The Teaching of Literature: Approaches and Methods

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Abstract
There has been a remarkable loss of interest in the study of literature among secondary school students these days. This has been attributed to a number of factors. Apart from the obvious laziness on the part of the students and the teachers, there is observable shift from recreational reading to electronic chatting generally. This paper reiterates the value of literature as a school subject appraises the approaches and methods over the years and recommends contemporary techniques that are believed will facilitate the teaching and learning of literature.

Introduction
The curriculum of Nigerian Education is carefully planned by experts in the various fields of study and distinguished scholars in the business of education. Thus, every school subject in the curriculum is a means of achieving some educational and national goals. Same applies to literature as a school subject. Perhaps, one good question to address is why teach or study literature in schools? When this is justified, it will become expedient to boost the interest or morale of those who study it.

Rationale for Teaching and Studying Literature
The value of literature is so enormous that its mention can never be over flogged. For instance literature;
- Gets one acquainted with the world's great minds, personalities and great teachers of all ages.
- Aims at helping one understand oneself as well as others.
- Provides opportunity for development of sensory, affective, social, intellectual and religious senses or faculties.
- Provides vicarious experiences to those exposed to it
- Trains the mind and equips the child for independent work and unbiased judgment i.e in analysis and criticism.
- Helps one operate one's rationale facilities. It in fact exposes one to healthy human values and attitudes, character and behavior and to understand the complex nature of human being (Rees 1973).
- Helps one in analysis, interpreting and dealing with the world of reality.
- Helps in the acquisition and reinforcement of the language skills (Gbenedio 1984).
- Imposes a kind of high discipline on those who are exposed to it.
- Broadens the cultural needs and horizon of the child.
- Exposes the child to the beauty and potentials of language (i.e the aesthetic value of literature).
- Encourages attempts at creative writing which stems from understanding a creative processes as well as appreciating the principal of creativity (Lawal 1985).

In fact, the nature of literature makes it so sterile that Moody (1973) says, it offers a vast reservoir of human experience and judgment of experience, a development of imagination, an entry into human situations which otherwise might fall outside our ken.

These imply that even though other subjects contribute to the making of the whole man, literature has a unique effectiveness in opening the mind and illuminating it; also of purging the mind of prejudices and received ideas and leaves it free and active. In summary literature by its nature moulds the personality of a child more effectively than other subjects.

Factors Militating Against the Study of Literature

As captured vividly above, literature is a functional, valuable school subject that has the capacity of molding an all round personality that is socially acceptable not deviants and outlaws. Below are some of the reasons students do not study literature these days.

a. **Laziness**

The factor of laziness although sounds childish, is the fundamental reason why students do not study literature anymore. The teachers on one part do not show sufficient interest in reading the recommended texts in the class. Any teacher who wants his students to read must be seen reading. The teacher of literature must practice loud reading in the class. He or she must model reading so that the students can emulate. A good literature teacher will take advantage of loud reading to teach pronunciation, new vocabulary, correct speech disorders and consequently develop communicative competence in the learners. Today, a lot of our children are leaving secondary school without the aptitude for independent study neither do they acquire sufficient proficiency in reading. How would such students survive the competitive world of academics or world of work. They choose to be spoon-fed. Instead of buying and reading the actual recommended text, they would buy the summarized version with questions and answers; versions that aid examination malpractice. Some of the would read the texts at home and summarize them in the class leaving greater details out while the nonchalant ones would simply ask the students to read and summarize for themselves. This is sheer case of laziness. The teaching and learning of literature goes beyond story telling. The styles of the authors, the language aphorisms, diction, vocabulary, didactics, characterization, gestures and body language are important components to be discussed in their relevant contexts while reading the texts with class participation. When literature texts are read in the class, the students will develop interest that will be infectious enough to motivate one another. The more they brand themselves with the characters in the books, the more they popularize the books and the subject.

b. **Competing Media and Electronic Chatting among Students**

In those days, people whether students or not irrespective of their discipline would undertake recreational or leisure reading to kill boredom, relax their nerves, for fun or for whatever reason. This is hardly observed days because of competing mass media. Today, television viewing and precisely movie watching has become the undoing of most children. This is so apparent that a professor I know finds himself drilling his children every morning with the following chorus, 'four things that will destroy you are' and the children will respond while drawing their ears, 'film, phone, friends and fear'. Students these days are so engrossed with movie viewing that they throw away useful time to gratify their obsession. The time they would have availed themselves to read is directed to movie watching. Some of them claim that movie watching is a way of studying literature. This is not far from being true but the

issue is, what type of movies do students watch? If the literature texts are acted out and cut into CD it is good but if they watch all manner of films censored and uncensored with wild and anti-social didactics at the expense of their recommended texts, it is their undoing.

Furthermore, the new technology competes with students' interest in reading and studying literature. The social media such as 2go, whatsApp. Twitter, You Tube, face book to mention but a few have brought a new dimension to the concept of talking without noise. Students spend more time chatting with friends and peers on phone than they are ever willing to give to their studies.

c.   Methods of Teaching Literature

Concept of Approach and Method

In the discussion of these two concepts, mention will be made of the concept of techniques for its relationship with others. These three concepts have been misapplied on many occasions. That's why you hear one teacher say, 'I am using discussion method', another says he uses discussion approach or technique, the question is this, are they saying the same thing? To answer this, Edward (1965) addressed the ambiguity in the use of the three concepts. In the first instance, he placed them in a hierarchy with the operational key that techniques carry out a method which is consistent with an approach. In his own study, Ubahakwe (1991) also considers the three as closely related. In his own ranking, he placed approach on top, followed by method and then technique. By definition, both Edward and Ubahakwe agree. For instance; Approach they see as 'a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of teaching and learning a subject and as a theoretical or ideological concept which underlies a peculiar way of teaching a given subject'. To them approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught. Speaking further, Edward says that 'approach states a point of view, a philosophy, an article of faith – i.e something one believes but cannot necessarily prove, often unarguable except in terms of the effectiveness of the method that grow out of it. By method is meant 'an overall plan for orderly presentation of subject material' (Edward 1965). Method is systematic and procedural and to be used by teachers who know it. It is based on a selected approach. In agreement too, Ubahakwe (1991) says 'method is a systematic, predictable procedure of teaching'. According to him, it includes selection and ordering of teaching contexts, a specification of the roles of the teacher as well as of the learners in the classroom encounter, a specification of the types and functions of the teaching materials in a given situation. Also, they agree that in one approach, there may be many methods.

Approaches and Methods of Teaching Literature over the Years

Historically, there are two major approaches to the teaching of literatures. These approaches are viewed equally as traditions in the teaching of literature over the years. They are the conservatives and the progressives. Also, each one of them has characteristics. For instance, the conservatives are characterized thus:

- Not believing in the didactic functions of literature they are simply engrossed in the literary works itself.
- Prefer intensive reading to extensive; in other words quality in place of quantity not considering the background of the students in selecting texts for them.
- They ignore the principle of individual difference and also make the students passive in the selection of texts.
- They evaluate based on student's knowledge of the content of the text. Their literary test does not involve more than recall from simply stated facts already presented in the text or class discussion. There the approach is acceptance instead of appreciation.

- Works are arranged in terms of author, type and chronology which have little or no intrinsic relation to the ability of the students and do very little to increase their literacy competence.

On the other hand, the progressive;

- Tend to use literature didactically to help individuals adjust to the society
- Favour extensive reading i.e quantity replacing quality
- Express concern for individual difference
- Believe in students – teacher collaborative planning.
- See evaluation in terms of content of instructions just as a means of reaching other goals and rather, describe what the teachers and students will do during the course of interaction. Subject matter gives way for integrated approach.

It should however be borne in mind that the essence of the highlights on the two traditions is that the approaches in use in our schools are derived from them. At this juncture, attention will be on the currents in our schools. One of the approaches that poses problem in the effective teaching of literature has to do with choice of texts. The teachers and students have little or no right to the choice of texts for class use. This is because the selection is made from the lists in the syllabus which allows for no appraisal of the competent level of the teacher, the interest of the learner and the readability qualities of the text in question. With this approach in vogue, the teachers and students resort to use of commentaries or study guide instead of the actual text which may be voluminous, difficult and of unfamiliar backgrounds. This has led to teaching literature using comprehension approach where the students just need to understand the story.

Furthermore, the importance attached to examination and certificates has given rise to another approach. This approach leads to students' persistence on seeking stereotyped and irrelevant responses to literature. Because in literature, it is believed that good performance means good teaching, teachers succumb to giving ready-made answers derived from students' 'notes and model answers'. The students' attitude become that of tell us what we are expected to say and we shall learn to say it'.

When this is the case, students become passive readers of actual texts. The sense of actual reading, creative thinking and judgment of evidence is lost. Then they develop blank mind which leads to 'blind assimilation instead of appreciation, acceptance and critical judgment'. Moody (1978) frowns at this approach and advised that 'students should be discouraged from giving rehearsed response Instead of their own responses to literature'. Another approach that has killed the interest of learners is the inadequate opportunity to act plays in secondary schools. Plays are meant primarily to be acted but because of the emphases placed in the theoretical answers in literature examinations, the teachers have resorted to the approach of reading drama texts and de-emphasize the practical performance. This has made the supply of facilities for play acting in schools inadequate and even unnecessary. But it should be borne in mind that acting roles helps readers understand and appreciate the play better. Lack of interest in the study of literature has given rise to lack of linguistic, communicative and discourse competence among students and graduates of nowadays. In the cradle of education and in the ancient times, the study of literature particularly poetry and rhetoric was of paramount importance. Accordingly, the ancient system produced strong orators who were proficient in all sphere of endeavor; administration, politics and legal to mention but a few. Today, little or no attention is paid to poetry as a genre of literature.

Recommended Approaches and Methods

In view of the foregoing, the following have been recommended and it should be noted that no approach or method is extolled over others. The choice is for the teacher and combinations could be effective.

Approaches

- Thematic approach: This is the teaching of literature based on the understanding of the central theme and the sub themes.
- Stylistic approach: This has to do with looking at the text in respect of the author's style and in comparison with another author.
- Group Approach: This engages the weak and the strong in a common activity possibly to strengthen the weak. But as an approach to teaching of literature, group approach is engaged in to dramatize or act out the text.
- Response Approach: This portrays the critical method. This offers the student the freedom to be real to the text and not stereotyped or stage-managed.
- Integrated approach: This has to do with looking at a text as a whole entity. This approach also involves using the text to teach language and literature. A test could be so used to teach vocabularies, pronunciation, literary devices etc.
- Problem posing approach requires the students to unravel a given mystery in the text.

Methods

- Criticism method: This is highly recommended in literature teaching. Students may be occasionally required to criticize the information they obtain from the 'Study Guides' with close reference to the actual text. This method prompts student to read further for more information. This is capable of evoking and sustaining the interest of the students in the subject.
- Discussion method: This could be an effective means of ensuring that students read the text and acquire the correct information.
- Discovery method: This stems from problem posing approach and can achieve greater result when fused with discussion method. Here the teacher can identify some of the contemporary issues raised in the text under study and encourage the students to propose solutions bearing in mind the evidence contained in the text. This encourages originality and flexibility of ideas or thoughts.
- Also to encourage initiatives and curiosity, questioning method is encouraged.
- Project method: Because of individual differences, some students are known to demonstrate poor language skills. Project method can assist them. Here it is recommended that creative writing based on some topics from the text becomes a regular exercise.
- Activity method: This can be best portrayed with dramatization technique which is great value to the teaching of literature.
- Read and explain method though related to discussion method, is also a good method that challenges the students.

Techniques

The teacher can develop a variety of techniques to facilitate the teaching and learning of literature. His techniques would be determined by a number of factors viz; the age of the learners, the environment where the teaching/learning takes place, the text to be read, availability of material resources and of course the time available to the class. Against these backdrops, the teacher can ask the students to memorize poems and recite them to the class or at school functions. They can be encouraged to rewrite a novel using different characters from the names in the original text. The teacher can organize book carnivals where the

students would not just act out plays, model reading but would exhibit the different genres of literature they have written; short stories, poem etc. Debates for and against the roles of the protagonist, antagonist and other characters of interest will boost the morale of the students. The teacher can equally teach language via the literature class by giving such tasks or assignments as, qualify each character in the text using ten different adjectives.

Conclusion
Given the numerous goals the study of literature is set to achieve in the students, teachers ought not to dampen the interest of the students by employing approaches and methods that are not challenging to the students. Also in selecting a text from the list, the teacher, as much as it depends on him, should consider all the readability qualities of a text as well as the interest of the learners. They should also discontinue the idea of writing 'Study Guides' in form of 'Model Questions and Answers' for the students (Ezekoli 1980). The WAEC Moderation Report of 1978 criticized the approach of teaching literature as a 'Comprehension Course'. This implies that teachers should teach literature using appropriate literary terms and ensure that students could identify them in their subsequent reading activities. Some techniques as audiovisuals i.e. music, films, slide sets be employed in the teaching of literature. Authors however should endeavour to provide clear explanations and illustrations of obscure or archaic words and expressions, unfamiliar and difficult words as well as allusions contained in their texts. Finally, given the good approaches and methods, other problems in the teaching and studying of literature are bound to thin into insignificance.

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