

Enhancing Literature Education for Social Cohesion in the Contemporary Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of literature education in shaping social orientation in Nigeria. It begins by exploring various scholarly perspectives on the concept of literature and highlights its impact in fostering peace amidst the country's current security challenges. The study underscores the significance of literary communication in raising awareness about social responsibility and vigilance. It critically analyzes how literature, through different genres, helps in preventing conflicts and mitigating potential uprisings. This is exemplified by the use of songs and poems during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to disseminate safety information. The paper further emphasizes the role of literary figures in educating the public on government policies. Finally, it offers recommendations on how the government can leverage literature to promote peace and social cohesion.

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INTRODUCTION

In a more specific sense, literature is more human and personal in the way it handles its subjects than scientific or technical writing (Young, 2008). It deals with feelings, which are communicated in words or action. Literature is also more decorative and captivating in its operation (Kelani, 2004). This is why the creative writer is concerned not only with the subject matter but also with the art of representing or recreating social realities within the structures of imagination-poetry, prose and drama. Literature is a discipline of its own. In other words, it is an independent subject of study like economics, geography and physics. It was in the nineteenth century that literature gained specialized meaning.

The word "literature" was derived from Latin *Littera*, which means letter, while *litarature* from the Greek word *grammatika* means the knowledge of reading and writing" (Tambling, 1988 p 6). Literature as a course of study is all about man and the society in which he/she lives. It studies and examines man as a social being. In effect, it looks at human virtues and vices as

products of varying circumstances within the context of the socio-cultural milieu. It is important to further note that the primary tool for achieving this is language with which the creative writer decorates what he or she is saying, using figurative rather than everyday language, to invent and create situations which can be easily imagined. Similarly, the writer, from this perspective, is not concerned with facts as they really are in real life as the scientist is but rather concerns with imaginative experiences. Literature is a recreation of life; it acts as a mirror through which life is seen or reflected. "It is imaginative writing in the sense of fiction-writing, which is not literally true" (Eagleton 1983 p.1).

LITERATURE AND EDUCATION

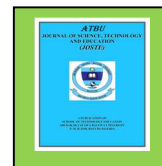
Literature contributes, on a grand scale, to the world we live in terms of the way it opens window for us to see and appreciate our cultures and other people's cultures. This is because literature is concerned not only with the subject matter but also with the art of representing or recreating socio-cultural realities within the structures of imagination- poetry, prose

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and drama (Simon, 2007). No doubt, this instills moral obligation in minds of our youths to behave in socially accepted manner. Corroborating this, Abdu (2018) contends that literature provides one with the ability to connect human relationships and define what is right and what is wrong. Morrow (2003) adds that "literature is the foundation of life" (p.23). It places an emphasis on many topics from human tragedies to tales of ever popular search for love (Torry, 2009). This underscores the fact that while literature is physically written in words, these words come alive in the imagination of the mind and its ability to comprehend the complexity or simplicity of the text (Ojinmah, 1991). Literature enables the people to see through the lenses of others. Therefore, it can be referred to as a looking glass of world experiences (Hayesp, 2001). Through its educational value, drama can be used to propagate or disseminate desirable attitudes, especially ones that bring together people from diverse socio-cultural orientations into monolithic unification (Fayose, 1995).

The Role of Literature in Promoting Peace

Peace is generally conceived as the absence of war or physical violence. According to Longman dictionary of contemporary English (2012), peace is a situation in which there is no war between countries or in a country. It is a direct opposite of conflict or crises. Peace is a direct or original state of security and absent of social, political or religious tensions that can debar progress in human societies. Literature can be used to promote and instill peace through its three generic forms. For example, drama can be enacted to enable people imbibe the values of peace much the same as songs (poems) and novels can disseminate the spirit of peaceful co-existence among people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Ekwensi *Iska* is a typical example of novel-literature can be deploy to educate people about living in diversity.

Literature as a Tool for Conflict Resolution

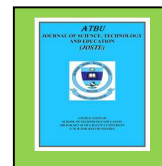
Conflict is actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interest (Albert, 2007 cited in Adam and AbdulSalam, 2013).

Conflict is the result of many social vices, such as social disagreement, conflict of interest and fight between two individuals, groups or organizations (Saraki, 2013). Literature can be used to create awareness among people and resolve their conflicting views. Inherent in it, literature is a mirror of life. It reflects human beings' different backgrounds, interest, and worldviews from its imaginative ethos or lens. It satirizes the way we respond to conflict that determines whether it would be positive or negative to our daily life. For example, folktales can be used to teach children the bad effects of conflict through animated characters. As for the young adults, novels and drama can be used to teach them the danger inherent in delving one in conflicts or crisis. This corroborates the fact that literature has the power to entertain, to instruct, to reach, to satirize, to reconstruct and even to destroy. A reader smile when he has read something those interests his or her. The same reader may begin to cry when an account reveals of genocide and the numbers that perished or died.

Literature and the security Issue

The need for security is necessary for socio-cultural development of any nation. This underpins the fact that "the government should be responsible for overseeing the survival of all citizenry" (Krahmann, 2003, P.9). Security has to do with freedom from danger or threats; therefore it incumbent upon a nation to cherish its nuanced values in order to develop measures that would protect its citizenry and sovereignty from effect of insecurity. Security, from the perceived view of Sen (1999), focuses on promoting and protecting legitimate interests and enhancing the well being of people. National security promotes internal cohesion and cooperate existence of people (Wolfers, 1998).

The sensitivity of literature in mopping and sensitizing people on security issues is significant. The ideal of sensitivity in is to restore peace rather than promotion of violence. It identifies conflict, its roots and phases. The literary artists are social reformers. They use their creative ingenuity to indict society against



moral failings and insecurity. One of the devastating security concerns Nigeria is grappling with in the recent times is banditry. At worst, this triggers the worst at north east of Nigeria. Literature could operate as character formation in which children right from primary to secondary schools are taught stories, poems and drama that are thematically patriotic in tones. This will create moral thumbprint in their day-to-day life. Knowledge about cultural traits in literature lessons facilitate full of comprehension of the message being passed across. In other words, no meaningful discussion of security-based education can be fully achieved in absolute neglect of literature. This goes without saying that conflict managers should be watchful in the course of their duties

Way Forward

The Nigerian government should continue to advocate for peaceful co-existence of her citizens through the literature. This has become necessary due to the various nefarious activities of some groups, such as the Niger-delta militants, kidnappers and recently the Boko Haram. They operate mainly in the northern part of the country by attacking and killing people with bombs and other dangerous weapons. Through their operations, hundreds of Nigerians have been sent to their early graves. Hence, the repeated appeal in the use of literature to encourage people to embrace peace. In this way, it axiomatic upon curriculum designers to prioritize the teaching of literature in all public primary and secondary schools. It is worrisome to note that in the whole architectural design of time table in Northern Nigerian public secondary schools, hardly one can see a single period devoted to teaching of literature. Much time is spent in the teaching of language-based lessons, such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar etc.

CONCLUSION

Literature opens window for children and adults to come to term with new experiences and learn good manners from imaginary characters. Above all, literature help students

learn about the past as well as the present and learn about a variety of cultures, including their own. Above all, literature transmits the cultural norms and values of a particular society. Such transmission is done using imaginary characters and settings. This becomes an important avenue because literature does such a function in a comic and an exciting manner. Besides, the language of literature is memorable and, in a way, keeps one informed of his or her cultural heritage.

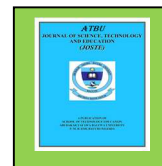
RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper offers the following recommendation:

- Literary writers should tap or draw their creative inspirations from African literary heritage to document experiences of young Adults
- Literature teachers should be moral and social reformers; thus they have to select novels, plays and poems laden with didactic messages aimed at changing the behaviour of Adult persons.
- Literary texts for young adults must feature African norms and values as such choosing European texts should be done with caution.
- Considering the moral derailments of our youths, literary writers should be creatively conscious on what to write to proffer solutions.
- Government and educational stakeholders should boost the morale of young and engaging writers by providing them with needed support.

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