



Literature and ELT and Learning of English Language and Literature
(A Case Study and Relationship)

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Abstract

Language and literature are co-related to each other in one way or the other. This close relationship is crystal clear on account of certain presupposition in literature and indication. It is inconceivable to discuss literature without reference to language. But going by the traditional practice at the secondary school level in other foreign countries, there are indications that Literature and English Language are treated as two separate school subjects. At the senior secondary school level, the subjects are taught in different classroom settings by teachers that are either designated Literature teachers or English teachers. By this dichotomy, the Literature teachers, to a large extent, pre-occupy their teaching period with the teaching of the stories, the contents and the socio-cultural, economic and religious implications of the prescribed literary texts without placing much emphasis on the language components of the texts. In the end, some students have been found to have done very well in the Literature exams but perform poorly in English Language. Against this background, this paper shows that the relationship between literature and language is mutual. It was, therefore, suggested that the relationship should be explored and exploited in order to enhance effective teaching and learning of Literature and English Language at the secondary school level so that the learners would possess high level of proficiency in the use of English Language, which would ultimately contribute immensely in addressing the seeming poor academic performance at the secondary and tertiary levels of education in Nigeria. Some suggestions for effective teaching and learning of Literature and English Language were made.

1. Introduction

The significant role of English Language in the linguistic, educational, socio-economic and cultural settings of Nigeria is not in doubt. In the field of education in particular, English Language plays a dominant role. As the language for education and by extension the target

language, the success or failure of formal education, to a large extent, depends on the level of competence of learners in English Language in schools and colleges. Unfortunately, in contemporary time, “available evidence in the way our students use English in our schools and colleges shows that their English Language competence and English Language awareness leave much to be desired” (Onukaogu, 2002, p. 300). For instance, it is common knowledge that a good number of secondary school leavers and tertiary institution graduates hardly express themselves fluently in both spoken and written English, and this anomaly has been found to be partly responsible for the poor academic performance have been threatening. Literature classroom is different from that of English Language. Consequently, the resources of Literature, which have the potentialities of enhancing effective language learning, are denied the learners. This practice, no doubt, could be said to have inhibited effective teaching and learning of Literature and English Language in our schools and colleges. No wonder a good number of Nigerian secondary school students hardly express themselves sufficiently in English even after they had offered Literature and had a good grade in it.

In the light of the foregoing, the thrust of this paper is to establish the fact that there is a symbiotic relationship between literature and language; and further demonstrate how Literature could be integrated with English Language teaching and learning in an ESL setting for effective result.

2. The Concept and Functions of Literature

The term “literature” is used basically in two different senses. First, it is 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 applies to us in this context. As a subject or discipline, Literature has been variously defined by different scholars. According to Onuekwusi (2013, p. 5), “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”. Although the definition of Literature by Onuekwusi succinctly attempts to capture the essence of literature, it is pertinent to point out that not all literature is imaginative. As a matter of fact, some literary works are factual, and it is based on this understanding that 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 that is indispensable that can be deduced from the definition under reference is the fact that Literature, no matter the type or genre, is written in words. This is to say that language is the basic raw material 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, concepts and styles are put into function in the creation of literary texts.

Therefore, if one must interpret and analysis a literary text, one must be competent in the 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. As a school subject, there are some significant functions Literature performs. Put differently, the whole essence of developing Literature as a school subject is for the students to derive some benefits. Ayo (2003, p. 128) describes the benefits as the general utilities of Literature. According to him, “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". Collie and Slater (1987) support the inclusion of Literature in the language classroom because it provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute to readers' cultural as well as language enrichment. Still on the utilities of Literature, Lazar (1993, pp. 15-19) provides five reasons for using literature in ELT to include:

- 1) Motivating materials
- 2) Encouraging language acquisition
- 3) Expanding students' language awareness
- 4) Developing students' interpretative abilities

3. The Symbiotic Relationship between Literature and Language

Literature and language are not only intertwined but also inter-related. Literature pre-supposes language because it is with the instrument of language that Literature is concretized. Therefore, it sounds absurd to study Literature without language at the centre stage or to study language without Literature playing a prominent role. It is based on this view that the relationship between Literature and language is best described as symbiotic. A work of literature for all reading ages—is an organisation of language to which linguistic awareness must be applied if it is to be understood and appreciated. In the process the pupil learns much of practical value both about language and in the use of language. In his literary studies he meets language in its most varied and powerful forms, and learns to examine the writer's use of it in the context of all the linguistic resources available to him. Thus, literature demonstrates language at work. But it also helps the pupil to use language; it offers good models and stimulates linguistic responses of various kinds. English teachers not only present literature; they also exploit it, because it can generate language as well as exemplify it.

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 like. Literature, a convenient source of content for a course in foreign language, provides motivating materials for language teaching. Carter and Long (1991) equally agree that Literature is a legitimate and valuable resource for language teaching.

4. Suggestions for Teaching Literature and English for Effective Result

In this section of the paper, it is our intention to outline some suggestions for teaching Literature and English Language for effective result.

- 1) The Literature and the English Language teachers should be made to have a common goal of promoting efficiency in the use of English in their professional assignment. In order to achieve this goal, their professional training should be designed in such a way

that they would be competent in both Literature and English Language so that the Literature teacher should possess all the basic skills necessary for teaching language while the English Language teacher should also be competent enough to teach Literature. The practice whereby a teacher claims he specialises in teaching Literature while teacher B is an expert in English Language should be de-emphasised. In the classroom setting, their teaching should compliment each other's effort. The Literature teacher should not close his eyes to the language hints that abound in the prescribed literary texts while the language teacher should not hesitate to use excerpts from the prescribed literary texts to illustrate his teaching of various language components. By this approach, the success or failure of the learners in English Language in the classroom should be a collective responsibility of both the language and Literature teacher and not exclusively that of the language teacher as it is the case in the present time.

- 2) The importance attached to English language and Mathematics should be extended to Literature at the secondary school level. At the junior secondary school it should be taught and learnt as a fully-fledged subject and not a component of English language where it is given a scanty coverage.

A situation whereby students are required to read only the few literary books prescribed by the examination bodies for Literature does not create room for the students to imbibe the culture of extensive reading, which research findings have found to be one of the potent ways of addressing lack of proficiency in English. The students at both the junior and the senior secondary school should be made to read appreciable number of literary texts as it would create room for the learners to be immersed in the target language, which would in turn boost their proficiency in English.

- 3) Literature should be allotted a reasonable number of periods on the school time table as in the case of English and Mathematics. The current practice whereby only two or three periods are assigned to literature per week is counter productive. For one thing, it does not create an ample opportunity for the teacher to treat the scheme exhaustively for the term or session; and on the part of the students, they do not have enough time for effective classroom work on the subject.
- 4) The prescribed literature texts should be within the linguistic competence of the students and be relevant to their educational and socio-cultural experiences. Although Shakespearean texts are classical and reflect the culture of the ancient English people, such texts cannot be useful for effective acquisition of modern English. Examination bodies and Literature teachers should prescribe texts that are rich in English culture written in modern English.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have strived to establish the fact that there is a symbiotic relationship between Literature and language. It is our opinion that if this relationship is well harnessed in the teaching and learning of Literature and English Language at the secondary school level, it would go a long way in addressing lack of proficiency in English on the part of Nigerian students at all levels of education and by extension minimize high rate of failure in English Language in public

examinations. It is also expected that a high level of proficiency in English Language on the part of Nigerian students would be the needed panacea to the intractable problem of poor academic performance currently threatening the education industry. Therefore, the government, the curriculum designers, the school as well as the teachers of Literature and English Language should work hand in glove to ensure that this suggested innovation in the teaching of Literature and English Language in our schools and colleges is effectively implemented.

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