacuum in that it mirrors the society and its people. This inevitably will help in drawing conclusion as to whether the literature being discussed is Literature –in- English or English Literature.

Literature -in- English and English Literature defined.

Literature- in- English deals with expression reflecting the three genres of literature, that is, prose, poetry and drama with its various subgenres like norms and values, history, music, cultures, festivals and oral as well as theatrical performances written in English language. The type of writing contained in Literature- in- English is alien to the British cultural norms and values but the message inherent employed the English language as the language used to communicate the thoughts. Any

written format in its tripartite genres expressing the culture of societies other than that of the English people in English language can be regarded as Literature –in English. Things Fall Apart by Achebe vividly created the mental picture of the Igbo Society before and during the Colonial Era by making use of series of Igbo proverbs and witty utterances. It reflects the norms and culture, religious systems, sports, farming activities and all associated with the Igbo tradition by domesticating the English language, to provide the readers with good and very rich source of information on Literature-in English text. Sefi Atta's *Bit of Difference* projected the image of the negative effects of military incursion into the Nigerian political landscape and the corruption orchestrated by their prolonged stay in power. Agary Kaine's *Yellow- Yellow* presented the gory picture of the happenings in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Thus, Nigerian literature can then be postulated to mean any Nigerian literary work expressed in English Language (Awoyemi, 2013). Literature written in another language but translated to the English Language is also an example of Literature- in –English. For example, the “Forest of a Thousand Daemon”, an interpreted version of Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irumole* by Wole Soyinka is an example of Literature-in- English text. In brief, most African writings reflecting the culture of the land of birth of the writers in English language can then be postulated to mean Literature-in –English. Literature- in- English encompasses all literary and artistic works written by Nigerians for study in schools. Therefore, Literature-in- English is a subject being taught in Nigeria's secondary schools to complement the study of English language. It is a subject without which anyone aspiring to study English language in any Nigerian university would not secure admission.

Having established the concept of Literature- in -English, the term English literature could be a bit complex to clarify because the terms, that is, the former and the latter, exhibit not too much of a dichotomy. Sometimes, scholars have referred to the terms synonymously, perceiving Literature- in- English and English Literature to connote similar thing. For the purpose of clarity however, English Literature deals with “literary work written by writers that are not necessarily from England but that which incorporates writers from Wales, Scotland, British Colonies including the United States of America

“(English Literature versus Literature- in- English, 2014, para.2).English Literature showcases the culture of the English people and it is written in English language. Majority of written stuffs in English Literature are from Great Britain and British Colonies.

Dealing with chronological pairing, several periods of English Literature can be identified- Old English Literature (c658-1100), Middle English literature (1100-1500), Renaissance English (1500-1660), Neo – Classical Period (1600-1778), 19th century literature, that is, English Literature since 1901 with subdivisions such as modern, post modern and 20th century literature. Each of the foretasted periods produced notable writers of repute like William Shakespeare (England), William Blake (England), Jane Austin (England), James Joyce (Ireland) Arthur Conon Doyle (Scotland), Virginia Woolf (England), T.S. Eliot (United States) Dylan Thomas (Wales) Salman Rushdie (Indian) and George Orwell (England) whose real name was Eric Arthur Blair to mention just a few (What is English Literature?, 2014, para.1).

Symbiotic Relationship between English Literature and Literature- in- English

Historically, English language, being the language bequeathed to the foremost educated Nigerians became the only weapon through which political awareness for self-government could be expressed. The fact that the Nigerian nation would have to adopt the English Language as her official and education language also lends credence to the prime of place accorded the language as 'de facto' means of communication. As a result of this, if works written by Nigerian foremost authors were to be accorded any due recognition and acceptability internationally, it must be written in this world-acclaimed language. One should also bear in mind the initial perception of the British Colonizers about the African continent that they tagged: Dark Continent. Quoting this erroneous view, “...the occupants of the dark continent were dark mentally, spiritually, culturally and otherwise; they thus needed the finesse of the European culture to elevate them from the level of beasts to that of human beings”(Gbileeka, 1997, cited in Awoyemi, 2013).

One way of disabusing the minds of the non-Africans and the world at large is by showcasing the cultures of the African people through the medium of the English Language. Leading these corpuses of writers were Nigerian writers, who through either

agitation for self government as earlier stated, or by presenting the rich African cultures, employed the use of English language to propagate their thoughts. Thus, the oral forms of literature in its various categories like rituals, folktales, myths, legends, to mention but a few became a very rich ambience to kick-start their efforts. Apart from this, as the nation metamorphoses into diverse appealing and unappealing experiences, Nigerians' writers began to chronicle these experiences in English Language to produce the Nigerian varieties of Literature-in- English. Just like the writers of other African descents, the body of Nigerian writers also re-echo the sensibilities of the Nigerians in writing to produce the different genres of Nigerians' Literature. Also, as Nigeria undergoes series of social, political and economic transformation, the need to reconstruct the subject matter in accordance with the compelling dictate of the era, gave rise to new trends in Nigerian writers and their writings. Mention must be made of Cyprian Ekwensi, popular writer during the Onitsha Market Literature Era. He wrote pamphlets known as “When the Love Whispers” and collections of Igbo tales known as Ikolo, the “Wrestlers and other Tales” in 1947. Amos Tutuola came up with his transliteration literary text titled: The Palmwine Drinkards in 1952, followed by Achebe's Things Fall Apart in 1958. In 1957, when a German scholar, named Ulli Beier started the Black Orpheus, a sort of magazine, the first published works of yet to be named Nobel Laureate then, Wole Soyinka came into being. They were collection of poems titled: “The Immigrant” and “My Next Door Neighbour” (National Open University of Nigeria).

Efforts of other Nigerian writers such as the author of “One Man One Wife” (1959), Timothy Aluko and Elechi Amadi's “The Concubine” (1966) are also good reference points to what has now become the Nigerian Literature –in- English (NLE). The final nod and recognition heralding the approval of the NLE and invariably, Literature- in- English for other African writers, was the Nobel Prize for Literature won by Wole Soyinka in 1986 (Anthony, n.d.).

One of the reasons for painstakingly examining the relationship between Literature- in- English and English Literature in general for the purpose of this paper is to bring to fore the fact that an average Nigerian child must compulsorily master both the NLE and the English Literature. The child is confronted with double-edged problem; mastering the literature of his/her immediate background and those

of other cultures alien to him/her. Compounding the problem further is the statement expressed in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (1998,p.7), some of the objectives of the policy is “to raise generation of people who can think for themselves, *respect the views and feelings of others...* and appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims and live as good citizens”. The italicized phrase as specified in the objectives connotes that, if the Nigerian child is to “respect and appreciate the feeling of others”, studying and understanding the cultures of other societies apart from that of his/her immediate environment is a key factor and this can only be achieved by incorporating the English Literature texts into the curriculum of Nigerian senior secondary school students' Literature-in-English syllabus.

The Need for Literature Teaching in Nigerians' Secondary Schools

In line with the views just enunciated, the Federal Ministry of Education Senior Secondary School Curriculum (2016-2020) emphasized the following aims and objectives for teaching Literature-in-English:

- (1) To give students a rich and well rounded humanistic education. This can be achieved through broadening the cultural horizon of students by exposing them to works that are varied in perspectives and yet universal in application.
- (2) To re-enforce the English Language skill already acquired by the students by exposing them to language in action in literary tests and works.
- (3) To expose students to the beauty and potentials of language.
- (4) To equip the students to develop the capacity for independent thought and judgment.
- (5) To encourage attempts at creative writing as a means of understanding the creative process and appreciating the principle of creativity especially for those who can benefit from it.
- (6) To develop students' ability to respond

appropriately and independently to literary works.

- (7) To inculcate in the students the entertainment and instructive values of literature as a follow-up to the literary skills learnt in the Junior Secondary School.
- (8) To utilize each literary activity as scaffolding for language growth.
- (9) To prepare the students to pass literature in the Senior Secondary School Examinations, and the Joint Matriculation Examination and also prepare them for work (p.iii).

An evaluative assessment of the objectives of teaching Literature-in-English stated above can be summarized in a sentence coined from the Ugandan Literature-in-English Curriculum's objectives: “An exposure to *varieties of texts* (the italicized to be emphasized in due course) will help students to develop problem-solving, conflict management, information gathering, negotiation, decision-making, critical thinking, tolerance, sharing, respect, self-esteem and confidence” (Ugandan Literature in English Curriculum, para.9).

It can be vividly deciphered that the Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives is indirectly emphasized in the Curriculum Objectives highlighted, that is, the development of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of the child (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill & Krathwohl, 1956). The development of the cognitive domain of the child through the study of literature will ultimately help the child to develop capacities for discriminating, judging as well as making crucial decision whenever the need arises. At this level of learning, understanding literature will aid language development. This is because language is best learnt in real life situations and Literature being learnt in an endless series of situations where language is heard or used will easily facilitate language development.

Moody (1992) tersely states further that literature helps in training the individual in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In other words, an integrated approach while handling literature classes could be a very good way of helping the students to achieve maximally in English language. For example, poem recitation could be used to teach listening, pronunciation and fluency in speaking, while acting the various plays in the

assigned textbooks can instill boldness and good oral presentation in learners (Olufunmike, 2015).

In the affective domain, literature is used for the expression of feelings and emotions. It purges the mind of prejudices and preconceived ideas. Bright and McGregor (1970, p.127) points out that in helping the development of the psychomotor skills; literature provides an avenue for “dramatization, demonstration and active participation of the individual involved”. The statements and the argument raised emphasize the importance of literature in Nigeria's secondary schools where it is taught as Literature –in- English language and English Literature.

No wonder then that the Literature in English syllabus for Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE), being conducted by the West African School Certificate Examination Council (WASCE) revolves around the study of both the African and non-African writers; that is, Literature-in -English and English Literature. This is to expose the students to *varieties of texts* in line with one of the objectives the writer earlier stated. For example, the 2016-2020 harmonized lists of set texts for the West African Senior Certificate Examination (WASCE) compulsorily mandated the students writing Literature- in- English examination to study the following texts:

Amma Darko's “Faceless” and Bayo Adebowale's “Lonely Days” for African Prose while section B deals with the study of non-African Prose texts. These include Richard Wright's “Native Son” and Patience Swift's “The Last Goodman”. The drama genre involves the study of African and Non African writers as well. Frank Ogodo's “Harvest of Corruption” and Dele Charles' “The blood of Stranger” are the lists of the African playwright texts chosen for consideration, while Oliver Goldsmith's “She Stoops to Conquer” and Lorraine Hansberry's “A Raisin in the Sun” are the non-African texts selected for study.

An insight into the poetry genre of the list of texts to be studied for examination reveals the same structure of African and non-African selected texts and authors. For African poetry, Birago Diop's “Vanity”, Gabriel Okara's “Piano and Drum”, Gbanaban Hallowell's “The Dining Table”, Lenrie Peters,' “The Panic of Growing Older”, Kofi Awonor's “The Anvil and the Hammer” and Gbemisola Adeoti's “Ambush” are to be studied. Non

the Bar”, George Herbert's “The Pulley”, William Blake's “The School Boy”, William Morris', “The Proud King”, Robert Frost's “Birches” and William Shakespeare's “Shall I Compare Thee to A Summer Day?” (Federal Ministry of Education SSCE Curriculum,2016).

A critical examination of the lists of texts to be studied by Nigerian senior secondary school students picking Literature-in- English as prerequisite to study English Language in the university shows that the candidate must be well-groomed in the texts of authors within his or her environment; that of the other African writers- the two being referred to as Literature-in –English. Added to these lists are the texts of other non- African writers, otherwise called the English Literature.

Factors Militating against Effective Teaching of Literature –in –English in Nigerian Secondary School.

First, it must be emphasized at this juncture that while there is a clear-cut objectives for teaching and learning of Literature –in- English at the Senior Secondary School in Nigeria, there seems not to be such at the Junior Secondary School level. This is because the teaching of English language and Literature –in-English are integrated into the same curriculum. Another observation is that while there is uniformity in the choice of texts to be read by students at the senior secondary school level, nothing of such is available at the junior secondary school level. The choice of texts for study, which is the exclusive duty of the ministry, has been hijacked by hungry authors, who most of the time are found advertising their junk literary publications in most public and private secondary schools. Some of them having friends and relations in the Ministry of Education often lobby the officials to include their texts among the reading texts at the junior secondary schools. At the junior secondary school, only Literature –in- English is usually briefly considered while the foreign literary texts are delayed until later in senior secondary school. In other words, it is the texts written by young and up-coming Nigerian writers that are often chosen for brief consideration in Literature-in- English class integrated into English Language Study Curriculum. Information from an impeccable source, a serving teacher, revealed that more than a hundred of such texts and their writers are often sent by mere letters from the Ministry of Education to schools for possible inclusion of their texts for study. The resultant effect

of not using texts written by Nigerian writers at the earlier stage, is that the child after being introduced to foreign texts like the works of writers like Shakespeare and others at SSS classes would find the experience shared in these texts very strange and complex to comprehend.

Going through some of the texts recommended for study's consideration at the junior secondary school level, the researchers discovered that majority of these texts did not possess the literary and aesthetic quality of most of the texts written by notable Nigerian writers. Some of the pitfalls discovered in the writings include lack of creativity in the discussion of the subject matter of the story, inappropriate organization of the plots of the story, improper use of flashback linking the past with the episodes being currently shared, lack of ornamental diction to embellish the experience under discussion to arouse readers' quest and interest and wrong choice of vocabulary items to mention just a few. In brief, most of these texts lack analytical narration of the experience being shared.

Another factor militating against the study of Literature-in-English in the Nigeria's secondary schools is lack of effective strategy for its teaching and learning. Most of these teachers do not have any specific strategy apart from "take your book and read approach." Ogunnaike (2002) reasserts the same opinion but adds that, "poor planning, poor pedagogy and poor presentation" (p.22) are some of the factors militating against the teaching and learning of literature in Nigerian secondary schools.

Associated with the just concluded assertion is that the period allocated to the teaching and learning of literature in most of the Nigerians' secondary schools is not sufficient enough to handle the teaching of the subject effectively. A close observation of the time table of some schools reveals only three periods of forty minutes each weekly. For a subject that requires a detailed and exhaustive study of all the texts highlighted earlier at the SSS classes, the periods fall short of the teacher's need looking at the exigency of work to be undertaken for thorough understanding of these texts.

Another factor worthy of consideration as well deals with society's perception of the subject, Literature-in-English. In the recent time, the issues of gender and performance in most subject areas have received attention from scholars and literature is replete with gender-related issue and academic achievement in general. Based on Tantarinstein's

(2018) view, "the word sex and gender is a frequent topic for debates within research and epistemology (p.1). This researcher reports that females perform better in written discourse where themes addressed are central to issues like "human beings, romantic love strong feelings and human activities"(p.67), which are usually the subject matter of any literary engagement (my emphasis). Synonymous with this is the Eurydite network's (2010) submission where it is tersely stated that, "girls read more and enjoy reading than boys ... boys are more likely to be among the poorest performers in reading" (p.11). Of course, it is a known fact that ability to read extensively is a prerequisite for effective study of literature.

Adeogun (2005) opines that parent's attitude also undermines the learning of literature in the sense that some parents are of the opinion that literature is more important to a particular sex group. It has even become a convention by some scholars that a particular sex group performs better in some subjects more than the other. As opined by Guledani (2011) "as a rule boys perform than girls in mathematics, physics and engineering while girls are better in literature, languages, history and art (para.5). The conclusion to be reached as a result of this impression is that on yearly basis, there has been sharp reduction on the number of students intending to write Literature-in-English examination because of the perception that it a subject dominated mostly by female students.

Of equal relevance to this assertion is that the material resources for the teaching of Literature-in-English in secondary schools are below the expected standard where they are used and in so many cases, these materials are not even available. One major factor plaguing the teaching and learning of literature is the lack of instructional materials. The main instructional aids to effective teaching of Literature are the recommended textbooks required for reading.

Nicole (2015) regretfully bemoans the effect of lack of teaching resources with particular reference to textbooks in a 10th grade Chicago College, "I never had enough novels to allow my kids to take them home and read" (para.1). The effect of the statement made by this teacher is the lack of teaching on how to engage students with the texts in a way that will be of benefit to them. The same scenario holds sways in most Nigerians senior secondary schools where the teaching of literature is much more emphasized. Most schools are not equipped with

good libraries stocked with most of the recommended textbooks needed for effective teaching and learning of literature. The effect of poverty on part of the parents can be ameliorated if the government can provide good libraries stocked with recommended and non-recommended good reading materials that can enhance the teaching and learning of literature but the reverse has always been the case in most Nigerians secondary schools.

Ayedun (2014) stressed the importance of in-service training and the dearth of it for English language teachers in most Nigerians schools. It was discovered that for several years in Ogun state, most of these teachers have not attended any training. Teaching today, like any other profession, has undergone a long process of transformation and this includes the teaching and learning of literature as well. The underline assumption here is that most of the teachers saddled with the teaching of literature are ill-equipped to handle it effectively.

Considering the fact that literature is an important subject in the Nigerian senior secondary schools' curriculum, in fact, a pre-requisite good grade in literature at the ordinary level of certificate is compulsory for seeking admission to study English Language in all Nigerian universities. Most teachers encountered in the process of this study also confirmed the importance of literature as veritable tool for effective handling of language classes and the necessity to improve upon the technique being used to teach the subject.

Suggested Action for Improvement

Literature plays a vital role in teaching and learning situation and the development of a holistic scholar in general. Beside, promoting reading and writing culture among the Nigerians' scholar would become a mere mirage if attention given to the teaching and learning of Literature-in- English remains as it is currently. In fact, poor performance in English Language examinations of any category has become an annual ritual as a result of bad standard of mostly written communication and indirectly oral communication. This could partly be blamed on negative attitude towards effective teaching and learning of Literature-in-English.

In order to salvage the situation, the following actions are suggested. First, the teaching and learning of the subject should be given more attention than it is being given at the moment. Doing this will require a proactive measure such as

integrating the teaching and learning of Literature-in- English to the curriculum of Senior Secondary School Students like it has been done at the JSS level. This is to let those not offering the course in their senior school certificate examination have a taste of what the course is all about. This will help boost their performance in English Language examination. There is also the need to restructure the syllabus of Literature-in -English at the JSS classes in order to revitalize its teaching and learning, a situation whereby books written by amateur writers are used for study should be re-addressed. This is not however suggesting that those young writers' texts of high qualities and certified standards by the body in charge should be discouraged. African and Non - African texts of high quality should be introduced for study consideration in at least, the third year of JSS classes. The erroneous impression that they are too young to be introduced to such texts should be out of place. Imagine how these young children are coping with the world of internet with all its intricacies and complexities. This means that more time should be allotted to its teaching and learning.

Government and private organizations can also assist in one way or the other. For instance, the government should equip most of the nation's secondary schools with library stocked with recommended textbooks and other literary materials so that poor students can loan these texts for their studies at homes. Seminars and workshops for in-service teachers that are often sparingly organized should not be restricted to English, mathematics and science teachers alone, Literature- in- English teachers should be incorporated and it must also be regular. Synonymous with this suggestion is that expert teachers in Literature teaching should be employed to handle the subject not those who specialize in language teaching.

Private organizations and individuals can also donate books to schools to assist the students, their teachers and the schools in general. On part of those saddled with the responsibility of teaching and learning of this subject, the teachers, the place of self-development cannot be over emphasized, they must avail themselves of this opportunity. They must seek for new techniques of teaching and have nose for news on current issues related to effective teaching and learning of Literature -in- English. For effective teaching of literature-in English, teachers of the subject should encourage writing of imaginary conversations, episodes etc. This simply means that

the subjects' teachers should develop and prepare the students to develop the habit of creative writing while engaging them in the teaching and learning of Literature-in-English classes.

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