ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS TO THE USE OF LITERATURE IN TEACHING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS IN THE NIGERIAN CLASSROOMS: A STUDY OF IHIALA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE.

BY

EMODI, LIVINA N

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

CHUKWUEMEKA ODUMEGWU UNIVERSITY, IGARIAM CAMPUS

Abstract

The study of a second language aims at a good command of the language for the purpose of communication and does not therefore rule out a reading of the literature in the language. To achieve communicative competence, Nigerian educational planners have joined the two subjects to be one in the Nigerian junior secondary schools. But the problem is lack of effective implementation in the Nigerian schools. So the aim of this paper is to investigate the attitude of teachers towards the use of this method in Ihiala Local Government Area. Using a qualitative interview method, the researcher has tried to elicit the teachers’ perceptions about the method. The results of the data collected show that the literary text is a good and useful tool for learning a second language because it leads the learner into developing the language skills, exposing the learner to real language and active participation in the class. Preference is given to reading and listening. Language level, students’ needs and interests, and course objectives are some of the criteria to consider while choosing a literary text and all the teachers would like to receive training in the method especially in designing activities. It is also important to note that some findings are consistent while some contradict with previous studies. After a brief introduction, she reviewed some related literature, presented the analysis of the data collected and the methodology she used in achieving her objectives. Then she presented some
recommendations that would help in achieving greater impact in the use of literature in the language classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Many linguists have stressed the need to focus on content-based knowledge while teaching language areas. In content-based instruction, the focus is on making the language meaningful and getting the students to communicate in the target language (Rodmans and others: 464). What it means is that learners are encouraged to discuss issues and express opinions on various topics of interest to them in the target language. However, in the world of language teaching, where what to know is growing exponentially every day; teachers need to learn how to give their students opportunities to acquire information, and how to present it to their students. In a second language learning environment, using a literary material is an essential teaching strategy. The usage of literature will facilitate learning and instruction and as well provide confidence to language teachers and enhance the learners’ learning of second languages.

Because of the importance attached to the use of literature in the language classroom, the Nigerian educational planners in Nigeria have joined the two subjects into one. A look at The National Policy on Education (2014 Edition) also shows that Literature in English is not among the subjects offered in the Junior Secondary School Examinations. And the Junior Secondary School Curriculum states it boldly that English is offered together with literature (http://www.eiso.org/junior_curriculum.php). Thus, in the National Curriculum for English Language in the Junior Secondary School, the two subjects have been fused into one.
named ‘English Studies’. The integrated English teaching approach is part of the movement towards communicative language teaching (Lambo. https://www.unilorin.edu.ng/journals/education/nijef/March_1992). Lambo, while commending the efforts behind the integrative English curriculum at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level, stresses the need for effective implementation. She suggests the need for periodic orientation or re-training of both teachers and supervisors of in Junior Secondary schools, in view of the fact that integrative teaching of English at the JSS level is innovative.

Popoola (http://www.medwelljournals.com/fulltext/?doi=ssscience.2010.49.54) maintains that the integration of the two subjects implies that the English Language teachers in the JSS are now saddled with the responsibility of teaching the new subject (English Studies), which consists of English language and Literature in English. He says that the new arrangement is rocked with a number of problems. First and foremost, because there is no specific period allocated to Literature in English on the school’s general time-table, the teachers are faced with the problem of balancing the time allocation for the two aspects of the new subject at the junior secondary school level. Secondly, deriving from the first problem, teachers at this level of education, do not normally give enough attention to the literature aspect of the subject in the class as many of them do not even know the rationale for merging the two subjects. The two linguists quoted above have shown that although there is a policy on ground about the use of literature in the language classroom, the policy has not yet been effectively utilized in Nigerian schools. There is need to find out what the perceptions of our secondary teachers are about the practice and this is the essence of the research.

**Objectives of the Study:** The objectives of this study include:
1) To determine the attitudes of English language teachers at the Junior Secondary School towards using literary texts in their language classes.

2) To make recommendations that would help in achieving greater impact in the learning of these language skills, using literature.

**Statement of the Problem**

Learning English as a second language through memorization is a very ineffective strategy. To achieve communicative competence in the students, Nigerian Educational Planners have merged the two subjects - Literature and English - as ‘English studies’ in the junior secondary classes. But one thing is to formulate a policy, another is to implement it. Most teachers have not started implementing it because they may not know how to go about it or the rationale behind the merging. There is need to continue creating awareness for its importance and then provide insights on some of the possible ways of achieving the academic planners’ objectives. The researcher feels that using literary texts can improve ESL students’ interest in learning a second language. She also believes that if teachers use a variety of literary texts in the ESL classroom, it can help students to strengthen and reinforce what they have learned and trigger students’ motivation in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the English language.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is very important in so many ways. The topic of this research is – Attitude of Teachers to the Use of Literature in Teaching the English Language Skills in the Nigerian Classrooms: A Study of Ihiala Local Government Area in Anambra State. The essence of the
research is to find out the attitudes of English language teachers at the junior secondary school towards the use of literary texts in their classes. The research will go a long way to guiding curriculum designers to create a better and workable curriculum for English language learning as a second language, a curriculum that bears in mind the participatory aspect of the learner. It will go a long way to providing data for educational policy, especially as it concerns teachers’ recruitment, training, and teachers’ motivational techniques.

**Literature Review on Some Advantages on the Use of Literature in Language Classroom**

Van (http://www.scribd.com/doc/189200367/literature-in-ESL#scribd) believes that studying literature in the second language situation is advantageous in a number of ways. It provides meaningful context, and encourages critical thinking. Lindsay Clandfield (http://www.onestopenglish.com/why) in his article ‘Why Use Literature’ says, there are many good reasons for using literature in the classroom and she enumerates them thus: Literature is authentic material, it encourages interaction, expands language awareness, educates the whole person. By examining values in literary texts, teachers encourage learners to develop positive attitudes towards them. These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom. Literature is motivating. It holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature. Nasr (http://www.scribd.com/doc/189200367/literature-in-ESL#scribd) reviews the related literature and makes some additional points in favour of literary exploration in ESL classes. It has the potential to consolidate the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. It requires learners to think out and put into practice special reading strategies to deal with the idiosyncratic characteristics of verse and prose. It broadens intellectual perspectives and boasts cognitive maturation. It helps learners to develop feelings for the language they are
learning. Collie and Slater (3) support the inclusion of literature in the language classroom as it provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and helps to contribute to the readers’ cultural as well as language enrichment. These advantages, they move on to assert, can be achieved provided teachers use relevant and appealing materials to learners through the use of activities that promote involvement, reader response, and a solid integration between language and literature. Lazar (11) asserts that literature should be seen as an invaluable resource of motivating material and as a bridge to provide access to cultural background. Literature, she moves on to say, encourages language acquisition, expands students’ language awareness and interpretation abilities, claims which might be connected to the role of stylistics in the study of literary text and it educates the whole person, which resembles the personal growth model as described below. Parkinson and Thomas (9-11) add that literature provides a good model for good writing; it is memorable, non-trivial and challenging, and it also helps to assimilate the rhythms of a language, thereby facilitating intelligence and sensibility training. Hall (47) claims that literature helps to enhance the psycholinguistic aspect of language learning as it focuses on form and discourse processing skills and improves vocabulary expansion and reading skills. Literature, in addition, has experienced a revival with the advent of communicative approach in language teaching as it provides learners with authentic, pleasurable and cultural materials.

Methodology

Data Collection

The data for this study is collected by using qualitative approach. Qualitative research is about exploring issues, understanding phenomena, and answering questions by analyzing and making sense of unstructured data (http://www.qsrinternational.com/what-is-qualitative-
research.aspx). Creswell groups the data-collecting procedures of qualitative research into four categories: observations, interviews, analyzing documents and audiovisual materials (Jerry Thomas & others http://www.humankinetics.com/excerpts). Following Creswell’s grouping, the researcher has used interviews as her method of data collection. Interviewing is a valuable assessment tool because it allows the participants to share their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs in their own words. The use of direct questions in the assessment findings helps the researcher present an accurate depiction of what is being evaluated. The researcher has chosen structured interviews, a type of interview that is very controlled, with fixed, pre-planned questions and she has done this through note-taking devices.

A qualitative research is therefore chosen to obtain information from teachers about their attitudes towards the use of literary text in the teaching of the four language skills. To achieve the objective of the study, the researcher visited the selected schools to identify with the teachers of English. After due consultation with the secondary school teachers, she was permitted to interview them. The interview questions contained seven items. Participants were asked to give as many answers according to their opinions. In addition, they were allowed to add their own comments regarding any item. At the end of each interview, the researcher made sure she had a suitable arrangement with the participants concerning the reviewing of the materials she had written down and thanked the participants for their valuable time.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

According to Brockopp and Hastings-Tolsma, there are several common steps suggested by researchers for use in the process of data analysis in qualitative research. These include: identification of themes, verifying the selected themes through reflection on the data, and
discussion with other researchers and experts in the area, categorizing the themes and recording of support data for the categories (www.queensu.ca/samp/sampreresources/.documents/). Therefore, the researcher identified and categorized the themes, records and supported these themes and records with evidence from the data collected. The researcher summarized the outcome of the interview based on the questions. As stated earlier, it sought to determine English teachers’ attitudes towards using literary texts in the language classroom. To answer the questions of the study, structured interview questions were used by the researcher to elicit information from 10 teachers from different schools in Ihiala local Government area of Anambra state. These questions contained seven items aimed at determining answers to the requirements of the study. Responses to the questions were analyzed in terms of answers to the questions and frequency of occurrence. These are converted into percentage to give the accurate attitude of teachers towards the use of literary texts in language classroom.

**Area of the Study**

This study was carried out in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State. The researcher had chosen this area because she lives there and there are also several secondary schools and many teachers the researcher could easily contact for information.

**Population of the Study**

A population is the total group of subjects that meet a designated set of criteria. The population of this study include: the teachers of English in Ihiala Local Government Area.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**
Sampling is the process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population (Polit&Hungler: 714). Participants are drawn from teachers of English in some secondary schools in Ihiala Local Government Area. Five schools are selected from the local government to participate in the study. These schools include: Abbot Boys, Ihiala, Abbot Girls, Ihiala, St Jude’s Secondary school, Ihiala(mixed school), Azia Girls’ School, Azia and Mbosi Community School, Mbosi(mixed school). All of them are government owned schools. Ten teachers are selected, two from each school to participate in the study. It is assumed that the five schools are representative of the local government since both urban and local schools are chosen.

Instrument for Data Collection

Structured interview questions are used to elicit responses from the participants in the first phase. The interview questions comprise seven items designed to obtain information from the teachers of English to determine their attitude towards the method of using literary texts in language classroom. These questions include:

1) Would you prefer to use literary texts in your classes?

2) Why won’t you prefer to use literary texts?

3) Why would you prefer to use literary texts?

4) In which classes would you use such materials?

5) What criteria of selection would you follow?

6) Do you think you need training in dealing with such materials?

7) What type of training will you need?
Analysis of Data on the Interview Conducted to find out the Attitude of Teachers over the Use of Literature in the Language Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Would you prefer to use literary texts in your classes?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Why won’t you prefer to use literary texts?</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult for the students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do not know how to use it</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Availability of easier teaching materials.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Why would you prefer to use literary texts?</td>
<td>Exposure to real language</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Motivate the students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improve the students’ skills</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Administration requirement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Active participation of students</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>In which class(es) would you use such texts?</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>What criteria of selection would you follow?</td>
<td>Language level</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Length of the text</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students’ needs and interests</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Course objectives.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in the Table above, the analysis of the data indicated a greater number of teachers supporting the beneficial effects literary texts have in teaching English as a second language. In their answers to the first item 60% of the teachers indicated that they prefer to use literary materials in their language classes. The other 40% did not prefer the use because they don’t know the rationale behind the use and they felt it is time consuming, and difficult for the students. So they resort to the use of English textbooks which is easier as shown in item 2. These textbooks are recommended by the ministry of education. In the third item, all the participants indicated that they want to use literary texts in their language class in order to develop students’ language skills. The implication is that even those who said they won’t prefer to use literary texts actually know that the use of literature in language classroom is beneficial but their problem is the challenges in application. Only few indicated that they are using it because it is required by the administration. Thus, although the administrative policy requires teachers to include literary texts in the language class, they apply it in their classes because of the benefits or effects it would have on students. The majority (90%) stated that they would provide literary texts in order to expose students to the real language as it is used by those who have mastered it like the native speakers. One of the teachers said: ‘Of course, I am in support of the use of literary texts. Using this technique connects the students to the real world. It saves the student a possible shock when she practises the language.’
Moreover, the analysis indicates that only 30% cared about motivating the students in learning the language by presenting such materials. One of the teachers indicated “I would provide anything that will improve the students’ language skills, whether they are motivated or not, it does not matter.”

These results suggest that teachers have positive attitudes toward using literary text in English as a second language classes. They believe that such materials improve students’ skills and expose them to the real language. It also helps in the active participation of the learner. It has demonstrated that the teachers do not consider the motivating power of literary texts in determining whether to incorporate them into the classroom. These findings are consistent with previous studies that demonstrated the positive effects of literary text in improving students’ reading and listening skills (Kortner, Lindsay, Nasr, Collie and Slater, etc.). The current results also demonstrate that teachers do not consider the motivating power of literary texts in determining whether to incorporate them into the classroom. This finding contradicts several studies that found that literary input increases students’ motivation (Lazar, Gajdusek, etc).

The analysis of participants’ responses to item four (in which classes would they use such materials?) found that 100% would use literary materials in reading classes, whereas 80% would use them in listening classes, 40% in speaking classes, and 20% in writing skills. Looking at the percentage responses, the low response on speaking and writing skills could be due to the fact that teachers may lack the technical support needed to provide those skills using the literary skills. In fact, one of the teachers said: “Literature can only be used to teach reading skill, there is no way you can use it to teach speaking or writing or other language areas.”
Regarding the selection criteria participants would follow (item five), 100% indicated that the texts’ language level, the objectives of the course, and students needs and interests would be the primary guidelines for material selection. Further, only 40% would think about the length of the text. Some of them did not mention the length of text because most texts recommended for the junior secondary students are normally brief but quality books. These findings are consistent with Berardo’s and Lee’s proposed criteria for selecting literary materials. But one important aspect that was not mentioned is culture. Is it that the Nigeria environment is comfortable with the indigenization of English in our environment? This calls for further research on how to bring in the culture of the owner of English language into the Nigeria curriculum.

An analysis of the participants’ responses to item six (regarding training) revealed that 100% indicated that they felt they needed training in using such materials to some extent. The researcher found that responses to this item were not affected by the length of teaching experience. One teacher with 20 years of teaching experience stated, “Any training that would help develop my teaching skills, I would be more than glad.”

To find out the type of training they needed, they were asked in item seven to specify the type of training they need. Only 50% said that they needed training in selecting the materials while 100% said they want training in designing appropriate task. One possible explanation for this finding is that designing the appropriate tasks is more challenging than selecting the appropriate texts.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

To determine the teachers’ attitude towards the use of literary texts in the language classroom, teachers believe in presenting students with rich and variety of literary materials to
engage students in language proficiency. The use of literary materials creates a lot of interest and makes teaching-learning process more effective. No doubt, language skills can be refined with much practice and experience by using the materials while teaching. Therefore, the usage of these materials offers second language learners a chance to improve their ability to understand or comprehend inputs. It is evident that the use of these materials increases the learners’ chances for improving and developing their language abilities and it allows teachers to ask both display and referential questions. Therefore, the use of literary materials is a positive learning strategy which can be used to improve listening, speaking, reading, and writing capabilities of speakers of English as a second language.

**Recommendations**

1) The researcher suggests a different policy on language. This language policy will contain a lot, including specific methods and strategies to apply in language teaching. The teacher can start his training by reading the language policy.

2) There is need to train teachers who are already in the teaching profession. Until they are trained, they keep on claiming they practise the method while in the actual sense, the policy is not implemented.

3) Nigerian College of Education programmes and curriculum on languages should be upgraded to include a course on the relationship between literature and language.

4) There should be adequate supervision of this method in the junior secondary schools.

5) Let the knowledge of the system(using literature in language classroom) be a criteria for recruitment of future language teachers in the secondary schools.

6) If Nigerian government wants to achieve communicative competence by using literary texts in the language classroom, it should minimize recommendation of English
textbooks for the junior secondary schools. What can one expect from a teacher who has
not been exposed to the use of literary texts in language class to do, and who has so many
textbooks before her as recommended textbooks for the subject; she would choose the
textbooks which are easier to use. I suggest that no English textbook be recommended
rather there should be course outline for the language and the recommended literary texts
should be able to take care of those exercises.

7) Trained ESL teachers should be sponsored to write literary texts which suit the objectives
    of the use of literary texts in language classroom. Some of the recommended texts are not
    written by experts and therefore do not serve the purpose of the method.

     When all these are implemented, then we know that we are at the right direction for the
programme. This innovative pedagogy would enhance communicative competence which is the
goal of language learning.
Work Cited


Labo-Popoola S.O. The Place of Literature in the Teaching of English as a Second Language. (http://www.medwelljournals.com/fulltext/?doi=ssscience.2010.49.54) 2010

LawalAdewale.‘Values and Limitations of Using Literary Texts for Teaching ESL’.


