

DEVELOPING THE NIGERIAN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' COMPETENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH THROUGH ENGLISH AND LITERATURE INTEGRATION

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Abstract

The use of literary texts to work out language problems of students in English is gradually gaining momentum in schools. This paper advocates the use of literature in teaching English as a second language. Literary texts provide scope to explore multi-dimensional use of language. The author explores some definitions of literature and its benefits to man. It is argued that a thorough understanding of the general models of teaching literature (cultural, language and personal growth) is very essential for English as a Second Language teachers in drawing inputs from literature to help their students attain mastery and competence in the use of their target language. The rationale behind the clamour for the integration of English and literature in teaching English as a Second Language is discussed, citing Nigeria as an example. Though English plays critical roles in Nigeria as the official language of government and language of education, students have continued to record low achievement in English language examinations. The author submits that the incorporation of literature in teaching English in Nigerian schools will boost students' achievement and competence in English. The ESL teachers need to possess some generic and specific competences to effectively utilize literature materials to teach language. They also need to develop their capacity to functionally use different activities to teach the language, and to integrate literary materials into English language lessons in order to stimulate students' interest and use of the target language.

Key Words: Literature, cultural conflict, literature teaching models, generic and specific competencies

Introduction

Literature is so a vast and rich discipline that it has attracted many definitions from different fertile minds across the ages. For this reason, it is difficult to arrive at a consensus definition for the term 'literature'. From a broad perspective, literature is regarded as anything that is written in any field of knowledge. This implies that all writings, be it in religion, science and technology, economics, geology, politics, banking, sports, etc are regarded as literature. In a narrow and specific term, literature can be described in the words of Rees (1973) as writing which expresses and communicates thought, feelings and attitudes towards life.

From its narrow point of view as a form of art and a discipline of study, literature contains the experiences of man in all facets of life. It is a compendium of people's experiences in life, which are either cast in oral or written mode. Cheigeonu (1999) further amplifies this that literature exists both in the written form and in oral form and both of them have the same characteristics in content form and language use. Literature is so much a part of our everyday life that it touches all areas of human endeavours. Aptly put, Adedokun (2012) submits that literature is a world on its own, broad, large and rich. For Eyoh (1998), literature may be defined as an imaginative (oral and written) composition which makes use of emotive language to convey a vision, an idea or an experience. Specifically, literature is writing that possesses literary merit and universal appeal; it is a body of creative works that offer the readers unique education in terms of wealth of ideas, worldviews, critical and intellectual thinking, language enrichment, socialization, etc. It is the product of the writer's imagination in selecting, interpreting, re-arranging and re-expressing life experiences. The language of literature is beautiful, the type that foregrounds literariness as opposed to ordinary language. Literature is naturally classified into three genres known as poetry, prose and drama, and can also be treated as fiction or non-fiction.

The benefit of literature to man seems to surpass what other disciplines have to offer. Almost all people make use of the works of literature. When you sit down listening to a thrilling story

from an elderly or on radio, you are enjoying oral literature. When you sing for your baby or you unconsciously waggle your head to the rhythmic beats of a melodious song, poetic literature is at work. A literate person who has not read any work of literature in his/her life cannot claim to be literate. As the mirror of life and a creative work of art, literature takes man in an excursion into the world. Since literature deals with virtually all issues of life, then it has the capacity to contribute to the holistic development of man. Apparently, children who are exposed to the works of literature will become conversant with various problems facing humanity which they may encounter in their sojourn in life, and how they can overcome them.

Literature offers to its readers a variety of issues of monumental importance; it is a body of works that presents unique education to people. It expands and enriches readers' ideas, perspectives, world-views, thoughts, emotion, etc. The works of literature get students acquainted with other people's views, experiences, beliefs, wisdom and understanding of the universe. Human diversity in terms of culture, geography, development, beliefs and religion are presented in literature for students to learn from.

Different scholars have variously summarized the benefits of literature to mankind. Adedokun (2001) attempts a summary of the benefits of literature to man as development of cultural values, development of imagination and creativity, moral and character development, development of feelings, development of language, development of mind, and giving of pleasure, entertainment and instructions. Also, Olaofe, Okunoye and Iwuchukwu (2008) comment that the works of literature are imaginative, express thoughts and feelings, deal with life experience, use words in a powerful, effective and captivating manner and promote recreation and revelation of hidden facts.

Interface of Literature and Language: Literature Teaching Models

Language and literature are intractably linked and inseparable. Therefore, success in teaching and learning either must as a matter of necessity and mutual reciprocation incorporate inputs from each other. The general objectives of teaching literature in schools have been weaved around three models. The understanding of the models is very critical for ESL teachers as it will help impart the necessary skills to students capable of empowering them to gain mastery and competence in their target language/second language. Teachers can use any of the models in isolation, but an eclectic blend of the three models will serve better in teaching the second language. The three models are:

- a. The cultural model,
- b. The language model, and
- c. The personal growth model

The cultural model

The cultural model places emphasis on making learners to understand the background of the literary works and to learn from the culture of the people described in such works. In other words, the students get to learn about the language, dressing, traditions, music, politics, etc of the people in a story book. The cultural model not only exposes learners to the cultural heritage of other people, but also instills in them feelings and appreciation for other people's ways of life. In this model of teaching literature, students learn about the culture, history, society, politics, language, etc of the country of the people in the story book (Violetta-Irene, 2015). It is believed that students will be able to understand and appreciate the background of the novel. The idea that students will learn about other people in a novel is a motivating stimulus for them to read it. Cultural model allows for the transmission of vital ideas, idiosyncrasies and feelings of people in literary works to students in the target language. In short, they are exposed to the culture of other people. However, this model may not be welcomed in many societies where the culture of the people in a novel is in conflict with

those of the second language learners. Cultural conflict has the tendency of hampering the learning of a second language by bilingual students.

The language model

The language model aims at making learners see how language works. Literature has been described as language in action. Therefore, teachers use language model in teaching literature to expose learners to a variety of creative ways of using the target language. The language model is child-centred and its proponents believe that it exposes students to a wide variety of styles in language use. Students are able to exploit the beauty of language by themselves and for themselves. The belief in this model is that literature is made from language and if students can read literary works on their own they will be able to improve and develop their competence in language. The teaching of literature through language model enhances language development of students. It exposes students to good use of language and different linguistic styles and vocabularies. The result of this is that students will develop their skills in listening, reading, speaking and writing in their second language.

The personal growth model

This model is cherished by a number of teachers who believe that literature should lead students to personal growth and maturity. This implies that teachers will select relevant texts for students to engage themselves in to achieve this objective. The aim of this model is to help students have personal engagement with literary texts in order to explore and evaluate them by themselves and for themselves for their personal development. Like language model, the personal growth model is learner-driven; it encourages students to read extensively as against intensive reading for academic purposes. The personal growth model engages students with literary works which have the capacity to boost their imaginative reasoning and their relationships with people in their society.

Rationale for Use of Literature in ESL Lessons

We may possibly ask, what is the justification for using literature as a second language teaching tool? Research has shown that literature contributes significantly to the language competence and proficiency of ESL students. The use of literary texts to work out language problems of students in English is gradually gaining momentum in schools. The study of Yeasmin, Azad and Ferdoush (2011) reveals the argument for using literature in the language classroom. According to them, literary texts provide scope to explore multi-dimensional use of the language. This shows that literature, as language in action, helps students to explore and practice language in all aspects. It makes real the rules of language they have acquired, thus using and practicing them in real life situations as obtainable in the works of literature. Awonusi (2001) regards language and literature as two sides of the same coin. He asserts that literature provides a practice field for the creativity of language as expressed in drama, poetry and prose works. Clearly speaking, literature provides a pool of oral and written materials that can enable learners to explore and exploit their target language, thus fostering their prolificacy and proficiency in the language.

No doubt, literature should be regarded as a tool for teaching English across school levels. In higher institutions, the use of literary texts to teach General English Courses will serve as a practical way of reducing increasing incompetence of students in English. In the studies of Linguistics and English, courses such as Discourse Analysis and Stylistics pointedly require the works of literature for analysis and proper application. Also, in translation courses, many language teachers can make their students translate literary texts like drama, poetry, and short stories into the mother tongue, hence students are able to practice the lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge they have acquired in language courses (Hismanoglu, 2005). Using literary texts to teach English language at primary and secondary school levels by English teachers is far more beneficial to students. Apart from cultivating the habit and courage of speaking English, students' competence in English will be developed in writing. The position of Alam (2007:381) is that the use of literary texts in language lessons

will ‘stimulate the imagination, offer learners’ specimens of real language use, allow for group discussions and individual exploration, and are intrinsically more dialogic’. From this, it is revealed that literature offers real language use, and allows learners to feel and sort out the target language through dialogue and discussion of characters, themes and events in literary works. Yeasmin, Azad and Ferdoush (2011) add that a literary text with richness can be stimulating for language learners and can be used to elicit a wide range of responses from the learners which are facilitating for language teaching and learning.

Furthermore, researchers have logically established the importance of using literary texts in EFL classrooms (Yeasmin, Azad and Ferdoush, 2011). As it is today as against the age-long traditional orientation of language teaching that puts emphasize on writing and reading skills, the contemporary Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) supports the incorporation of literary texts in language lessons because of its capacity to allow learners develop communicative competence in the target language. To buttress this, Formacion (2010) argues that the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) allows the use of authentic materials for the purpose of providing real-life contexts of practice for learners. The message here is that literature has a lot of linguistic input for students. Quoting Long who was cited by ALam (2007: 377), ‘communicative language teaching favours group activities and language-learner interaction. Prediction, creating a scenario, debating topics on or around a text—all seem to develop naturally out of a literature text’. Since literature contains oral and written productions, the use of literature in the two mediums will serve as motivation for learners to use language. Therefore, the use of literary texts in teaching English as a second or target language in Nigerian schools has positive implications on the students. Mujundar (2010:211) supports the forgoing argument when writes:

..the native English Literature is considered essential and important as the learning process of the English language. It might be learned and studied for its literacy aspects, to know and enjoy, English in its native expressions and to be acquainted with the works of great literary masters. English literature has

always been looked upon with high regards for its variety of subjects, style, reflection of life and magnitude.

The role of literature in teaching English language in classrooms seems inexhaustible. The following have been advanced in literature as some of the reasons for using literature as a technique in language teaching.

Literature Provides Value Authentic Materials for Language

Literature is a rich source of authentic material for students to learn how to use language. Yeasmin, Azad and Ferdoush (2011) maintain that literature exposes learners to the samples of the actual/target language, and quoting Brumfit and Carter (1986:15) that ‘a literary text is authentic text, real language in context, to which we can respond directly’. Similarly, Hismanoglu (2005:54) asserts that learners come into contact with the actual language samples of real life like setting and ‘become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings’ in classroom content. The use of literature materials in English lessons will make students develop their literary competence and as well internalize English. Literature provides students with an avalanche of authentic materials that are used contextually by native writers or in literary works that are written in Standard English. Reading of new words, phrases, proverbs, slangs, idioms, etc in English literary texts will enrich and hasten their competence in the language. For Cruz (2010:2), literature can be regarded as a rich ‘source of authentic material because it conveys two features in its written text: one is ‘language in use’ that is, the employment of linguistics by those who have mastered it into a fashion intended for native speakers; the second is an aesthetic representation of the spoken language which is meant to represent language within a certain cultural context’.

Literature Provides Motivation for Language Use

Students have a lot of motivation to use language through literature works. By seeing other students acting out the roles of different characters in literary texts, reciting poems or rhymes, writing essays for debates on themes in prose or drama books, students will not only develop necessary skills to productively use the target language, but as well overcome public speaking phobia and derive inner motivation to use language to perform different roles in and outside the school settings. Literature is a platform for students to practice the four basic language skills namely, speaking, listening, reading and writing. Literarily speaking, literary texts serve as tools for meaningful use of English by students and evocation of dynamism in classroom lessons.

Literature Enriches Students' Language

The beauty of using 'language in action' to teach English is intractably linked to its exposition of students to different styles of writing. For example, Joseph Conrad, a great Polish author was a non-native English novelist whose novels have become classics of English literature (Yule, 1997). Conrad is said to have gained a native-like writing competence in English which was his second language. This could not have happened but for his wide exposition to the works of great British writers. This is why Obediat (1997) writes that literature helps students acquire a native-like competence in English. The implication of this is that students will be able to express their ideas and thoughts in good English, learning the features of contemporary English as used in literary texts and using them in their own expressions and communication in both written and spoken modes.

In their written or spoken English, students' knowledge of styles and choice of words in different works of literature will be reflected. Literary texts provide students with new words and how they are used to form sentences. The students come into grip with syntactic structures of written texts and have a clearer idea of how words are connected to form acceptable phrases, clauses and sentences. Literary texts also provide them with functional

understanding of how these are developed into paragraphs. In fact, the contextual manipulation of language is exposed to students in literature texts. In the words of Cruz (2010:2), literature enables students to understand to what extent written language differs from spoken language and ‘breaks through the static nature that is established by artificial grammar of a classroom provided by textbooks’. The utility of language proficiency is one key essence of using literature in language lessons; students’ vocabulary horizon and accumulation will be greatly enlarged, and it will also increase their linguistic knowledge and language skills.

Literature provides cultural enrichment for students

Literature is a world of cultures. It brings to the bear in the eyes of the learners of English different cultures of people around the world. These include their language use, customs, traditions, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, marriage, etc as expressed in the works of literature. Readers of literary works, whether plays or short stories, come across different characters who come from different socio-cultural backgrounds, and who try to project their views and cultures for others to admire, enjoy or take after. In this sense, the use of English literature to teach English in our schools will allow students to gain access to the cultures of the British whose language serves as our official and second language in Nigeria. Justifying this, Hismanoglu (2005) contends that literature will add a lot to the cultural grammar of the learners. More reason for this is the fact that language is embedded in culture and it is also a vehicle for expressing culture. From literature works, students can learn and imbibe good aspects of cultures of people in distant places. According to Yeastmin, Azad and Ferdoush (2011), the use of literary text in language class can act as a means of target language society and also makes them understand how communication takes place in a particular community.

Literature develops analytical mind in students

Students can develop different skills through literary works. Custodio and Sutton (1998) believe that literature has the capacity of opening horizons of possibility, allowing students to

question, interpret, connect, and explore. Literature works, whether prose, drama or poetry, boost the intellectual thinking and reasoning of students. By using literature to teach language, students will be able to develop the skills of analysis, questioning, logic, interpretation and criticism that will equip them to contribute meaningfully in discussions using the target language. Through the reading of literary texts, students can learn from different characters how difficult issues are analyzed and resolved. Literature helps its readers to make scientific hypothesis. This is done as they guess the meaning or formation of unfamiliar words from those they have come across in literary texts.

Students' Achievement in English and ESL Teaching in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multilingual nation of about 520 indigenous languages and dialects. English is the official language of government, education, international diplomacy, trade and commerce, etc in Nigeria. But the achievement, proficiency and competence of majority of the students in English have been generally discouraging at all levels. The continued low achievement of students in West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in English language examinations has become a source of worry to all stakeholders in education industry in Nigeria. According to Atanda and Jaiyeoba (2011, p.9), 'in 2007, out of 1,275,466 candidates, 325,754 (25.5%) passed English Language with other four subjects while, in 2008, 188,442 (13.76%) passed English with additional four subjects out of 1, 369, 42. This was even worse than 2007. In 2009, out of 1,373,009 candidates, 356,981 (25.9%) passed. The improvement in that year was appreciable'. The result clearly confirms the general outcry that students' achievement in English language has been consistently poor over the years.

Similarly, available statistics of students who passed English Language in West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in the last four academic sessions in Nigera show that there is still much to do to help students to improve on their achievement in English Language. Adesulu (2016) in gave the statistics of performances of students in English Language in May/June WASSCE between 2012 and 2016. According to Adedokun

(2017), the statistics showed that 38.81% of candidates that sat for the examination in 2012 obtained five (5) credits and above in English language, 36.57% of candidates that sat for the examination in 2013 obtained five (5) credits and above in English language, 31.8% of candidates that sat for the examination in 2014 obtained five (5) credits and above in English language, 38.68% of candidates that sat for the examination in 2015 obtained five (5) credits and above in English language, while 53% of candidates that sat for the examination in 2016 obtained five (5) credits and above in English language. The achievement of students in English language as shown in the 2012 – 2016 WASSCE May/June Result Statistics clearly reveal the poor condition of English language teaching in secondary schools in Nigeria.

The general weaknesses of students in English language has become a matter of concern to teachers and researchers in Nigeria because English language is a compulsory subject that students must pass at credit level to gain admission into higher institutions. The implication of this is that more students will find it difficult to proceed further in their education. Mgbodile (1999) supports this opinion that English language is one of the most important subjects for communication within and outside Nigeria and for gaining admission into institutions of higher learning. This is why the teaching of English language should be given adequate priority in Nigeria for students to attain high achievement, proficiency and competence in the language.

Studies in Nigeria have linked the poor performances of students across curriculum subjects to poor methods of teaching in secondary schools (Akabogu, 2002; Olaofe and Mesembe, 2006; Ifedili, 2009, Adedokun, 2017). For example, Adeniji and Omale (2010) reported that a number of English teachers did not use relevant approach to teach reading comprehension. This implies that many teachers of English lack methods of imparting knowledge in English language to the learners. Knowing the critical role that English plays in Nigeria among over 170 million people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, etc, competence is required of all Nigerian students in the language. This calls for further researches into practical and result-

oriented ways of teaching English in Nigerian schools. It is in this sense that use of literature in teaching English language in Nigerian schools should be explored.

The Nigerian English Language teachers from primary school level to tertiary institutions have important roles to play in teaching English with the instrumentality of literature. There is the need to establish the language needs of the students first. The language needs of students may be deficiencies in any of the four language skills—speaking, listening, reading and writing or some specific aspects of language like lexicon, concord, tenses, etc. The knowledge of these needs will guide teachers on what and how to incorporate literary texts into their lessons/lectures/tutorials to help students overcome their language problems. They should be able to select appropriate methods, strategies, techniques that will help students use literature to meet their language needs. McRae (2016) of Universidad de Alcala outlines generic and specific competences as necessary skills that foreign language teachers must acquire in using literature as a tool in language teaching. The ESL teachers need to possess these competencies for them to effectively use literature in language lessons. The two competencies are highlighted as:

Generic Competences

1. Understand referential and representational language.
2. Understand the beneficial role that literature can play in the foreign language classroom.
3. Gain expertise in teaching English through literature.
4. Learn the latest theories and techniques on using literary texts as a language teaching resource.
5. Analyse the relationship between the study of language and literature; and

Specific Competences

1. Develop advanced literary and communication skills and the ability to apply these in appropriate contexts, including the ability to present sustained and persuasive written and oral arguments cogently and coherently.
2. Determine what literary texts are appropriate in the foreign language classroom.
3. Use literature in such a way as to further the learner's mastery in the four basic areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing.
4. Develop alternative ways to present and use literature in order to broaden the range of involving activities for our students.
5. Develop the ability to handle information and argument in a critical and self-reflective manner.

Conclusion

The discussion in this article shows that results of studies profoundly support the use of literature materials in English in ESL learning situations like Nigeria. Many scholars like Murat (2005) and McRae (2016) have advocated for the use of literature as a technique for teaching English. Murat (2005) argues that literature is being successfully used as a technique for teaching the four basic language skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking and other aspects of language like vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in schools.

The competence of Nigerian students is declining daily in English language. The increasing abysmal performance of students in English seems to have come to stay. Students keep on harvesting tones of failures in West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) English language examinations every year. Yet the language remains our language of government, commerce, education, press, international relations, armed forces, parliament, and the rest of them. Competence in the language is therefore indispensable for all Nigerian students. It is in this regard that the advocacy for the use of literature in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is advocated in this article. It will not only develop students' competence in English, but as well boost their performance in their various examinations.

Recommendations

Language needs materials from literature for application for literature is language in action. Thus, English teachers at different levels of education must understand that language and literature are inseparable. The relationship between language and literature is inseparably tight so much that it is nearly impossible to learn one better without the other. For example, the Use of English as a compulsory course in tertiary institutions in Nigeria must essentially incorporate the use of literary texts. Students in General Studies Classes should be made to read a number of prose, poetry and drama works upon which they will be tested orally or in writing.

For real language use, English teachers should master the use of activities like role play, presentation, drama, debate, tutorial and group discussion to introduce literary texts into English language class. This will create enthusiasm and interest in students and the result will be appropriate responses from them.

The teaching of English language in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should include exposition of ELT teachers to the use of literature in teaching the target language. This will equip them with necessary skills to adapt inputs from literature works in their language lessons. Literary works are capable of helping students gain mastery over English in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing in the language. They are also a veritable tool in teaching ESL learners' vocabularies, tenses, sentence patterns, punctuation, etc of the target language.

Lastly, if enhanced achievement and competence of students in English must be realized in Nigeria and in other nations where English is not native, it is strongly advised that all students across school levels should compulsorily be exposed to carefully selected works of literature.

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