

REFOCUSING LITERARY ARTS RELEVANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper gives information about the usefulness and importance of literature to our educational system as a means towards the enhancement of national development. Therefore, literature should be taught from primary to tertiary institutions so that society can benefit from the creative writers experiences about human nature and what happens in the human society. This will encourage change from vices within the nation to positive reasoning to enhance development. Literary arts are a subject that should be given prominence in the educational system at all levels because its relevance to the needs of the society. Literature is about the activities of man in his society, as such, what happens in the society is of great importance to educational planners and learners. It encourages the learners to develop interest in things within his society since it enlightens the readers about the events, incidents, people activities, social, political, economic and religious issues in the society generally. It is through the study of literature that students learn how to read and communicate effectively.

Introduction

Literary arts are creative writing that focuses on the people, events and incidents that happen in our society and the world at large. Literature is basically about the problems and developments in the different communities, states and countries that we live in, its focus is about the cultures, values, morals, discipline and the vices that are inherent in human nature and the sociological issues in any given society.

Literature as a subject taught in Primary Schools, Secondary Schools and Tertiary institutions is very important because of its relevance to the human societal values while at the same time, exposing their problems and sometimes proposing solutions too. Moody (1968:12), defines literature as an art which springs from our inborn love of telling story and arranging words in pleasant pattern while expressing in words, some special aspects of our human experiences. This goes to show that literary arts have its special beauty in style choice of words to create effect on the readers. In poetry, it is in the diction, rhyme and rhythm that create beauty.

Looking at prose, the beauty is in the narrative technique and the diction which gives the aptness of expressions, the dramatic effect that visualizes graphically the images and the symbols that capture the readers' attention. Drama presents the actors in dialogue as in the real human society so that the demonstrations and actions depict the real societal values and concepts. Generally, there are attractions attached to literature because of the subject's relevance to the society.

Refocusing of Literature in Education for Sustainable National Development

Literature as a subject in Educational Institutions is prominent since it is about what obtains in our society. Refocusing literature in education means; giving prominence to the teaching, learning and importance of literary arts to reflect its relevance to the societal values. It implies that literature should be taught as a subject separate from English Language to pupils in Primary schools, students in Secondary Schools level, and up to tertiary institutions because it deals with human activities and problems in the society and nation. Rosenblatt (1970:123), stated that literature is a form of art having aesthetic values which can be enjoyed in itself and at the same time, has a social origin and social effect in the society.

From the explication, it is observed that literature has as its special domain the aesthetic values that portray the nature of the society, concept of socio-political and economic order in the society as a way of creating peace and stability which are factors that can enhance advancement and development in a nation. The role of literature to educational advancement can never be overemphasized. Literature in the first instance is interesting since it deals with stories about man in his society and other human relationship with nature and animals. Such stories in literary works enable the readers to learn how to read and communicate as in the class situation where they are expected to give the summaries of events, incidents and characters.

The essence of education is first of all for communication. A learner is able to communicate when he can read, understand and interpret, paraphrase or summarize what he reads from textbooks and literary works. It is therefore, necessary for educators to use simple literature and storybooks to teach the pupils and students proper reading and comprehension instead of short passage in English Language textbooks. The advantage here is that the students and pupils can read the entire story from the beginning and appreciate the plot, subject matter, theme, style and diction. They can now communicate the ideas from the novel as a whole or single unit of story. This will equally enhance their communicative competence in English language and help them to study and understand other subjects better.

Equally, when Drama is taught, the demonstration and practical participation in play leaves an indelible mark on the minds of the pupils and students. What is important in this case is that the words and statements are reduced to practical demonstrations, which encourage the learners to embrace the lesson and the art of speaking in English. Since what they study in drama and prose literature are facts about life, the subject itself is seen as part of the social, political, religious and cultural life of the society that they live in thereby encouraging them to develop interest for the events in the country. In the real sense of it, literary arts especially drama can transform the learners from passive attitude to active participation in the lesson practically. Campbell and Allen (1972), expressed that: Imaginative play has always been a powerful educational device both for children and adults, by creating a dramatic situation in a classroom by acting out dialogues but also in part by re-labeling objects and people in the room to prepare for imaginative role-playing in the society (Allen and Campbell (1972:41).

This explication implies that drama as an aspect of literary arts can prepare the learner for his future leadership and competent role in the society after learning and taking active part in role-play in the literary lessons. The dramatic approach will encourage the learners to learn the rudiments of speech act and gain self-confidence while expressing the verses or lines before the class or audience.

On the other hand, literature enables the learners to study their societal cultures since most of what is learned as literature obtains its materials from local sources within the society that they live. What this implies is that, literature draws information from events, incidents and people of different societies. For instance, in Nigeria Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Elechi Amadi, Cyprian Ekwensi, Festus Iyayi, Kalu Uka, Ola Rotimi and many other literary artists make use of the events in the history of their different tribes and states to create literature that reflect the socio-cultural, economic, political and religious lives of the people in their communities.

Some of the writers definitely portray the contemporary economic and political situations in their 'Society and Nigeria in order to encourage the learners or readers to understand the problems in the society. Most of the issues in literary works encourage the learners to learn from the past mistakes of the leaders, characters and people in the society.

Socio-Political Functions of Literature

Literature works serve as means of understanding the sociological and political situations of a given society in a given period of time. The concerns of the writers depend on the problems of the society as at the time of writing.

Literature, as an aspect of historical creation, depicts what happens in the society and country in phases. For instance, Modern African Literature is written in about four phases. The first phase, is the pre-colonial literature, which Achebe depicts in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* by pointing to the traditional and cultural values of the Igbo people before the coming of the Europeans. The second phase, is the colonial period, which is also shown in the same *Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God* respectively by pointing to the advent of Christianity and colonial government's indirect rule system. The third phase, is post independence era, which is shown by Achebe in *A Man of the People* and the disillusionment that follows the independent rule. The fourth, is indicated in the contemporary writers for eradication of corruption and visionless leaders who survive by intrigues and perpetration of violence in the society as in the *Legacy of Thunder* by Chris Egharevba.

One of the social functions of literature which Okolie (2002:72), postulates is that literature is a factor to social change and that the writer transforms into a pathfinder, a leader and a revolutionary when social conditions overwhelm man and turn him into a victim who can no longer enjoy freely, his natural

rights to transform society and its conditions. Literary arts as we can see in all ramifications, are works of art that can change the structures of any give society as expressed in their criticisms of the ills that plaque our national polity and psyche. It aims at eradicating the evils and corruption by educating and entertaining the people so as to awaken their consciousness about the issues and problems in the societies.

Rosenblatt (1970:75-80), postulates that literature has a social origin and social effect making use of words to express worldwide ideas about human experiences in the society by communicating ideas, values, social, economic and religious issues. This indicates that literary works are related to national development. Literary artists watch what happens in their societies and write for or against the observable situations. This makes literature relevant to the needs of the society since it portrays the culture, socio-political and economic realities in the society.

In order to show the relevance of literary arts to the societal issues, Chinweizu (1989:253), postulates that:

A writer has minimum professional responsibility to make his work relevant and intelligible to his society and its concerns. In focusing on these concerns, the matter for his poetry, novel or other historical writings may be historical, philosophical, sociological, scientific, fantastic or topical. He may choose to lampoon its foible or castigate its wrong doings. (Chinweizu 1989:253).

To our understanding, Chinweizu implies the positive contribution of literary arts to the enhancement of the societal values and norms. It therefore, means that the role of literature as a subject at all levels of education will help to bring positive development to the society.

In poetry, its relevance to educational development is observed in the literary form and content. Poetry is a form of literature written in lines and stanzas. Its importance lies in the fact that it is meant to be recited and demonstrated. The strength of it lies in its oral production and expression of sounds and words. What adds beauty to poetic demonstration are the rhyme and rhythm of the lines. Williams stated that:

The learners mastery of sound system can be enhanced through practice with stress and rhythm in poetry and with dialogue in drama. His use of vocabulary, idioms and syntactic structures can be improved through exposure to the best models of contemporary prose. (Williams 1990: 5 - 7).

As it is expressed in the statement, literature teaching in schools will enhance students performance in oral English thereby increasing their spoken level of performance in English Language learning. Language becomes easier through effective performance in prose, poetry and drama lessons, since they are engaged in speech act and demonstrations. The benefits derived in literary arts education are enormous when considering the place of effective communication towards national development.

Literary arts serve as reference points to the culture, tradition and social life of the people in the society. It also provides enlightenment to the political and economic realities and situations in our nation. Through the study of literature in schools, students learn a lot about the different things like events and incidents that happened in the past and the current issues in our society. Apart from the educational aspect, it also provides entertainment to the readers. The interesting things that literature deals with, enable the readers to learn and appreciate what they see in their societies.

Developing English Language Usage through Literary Arts

Literature is a very useful means towards the teaching and learning of English Language because all the literature books be it drama, prose or poetry are written in English Language since it is the only official language for the study of Western Education in Nigeria. We use language to express our thoughts, ideas, values, concepts and ideological beliefs and literature makes use of words from the common source of English language to create its own form.

Literary language is peculiar to ordinary language in some instances. Language in literature is sometimes figurative and sometimes connotative although we still make use of the denotative aspect I prose and other genres when the need arises. In most cases too, literary language creates new syntactic structures as created by the authors in their literary works. Therefore, this peculiar way of literary expressions brings beauty and gives additional colour and meanings to what the authors write about. In this way, it teaches the learners how to make use of idioms, proverbs and words in a manner that adds aesthetics to what is said. It also encourages the students to make wide range of choice of words for their communication.

In terms of peculiar language usage and creation by the literary artistic, Taiwo (1976:14) postulates that "a writer's language is a mirror held up to his personality and his particular circumstance. It is through his usage of language that he reflects his individual awareness of a given situation." It is therefore, necessary to assess each novelist usage of language and try to assess how effectively he has communicated to the readers of his works. This accounts for a close study of the peculiar expressions, idioms and proverbs as well as the addition of local speech pattern to his inventory of language.

Literary arts language usage according to Nwoga (1979:26), connotes "bilingualism as it enhances the transmission of ideas, the discovery of new expressiveness and new modes". He expresses that, literary arts goes on to weld together English and vernacular such as Ijaw, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio and Hausa which can make sense to at least a secondary school leaver and has emerged as a new creation for speech. Also, Palmer (1979:75), added that Achebe has produced something new and valuable to the English language from his narrative style using African though patterns in idiomatic expressions.

Therefore, literary arts create new creative language and vocabulary usage as postulated by the authors. Achebe and other writers use their creative imagination to transform the society while developing English language usage so that variations can occur. In order to check vices and correct the problems in the society, educational planners should encourage the teaching and studies of literature since it will help the learners to inculcate such habits as honesty, discipline, hard work, peace, love and goodness. It will also enlighten the students about national issues.

Recommendations

Public office aspirants and political office holders should be encouraged to read literature in order to know more about the problems of human society and how to provide solutions to them. Moreover, quotations of wise sayings, idioms and proverbs from literary texts and authors will enhance their power of oratory and add beauty to their eloquence in speech.

Knowledge of literature can help the leaders to know to use persuasion to encourage the populace to support and co-operate with them since they can borrow from the inventory of the creative writers and historical issues in literary works.

Finally, literature studies in schools will enhance the communicative competence of the learners of English Language. Students should be encouraged to study the subject in order to improve their English language vocabulary and performance.

Conclusion

Literary arts is a relevant subject to our educational system because it relates to issues that are needed for the cultural, political, social and economic development of the nation. Therefore, the subject should be made compulsory to all pupils and students at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. From literature, students learn how to read and communicate effectively. It enhances their performance and communicative competence in speech and writing many years after leaving school.

Since literature explores life in the society, it encourages the learners to appreciate their society through the thematic concerns of the literary authors. Their philosophy, psychology and emotions will be reshaped after reading about the activities of the people and leaders past and present in their literary works. Finally, literature is necessary subjects that can help in the all round development of the human mind and also give orientation towards the attainment of national goals and objectives.

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