

REPOSITIONING LITERATURE TEACHING IN IGBO LANGUAGE CURRICULUM IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Every society has its literature which has roles to play as well as duties to perform. It is a regulator of life and thought. Igbo literature has virtues of education, enlightenment and discipline as benefit to the individual. The paper gave various definitions of literature and highlighted the relationship between literature and education.

Objectives of teaching literature as well as the procedure for teaching it in J.S.S. was also highlighted. In-dept discussion was made on the problems that hamper the teaching of literature in our Junior Secondary Schools and solutions to the problems were suggested.

The paper concluded by encouraging the teachers to be hard working to make the teaching of literature an enjoyable exercise.

Introduction

Literature is a conglomerate or a combination of economical, political, social, aspiration, cultures, traditions etc. It is in fact the total world view of a people and their language. The commonest symbol in all cultures is used as a vehicle for its expression. They are interwoven and dependent on each other for existence. The teaching of Igbo literature in our Junior Secondary Schools cannot be treated with negligence or toyed with since it is the medium through which the values and norms of the society are inculcated as well as the transmission of its cultures. All these we know are veritable instruments for sustenance and continuity of language in the society. Often times, the objective of the classroom teacher is to train the students to have at least a "Pass" in the subject, which is very wrong. This paper discusses the problems that are associated with Igbo literature teaching in our Junior Secondary Schools and proffers solution to them.

What is Education and What is its Relationship to Literature

Fafunwa (1974) defines education as "the aggregate of all processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives". In order words, education is that instrument that helps the child to be disciplined as well as attain progressive development. Education, therefore, is the pivot on which the transmission of culture in terms of continuity revolves. Education is very vital because it aims at the complete development of the individual and bears the knowledge, which helps one to be librated from the problems of illiteracy and lack of enlightenment.

Since literature, we are aware, has the unique power to open the mind of an individual and illuminate it, it will definitely be useful in helping education in the achievement of its goal of all round development of an individual. At this juncture, it will be appropriate to consider some definitions of literature.

The concept of literature goes beyond mere definition of the word. Besides its various meanings, literary writers and experts see literature from varied perspectives. Corbin (1996) defines literature as anything that one says or writes that reveals a synthesis of existence and imagination regardless of the form it takes. From the above, its obvious that literature is just experience and imagination. Ogbaji (1997) sees it as "an artistic presentation about life and how it is lived". It is sourced from human society which implies that it draws all its subject matter and characters from the human society. This implies that it is an art form, which recreates, represents and produces life experiences through imaginative and artistic use of word.

Chapman (1973) sees it as "the work of men who are specially sensitive to the language of their time and who use the skills of language to make permanent their visions of life". Ogden (1997) defines literature as imitation, as a form of expressing one's feelings, and as containing explicit

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didactic elements. From this definition, it is easy to comprehend that the spirit of imitation is shown in literature and through it, one can express one's feelings freely.

In his own perception, Emenanjo (1995) opines that:

Literature is essentially an artistic presentation about life and how it is lived. Literature describes, depicts, delineates, exposes and dissects life Sociology or anthropology, philosophy biography, morality - all these and many more - are in literature as its very necessary ingredients : They become literature when the creative or imaginative sense employs the imaginative use of language and transform them into a new aesthetic reality Literature is the creative use of language. Page 27.

Thus, according to Ukegbu (2002) literature is not synonymous with its content, but rather with its method, and use language as a vehicle of expression, which makes for literary appreciation. Thus literature whether oral or written mirrors the society in its entirety including its historical experiences as well as its people.

Language Policy and Igbo Literature

The Federal Government of Nigeria Republic FRN (2004) in its National Policy on Education Section 1.8 stipulates that "In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the peoples culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major Nigerian languages to be Itausa, Igbo and Yoruba". In the National Cultural Policy NCP (1998) Culture is defined as the :

Totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social political economic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing the people From their neighbours.

From the above policy therefore we can find out that literature is an embodiment of culture of people and their way of life. It can therefore be seen as the totality of all aspects of life that are used to identify a people for example their belief, food, values, language mode of dressing etc.

Objectives of Teaching Igbo Literature in Our Junior Secondary Schools

Literature helps in the transmission of cultural values. Since literature is a vehicle of cultures, the primary purpose of teaching Igbo literature in our Junior Secondary School is to help in the transmission of this culture.

Literature helps in character development. Ogden (1997)'supports this view when he opines that "literature contributes to students development and therefore should be taught at secondary school level of education. This implies that with the knowledge of literature, an individual can develop. This development however embraces the development in the three domains viz Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor.

It enables us to cope with modern life. The study of literature keeps us in touch with the ideas of great minds in past and present ages. When we are acquainted with what is going on beyond our limited scope of experience we will be able to make reference to our universal background of culture and become more sophisticated in our outlook. (Williams, 199 0).

Literature helps to filter the positive ideals and virtues, which are germane to societies up liftment from all forms of perversion. Exposure to literature helps to improve performance in the language. It contributes to the process and purpose of language learning as it adds to human values and experiences.

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Literature rekindles the human spirit by illuminating it thereby restoring hope and confidence to the already disillusioned. It is an instrument for sensitizing against economic and vices that has bedeviled the society.

Literature is an invaluable source of entertainment or enjoyment. It helps in relaxing the human mind distracting it from the monotony of strain of day to day concerns. It performs this function without necessarily encouraging mental laziness etc.

How is Literature Taught in Our Junior Secondary Schools

Uwaifor (1979) outline the procedure of literature teaching as follows :

Silent and vocal reading of the text to help students acquire a knowledge of the plot.

Explanation of new words to enhance better understanding of the story.

Questioning which helps students to structure the events and write about each character.

Calling students' attention to author's style.

Discussion of some past questions.

He went further to stress that apart from reading and answering questions, students are not engaged in other activities. They are also neither encouraged to talk nor think for themselves, and the act of individual response to the work of art is almost absent.

Problems Associated with the Teaching of Igbo Literature in Our Junior Secondary Schools

The national curriculum on Igbo language for Junior Secondary education in Nigeria (1981) provided for only three topics for teaching of literature in J.S.S. 1 with the following topics :

Ikwuputa omenala Igbo

Agumagu Odinala and

Ikowaputa ihe gbasara agumagu e dere n'okwu Igbo.

In the J. S. S. 2 Class its own three topic are as follows :

Agumagu odinala

Omenala na ewumewu Igbo, akuko okike, nkwenye, mmemme.

Igu akwukwo agumagu a hoputara.

The same applies to J. S. S. 3 with the underlying topics :

Omenala na Ewumewu Igbo.

Agumagu Odinala Akwukwo

agumagu a hoputara.

A quick look at the above plan shows that enough time is not allocated to literature teaching in our Junior Secondary Schools; hence if in J.S.S. 1 - 3 only three topics are slated for study for a whole year, much can definitely not be achieved since anything worth doing is worth doing well.

Another problem that is confronting literature teaching is that of lack of proper planning by the teacher. This haphazard way of teaching is the brain behind some areas being over taught to the detriment of the others, thus killing the students interest by monotonous approach. Ogunnaike (2002) corroborates the above statement when he posits that "a major problem associated with literature teaching was poor planning of literature course and poor presentation in the class".

The next problem is that there are no clear cut criteria for the selection of literature texts for our Junior Secondary Schools. These days, quality of the texts are no longer important, rather the books recommended are those whose authors have "long legs" as well as have the ingredient to settle and push their books forward for recommendation by the powers that be. Book recommended no longer cater for psychological and linguistic needs of the students. Furthermore selection of texts are no longer based on psychological state of development of the learner and readability which promotes interest and gives rise to enjoyment.

The next problem is the issue of methodology. It is a common agreement in opinion that there is no specific method of literature teaching in Igbo language. It is the exclusive reserve of the teacher to do what ever he/she likes in the name of literature teaching. Often times the teacher resorts to "take your book and read approach". Close to this problem is that of incompetence on the part of the teacher as well as lukewarm attitude towards literature teaching in Igbo language. The teacher at this point is left without any form of monitoring to show either his inept ignorance of the subject matter of a particular literary text or his

incompetence in the methodology of teaching of the subject.

The last but not the least problem I wish to talk about is scarcity of literary text and even the ones available are too expensive and lack quality. The publishers work to enhance their economic gain and without the patronage of government; there is therefore a genuine fear of not making profit in the business. Most publishers concentrate on publishing on favoured aspects of school texts. Indigenous publishing is increasingly prohibitive. On this Odusote (1995) states “The result will be that almost all book stores will die a natural death ...as undergraduates, teachers, professors and all say good bye to academia as books are no longer affordable”. On the general problem of Igbo literature Emenanjo (1991) says “literature in the Igbo language has been the most hampered of the major Nigeria languages although it has as good a foundation as literature in Hausa and Yoruba. What are then the solutions to all these enlisted problems.

Solutions/Recommendations

- (1) One of the steps to solving these problems is allocating more time to the teaching of literature as well as broadening the topic to bring in more areas. Since it is a known fact that literature helps students in the study and understanding of other subjects. Allotting more time to it will not only better their performance in literature but will also help them to perform better in other school subjects.
- (2) On lack of proper planning, there should be proper planning by the teachers. A good plan indicates the topic, the aim the material or teaching aids to be used etc. This plans helps the teacher be focused on what he/she want to achieve at the end of the lesson. Proper planning also encourages better participation and removes boredom.
- (3) On selection of literature texts, the government should appoint a board whose responsibility it will be to let up and agree on the necessary criteria to be considered in recommending reading texts in our J.S.S. Their recommendations should be strictly adhered to without fear or favour. Furthermore literature text selected or recommended should cater for the psychological and linguistic needs of students. Bearing in mind that lack of relevance can cause unhealthy attitudes and poor understanding of materials required for reading. Selection also should be based on psychological stage of development, corresponding to the age of the learner. When students enter secondary school, they tend to look at life as romance, played out along simple lines. They like to read about heroes and heroines. Towards the end of their secondary education, they become more realistic, they are eager to read about what actually goes on in life. Materials should therefore be selected in accordance with the students readiness to cope with the issues involved. Since readability promotes interest in literature and enjoyment of it as earlier mentioned, where vocabularies and sentences are too difficult, the reader is automatically put off or frustrated. The literature text selected or recommended should be readable to promote comprehension, fluency as well as interest in reading.
- (4) On methodology, the literature teacher should encourage the students to participate. This he can do by encouraging them to write imaginary conversations, episodes etc. This will definitely make them to be actively involved and in turn take away monotony and boredom and there will be life and enjoyment in the teaching and learning of Igbo literature in our Junior Secondary Schools.
- (5) The last but not the least is the solution to scarcity of literary materials. I suggest that government should encourage the publishers by making the materials they use cheaper. They should also try to make cost of publishing cheaper at least in government owned publishing companies. They should allocate more money for the acquisition of more texts and monitoring it to see that the money allocated is used for the exact purpose it is meant for.

Its my humble opinion that if all these suggestion are strictly adhered to, there will definitely be improvement in the teaching and learning of literature which will in turn be felt in the excellent performance of the students in all areas of life.

Conclusion

In all ramifications the teacher has the singular duty to improve the lot of students in literature teaching. This he can do by encouragement, creativity, group work, arousing their interest through

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beautiful and captivating introductions of texts. Teachers should also endeavour to give outlines to guide their reading. Students should be encouraged to engage in extensive reading by creating invisible class library, which enables students to rotate different books purchased by all of them. The teacher should make sure that the evaluation is not based on factual recall only but should incorporate finding meaning, order and beauty in works of art. In other words let the learner be evaluated on the total appreciation of the whole text instead of an aspect.

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