

Problem and Prospect of Using Literature to Teach Writing in English as a Second Language

Alabere Rabiati Ajoke¹, Aspalila bt. Shapii²,

¹*School of education and Modern Languages, Universiti Utara Malaysia / Nigeria,*

²*School of Education and Modern Languages, Universiti Utara Malaysia*

ABSTRACT: *This conceptual paper intends to evaluate the problems and prospects of teaching English language skills particularly writing skill through literature. The importance of literature in language teaching will also be of emphasis in the paper. However, the poor performances of students in English language in both internal and external examinations, low quality of education all over the world prompt educationists and teachers of language to think and develop innovative approaches for teaching the language. In view of this, this author decides to see how literature can be used to enhance students' knowledge of the language and as a way of developing knowledge of writing skill as innovation in language teaching. Therefore, this paper will look at the problem and prospect of teaching literature in higher institutions as a way of enhancing English language learning.*

Keywords: *literature, English as a second language, language skills,*

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature according to Alabere (2006) is an exercise of the mind and intellect which emanates from man's desire to narrate stories using words creatively to expose aspects of the experiences of man. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines it as 'writings whose value is in the beauty of form or emotional effects' and it can also be defined as:

The organization of words to give pleasure through them to elevates and transforms experience, and functions in society as a continuous symbolic criticism of value. Ogunsina (1976) also sees it as a vehicle of human expression which seeks to investigate man, his behavior in the society, his knowledge of the universe in which he finds himself. Literature is a means of enlarging ones imagination and experience. It offers a vast reservoirs of human experiences and judgment of experience, development of imagination and entry into human situation which otherwise might well fall outside our imagination. However, the educational planners in Nigeria have made the teaching of literature in English a compulsory aspect of English language in our tertiary institutions. Based on this, the curriculum designed for tertiary institutions and particularly, Colleges of Arabic and Islamic Legal Studies, literature is taught in pre-diploma and diploma levels

Therefore, literature is the expression of the whole man who arts his own life out in the society in his bid to survive through the exploration of the organic link between man's social relation and how the interrelations produces some changes in his life.

II. THE PLACE OF LITERATURE IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The most interesting method of teaching English language is through literature. The place of literature in teaching is to expose learners to different valuable experiences, real and imaginative, building in students the love for extensive and sustained pleasurable reading. But the reverse is the case in recent development in the study of literature in Nigerian educational system of secondary school where literature is not reflected as a separate subject in the junior secondary school curriculum, as it used to be in the past when literature was introduced right from the first year in secondary school as a compulsory subject of study.

Literature is language in use; in other words, it is one of the tools for teaching English in a second language situation. It facilitates the acquisition of grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. Bright & Macgregor (1981) are also of the view that where there is little reading and writing there will be little language. Therefore, students can be taught the language skills using literature and learning literature, will expose learners to stylistic use of language thereby, enhances the performance in writing.

Using literature to teach language also helps students to achieve several goals in their education. Literature equip students with real life experience that can be useful for living within and outside the school system and the knowledge of stories from literature can be used to answer essay questions in English language. They are also exposed to several registers in the process of learning different literature texts. In other words when students are exposed to literary texts, they are able to appreciate and make judgments on important issues and develop linguistic use of language, especially, through dramatization; they acquire self-confidence in speaking and writing.

III. THE PURPOSES OF TEACHING LITERATURE IN SCHOOLS

The teaching of literature is very important at all levels of education. It is imperative that some emphases be accorded to it in all school. In the teaching of literature, the teacher should have the following objectives in mind.

1. To inculcate in students, the love for extensive and continual pleasurable reading through interesting texts for its own sake.
2. To introduce new types of experiences through literature.
3. To expose readers through varied valuable experiences, real or imagined which may contribute to their emotional, social and moral judgment.
4. To introduce the learners to a well-known characters, books and incidents in literature.
5. To develop the ability to think critically leading to adequate judgment.
6. Through the study of literature, students acquire human approaches to examining thoughts and actions.
7. Literature helps to develop learners in the areas of language skills and vocabulary.

IV. THE PROBLEMS OF USING LITERATURE TO TEACH LANGUAGE SKILLS

It is obvious that most schools do not teach literature as a subject on its own in junior secondary schools as it is applicable in the old days when students are made to take literature like other subjects. This has been a major problem in students learning through literature and in teaching it at the tertiary level. Students find it difficult to cope with the challenges of learning literature. This days students hardly cope with the challenges of learning English through literature due to poor background knowledge of literature.

Inadequate literary text suitable for teaching literature in English is another barrier in the teaching of literature to enhance language learning. According to Alabere (2006) text constitutes an impediment in the teaching and learning literature in English in Nigeria and in the developing countries generally. Literary texts are scarce, this scarcity is not related to the number of texts in the market but they are not readily available to the learners due to the harsh economic situation in the country and inadequate literary facilities at schools' library. Most available ones are not related to the socio-linguistic background of the learners as there are students of different backgrounds in the same class. Ohia and Adeosun (2002) are also of the opinion that no single text can satisfy the needs of a group of students from different socio-linguistic background.

Another problem according to Ubahakwe (1099) is the unhealthy attitudes of students learning literature could be as a result of teachers' attitudes and low level of competence in literary skills with students' inability to purchase recommended texts and only depend on teachers' given complementary notes which may not be adequate enough for thorough comprehension of a text. Therefore, students take literature to be difficult, demanding and challenging and prefer solution rather than taking time to read extensively to understand the style and language used by the writer to improve their language use and writing skills.

V. PROSPECT OF USING LITERATURE TO TEACH LANGUAGE

The present situation of literature in Nigerian secondary schools as alternative subject in WAEC/NECO where literature can be replaced with geography, history etc so only few students choose to do literature. This has made it difficult to teach language skills using literature therefore to bring back literature to its past glory the educational planners must revert to the old system where literature was made compulsory for all junior secondary schools to build solid foundation for the learning of literature which will help to enhance language learning. Literature can be used as motivating material which exposes learners to different themes and learning language skills unconsciously. Literary texts expose students to knowing their immediate environment and the world at large. For instance a play or a poem can allow learners to feel the impact of certain dilemmas and powerful emotional responses that can transform their lives.

Literature encourages students to acquire the four language skills. Through literature, students can cultivate reading culture that could lead to extensive reading outside the classroom. Drama text can encourage students to develop speaking especially when students are encouraged to act play as a way of developing language skills and when at higher level they absorbed the character of an authentic novel or story especially when recorded students practice their listening and speaking skills. Literary and debating society is another aspect of literature that can be used for language teaching in and outside the classroom, this will help learners to compose essay with ease. Therefore, using literature for enhancing English language can help students to develop their language skills.

Literary texts can also help to develop learners' interpretive abilities due to its rich levels of meaning and active involvement by learners. In other words, helping students to learn literature they get used to the ambiguities of the literary text, thereby developing their overall capacity to infer the meaning of what is read and apply it to their daily life activities.

The roles of teachers cannot be overemphasized in using literature to encourage students to learn language skills. Teachers should encourage learners to join literary and debating society which exposed them to

different literary texts according to Alabere et al., (2015) the introduction of literary and debating societies, reading/writing workshop and literary discussion group help students to communicate with other learners, share ideas and gain confidence with books and other printed materials, language teachers should select books that that are interesting and that appeal to the students both culturally and linguistically. They should direct learners to read materials that could enhance their enthusiasm for reading and learning language structure that could lead to better writing skill. Language teachers can also introduce audio-visual aids like watching plays and text related films.

The school library should be well equipped with relevant books and materials that are current for effective teaching and learning to take place. Teachers' personal copies of books should be given to them as recommended books for effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, the study of literature helps to preserve the precision and the vitality of language. Reading literary text for enjoyment relaxes the mind and enhances better performance of students in English language. Young experts should be encouraged to engage in writing textbooks so that there will be enough textbooks based on students' background to make its use for teaching language skills relevant.

In the process of using literature to teach English language skills, students are exposed to, different themes and uses of language. Learners get to know different foreign cultures and countries all over the world. Certain genre of Literature, such as drama and poetry tend to expose students to certain dilemmas and purgation that can transform their real lives as well as provide for them the culture of the real speakers of the target language. Literature encourages acquisition of language structures through extensive reading of novels and role play in drama carried out outside the classroom and listening skill can be learned by listening to literary audio-books. Therefore, students should be encouraged to do extensive reading of novels and plays as well as listen to audio texts. According to Alabere et al (2015) Literary activities can also be used to expand students' English language. Students should be encouraged to join literary and debating society, press club etc to enhance confidence and knowledge of the language. Although social aspects of student's life, do not directly affect their academic achievement, they do affect the overall performance of the students. Learning is not only achieved through reading books, but also can be learnt from peers through out-of-classroom activities. Students learn how to compromise and work in a group and interact with people who are not within their close group. Press club in school helps to improve the level of interaction among students; it also develops the skills of writing and preserves the norms and values of the school. It improves the intellectual activities by promoting learning environment. Press club creates an exciting, entertaining and creative environment in schools, thereby improving writing and speaking abilities for proficiency and efficiency in the use of English language.

Teaching language skills through literary texts can help to develop students' ability to interpretive contents of English text through multiple meanings of literary texts. Exposing students to stylistic use of words and ambiguities of literary texts help them to understand multiple meaning that can help them in real life situation. According to Borja and Morina (2005) apart from expanding the levels of interpretation of students, it can also stimulate the level of imagination of students, critical abilities and increased emotional awareness. Therefore, students will be able to respond personally to any text given to them and increased ability to respond by using their own ideas and emotions in English language.

VI. THE PLACE OF LITERATURE IN WRITING

The place of literature in language learning cannot be over emphasized. A simple story telling is an approach that may be used to improve students' spoken English which helps students to learn words and patterns of the target language by repeating the lines of the story. This significant role of literature in teaching language skills started fading away when linguistics started as the focus of language programs. That notwithstanding, literature still places a vital role in teaching and learning language skills especially writing through memorization of lines, and role play. It is motivating and powerful when literature is used as source for language teaching in ESL classroom as subject matter and as model when students are made to write the from the literary text the content, theme, organization and style of the writer.

Literary texts can be used as model for controlled writing whereby students are made to imitate a particular text especially for beginners when asked to rewrite passages from the text as a way of learning the grammar and style of the author. Literary text can also be used to teach guided writing by asking the students to complete sentences that sum up the content of the text as a model, which is very important for scenario approach and will help students to develop the skill of essay writing by reproducing the model. Through the reproduction of literary model, the students learn more of paraphrasing and summary writing, where students are required to use their words. By so doing, real life stories and plays that the events are chronological in form can be used to teach to teach learners how to write summary Murat (2005). Students can also write from literary text by using literary words of the text while writing out of or filling in as part of creative writing.

According to Tuyker (1991) referring to the work of Povey 1967 believes that since literature mirrors the culture of a nation, its benefit cannot be over emphasized due to its linguistic and cultural values that enable

students to gain extensive and connotative vocabulary as well as expanding their level of syntax and language skills. Adeyanju (1978) is also of the view that literature can be used to develop language usage though it is not an easy task to teach second language students (non-native speaking students). Introducing literary texts in language class due to the fact that the students are expected to read texts in the language they are not so good in and to discuss the structure and the style of the writer.

Why Literary Texts in English Second Language Class

The reasons why literature can be used to teach language in second language situation are numerous. According to Collie and Slater (1990) the reasons why literary texts can be used to teach language at any level of education are:

1. Valuable Authentic Materials
2. Cultural Value
3. Language Enhancement
4. Personal Involvement
5. Varieties and Interest

Valuable Authentic Materials

Literary texts are authentic materials that are not purposely for teaching language but meant for teaching morals, culture and aesthetic values of a particular group of people. Which are well constructed by expert in writing. Therefore, in language classroom teaching context, students are exposed to different cultures and language use as well as language structures with deep and surface meanings. Reading literary texts enhances students' potentials to understanding and knowing different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings.

Cultural Value

According to Muria (2005) the best way to improve students' knowledge and understanding of language in second language classroom, literary texts help to enhance and imbibe the culture, language, and style of the people in the community. Their level of imagination increases through the style and roles of the characters in the literary texts. Muria (2005) asserts that through literary texts, the readers can learn from the way or roles of the characters, thereby transforming their thoughts, feelings attitude to life, belief, fear, enjoy, and learn from the way they speak.

Language Enhancement

In the process of learning English language by second language learners through literature, the learners have personal involvement with the language learning process that literature is useful for. For instance, through literature, students learn variety of language structures, writing skills, how ideas are connected, more productive and adventurous through the richness of the richness and diversity of the language of the texts. Therefore, with literature the students in language class increase in their knowledge and competence in communication.

Students Involvement

The usefulness of literature in language class cannot be over emphasized, as students read literary texts they tend to have personal involvement and inhabit the text. They follow the story in the text wanting to see the end of the story or the peak (climax) and trying to share emotional feeling of the character. The process of personal involvement by students from the beginning to the end of the story helps to enhances students' language learning process while the level of expression and writing of the students increased.

Other reasons while literature could be source for language teaching according to Maley (1989) literature is universal in nature because it deals with man and his cultures which are relevant to all human races. For instance, love, belief, death etc are universal themes, when students read such texts their knowledge of the world and language will increase. Literature has personal relevant ideas, things, and events which students can relate to their personal lives and learn from them. He also believed that in literature students can learn different topics that are useful for ELT / L. they can find different language style or diction of different authors with variety of interesting topics the can occupy students' time and interest in knowing the theme of the texts and by so doing, learn more about the language and speak differently in different social context. Therefore, students learn wide range of language varieties like regional dialects, idiolects, jargons and sociolects and thereby enrich their sociolinguistic competence in the second language.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teachers should be cleared with the fact that, literary text is not an end in itself but a means of beginning a creative process in the minds and emotions of students (Turkey, 1991). Literature is a potential means for illustrating language use, control of emotional thought and contributing positively not only to his life but to the life of the larger society. On the part of the teacher, literary text will help students to

understand use of language especially in contexts. In essence, literary text in teaching language does not only enhance reading but is used to develop other language skills. Such as listening, speaking and writing skills.

To enhance proficiency in the teaching / learning of literature teachers, parents, students, school management and educational planners must have to work hand in hand to see to the effectiveness and efficiency of the learning of literature and the workability of the suggestions stated above. With the role of literature immense contribution will be made to the development of students in higher institution through the use of literary texts. Therefore, the teacher should determine the aim of language teaching in accordance to the needs and expectations of the learners. Teacher has to put into consideration the learners' language proficiency, age, and interest before selecting texts to be used in language class. In advance levels students should be given the texts in their original form to develop their language and literary competence.

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