



**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH
TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE USING LITERARY TEXTS IN
SELECTED SCHOOLS IN MAKURDI METROPOLIS OF
BENUE STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract:

This paper examined the problems associated with teaching English Language using Literature texts in Makurdi Metropolis of Benue State, Nigeria. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Three research questions were asked and 2 hypotheses formulated. Population for the study comprised of all teachers of Literature and English Language in Secondary Schools in Makurdi metropolis. Findings of the study revealed that Literature has great impact on the study of English Language, but that there are problems that hinder the full realization of the study of language through literature ($P = 0.10 < 1.66$). The study concluded that the problems can be surmounted. It was recommended that language teachers should attend training, workshops, and seminars, in order to up-grade their knowledge of language teaching through the use of literary texts.

Keywords: English language teaching, literary texts, secondary schools

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1. Introduction

In any human society, language is an important human heritage. The significance of language in human life cannot be over-emphasized. It is indeed central not only to our social interactions and relationships, but also in distinguishing us and enabling others to ascertain our position in the society. This explains why people with speech or hearing disabilities find it difficult to integrate and participate fully in their communities. Every language community has developed unique modes of using its language. At the same time, each language has a peculiar way of meeting the needs of the community that speaks it. In this way, every language is a unique system and therefore, a communication resource for mankind. It is because of the many unique systems in each language that we talk of linguistic diversity. The many languages spoken by the various world populations signify the communication problems, which human societies are likely to face in their day-to-day interactions.

All languages are unique in some senses because languages the world over, are not only significant to the personal and social well-being of their speakers, but they are also valuable as a resource and constitute an invaluable heritage to humanity. This is because each human language has a unique linguistic inventory and rules, reflects its own cultural experience, expresses its own world view and manifests its own artistic peculiarities. Thus, taken together, all the many world languages have an enormous wealth of linguistic, cultural, world view and artistic phenomena to offer mankind.

Today, as a result of globalization, there has been an increasing need to interact at both official and unofficial levels. In particular, nations of different countries have to move from one geographical location to another, and need a language for communication, for example English and French. For this reason, these languages mentioned above, need to be learnt if we must develop along with others.

In Nigeria, English language has been accepted as the official language since colonial rule. In spite of this long history of English language as an official language, many Nigerians do not communicate in the language except during official engagement. The reason for this is because English language is not the first language of Nigerians. In Nigeria, English language exists in relation to some major national languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and many others, which total about 400 languages. In a circumstance like this and being a former British colony, English language has naturally become a means of communicating ideas and information at both official and unofficial levels.

English language in Nigeria has become diversified with emergence of some native versions such as the Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and the Nigerian Standard English, which are spoken alongside the local languages. With this development, it has been possible for many Nigerians to code-switch and code-mix in their day-to-day interactions. It is important to note that the choice of any of these varieties as a means of communication depends on the educational level of the actors in the social interactions.

English Language is taught at almost all the levels of educational system in the country and therefore, it is introduced to students' right from the pre-primary to the tertiary level. A pass in English language thus becomes a major criterion for admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Literature according to Olukunle (2012) is imaginative; it expresses thoughts and feelings, deals with experiences of life, uses words in a powerful and effective way and, enhances creation. The general meaning of the word Literature is not relevant in this study.

Although at the beginning of the communicative approach of language teaching, authentic literary texts were considered as a means of equipping learners with representative usages of the language, many English teachers concentrated on the linguistic peculiarities and functions of the texts and scarcely used the original literature during the teaching-learning process.

Koutsompou (2015) emphasizes the role of literature as "*an ally of language.*" This technique is by no means novel, since literature has been a widely used teaching tool in different language teaching methods.

Language users are required to communicate properly and effectively with other speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Intercultural skills are required and they cannot be acquired solely through communication materials. Learners need to acquire not only grammar and lexis but also the intercultural communicative skills. They must be enabled to think critically and use proper language in particular situations to achieve communication.

Studying literature for cultural purposes has attracted the attention of many foreign language teachers. A close look at literature and language shows that the two are closely related. This close relationship is obvious because from all indications, literature presupposes language. It is inconceivable to discuss literature without reference to language.

If literature texts were to be used as source materials while studying a foreign language, students must be equipped with the necessary information to understand and analyze its key principles. They ought to learn to recognize its peculiar indications

in a literary text and find meanings from the diverse use of language. The first skill is known as “communicative consciousness” and the second as “linguistic consciousness”, and they both rely on the comparative and contrastive principles. Therefore, it is fundamental that students enjoy the communicative skills and competence to comprehend and interpret literary masterpieces and this ability is known as literary competence.

2. Theoretical framework

The study is based on social interactionist theory. The theory is an explanation of language development with emphasis on the role of social interactions between the developing child and linguistically knowledgeable adults. It is based on based on socio-cultural theories of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky believes that cultural development in children is visible in two stages. First, the child observes the interaction between other people and second, the language behavior develops inside the child. Vygotsky further theorized that a child learns best when interacting with those around him. He proposed the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) where the learners construct the target language, through socially mediated interaction. Vygotsky’s social development theory was adopted and made prominent in the Western world through Jerome Bruner (1983) who also laid the foundations of a model of language development.

This theory is relevant to this study because the use of literary texts by the language teacher in class is predominantly based on interaction of the teacher (adult) with other teachers (where necessary). The teacher is expected to interact with the text before coming to class. Whether prose, poetry or drama text, the teacher is expected to study it in order to know the content, word choice and why, as well as syntagmatic relations and why they were made. He or she then comes to class to discuss the content and grammar in the text.

3. Statement of the Problem

Despite the important role Literature plays in facilitating the teaching and learning of language, the researchers observed that there is still students’ low level of achievement in the subject in Benue State. This problem has become a worry to parents, teachers, government and other stakeholders in the education of the child. The huge resources invested into a child are mostly considered a waste. The need to improve students’

achievement and sustain students' positive attitude towards Literature has long been a major concern to the researchers. It has been observed that no effort is made to stimulate students' interest in Literature-in-English.

This has caused a decline in the moral values which the teaching and learning of Literature-in-English is supposed to inculcate in the learners and society at large. It is against this background that the researchers intend to examine the problems associated with teaching English Language using Literature in schools in Makurdi metropolis.

4. The Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the problems associated with teaching English Language using Literature in some schools in Makurdi metropolis. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the impact of Literature on the study of English Language in Makurdi.
2. Identify the problems hindering the use of Literature texts to teach English Language in schools in Makurdi.
3. Suggest possible solutions to the problems associated with using Literature to teach English Language.

4.1 Research Questions

For data collection and analysis, the following research questions are formulated.

1. What is the impact of Literature on the study of English Language in the selected schools?
2. What are the problems that hinder the use of Literature to teach English Language?
3. What are the possible solutions to the impediments of Literature in English Language teaching?

4.2 Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of teachers of Literature-in-English and English Language on the impact of Literature on the study of English Language in Makurdi metropolis.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of teachers of Literature-in-English and English Language on the problems hindering the use of Literature in English Language teaching.

5. Methodology

The research covers Makurdi metropolis which is the Headquarters of Makurdi LGA and the capital of Benue State located in the North Central, Nigeria along the Benue River. The major ethnic groups are the Tiv, Idoma and Igede. Makurdi is predominantly an agricultural area specializing in cash crops and subsistence crops.

The metropolis lies between longitude $8^{\circ}20''$ and 9° and latitudes $7^{\circ}20''$ and 8° North. It has an estimated population of 500,79 (based on 2006/2007 National Population Census figure) and a land area of 804km^2 . The location of Makurdi in Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World is plate 86 F8 (Collins Maps, 2013). It shares common boundary with Guma local government area in the North, it is bounded in the South with Gwer West, Gwer East local government area at the east and Obi local government of Nasarawa State in the west.

The population of the study comprised all 117 teachers of English language and 33 teachers of Literature-in-English from 20 secondary schools in Makurdi metropolis. Purposive sampling was used for the study. The entire population of 150 comprising of 117 teachers of English Language and 33 teachers of Literature-in-English were used as subjects for the study.

A structured questionnaire titled 'Problems Associated with Teaching English Language Using Literature (PTEL)' was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts in the field of research in the Department of Educational Foundations and General Studies, University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The process led to slight modification of both the Language and content of the items.

Data collected were presented in tables and analyzed using statistical mean score. The respondents' opinions were assessed based on agree and disagree on each item contained in the questionnaire. The decision mark for these items was 2.50 ($4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10/4 = 2.50$). Any item with a mean value of 2.50 or above was regarded as 'agreed' while any item with a mean value of less than 2.50 was regarded as 'not agreed'. An inferential statistics, t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

6. Result and Discussion

Table 1: Mean of English Language and Literature Teachers on the
 Impact of Literature on English Language Teaching

S/N	Item	N	X ₁	Remarks	X ₂	Remarks
1	Literature provides students with concrete patterns and it represents the language at its best and thus provides an ideal model for language learning.	150	3.09	Agree	3.31	Agree
2	Literature helps students develop their language awareness and knowledge about language	150	2.71	Agree	2.51	Agree
3	Themes and fables of literary materials promote meaningful debates, discussions that develop the linguistic and communicative competences	150	2.51	Agree	2.32	Agree
4	Literature provides an authentic source to teach grammar and vocabulary.	150	2.51	Agree	2.47	Agree
5	Literature fosters motivation in students because it develops the reader's imagination and emotions.	150	2.77	Agree	2.98	Agree
6	Literature provides students with knowledge about the cultural values and norms embodied in the language.	150	2.82	Agree	3.03	Agree
7	The study of literature affects the student's knowledge and world view	150	2.73	Agree	2.93	Agree
8	Literature gives students opportunities to develop their language skills and increase their interaction with texts.	150	2.97	Agree	3.18	Agree
9	Comparison of literary and non-literary texts allows students to shift from the known to the unknown; literature thus becomes accessible.	150	2.83	Agree	3.04	Agree
10	The combination of the study of literary texts with creative language activities makes the literary text more accessible.	150	2.98	Agree	3.19	Agree
11	The integration of linguistics and literature fosters language competence among the students.	150	2.87	Agree	3.08	Agree

N = number of respondents, X₁ = mean of English Language teachers and X₂ = mean of Literature teachers.

Source: Field survey, 2016

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Table 2: Mean of English Language and Literature Teachers on the Problems Hindering Language Teaching through Literature

S/N	Item	N	X ₁	Remarks	X ₂	Remarks
1	Corruption	150	2.87	Agree	3.08	Agree
2	Poverty	150	2.80	Agree	3.01	Agree
3	Apathy of government	150	2.71	Agree	2.91	Agree
4	Disillusionment in Nigerian literature	150	2.77	Agree	2.98	Agree
5	Negative Attitude of students	150	2.53	Agree	2.53	Agree

N = number of respondents, X₁ = mean of English Language teachers and X₂ = mean of Literature teachers.

Source: Field survey, 2016.

Table 3: Mean of English Language and Literature Teachers on the Solutions

S/N	Item	N	X ₁	Remarks	X ₂	Remarks
1	Show students the relevance of what they read in Literature class by having them connect key quotes from the work to news articles, photos etc.	150	2.87	Agree	3.08	Agree
2	Graphic novels should be taught across the curriculum in pre-primary and primary schools.	150	2.80	Agree	3.01	Agree
3	Explore the Learning Network's special Literature page, which has selected lessons about particular authors and genres.	150	2.77	Agree	2.98	Agree
4	Motivate students to do the reading with guiding questions	150	2.35	Agree	2.53	Agree
5	Encourage students to come to class with questions.	150	2.51	Agree	2.63	Agree
6	Discuss specific passages with your students	150	2.82	Agree	3.03	Agree
7	Make use of group activities	150	2.73	Agree	2.93	Agree

N = Number of respondents, X₁ = mean of English Language teachers and X₂ = mean of Literature teachers.

Source: Field survey, 2016.

Table 4: t-test on the Impact of Literature Texts on English Language Teaching

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-cal	t-tab	Remarks
Teachers of Literature	75	3.17	0.53	148	1.00	1.66	Significant
Teachers of English	75	1.81	0.53				

Source: Field survey, 2016.

Table 5: t-test on the Problems Hindering the Use of Literature to Teach English Language

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-cal	t-tab	Remarks
Teachers of Literature	75	2.79	0.74	148	0.10	1.66	Significant
Teachers of English	75	1.15	0.28				

Source: Field survey, 2016.

7. Discussion and Findings

The study was conducted to find out the factors militating against English Language teaching through Literature in schools in Makurdi metropolis of Benue State with all the items obtaining mean above 2.50. The findings of the study revealed that Literature has great impact on the study of English Language. The findings of this study are similar to a study conducted by Starja (2015) on the impact of literature in teaching a foreign language. The study found out that drama helped the students develop their critical and independent thinking because it developed their imagination. It helped students to express their opinions and contribute. Through its dialogue, it provided endless possibilities of interactions, communication aspects and language usage. Simulation, “rehearsal”, served as the most efficient means of tracing the world described. Drama had the ability to make students feel proud of their work.

The study also revealed that there are numerous problems hindering the teaching of English Language through literature. The findings affirm the result of Labo-Popoola (2010) on a study titled ‘The Place of Literature in the Teaching of English Language as a Second Language’. The study revealed that despite the benefits that could be derived from using literature to teach language, there could be problems if certain precautions are not taken. Some students find literature very difficult because of the choice of literary texts. If difficult authors are chosen, students will not enjoy reading their works. The students will rely on word-for-word translation, which is not the way to develop language skills or literary appreciation in students. Therefore, literary texts have to be chosen in such a way that they would capture the interest of the reader (learner). The texts should lead the students to discover language features. They should be chosen to serve as a springboard for creative communicative post-reading activities.

Another problem could be the teaching strategies adopted by the teacher. The manner in which the teacher handles the literature class goes a long way in giving the students the right attitude towards the subject. There is no specific method for teaching literature hence; the teacher uses whatever approach available to him. The attitude of the teacher as well as his competence in handling the text will determine his output in the class. The teacher, in using literature in his language class, should relate the class activities to real life situations. The class should be made to be lively, interesting and attractive. The teacher should ensure that the students’ background and culture are taken into consideration, when choosing literary texts. Since literature is language in action, there should be actual reading in the class. Though, extensive reading should be

encouraged, intensive reading is required of the students in order to ensure that they understand the text.

The findings of the study show that there are possible solutions to advance for the full realization of English Language teaching through Literature. The findings are in conformity with a study carried out by Barrett (2007) on Initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Initiatives that promote learner-centred teaching and awareness around the child-friendly school environments are often driven, at least in part, by a concern for equity. For much of the world, especially Africa and South Asia, gender remains the most significant basis for educational discrimination. Until recently, most of the literature on meeting the needs of girls in schools has focused on issues of access and retention. The establishment of a safe, girl-friendly school environment is crucial to attract girls to school and keep them there. Basic infrastructural concerns such as the provision of separate toilets have been the focus for some time, but attention is now shifting to a broader notion of a 'safe' environment that includes protection from violence and sexual harassment. This must include the development of gender awareness amongst staff and boys in schools leading to equality of respect for girls and women and the introduction of curricula and learning materials that are gender-sensitive and meet the needs of girls as much as those of boys. It is disappointing that even the most recent literature on gender and education in Africa presents few examples of gender-sensitive approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers should be recruited and deployed and be provided with the education and professional development they need to be effective.

8. Conclusion

Having studied the problems associated with language teaching through the use of literature, we can conclude, based on the responses from respondents, that there can be a great impact of Literature texts on the teaching of English language. However, there are many problems hindering the use of Literature in English Language teaching. Some solutions have been advanced here:

1. It is recommended that workshops, seminar, trainings and retraining should be stressed and made compulsory for all language teachers.
2. Ministries of Education at State and Federal levels should support language teachers to enable them use literature texts for language teaching.

3. Total elimination of negative attitudes of teachers and students of language towards literature. This can be done through careful selection of literature texts that are interesting and relevant to topics being taught the students.
4. Literature-in-English should be made compulsory from pre-primary to senior secondary level in all schools.
5. English language curricular from primary to secondary school levels in Nigeria should reflect the use of literature texts in the teaching of the English language. These curricular must include recommended texts to use at various levels, these books should be prescribed by experts in the field who will consider the age, cultural background and linguistic level of the pupils/students.

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