



An investigation of factors militating against the students' performance in literature-in-english at senior secondary schools in Bauchi state

Mustapha Abdu Muhammad, Haruna Shuaibu, Ibrahim Shehu

Department of English, Aminu Saleh, College of Education, Azare, Bauchi State, Nigeria

Abstract

Literature-in-English remains of the subjects with a questionable students' performance in Nigerian senior secondary schools. On this note, this research investigated the scenario in Bauchi State by examining the factors militating against students' performance in the subject. After critically reviewing some relevant literatures and conducting a pilot study through interview, the researchers formulated research hypotheses and subsequently used them as research questions. Through questions, affirmative responses were generated from of the research-subjects. The respondents were randomly selected from nine (9) local government areas, three (3) from each of the three (3) zones in the state. One school in which Literature-in-English is being taught was taken from each of the selected local government areas. This makes a total number of nine (9) schools where the research was conducted. Two researcher-designed questionnaires – one for teachers and the other for students, were distributed in the schools and successfully retrieved after filling by the respondents. Findings of the research reveal that both the teachers and the students agreed with the researchers that the following can be considered as the factors responsible for the problem under investigation. These include: lack of adequate teaching materials; unspecialized teachers of literature; students' limited vocabulary; students' lack of awareness on the relevance of the subject in securing admission at A-level; inadequate support from the authorities concerned and so on. The researchers therefore offer some recommendations for the general improvement in teaching and learning the subject.

Keywords: literature-in-english, students, performance, senior secondary schools

Introduction

Several researchers have pointed out that Language and Literature matter so much in our everyday thinking, our teaching and learning in school, our communicating with one another which inevitably arouses passions and creates problems (Abubakar 2011; Ihejirika 2014; Zumunta 2017) ^[2, 13, 25]. This premise therefore triggers a lot of research works in both Language and Literature in order to proffer solutions the identified problems. Right from the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 into the Nigerian education system, Literature-in-English used to be a compulsory subject for all the students in the junior classes of secondary schools. They can only drop it when they are promoted to senior classes. Even then, it became optional for science students but compulsory for arts students Zumunta (2017) ^[25]. Since then, both public and private secondary schools in Nigeria teach Literature-in-English.

Furthermore, the subject becomes one of the prerequisite to study courses like English language and law in the Nigerian Universities. Although, a report has shown that not all secondary schools in Bauchi state offer Literature-in-English as a subject, only 23 percent of the total number of the schools taught it as a subject. Indeed, even among the very few arts students offering the subject, their performance in both internal and external examinations: Mock and Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) were unsatisfactory. A Large percentage of the students fail the examinations which consequently deny them a chance to further their education into the Nigerian Universities Zumunta (2017) ^[25]. Consequently, the scenario has led to the undertaking of this research to reveal the factors responsible for the poor performance in the state. Thus, the research's findings would be relevant and useful to the policy makers, curriculum planners, literature specialists, parents, teachers and any other individuals concerned with the issue in question.

The Concept of Literature

The term "literature" is used basically in two different senses: First, it is literally used to refer to any written material on a subject. Second, it is a term used to refer to one of the school subjects studied by students or a university discipline; and it is this second sense that this research was built upon. As a subject or discipline, Literature has been variously defined by different scholars as the following.

According to Onuekwusi (2013: 5) ^[20], "Literature is any imaginative and beautiful creation in words whether oral or written, which explores man as he struggles to survive in his existential position and which provides entertainment, information, education and excitement to its audience". Even though, the foregone definition

centres on the meaning of literature from its purpose, however, the term covers not only imaginative creation in language but also factual part of literature that plays a crucial role.

Owoeye (2003:104) ^[22] on his own part defines Literature as “a writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings and attitudes to towards life”. This definition shows that Literature is the representation of life through the medium of language. It is however, not an exact replica of life; it is an interpretation of life as life shapes itself in the minds of writers.

According to Meyer (1997) ^[16] the concept of Literature could be described as: “written texts that are marked by careful use of language, including features such as creative metaphors, well-turned phrases, elegant syntax, rhyme, alliteration, meter are in a literary genre (poetry, prose fiction, or drama) and are read aesthetically as intended by the author and also contain many weak implicatures (which are deliberately somewhat open in interpretation)”.

According to Moody (1972) ^[18] Literature springs from our in born love of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expression in words some special aspects of our human experience. Moody’s definition holds the view that human instinctive connection with stories and using language artistically are what gave birth to Literature. This situation gives human beings opportunity to express their experiences systematically.

Rees (1973) ^[23] concludes that certain things are common to all the definitions of Literature as they all recognize the fact that:

- a. Literature is imaginative
- b. Literature expresses thoughts and feelings
- c. Literature deals with life experiences
- d. Literatures uses words in a powerful, effective and yet captivating manner
- e. Literature promotes recreation and revelation of hidden facts

Significance of Literature

Literature has so many important functions contained in its subjects. It is a vital record of what people have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all. With regards to the benefits that every student can derive from literature, Ayo (2003: 23) deduces advantage on utmost utilization of Literature by saying the following:…The utilities of Literature includes: educational, cultural, recreational and socio-political advantages. Literature has the advantage to improving the linguistics performance of the students as it keeps them with the ability to extensive reading from literary texts…Literature is of benefit to students’ ability to comprehend what they read. More so, Slater (1987) proposes the inclusion of Literature in language classes because it contains valuable genuine materials, helps in developing readers’ cultural and linguistic enhancement. In the same development, Lazar (1997: 14-20) ^[15] on the advantages of Literature, provides five reasons for using literature:

1. It is motivational;
2. It encourages acquisition of language;
3. It provides expansion of language awareness in students;
4. It develops of students’ ability to become interpretive;
5. It educate of the whole person.

Genres of Literature

The word “Genre” is a French word adopted in English and it literally means kind, sort or style. Being used as a term in Literature, genre is used in literary discourse to denote types or classes of literature which follows certain common compositions which distinguish it from another literary genre. These common conventions enable a reader to recognize a literary composition as belonging to a certain literary genre and prevent him from mistaking it for any other kind. The three genres are:

- a. **Prose:** is defined as a literary medium distinguished from poetry especially by its irregularity and variety of rhythm and its close correspondence to the patterns Chen (2019: 512) ^[7]. However, Chen continued to give more explanation of the term by giving another definition in a narrow sense and says “prose refers to a type of literary genres opposed to poetry, fiction and drama. And there are some features which make it possible to distinguish it from poetry drama and fiction.
- b. **Poetry:** is the oldest of the three major forms of literature with roots deep in the rituals and religious observances of antiquity. Hence, it was primarily oral, performance-oriented and public as it was, more often than not, a tool for supplication, communal tribal celebration and celebration of the supernatural as well as appreciation of the gifts of nature.

Arguably, there cannot be a single definition that will be comprehensive enough to accommodate the various shades of opinions and schools of thought regarding the exact nature of the genre. However, it can be put that poetry as a form of literary expression embodies all the defining qualities of literature such as imagination, creativity, suggestiveness or indirection and as a mirror reflecting the individual’s perception of the world. Below is a famous definition of poetry and its explanation by different William Wordsworth.

Wordsworth (1805) as quoted in Andrew (2015: 191) ^[4] defines poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility”. Based on his definition of poetry, many scholars hold the view that Wordsworth believes that poetry should express common human feelings and there should be no restriction in the expression of the experiences of the senses and sensibilities.

Another idea of Wordsworth is that the function of poetry is to give pleasure to readers by presenting the incidents and situations of their lives in a fascinating and unusual way with a colour of imagination. In the same vein, Wordsworth agrees with Aristotle that “poetry is the most philosophical of all writings. The subject of poetry is general and operative truth which is its own testimony”.

- c. **Drama:** as a literary genre, drama is realized in performance and can be described as a “staged art.” It is designed for the theatre because characters are assigned roles and they act out their roles as the action is enacted on stage. These characters can be human beings, dead or spiritual beings, animals, or abstract qualities. According to Martin Esslin (1977: 9-13)^[9] the following can be regarded as definitions of drama:
1. Drama can be seen as a manifestation of the play instinct as in children who are playing mother and father.
 2. Drama is something one goes to see, which is organized as something to be seen.
 3. It is an enacted fiction an art form based on mimetic action.
 4. In arts, drama is the most elegant expression of thought nearest to the truth (reality).
 5. It is the most concrete form in which art can recreate human situation, human relationship.

However, according to Bertolt Brecht (1964) drama is not just an imitation of action, but a tool for the demonstration of social conditions. It is not just an entertainment but an instrument of political and social change. From these definitions, it can be concluded that drama is a way of creating or recreating a situation, an articulation of reality through impersonation or re-enactment.

Literature and Language

The relationship between Literature and Language is obvious for the fact that, to effectively teach literature, language is an integral part. Hence, you cannot teach or learn literature without language. Even though the tradition that the secondary schools have in Nigerian context is that Language and Literature are two different school disciplines. However the two remain interwoven and interdependent to each other. On this, Abubakar and Isah (2020)^[3] say the following:

The literature for all grades of learning conglomerates language components that lead to the understanding and appreciation of the language. In this process, learners tend to learn the linguistic components based on the contextual usage in literary dispensations. This shows the elements of intimate relation between literature and language (p. 86).

The above quotation brings out how the two concepts are helpful to each other as being good in one helps in proper understanding of the other. Furthermore, Willmott (1979: 57)^[24] puts it that “a work of literature is an organization of language to which linguistic awareness must be applied if it is to be understood and appreciated. In the process the learners learn much of practical value both about language and in the use of language”.

Methodology

Adopting a survey research design, a sample of the definite population of the area under investigation was used for this research. As the population ideally includes all the Senior Secondary Schools where Literature is being taught in the state, their large number necessitated a selection of the sample for a smooth conduct of the research. Thus, with the three senatorial districts in the state, that division guided the selection of the samples. Three (3) local government areas were selected from each zone making a total number of nine (9) local governments where the research was conducted. The selection of the sample was guided by two different types of sampling techniques. These are stratified sampling and random sampling. The former enabled the researchers to categorise the selected schools based on their local government areas while the latter was used to ensure that each student within a school has an equal chance of being selected.

The data types of this research included both quantitative and qualitative driven from the primary and secondary sources. The primary data was generated from the study areas selected within the state using the instruments for data collection, and related information on why poor performance is recorded in Literature-in-English has been obtained. In the other hand, the secondary data was sourced through literatures that seem to add credence to the research under investigation.

The qualitative data obtained was analysed using a statistical package called “a simple descriptive statistics {table}.” frequency and simple percentage. For the teachers, five-point scale was used with assigned values of 1,2,3,4 and 5: Agreed; Strong Agreed; Disagreed; Strongly Disagreed, and Undecided respectively. For the students, three-point scale was used assigned values of 1, 2 and 3: Yes; No; and Undecided respectively. Finally, the results generated were interpreted accordingly.

Discussion of the Findings

The ten points used for gathering data received a total number of one hundred and seventeen (117) responses – twenty seven (27) from the teachers and ninety (90) from the students. In order to arrive at an overall result of the investigation, those responses of both the teachers and the students are merged together and presented in the table below, using a condensed scale with three options: “AGREED”; “DISAGREED” and “UNDECIDED”. So, the “YES” in the students’ responses was recorded as “AGREED” while “NO” was recorded as “DISAGREED”.

Table 1: Showing the Overall Results

Statement	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Teaching Literature is more difficult than that of Language			
1	Agreed	76	64.96%
	Disagreed	39	33.34%
	Undecided	2	1.70%
The schools do not have adequate materials for Literature			
2	Agreed	73	62.40%
	Disagreed	40	34.18%
	Undecided	4	3.42%
The students do not want Literature because it require reading			
3	Agreed	57	48.72%
	Disagreed	60	51.28%
	Undecided	0	0.00%
Most of the teachers teaching Literature did not specialize in the subject.			
4	Agreed	84	71.80%
	Disagreed	32	27.35%
	Undecided	1	0.85%
Students' limited vocabulary contributes to their failure in the subject.			
5	Agreed	83	70.94%
	Disagreed	27	23.07%
	Undecided	7	5.99%
Most of the students are unaware of the role of Literature in university education.			
6	Agreed	76	64.96%
	Disagreed	41	34.04%
	Undecided	0	0.00%
The teaching of Literature does not necessary support from the authorities concerned.			
7	Agreed	40	80.35.19%
	Disagreed	71	14.53%
	Undecided	6	5.12%
Literature helps in developing students' intelligent thinking.			
8	Agreed	98	83.76%
	Disagreed	19	16.24%
	Undecided	0	0.00%
The genres of Literature should be separately taught in secondary schools.			
9	Agreed	89	76.06%
	Disagreed	23	19.66%
	Undecided	5	4.28%
Good approaches and techniques can minimize students' failure in Literature			
10	Agreed	74	63.24%
	Disagreed	37	31.63%
	Undecided	6	5.13%

Looking at the table above, it can be said that the result shows virtually a total agreement of the respondents with the researchers. Both the teachers and the students affirmed the points raised by the researchers as reasons of the poor students' performance in Literature-in-English at senior secondary schools. High number frequencies are recorded in agreement with the points with the exception of point 3. In that point, sixty (60) was recorded in the "disagreed" column representing 51.28% of the total number of responses to that point. Through the point, the respondents expressed that students do not run away from Literature-in-English because of its inevitable connection with reading.

Conclusion

Based on observations, responses of the respondents and analyses, it can be concluded that poor students' performance in Literature-in-English can be attributed to the factors hypothesized earlier in this research. The factors include but not limited to inadequate supply materials necessary for teaching the subject; lack teachers specialised in the subject; inappropriate strategies and other pedagogical approaches; deterioration of reading culture among the students and their limited vocabulary as well as inadequate support from the authorities concerned.

More so, the identified factors could only be dealt with through collective efforts of government, teachers, students, parents and the society at large to ensure that benefits of learning the subject to learners are realized. The benefits are but not limited to: empowerment, pleasure, language acquisition, acculturation dissemination of information and acquaintance with nuances of English language.

Recommendations

Taken into consideration the findings of this research, the following recommendations are hereby offered: to help in drawing the attention of the parties concerned in teaching and learning of Literature-in-English on the students' general improvement and good performance in the subject:

Government should provide adequate materials necessary for teaching and learning of Literature-in-English in Nigerian senior secondary schools.

Policy makers and syllable designers should make the subject one of the prerequisites in securing A-level admission in other related fields like Social and Management Sciences.

Teachers should teach the subject with enthusiasm and vary their strategies and methods so as to make it interesting and comprehensive.

Students should be encouraged and trained to embrace reading culture as that would facilitate not only their performance in Literature-in-English but also in other areas of learning.

Conferences, seminars, workshops and other related programmes should be organised specifically on finding lasting solutions to this problem and other related ones.

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