

THE IMPERATIVES OF MODERN INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES' USE IN THE TEACHING OF POETRY TO JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The rapid digitalization of contemporary communication has cut across every sphere, and education is not an exemption, which has put educators on their toes when it comes to course presentations to learners. The teaching of poetry has also been challenged. Hence, this work is aimed at accessing the loopholes that characterize the teaching-learning process of poetry and also offering valuable insights about the effective integration of instructional materials into the academic environment that would fit into the fast-growing technology world in order to advance as well as enhance the experiences of both teachers and learners in poetry. It was concluded that there was a need for collaborative instructional approaches, stakeholders' action, and a change in curriculum.

Key words: Poetry, Teaching, Instructional approaches

INTRODUCTION

The efforts displayed in certain subjects are evaluated when assigning students to departments (Science, Arts, or Commercial) for senior secondary school studies. One of the prerequisites for the Arts department is to pass literature-in-English, but, unfortunately, the scholarly attainment of pupils has consistently demonstrated a persistent pattern of insufficiency, particularly in the domain of poetry (Timothy & Obiekezie, (2019). It is, therefore, expedient for teachers of this subject to actively engage or motivate the students in order for them to pass the subject in the Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination, as a deficiency in this may lead to the students not being able to fulfill their career dream. Apart from being a prerequisite for specific careers in the Arts disciplines, it tends to impact students' language proficiency as well as improve, develop, and positively impact their reading skills (Rasinki and Zimmerman, 2013).

Literature are commonly regarded as literary compositions that are designated as objects of scholarly inquiry and encompass a wide range of imaginative artistic creations, including visual, written, sung, spoken, or charted forms. It could be said to be a form of artistic expression which covers the aesthetic rearrangement of human experiences to convey them in a more comprehensive or precise manner, through eloquent and artfully crafted language, with the primary intention of evoking amusement, morals, delight, information or pleasure, and engender a meaningful transmission of ideas which has no intention of being interpreted by fact but upon analysis can be linked to several truths. Zengin et al. (2019) believes that literature can promote language

proficiency in individuals who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) because as students interact with literary texts, they not only expand their vocabulary but also develop critical skills, imaginative cognitive skills, communication skills and aesthetic goals.

Furthermore, scholarly researchers, including Gönen (2018), Calafato and Paran (2018), and Adejimola and Ojuolape (2013) cited by Timothy and Obiekezie (2019), have observed that poetry plays a crucial function in facilitating the development of language proficiency, which encompasses the improvement of listening, speaking, reading, and writing capabilities.

WHAT IS POETRY?

Poetry is the oldest literary genre, not restricted to just one sphere of life. It is a piece of frugal literary work with deliberate and impactful spoken or written words that create vivid imagination and express thoughts, emotions, and experiences using figurative devices Okolo (2003) such as imagery, rhythm, and sound intending to unite pleasure with truth. For Ibitoye (2005), it is an unexplainable emotional and expressive writing usually written in stanzas and lines with lyrical effects and may be tricky to explain in literary form. Abioye's words shed light on Levy's (2001) point of view that poetry is a way of negotiating experience, attending to external and internal worlds, and bringing diverse worlds into close relation to arrive at renewed perception. Therefore, it is very germane as it is the vehicle through which society gives meaningful and sensitive expression to individuals' and groups' innermost thoughts, feelings, and emotions. According to Parr and Campbell (2006) in Timothy and Obiekezie (2019), children's ability to sing and recite poems would foster their ability to read it. They further stated that if students can read it, then they will be able to write it in the nearest future. The claim by Parr and Campbell could be interpreted as "poetry awakens and fosters creative writing skills as it makes students to connect to their environment and to their community. Little wonder that it has a place in the Nigerian school system.

THE PLACE OF POETRY IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

Poetry being one of the three genres of literature, is a very important aspect of the culture and tradition of Nigerian society. It is part of the cultural and traditional life of Nigerians because day-to-day interactions are decorated in poetic expressions. As we know that language is the instrument of communication in every society, it is the vehicle upon which literature is conveyed to human understanding and use. The greetings, lullaby, praise songs, religious invocations, love expressions, war songs, recreational verses and many more are parts of the normal life of the people. Greetings is one of the cultural values of the African people of which Nigeria is not left out. There are some unique ways of greetings, examples of some are examined here.

In every Nigerian linguistic society, occupational vocations are identified with peculiar greeting mode including some other gatherings which are poetic in nature. In the Yoruba linguistic settings, the followings are used to date.

Blacksmith	Greeting	Response
	Aroye o (You will be successful)	Ogun agbe O (The god of Iron will favour you)
Hunter	Arepa ntogun	Ogun agbe O (The god of Iron will favour you)
Driver	Awaye O	Ogun agbe O (The god of Iron will favour you)
Farmer	Arokobodun de O	Ogun agbe o (The god of Iron will favour you)
Hairdresser	Ojugbooro O.	Oya aya o (Comb will move freely)
Wedding:	Eyiniyawo o nimeni	A o renenibe o (It shall be fruitful).
Mourning:	Aku aseinde O (Well done for surviving the dead)	
	Aku araferaku (Sorry for the loss)	
	Aku iroju O (Sorry for bearing the loss)	
	Aku oro eniyan (sorry for care of a person)	
Response for all: Aoniriiru e mo O.		

All the expressions cited in the various settings are metaphorical. None is a direct statement for the meaning intended. Yet, it is the common interactive conveyance of the thoughts and messages of the people in such occasions. As these relates to greetings, there are family praise songs, festival renditions, satirical compositions, dirge, epics, elegies and others.

The Nigerian traditional poems are greatly valuable to human society because of the positive effects on the well-being of the people. It is artistically rich with it linguistic, emotional and thematic resources. The deep linguistic expression of the cited modes of greetings as being metaphorical, the special tones and accompanying gestures and cues in the actions are strong to elicit emotional responses confirming the achievement of its purpose.

During festivals, various songs are rendered with thematic content and tones that convey communal values and virtues accentuating approval and disapproval, likes and dislikes, principles and philosophy that binds their souls and spirits together as a people. If there are any mis-behaviour, acts that are of grievous moral mis-normal, it shall be singled out for condemnation in songs and various dramatic displays that will inflict emotional pain, discomfort, humiliation with public shame and ridicules to such individuals, family or group of people. On the other hand, any heroic feat of a leader or member of the community are rewarded with epic composed and rendered for them. For heroes/heroines who are no more alive, dirge/eulogy are composed and rendered to commemorate their deeds. This use of poetry within Nigerian society makes it a great asset to be explored for rejuvenation of moral and social decadence in our society.

In the present dispensation, the political sector of the society makes great use of poetry. In campaign slogans, in manifestoes and rallies, various songs in different linguistic compositions are rendered to convey different messages to the populace. Though there are some of the renditions that are not morally sound in the sense that opposition parties and individuals are attacked and ridiculed rather than produce materials that endanger healthy rivalry, the result to bitter and hated type of rivalry which is at variance to the objective of traditional poetry Nigerian society birthed.

For enthusiasm in fostering cooperation and development of individuals and society economically, different cooperative societies and groups emerge. In their meetings, there are many thematic songs rendered to encourage themselves and equally applaud the efforts of the visioners and sources of the provision of the succor for mostly financially vulnerable members of society in business and other needs.

At various settings of children gatherings in holiday parties, birthday, excursions and recreational time outs, poetry has become a signature tune. There is no gathering of children that songs, and deliberately too, a recitation of one form or the other would not be rendered. It is worthy of note that such compositions and renditions are thematically functional to build morals and ethics of the society in the children (Onyejizu& Obi 2020).

Since the target of Nigerian education is to make learners useful to himself and the society, poetry is incorporated in the curriculum to explore the various benefits derivable in it. From the nursery to the higher level of the education system, poetry is exposed to learners in diverse ways for the purpose of its inclusion. Nevertheless, it seems the teaching and learning of poetry still remain a herculean task. It is instructive to state that proper and resourceful teaching of poetry is highly imperative.

The engagement of learners at the nursery level majorly, is via songs and rhymes. They are exposed to numerous nursery rhymes, learning morals, mathematics, language and other subject areas. Though, the consciousness of knowledge acquisition by this means is hidden to the young minds because, to them, they are fun. As they progress to upper levels most especially secondary school, they begin to understand acquisition of knowledge, as deliberate examination of the content of poetry is embarked upon. Hence, the prevalent experience of aversion to learning poetry and resultant discouraging performances in various internal and external examinations.

Written modern poetry has owed its existence to the agelong oral poetry because, writers explore and exploit resources of oral poetry to produce relevant and interesting artistic works (Ezenwa-Ohaelo 1998). According to Onyejizu& Obi (2020), the works of modern African poets

pursue cultural issues for the purpose to enliven the realities of Africans by the use of images, proverbs and others that are inherent in the traditional oral renditions. They further stated that Modern African poets explore themes that are persuasive to Africans' sensibility; using Language expressions and manners attributed to Africans' belief system, and poetic composition. In modern African poetry, the neglected and despised cultures, prevalent sociopolitical situations, and relationship between man and his environment, are portrayed. Nigerian society is conspicuously entwined in this pursuit. Such Nigerian poets include NiyiOsundare. Ezenwa-Ohaelo, Tanure Olajide and Mazi Kunene. The poems of NiyiOsundare, for example are variously identified with cultural art forms deplored to satirise the exploitative nature of post-colonial leaders, using traditional literary elements like irony, metaphor, symbols, images and others, humorously, to create a vivid effect of his message (Aminu & Oluwabenga 2017, Anyokwu 2013). *Okiri, The Eye of the Earth and Village Voices* are copious examples.

Given that oral poetry in the form of eulogy and ode has existed as far back as the pre-literate Nigeria society, it is not surprising that the school system adopted it. In Nigerian Secondary Schools, Literature- in English consists of drama and poetry—the latter includes elegy, sonnet, epic, and so on. For the Senior Secondary Schools, the students have a total of twelve African Poems and Non-African poems for WASSCE and a different set of twelve poems for NECO. Its importance is non-negotiable for students who want to study specific courses in the University. However, it is expedient for Junior Secondary School students to have a sufficient score in the subject if they want to be assigned to the Art department in senior secondary school. Though poetry is fascinating, it is ideal to look at the factors that affect its teaching in schools.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS

Okonkwo (2021), in her study on impediments of effective teaching of poetry in Onueke Education Zone of Ebonyi State's senior secondary schools, identified three major areas confronting the teaching of poetry in Nigerian schools. They are:

- Inherent difficulties in poetry as a genre of literature. The problems include connotative use of words, non-concrete ideas, and hidden meaning.
- Teaching methods are teacher-centered. Here, use of conventional method by teachers which is characterized with assignment of advance reading of text, only class experience of reading poems, use of different materials for illustration, explanation of difficult words, identification of figurative languages and others.
- Poor attitudes of students. Students were identified with low interest for poetry as compared to other genres of literature.

The following areas are generally identified as specific areas to be address.

Poetry Language: Many students believe that poetry is hard to comprehend due to its unique style of language use, structure, meaning, and expression, which they consider too complex to be broken. Hence, students are scared and develop phobia of no interest and dislike. Equally, some teachers were found to find the teaching of poetry difficult because of the same issue of the complex structure and language of poetry (Akporobaro, 2008, Alexander & Eucharia, 2019). The fear attributed to the preference placed on the different literary genres which resulted to students making poetry the last of the three, prose, drama and poetry.

This buttresses Alvi and Alvi's (2019) discovery that teachers engage in the use of the traditional teacher-centered method to teach poetry. To further shed light on this, he opined that teachers teach poetry as though they were mediators to impart information about poets and poems while the students are passive recipients of information without critical, creative and evaluative abilities. WAEC's Chief Examiners report (2011) revealed that candidates performed poorly in

poetry because of inability to use language efficiently with deficiency in use of figurative expressions and theme development.

Teachers' attitudes and strategies Many students have a phobia of poetry because they believe their literature-in-English teachers are not forthcoming through their teaching attitude or strategy. For example, some teachers give students poems to analyze without sincerely telling them what to do; some tell them to copy notes without the active involvement of the class. Hence, the students do not know what to do, making them conclude that their teachers are incompetent.

Inadequate teachers: Many government-owned schools need more teachers to take subjects, and literature-in-English is not an exemption. Due to this factor, sometimes, anyone is just chosen to teach the subject, leading to low confidence in teaching poetry because they find it tedious.

The types of poems selected to be studied in the curriculum also pose a significant challenge in teaching literature in English in schools. Some poems do not fit into Nigerian society, so the students need help connecting the poem to their reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Active student participation: An effective learning process occurs when teachers and students interact and participate in the learning activities, which encourages the mutual exchange of information, stimulates interest, and recognizes respect among teachers and students. Mina et al. (2015) in Alonge et al viewed classroom participation as an active involvement process that could be divided into classification, preparation, contributions to discussions, group work, communication skills, and attendance because the role of teachers in nurturing students creativity cannot be under emphasized. . For example, teachers could leave students to generate meanings and arrive at their conclusions based on their environment and experience instead of leaving them with stereotypical meanings.

Teachers' interest: There is a need for teachers to develop a keen interest in poetry because their attitude towards the subject can be easily transferred to their students. How the teacher views the subject and his interest; would propel him to gradually and pleasurably introduce students to the subject, and engaging them critically and creatively to all forms of poems. Furthermore, the teacher's interest should be on helping the students to discover the meaning to a poem rather than being stereotype because a poem can possess multiple valid meanings.

Language: Since poetic language may appear challenging, Poems can be sung like cathedral hymns; they can be read to the rhythm of R&B, afro beats, reggae, hip-hop, or blues. Moreover, poems can be turned into drama, choreography, illustration, comics, and narration to make the language more flexible for students to comprehend.

Accessible texts: The examination bodies, policymakers, and curriculum planners in charge of text suggestions in the school curriculum in Nigeria should prescribe poems that would move from the simple to the complex, the familiar to the non-familiar, and from Nigerian to the African then to non-African so that students initiation to poetry would be flexible.

Teacher Training: It is important for teachers in colleges of education and universities who are saddled with training of future teachers especially those in English language department i.e those training teachers of English and Literature, to emphasize to the learners on the need to develop creative and innovative pedagogical strategies on teaching of poetry. In addition, teacher-training institutions should deliberately introduce courses on how poetry can be taught. More than merely taking courses from English and Literary Studies departments is required and does not automatically equip future teachers with the skills to teach literature. In the same manner, periodic teacher training workshop on creativity, interaction and the need to stop teaching poetry through instincts in a poetry class is also recommended to teachers.

Assistive Technology Solutions: The use of assistive technological means will enhance the teaching and learning of poetry. Simpson (2010) posited that assistive technology solutions are helpful in completing tasks. In a study he carried out in Ghana, it was reported that students learned better through focusing computer screen that highlighted words when read aloud different from listening to digital versions of books. So, technology solution enabled them to learn difficult words. Co-Writer which is a word prediction software would be beneficial to both teacher and students by imputing words into computer when the need arises.

CONCLUSION

The key is to give life to the poem by transforming it into other media (Snapper, 2009), for leaving poetry on the page might kill it (Dymoke & Hughes, 2009). The methods and techniques teachers adopt in poetry lessons are germane to the teaching and learning of poetry. They determine the success or failure of any poetry lesson. They also determine students' success, failure, and interest in poetry. Effective use of these methods, techniques, and questioning behavior is essential as they will promote students' interest in poetry, positively improving their academic performance in Literature - in English. Proper and effective teaching of poetry would equally facilitate the realisation of the goals and achievement of the objectives of including literature, and poetry in particular to the school curriculum. Therefore, literacy advocates, as well as ministries of education, have to prioritize training for teachers of poetry.

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