

Impact of Literature on the Teaching of English Language in Secondary Schools in Nigeria.

Omotoyinbo, Dare Williams

*Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education
Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria.*

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of literature in English on senior secondary school students' achievement in English language. The study employed an ex-post facto research design. A sample size of about five hundred and thirty-six (536) students randomly selected from five Senior Secondary Schools in Akoko South Local Government Area of Ondo state, Nigeria, was used. The schools selected were co-educational. Data used for the study were the year 2017/2018 senior secondary school students' West African Examination Council (WAEC) result in English language. One research Question and a null hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. Mean and standard Deviation were used to answer the research question while t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that there is a significant differences in the mean achievement scores of literature and non- literature students in English Language. It also showed that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students from urban and rural schools. Further, there is significant difference in the achievement scores of male students and female students. Based on the findings, recommendations were made which include that the study of literature in English should be compulsory for all students in senior secondary school classes, science or art classes notwithstanding.

Keywords: *Impact, literature in English, English language, Non literature students, Gender, Location, Co-educational schools.*

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I. Introduction

Newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines, biographies, autobiographies, and social commentaries are grouped under non-literary works. By exposing secondary school students to literature work through the study of literature in English, may enhance their proficiency in the English language.

Literature is an expression of cultural experience of a people and language is part of this cultural experience. To know a people's language, literature is highly indispensable. Literature is an art of language and words are the essential ingredients of language.

The definitions examined above show that Literature-in-English and English language are tools in the hand of each other. While language is a tool by which literature establishes an existence, literature serves as a tool through which language propagates itself. The relationship between language and literature is an interdependent one; literature does not and cannot exist independent of language because language is the conveyor of literature. An understanding of the nature and structure of language would enable us to appreciate a literary work much better because language and thought are the raw materials of literature. Literary writers use language in their work. Literature can be used to teach language, for instance, drama and poetry can be used for the teaching of speech while prose can be used to teach summary and comprehension. New words and expressions are acquired through literature. Through this means, vocabulary development is enhanced. In literature classes, when students are made to tell stories their speech fluency is sharpened. Bright and Macgregor (1970) stated that:

“It is in literature that student is most likely to find words used memorably with force and point. It is there that he will find words used in their widest range of contexts, and there he will find words passionately or delicately conveying emotions; learn to see wholes greater than the sum of their parts”

Literature art does not only help in mastering the skills for communication, but, also holds the key for the understanding of other subjects. Within and Within (2000), stressed the role of literature in understanding of other subjects when they state that writing and talking are the ways learners can make their mathematical thinking visible and both writing and talking tools for collaboration, discovery, and reflection. Palmer (1998) was of the view that literature is an application of linguistic science which is not science itself. He argued further that literature can be seen as history and practice of the written form of language which has become

classic. William (1999) while commenting on the role of literature in the understanding of other subjects said that knowledge of humanities and science can be gained from literature.

It is apposite to make known here that Literature-in-English is not taught in school just for the fun of it, but, for the various roles it is expected to play in language acquisition, opinion formation and moral development. For these to be achieved, it is expedient that the teachers teach Literature-in-English effectively.

It is also very essential for Africans to preserve their rich literary heritage and to know more about that of their contemporaries in the outside world. So there should be a keen interest in literature as a medium of propagating cultural values and performing linguistic functions. Since language is a means of communication among members of any given society and literature reflects the customs, tradition, culture, religion and the norms of any given society, it is clear, therefore, that the interconnectedness of these two subjects cannot be over emphasized. The fact that intensifying the teaching and learning of Literature –in-English among the secondary school students could enhance their performance in the English language is an undisputable fact because the components of Literature-in-English can impact the learner's competence in English.

Although the study of literature contributes a lot to language learning, nevertheless, there are other variables that can influence the learning of English language. One of such has been found to be the location of schools. School location in this sense refers to the site of the school, either in the urban or rural centre. Difference in location of schools simply means existence of differences in the language environment and the school tone. Language environment refers to the immediate surroundings of a school. In the opinion of Lawal (2001), the future of the child, whether in urban or rural area, is invariably linked to the quality of his or her environment. The environment of the learner determines what takes place in the learner. Environment refers to conditions in which a person lives or operates in which a particular activity is carried out. This is so because the environment of the school determines the facilities in the school buildings, instructional materials and staff. Lending credence to the behaviorists, the language environment of a language learner has a lot to contribute because the learner learns from what he or she hears or sees. Instructional materials such as radio, television, standard library and computers are not hard to find in urban areas. These are however, absent in rural schools. Ezema (2002), commented that electronic teaching aids are very facilitative in second language learning, but they cannot be used in rural schools where there is no electricity.

II. Background To The Study

The term literature is used basically in two different sense. First, it is used to refer to any writing materials on a subject. Second, it is a term used to refer to one of d school subjects or university discipline; and it is this second sense that applies to us in this context. As a subject or discipline, literature has been variously defined by different scholars. To Onuekwusi (2013,p.5), "Literature is any imaginative and beautiful creation in words whether oral or written, which explores man as he struggles for survival in his existential positions and which provides entertainment, information, education and excitement to its audience". The definition of literature above succinctly attempt to capture the essence of literature, it is however important to state that not all literature is imaginative. In fact, some literary works are factual, and based on this understanding, the prose genre is classified into two, namely fiction and non-fiction. A good example of a popular non-fictional literary work is *Zambia Shall be Free* written by Kenneth Kaunda. But, be that as it may, the basic element in literature is the fact that literature, no matter the type or genre, is written in words. This implies that language is the basic raw materials with which literature is manufactured. It is based on this view that it is usually said that literature is language in practice" that is to say that language theories, concept and styles are put into function in the creation of literary texts. Therefore, if one must interpret and analyze a literary text, one must be competent in language of the text and conversely, if one must be competent in language, one should be sufficiently exposed to the literature of the language in question.

According to Ajah (1998), literature has also been defined as what is composed of those books, and books only which in the first place, by reason of their subject matter and their mode of treating it, are of general human interest, and in the second place the element of form and the pleasure which form gives are to be regarded as essential. Literature can also be defined in relation to its genres/ branches. As a result, literature can be referred to as pieces of writing valued as works of art especially drama, poetry and fiction-which often teach and or entertain. Therefore, literature as an imaginative form of expression can be seen essentially as a form of art whose distinguishing trait is functionality, creative imagination and using words as its instruments.

In another perspective, literature is seen as a mirror of life; hence, it attempts to create life in the human society through the author's vision. It then follows that the subject-matter of literature is humanity, the form and mode of expression must be artistic through the use of language. In agreement with the assertion above, Willmott (1979) , stated that "literature after all, is life, for it deals with men in every conceivable relation with others, his joys and woes, his tragedies and comedies, his fear and hope..." since literature mirrors human experience, we find in it an importance comparable to life in general.

As a subject of study in schools, there are some significant functions literature performs. According to Ayo (2003, p.128), these benefits are known as the general utilities of literature. He stated further that,

“ the utilities of Literature could be educational, cultural, moral, recreational and socio-political. Literature helps to develop the learner’s linguistic performance because it arouses their zeal and keeps in them an ever-ready inclination to read. Moreover, it helps the learners to develop fluency and the ability to comprehend what is read”.

Reacting to the various roles of literature as a school subject, Unoh (1981), as cited in Ogunnaike (2002) avered that a good literature can be an important aid to cultural assimilation; language development and competence; conflict resolution; emotional development and stability; development of positive and good-oriented attitudes to life; a good liberal education, entertainment, relaxation and the sharing of vicarious experiences of positive value; the development of desired and desirable moral or other attributes; and as a consequence of all these, a stable and mature personality.

Toeing the same line of thought, Collie and Slater (1987) were of the view that the inclusion of literature in language classroom provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and helps contribute to readers’ cultural as well as language enrichment.

It will be safe to conclude here that literature could be seen as what is read, as well as something experienced in life. It may also be a story heard, a poem recited and a play seen or enacted with the aim of giving pleasure and nourishment to the mind. Literature is therefore, seen as the expression of the whole man as it reveals life in its entirety. Apart from language learning and teaching, every genuine literature contains imaginative vitality and it sharpens the reader’s imaginative life. It is the aesthetic use of words, conscious and deliberate choice of diction with an intention to produce a desired effect on the reader.

The significant role of literature in English language cannot be overemphasized. In literature, students are presented in its most varied and powerful forms. Student in turn employs different strategies of reading to examine a writer’s use of it in context of all the linguistic resources available to him. For instance; a close reference to the genres or branches of literature-drama is a perfect tool for the development of language learners. In a stage play, every actor must be very attentive to what another is saying and be ready to give his quick response. In view of this, William (1999) asserted that drama develops the aural-oral skills in second or foreign language learning. It offers opportunities for practice in speaking dialogue, dialogue is the key element in any dramatic activity and it aims at developing the skills of listening and speaking.

Furthermore, the dramatist uses various theatrical techniques such as scenes, costumes and physical actions to relay messages to his/her audience. Drama encompasses a vast range of opportunities at various levels of language competencies.

Students enjoy the learning situation (gestures and expressions) in drama, because, it avails them the opportunity to perform on a stage. In drama, the stage is therefore set for them to experience the elements of language through the expression of emotions, meaningful gestures and other factors that do stimulate learning. As the students participate in reading and acting drama texts in classroom, they become fully involved in the learning process. These equally give students opportunity to use the correct sentences that have been written out for the practice. In a similar vein, Slater (1997) stated that drama texts constitute valuable authentic materials which expose the learner to different registers and types of language use. Drama provides language enrichment by revealing insight into the target language. It presents language contexts that make items memorable, placing them in a realistic social and physical context.

By assigning different dramatic roles to students, the students are made to discover where he/she has language faults. Responsibility is now placed on the students to prepare and participate in language learning process. Through drama, students are made to realize that language is for communication of thoughts and ideas in a setting, which provides real communicative urgency, thereby enhancing their listening and speaking abilities.

Another genre of literature which helps in language developments is poetry. Poetry is as old as man. It has been with man in time immemorial. Poems are usually sung. Poetry helps in developing oral skill. Because of the nature of poetry, William (1999) viewed poetry as basically oral literature since it is meant to be read aloud. He went on to say that the rhyme and rhythm of verse can readily come to our aid in the teaching of oral language. Through choral recitation, the students could practice in the vowel and consonant sounds in the end-rhymes. He went further that when a poet writes a poem, he uses words that are available to all speakers of the language. What makes him a poet is that he uses the words with greater sensitivity and greater artistry. He makes use of such devices as comparison like simile and metaphor, sounds like alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia, devices and grammar like repetition, ellipses, symbolism etc. some scholars are of the opinion that the mother tongue interference which are usually encountered in second language learning situations can be

subdued to a greater extent if they are able to grasp the strange forms, rhythms, ideas and pattern of English poetry.

Furthermore, prose is another genre of literature. It is the recent and the most widely practiced form of literature in the world today. To write in prosaic form means to write in everyday language. In other words, when you write in prose, you write in straight forward manner. Prose involves a self conscious organization of language. Prose teaching and learning expose the students to varied language drills such as drill in reading, learning of pronunciation, questioning and summary writing. According to Uwaifo (1979), questioning is one of the most useful teaching devices and by all teachers. When a teacher pose a question in order to evaluate students' comprehension of a novel, students' skills of analysis and synthesis-skill are being developed.

The study of prose narrative is a very good way of developing the reading skill in the students and a sure way of increasing the students' vocabulary. As the students read different prose texts, they learn new words used in different contexts. This view made Uwaifo (1979), state that as far as the teaching of new words is concerned; it is gratifying that most of the teachers, especially trained ones, taught meaning of words contextually. In a classroom setting where a prose narrative is being taught, in the process of teaching and learning prose text, series of lessons are given in grammar through explanations of grammatical elements in the text. It is pointed out that a good literature contains all that is valuable and permanent in the expressive possibility of language. If literature helps the student develop the abilities of analyzing on their own, it may also go a long way in enhancing their achievement in English reading comprehension and mastery of English language, generally.

One outstanding element common to all genres of literature is the use of figurative language. Figurative language is non-literal use of language for special effects. Figurative language is one of the richest means of emotional communication and it is an indispensable tool for arousing the feelings of hearers or readers. It enriches literary writing as images and evocative expressions. According to Agada (2008), the use of figurative language makes for conciseness in speech and writing. In other words, its use gives rise to economy of words, enhances clarification of meaning, provides vivid examples, stimulates association and emotions and gives life to inanimate objects and ornaments. The kind of figurative language people use stem from the underlying values and assumption of their culture or society. A well understood metaphor in one culture may have an entirely different meaning in another culture. For example, figurative meaning of different colours varies from one language group to another. According to Palmer and Brooks (2004), the conventional association in British English between the colour "green" to mean nature and innocence might not be the same for students in other cultures. Students ought to be aware of these associations in order to make sense of idiomatic usages like "to be green" (referring to the colour of a thing and "to have green fingers" which means "one good at making plants grow", as well as more literary uses of the colour green). The teacher's task is to sensitize students to the cultural significance obtainable to particular examples of figurative language in English while encouraging them to compare the association with those in their own language.

III. Language And Literature; Two Sides Of A Coin

In the relationship between language and literature, two schools of thoughts emerge. One of the schools known as the Monist holds that there is no difference between language and literature. The Monist believes that literature cannot exist on its own without language. At the extreme side, we have the Dualist. The Dualists believe that language is different from literature. Therefore, Language should be treated as language and literature should be treated as literature.

Language and literature are not only intertwined, but, also inter-related. Language is subsumed in literature, because it is with the instrument of language that literature is concretized. It is therefore off-point to study Literature without language at the center stage or to study language without literature playing a prominent role. It is because of this view that the relationship between language and literature is best described as symbiotic. Language and literature are so much related such that they cannot be studied in isolation. It has been said that literature is the expression of life and experience of a people. Language is part of this cultural experience; therefore to know-people's language, their literature is highly indispensable (Azikiwe, 2007).

In the course of establishing the relationship between language and literature, Ogbe (1995) asserted that language provides the rules whereas literature expands the rules to produce the best expressions in language community. In the same vein, Ajah (1998) posited that language, through literature, is a dress of thought. So the purpose of language as well as literature is to communicate and express ideas and feeling. The thoughts or feelings being expressed in language may be through literary work. Any wrong selection of the linguistic items of the language, syntax, vocabulary and even the sound system is capable of leading to a misinterpretation of the message.

English language as is case in Nigeria, as a second and foreign language has different skills and different cultural habits. It is only in literature-in-English that learners of English come in meaningful contact with the language in its real form. In agreement with this view, Ikegulu (1987) identifies literature as the

manifestation of language in action or as creative writing meant for use in developing reading interest, skills, enrich and extending cultural horizons of individual learners. Literature has helped readers to develop the ability to discover specific facts, infer meaning of unknown words from the contexts, acquire reading habit, respond to opinion expressed by the writer in his interaction with short prose composition as comprehension passages. Stressing the relevance of literature in language learning, Akwanya (2006), stated that it is through literary work that we see dialogue or even the language of conversation as well as the one governed by rhythm, rhyme and measure, we see transparent and anonymous language that distinguishes narration by contrast to the one governed by norms of thematic prose as in speech. Every language has four basic skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing. For the English language learners to be termed competent in the language, these skills have to be well developed in them. Literature, in addition to play other roles, helps to develop all these skills in the students through the different genres. According to John in Azikiwe (2007), literature should be given its rightful place especially with regards to the learning of English as a second language. He stressed that literature enhances competence in all skills of language. In his opinion, massive exposure to the good literature texts in written English in form of poetry, drama, fictional and non-fictional prose of a creative kind should not be optional to a foreign language learner.

Literature exposes the students to varieties of texts with words used in different contexts. When a learner becomes competent in a language, he/she reads and comprehends texts written in that language. To claim to understand or comprehend what has been read, the reader must have enough vocabulary of that language. Azikiwe (2007) speaking along this view, said that, literature provides the learner with the widest variety of syntax, the richest variation of vocabulary discriminations and language employed at its most effective, subtle and suggestive form. The language learner through literature, develops ability to read independently, he develops fluency and ability to read different literary texts that enable him to express his ideas and views effectively in conversation, comprehend written text and summarize it in his own words.

Literature is rooted in language and language gets life through literature. So literature and language are closely interconnected. According to Lazar (1993), literature should be used with students because it is a motivating stimulus for language acquisition, students enjoy it, and it is a fun, it is found in many syllabuses and the likes. Literature, a convenient source of content for a course in foreign language, provides motivating materials for language teaching. Carter and Long (1991) equally agreed that literature is a legitimate and valuable resource for language teaching.

Valdes (1986) opined that it is simply accepted as given, that literature is a viable component of second language programmes at the appropriate level and that one of the major function of literature is to serve as a medium to transmit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written. When we use literature in language classroom, we are teaching language. Literature is a point of language usage; arguably, it marks the greatest skills a language user can demonstrate. Anyone who wants to acquire profound knowledge of language that goes beyond the utilitarian, will read literary texts in the language (Basnett & Grundy, 1993).

Still on the relationship between literature and language, Udor and Ubahakwe (1979) also said that English and Literature are interrelated and therefore support that the study of English Language and Literature should be integrated, since the latter is wholly and inevitably rooted in the former. They argued that since there could be no dichotomy between a father and a son, so there is no sharp demarcation between language and literature because literature presupposes language. In the same vein, Ayo (2003, p. 130) is of the opinion that “through the creative methods of teaching Literature, the students can be helped to develop confidence in themselves in producing coherent and cohesive spoken discourses and in organizing sentences into paragraphs with effective linkers and organizing paragraphs into coherent and meaningful written discourse”.

Besides, the study of literature particularly enhances the development of extensive reading skills. Research findings are overwhelmingly in support of the fact that there is correlation between extensive reading and language acquisition, especially effective writing. For instance, Wilkins (1978) posits that reading can provide a ready means for the acquisition of vocabulary and effective writing in a second language. The source further states that reading brings to the reach of the learner large repertoires of lexical items in their natural linguistic contexts. Wilkins’ argument that reading facilitates acquisition of vocabulary is very much strong because the hall mark of any effective writing is ability to use appropriate words to form meaningful sentences that are logically and sequentially linked. Thus, all effort to write would come to naught if the writer does not have a good command of the vocabulary of the target language. Guth and Schuster (1997, p. 75) agreed with the proponents of the reading-writing relationship theory by insisting that: “the good writer is a good reader”. Explaining the role of reading in the ability to write well, they argued further that in our writing, ... we draw first of all from our own experience. But our Personal experience is limited. Most of us have little Chance of becoming world travel or explorer of spaces.

Not everyone can become a recognized expert in some branch of science or a brilliant analyst of foreign affairs.

But all of us can share in such knowledge and have taken the time to set it down for us in books and magazine.

Learning a particular language alongside the literature written in that language helps the learner to encounter that language in its fullness and develop the skills of the language. Little wonder Azikiwe (2007) asserts that to learn a language is to understand it. The study of literature improves the command of language ; since language and literature are complementary, it means that none should be emphasized to the detriment of the other. Considering the complementary role of literature and language , it may be necessary for every student to study literature alongside English language for a better performance in the language.

From the foregoing, it is crystal clear that reading , which is a characteristic feature of literature, enhances language acquisition in general and effective writing in particular. But going by the abysmal poor performance of students in English at all levels of education in contemporary time, it would appear that the resources of literature that facilitate language acquisition have not been fully harnessed, especially at the secondary school level because of the current method of teaching literature at that level. It is common knowledge that literature at the secondary school level is taught as a separate subject different from English. Going by this method, while some teachers are designated Literature teachers, others are classified as English teachers. Going by this, the business of literature teachers therefore is to strictly teach literature without reference to the language component while English teachers do the same without reference to literature. In all, there is no correlation or teaching cooperation between the two classes of teachers since every one of them is on their own. This traditional method should therefore be reviewed to pave way for an innovation thus creating room for the exploration and exploitation of the symbiotic relationship between literature and language in order to enhance proficiency in the use of English language among learners of English as a second language.

IV. Methodology

Sample and sampling technique

Simple Random Sampling technique was used to select Five (5) schools out of 26 Senior secondary schools in Akoko South Local Government Area. Three (3)schools were drawn from rural and Two (2) from urban areas respectively. A total number of about 526 students formed the sample size of the study.

Research design

An Ex- post facto research design was adopted for the study. This is a research design that seeks to find out the cause-effect relationships. In this research, the researcher has no control over the variables, rather, the cause effect relationship is determined by examining English Language WAEC result for 2017/2018 session.

V. Research Question, Hypothesis And Results

Research question

What is the influence of gender on students' achievement in English language?

Table 1: Influence of gender on achievement in English Language

Grades	Weighted Value	Male	Female
C	4	46	83
D	3	31	33
E	2	18	22
F	1	27	24
Mean		2,7869	3,0802

Table one shows the influence of gender on students achievement in English Language. The results show that the males had a mean achievement score of 2,7869, while the female students had 3,0802 as their mean achievement score.

Hypothesis 1:

There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores in English language of students who studied literature in urban schools and those who studied it in the rural schools.

Table 2: t – test Analysis of the Mean Score Difference in English Language between the Urban and Rural Students

Location	N	Mean	SD	T	Df.	Sig. (2 tail.)
Urban	161	2.7391	1.0487			
Rural	136	2.6014	0.0365	0.3711	295	.0104

Source: Field work 2017/2018

The **results** of table 2 indicate that the calculated t-value is .104. This value is less than the value of t-critical which is accepted. In other words, there is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores in English language of students who studied literature in urban and rural schools.

VI. Discussion

The study revealed that a great number of students who studied literature in English simultaneously with English language in Senior Secondary classes passed English language at credit level. This implies that the study of the language through the study of different literary texts in literature, gave the students an edge over their colleagues in sciences and commercial classes. It is no longer news that the minimum requirement for admission into higher institutions is a pass at credit level in English language. It is expedient to state that the study of Literature in English is not useless. Through the study of literature in English, students are exposed to different literary texts that would complement their knowledge of grammar.

VII. Conclusion

From the findings and discussions of the study, the following conclusions were made:

The study of literature in English facilitates the learning of and achievement in English language. There is, therefore, difference in the mean achievement scores of students who studied literature in English than those who did not. There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores in English language of students who studied literature in urban and rural schools. There is also significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students who studied literature in English. The findings also showed that students from urban and rural schools benefited equally from the study of literature in English.

VIII. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the implications of the study, the following recommendations are suggested.

1. Since the results of this study have proved the effectiveness of Literature in English on students' achievement in English Language. Therefore, the serving teachers should be encouraged to adopt both the methods of language teaching and methods of teaching Literature.
2. Curriculum planners should make the study of literature in English compulsory for all the students in Senior Secondary classes, science or art class notwithstanding.
3. They (planners) should also select literary texts that are written in suitable and standard vocabulary since it will complement the students' learning of English language.
4. Even though Literatures in English and English Language are separate subjects in the curriculum, the English language teachers should integrate the two while teaching.
5. Seminars, workshops, conferences and symposiums should be organized regularly to train teachers on the use of Literature in English to teach English language for effective teaching and learning of second language.
6. Students should be encouraged to engage in extensive reading to increase their vocabularies for smooth expression of their minds.
7. Adequate facilities and materials should be provided by governments, donor, agencies, parents and old students' associations to facilitate language learning.
8. Teachers, school administrators and stakeholders in schools should make learning environment conducive for students. They should also encourage discipline and frown at laziness.

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