

THE CHALLENGES OF LITERATURE IN SOCIAL STUDIES PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

Literature poses great challenges to the teaching of social studies and making it relevant to Nigeria's national life. This paper is of the view that literature will provide the social studies teacher with rich real life case studies for social studies instruction. On this basis, the paper takes a look into the objectives for which the two disciplines are taught, examines the link between literature and social studies, identifies certain social concepts that could quite easily be taught using some suggested literary texts. The yardstick for selecting an appropriate literature text is also discussed, suggestions are made and the paper concludes on the note that literature should be integrated into social studies teaching at all levels.

Introduction

Traditionally, most secondary school curriculum is being rigidly compartmentalized in the sense that subjects are usually taught in isolation. However, connections are increasingly being made between related subjects. But much thought has not been given to the possible link between literature or literary studies and other disciplines in the social sciences like Geography, History, Social Studies, Civics, etc.

Most often materials for the teaching of these disciplines are drawn heavily from the traditional textbooks, reference books and articles while neglecting one of the most useful source materials, which is literature. Social studies explores issues relating to Nigeria's national life, no discipline sharpens our awareness of national life and makes them seem so real as literature.

The focus of this paper is on exploring the possible links between literature and social studies and how a social studies teacher can harness these links in the teaching of social studies for a greater awareness of our national life.

What is Literature?

By literature in this discourse, we refer to novels, short stories, poetry, drama and folk tales. Though this paper is advocating the use of literature in social studies pedagogy, it is not of the view that literature should be the sole tool in social studies teaching. It is to be used to complement the traditional social studies text.

According to Kennedy (1983), *Literature is a kind of art usually written, that offers pleasure and illumination*. Literature is an art, it reflects human values and is a repository of moral education (Ezenandu, 2001). Mathew Arnold in George (1979), notes: 'Literature is a criticism of life'. A.B. Uwaifo (1979); cited in Ezenandu (2003) writes . . . literature after all is life for it deals with man in every conceivable relation with other, his joys, and woes, his tragedies and comedies, his fears and hopes'. Therefore, literature enhances the acquisition of values, be it moral, social, cultural, or political values.

The definitions above point to the fact that literature equips the child with the ability to be culturally and intellectually aware of his environment as well as the world beyond. (National Curriculum for Senior Secondary Schools, Modern Languages Vol. 12) in Ezenandu (2003). Having explained what literature means in relation to this paper, we now highlight the objectives of teaching literature and social studies.

Objectives of Teaching Literature

Literature provides pleasurable reading and is highly educative. Adeyanju (1979), categorized the objectives of teaching literature into: Long term and Short term objectives. According to him the long term objectives are:

- (i) The development of an appropriate (and, perhaps, a love) for literature, sometimes vaguely referred to as the 'enjoyment' of literature, (ii) The formation of a civilized character through the modification and enlargement of values, or more specifically the development of the ability to think intelligently, maturely and

responsibly; the short term objectives includes:

- (i) To provide students with "various literary experience
- (ii) To reinforce language learning.

One can infer from the above objectives that literature enhances cognitive, linguistic and affective development of the individual in the society. By cognitive development, the child's mental capacity improves which enables him play his role as a responsible and civilized member of the society.

Affectively, literature provides an avenue for the expression of feelings, attitudes and values. Thus, literature sharpens the child's insights, widens his experience, sets moral standard, and develops critical mind and forms independent judgment.

In terms of linguistic development, literature enhances the acquisition of the basic language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Thus, in literature, students encounter words used in various contexts and situations.

Objectives of Social Studies

Social studies deal with the study of man's experience in his environments. Social studies is therefore, described as the way man lives in and interacts with his social and physical environments and how science and technology help him to live well in those environment (Amonoo, 1979).

Some of the objectives of social studies relevant to this study therefore include the following: (i) It teaches and trains Nigerians to be good citizens and nation builders. It does this by helping students to develop good skills, habits and positive attitudes towards one another and towards the nation, (ii) Social studies trains people to be effective leaders and good followers, (iii) Social studies make people understand their own culture and the cultures of other Nigerians.

Thus, Nigerians can appreciate their differences and the need to live together as one society, (iv) Social studies help us develop a good sense of judgement and a sense of moral and social responsibility. This enables us to become useful members not destroyers, of our society and nation, (v) As well as making them well-informed social studies makes people realize the need for honesty, hard work and co-operation with others, (vi) Social studies help people acquire different kinds of skills, for example, reading, listening, observation and analysis. These skills make us better citizens of the locality and the nation (see Amonoo, 1979: 4-6) The overall objective of social studies therefore, is to produce good citizens.

If a critical analysis is made of the objectives of teaching literature and social studies as stated above, one would immediately observe the obvious linkages and connections existing between the two disciplines. Both disciplines examine the human situation within a given social order. Thus, it is obvious that literature is not only necessary but desirable in social studies education especially, at the secondary school level.

Our next concern in this paper, will be to examine the connection between literature and social studies education and how through literature teachers can enhance the teaching of social studies.

Why Use Literature to Teach Social Studies

As earlier noted in this paper, by no means should literature be the sole tool used to teach social studies or other subjects of the social studies. Rather each form of narrative and expository writing has its place in the social studies curriculum (Hume, 1996).

Since social studies has to do with the total experience of man as he interact in his environment, it has integrated into its curriculum such other traditional subjects as Civics, History, Geography, Religious studies, Sociology, etc. Social studies pedagogy therefore stands to gain a lot from the arts, which is a celebration of the ways people express themselves in their socio-cultural traditions, beliefs and values. The paper at this juncture, will examine the specific links between literature and social studies.

There is a natural link between literature and social studies: Literature like all arts is a reflection of the society or a particular social milieu. Virtually all story has a setting in which the events of the story occurred. Thus in stories students encounter characters and are confronted with how these characters interact with and are affected by their social environment.

The literary artist and (the social sciences both deal with real social situations, however, the literary artist through a well-written novel can pin point and yet express a human situation in a way that may seem to be more real than a social scientist can. (Jato, 1989, Hume, 1996). Therefore, a literature-based approach can enrich and reinforce students learning. Students will also see the relevance of literature and social studies outside the classroom.

It can thus, be argued that literature improves comprehension of social studies. Case studies in social studies teaching are very useful activities because they involve bringing real situations into the classroom for close examination and analysis. The novel becomes an excellent example of case studies. It is evidently becoming more difficult to observe real event, to have real people and situations as models, so referring to the events of the novel over and over again and discussing the events and human situations in the novel as they relate to specific problems and issues of the social studies syllabus will be a great challenge to the social studies teacher. This will help in creating a learning environment that comes closest to being real (Bein, 1990). Ornstein (1992), argues that typical traditional textbooks only bombard students with carefully packed concepts and superficial explanations but according to McGowan and Guzzetti (1991); cited in Hume (1996), literature in contrast allows students to focus and reflect upon a few concepts at a time.

Thus students could be taught different societal concepts like social interactions, social organisations, like family kingship, marriage, political institutions, economic institutions, legal institutions, culture and civic rights and responsibilities with an appropriate literary text as an illustrative reference material. For instance, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the story of a man who finds himself torn between two worlds and dies trying to cling to the norms and values of his social cultural milieu i.e. the old patterns of behaviour is an excellent material to use in teaching cultural history and values in a traditional society prior to colonialism as well as the impact of colonialism on the life of traditional African societies.

In *A Man of the People*, No Longer at Ease, Achebe, focuses more on contemporary national problems. The above novels could provide a view of our nation's social and political experiences. *A Man of the People* for instance provides insight into our failure as nation, as 'a result of corrupt politicians and failed governance', Yakubu (2001). Thus, when children encounter characters like Chief Nwanga in *A Man of the People*, they come face to face with the evils of corruption and political nepotism which are negative values that can lead to the destruction of our national life.

On the other hand, when children are exposed to strong characters with clear moral and intellectual values, they will identify with such characters and internalize the values exhibited by such characters. A novel like Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, though written by a Ghanaian is quite relevant in teaching social studies. It gives insight into the socio-political situation in contemporary African states. The protagonist, nameless, simply referred to as 'The Man' exhibits a strong moral and intellectual principle. He chooses to live by the dictates of his conscience. The man, a junior worker in a railway station in Ghana, sees all round him nothing but cheating, bribery and corruption. He however, refuses to participate, despite the fact that such practices offer him the opportunity to better his position in life. As a result of this, he suffers social disapproval and isolation. His family and friends reject him. They wondered why he could not be like his classmate, Koomson who had joined a political party as an opportunist and is now a minister in the government.

In spite of his suffering, at the end, 'The Man' triumphed and the corrupt politician is made to suffer shame and humiliation. The novel is an excellent example for teaching good citizenship in a social studies class. In fact, it is also a good text for teaching students that honesty and dignity of labour is the watchword, it is wrong to cheat your country, all corrupt practices must be abhorred and people who practice such must not evade the long hand of the law.

Ola Rotimi's *If and Hopes of the Living Dead* are plays focusing on contemporary social realities. In teaching social-cultural and ethnic differences Ola Rotimi's *If* provides students the opportunity to learn the essence of unity in diversity and harmonious co-existent despite our socio-cultural and tribal differences. The characters in the play are drawn from different tribal groups both the minority and majority groups. They all live together in one yard with common kitchen and toilet.

The Hopes of the Living Dead also brought together people of different culture and tribe. In both plays, the characters struggle collectively against an oppressive system, against injustice, and bad leadership.

The two plays will be excellent in teaching social studies, specifically in teaching: Social integration, Unity, National integration, Rights and duties of citizens within the community as well as the rights and duties of the community towards the citizens, Civil rights, Leadership, Duties of a leader.

Finally, a literature-based approach to social studies teaching improves reading comprehension. Research has shown that students reading ability is low and that Nigerians have no reading culture (Emenyeonu, 1983; Lawal, 1989; Omojuwa, 1997; Fagbemi, 1997).

The use of a single textbook is inappropriate for the reading levels of many, if not most students. Students who read materials other than textbooks in their classes demonstrate a broader vocabulary and greater reading comprehension than if they use textbooks alone (Smith, Monson and Dobson (1992) cited in Hume 1996). Therefore, using literature to teach social studies will capture students' interest and imaginations and they will exhibit a better attitude towards reading.

Choosing Appropriate Literature Text

Choosing a literature text demands that the teacher develops his own guideline or criteria. Granted, he is not a literature teacher, so he has to work in constant co-operation with literature teachers. So in designing a literature based programme, it is important to be aware of one's students' need as well as defining the course objectives, thus, Thompson (1986), considers literary quality, sociological value and character¹ appeal as important determinants for selecting a text material. Material selected should be devoid of stereotypical and inaccurate information.

Another important factor to consider is the author. There is no better way of teaching a particular social milieu than through the voice of one that had lived or lives within that social milieu. Therefore, in teaching topics related to Nigerian, appropriate literature text by Nigerian or African Authors (if there is relevance) should be selected and vice versa. However, according to Humes (1996) care should be taken never to sacrifice literary quality and content relevance in the interest of finding a local author.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, it is the recommendations of this paper that: (i) Further empirical study be carried out to determine the effect of a literature based approach on students performance in social studies, (ii) There should be a review of the social studies curriculum at the secondary school level to incorporate literature programme for an effective social studies teaching, (iii) There should be a decornpartmentalization of subject. Subjects in the arts and humanities should be taught to highlight cross-circular relevance, (iv) At least a pass in literature should be one of the requirements for students offering to study social studies in the tertiary institution. There should be constant forum for teachers in this discipline to come together to explore ways of tapping from each other's repertoire of knowledge to enhance teaching in their subject area, (v) Appropriate literature programme be designed for social studies students in Colleges of Education.

Conclusion

So far, this paper has focused on the objectives of teaching literature and social studies in our secondary schools. The paper has also traced the obvious connections existing between the two subjects and has also explored ways of using literature to teach certain specific topics in social studies. There are also suggestions that literature should be integrated within social studies teaching so that students would be better equipped to deal with the challenges of our national life.

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