

The Influence of the Teaching of Literature in English on the Values, Virtues and Development of Crisis in Nigeria

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Abstract: The studies investigated the teaching of literature in English on the values, virtues and development of crisis in Nigeria. Descriptive survey method was used to elicit information from 200 literature students in 3 Universities located in Ekiti, Ondo and Ogun states in the south west Nigeria. The study attempts to find out if there would be any difference between students who were taught literature at the secondary schools and those who were not taught specifically in their abilities to identify values and virtues that can contribute to or inhibit the development of Nigeria and also if literature teaching can enhance development of positive values and virtues which will lessen development of crisis in Nigeria. The analysis of the data collected shows that, there is significant difference in the ability of the students who were taught literature and those who were not in their ability to identify and develop positive values and virtues that will minimize development of crisis. It is recommended that literature should be a core subject at the secondary school level. The teachers have to emphasize any lesson derived from any literary text studied by the students.

Key words: Literature, influence, crisis, development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Language, like the society, is dynamic because of many changes that occur everyday. Human beings are always in a hurry to conquer their environment or attempt to make life comfortable and meaningful. The attempt to conquer the environment is not limited to the scientists or sciences alone, many other branches of knowledge are also struggling to use the findings from their studies to conquer their environment. One of the branches of knowledge involved is language. Language is very important in human endeavour. It appears as if all the activities of man are anchored on the use of language.

The BBC English Dictionary (1992) defines language as a system of sounds and written symbols used by the people of a particular country, area or tribe to communicate with each other. Human beings also use non-verbal communication means through the use of signs, gestures or inarticulate sounds to communicate. More broadly, language may be defined as communication; in general, it can be regarded as a form of knowledge that is of thought and cognition. Language use is the concerns of scholars in many fields among them are linguistics, literature, communications, speech and rhetoric, sociology, political science and psychology (Microsoft Encarta, 2004).

Some Linguists study language from different perspectives. Some show interest in what human beings say, while some are interested in what human beings write

and what they are thinking. Akindele and Adegbite (1999) observe that man uses language to communicate his individual thoughts, inner feelings and personal psychological experience. Language is seen as a particular way words are selected and combined that is characteristic of individual words or a group of literary genre. Literature is an aspect of language studies. It is made up of three genres namely prose, drama and poetry. Each of these three types is closely related to the values, virtues and development that had also gone on or is currently going on in a society. As the society grows, her literature is expected to grow along with it. Value as considered in this study is the importance or usefulness of the moral principles and beliefs of Nigerians. While, virtue is considered as the thinking and doing of what is right and avoiding what is wrong. Development is considered as a process that will improve the conditions of human beings in all its ramifications. Nigerians believe in moral uprightness and truthfulness in all human endeavour. While, Nigerians believe in doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong as much as it is humanly possible. It is in this sense that the words values and virtues are used in this study.

Purpose of study: The study sorts to find out if there would be any difference between the students who offered literature in English as a subject and those who did not at secondary school. The study also finds out if the knowledge gained in literature will enhance literature

student's ability to identify values and virtues that can contribute to the development of Nigeria better than non literature students. The study investigates whether knowledge gained from the study of literature in English will enhance development of positive values and virtues which will lessen developmental crises in Nigeria.

The problem: Nigeria society, just like any society in the world, is growing and each day unfolds new events and findings. History is repeating itself daily. Nigeria is a conglomeration of people with diverse cultures and languages. This, in itself, has a sort of inbuilt problem which the country is still sorting out after about 5 decades of independence. Some of the problems being experienced in the country today are the problems associated with governance, social problems, poverty, corruption, dishonesty and insincerity. Above all, the country is facing the problem of selfishness and lack of patriotism by some of the leaders and citizens. Literature has widely reported that some Nigerian past leaders and even some serving ones are looting the Treasury of the country. For instance a lot of money was retrieved from the accounts of a Nigerian military ruler who ruled between 1993 and 1999. Also in October 2005, *The Week*, a Nigerian weekly magazine, reported that the Bayelsa State Governor in the south-south Nigeria was arrested and detained in London for money laundering. As a result of this and other similar occurrences, the present civilian government in Nigeria has decided to wage war against corruption which has become a recurrent theme in Nigeria. To this end the federal government in Nigeria established a commission named Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to arrest suspects for trial in Nigerian courts.

This study, therefore, attempts to find out if the teaching of literature in English will have a positive influence on the attitudes of Nigerians in the area of values and virtues. In order to investigate the problems stated above, 2 general questions are raised:

- What is the contribution of literature in English to the development of positive virtues and values by Nigerians?
- What will the teaching of literature in English contribute to solving development of crises?

Research hypotheses: As a result of the problems stated above, the following research hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- There is no significant difference in the ability of students to identify and develop positive values if they were taught literature or not in the secondary schools.

- There is no significant difference in the ability of students to identify and develop good virtues if they were taught literature or not in the secondary school.
- There is no significant difference in the ability of students to identify behaviour that can lead to developmental crises if they were taught literature or not at the secondary school.
- There is no significant difference between the contribution of the students who were taught literature and those who were not to the development of their society.

Literature review: Literature in English is a subject that permeates through all human activities. It is like a torch that brings light into the minds of man and society. It searches the inner minds of people as well as looking into people's environment (Uwaifo, 1996). Literature in English discusses the culture, past and present events, civilization, social life and political activities, values and development of crises in a particular nation.

The thrust of this study is based on the values, virtues and development of crises in Nigeria as a developing nation. Nigeria has passed through many historic stages such as colonization, civil war, military government, economic fluctuation, political upheavals and social violence.

Literature has been used to expose various crises that had rocked and in fact still rocking and creating social problems as well as political problems in Nigeria and Africa. These crises are aptly described in Nigeria National Literature. For the purpose of this study, National literature can be described as those literary texts-prose, drama and poetry that serve the purpose of expressing the culture of the people and their protests. National literatures are expressed in English or in the indigenous languages. For instance, the earliest African writings in English Language have the themes of protests and conflicts, such protests are against colonialism in Africa, the destruction and destabilization of African ways of life through the introduction of Western culture. The conflicts in these literary genres center on the colonies abilities to reject western cultures and upholding of indigenous ways of life. The literary texts are either fictionalized or expressed as realistically. Some examples are Achebe's *Things fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1969), Aluko's *One Man One Matchet* (1965), *One Man One Wife* (1967), Ngugi's *Weep not Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1967), *De Graft, Sons and Daughters* (1974) and Kolawole's *Politics in the Nation* (2007).

Subsequent literary works could be classified as disenchantment that greeted the expectations of Africans from the activities of their leaders, some few examples are: Soyinka's *Interpreters* and Achebe's *A Man of the*

people. Others see freedom as nightmare because of the crises that accomplished the independence obtained by African nations some examples of such works are: Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969) and Duodu's *The Gab Boys* (1967).

Achebe (1969), in *No Longer at Ease*, attempts to assess the colonial inheritance of Nigeria on the eve of the country's Independence. The action is centered on a patriotic, named young graduate who aspires to rid his country of moral and social ills, which he attributes to backwardness. He later succumbs to deep pessimisms and acknowledges the inadequacy of his generation in providing answers to the complex dilemmas of modern African when he faced the temptation and stresses of living in decaying social system. Many innocent and powerless Africans are facing political, economic repression, moral and social ills today.

Obi, the hero of the novel had laudable ideal picture of what Nigeria should be when he was a student in England. He composed a poem, which reflects his dreamy, euphoristic quality of his nationalistic sentiments. The first stanza of the poem reads.

God bless our noble fatherland.
Great land of sunshine bright.
Where brave man chosen the way of peace.
To win their freedom fight.
May we preserve our purity?
Our zest for life and jollity.

When he returns to Nigeria, the reality stares him in the face as he goes through painful experiences that bring him into conflict with his family, fiancée, his tribe and in-laws as well as with his own ideals. He faces disillusionment, he does not find in Nigeria, the way of peace 'Our purity' and any 'zest for life and jollity' judging by examples of the behaviours of some African leaders. Hence, Obi renounces his sentimental dream and allows himself to fall into a deep cynicism as he takes bribes; he is arrested, tried and jailed. Young ones and literature students have moral lessons to learn from this type of story.

In Armah's (1969), *The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born*, he says that "the man" who is the hero in the book represents the masses whom all the African politician exploit daily but no one ever plans to improve their conditions. Armah presents a story that exposes the levels of corruption in post-independent African Countries. The leaders are busy swindling the wealth of the people with meaningless verbiage, which still happens today. It exhibits African incredible filth, shit and stink. African is seen as nothing but one mess in which

everybody from the establishment to the most oppressed urban worker is caught irredeemably. The citizens are bewildered and cynically looking out for ways, very often, shady, out of their nightmares. The situation has not changed from what it used to be when the book was written many years ago.

Today, we had seen African leaders who were reported to be richer than their countries, having looted the treasury of their countries. Some of these leaders still handle the affairs and wealth of their countries as their personal estate. Political parties are run like business organization with sole proprietors, laws are flouted while courts judgements are disobeyed by the people in 'power'. The conclusion is that most African countries are freed politically from their colonial masters but their leaders still manage their affairs very badly.

In Soyinka's (1970) "Interpreters", the issue of decadence and sterility of the contemporary social and political set up in many African countries is vividly described. The post independence dilemmas as presented through the main characters (the group of vibrant intellectuals), who are alive to the social realities of their country. They dislike the situation intensively and wish to change it but they are pushed aside by the politicians using their political positions and power. Hence, the changes that they had dreamt could not be injected into the society therefore, the society keeps on drifting. This situation still persists in most African countries today. The politicians will do everything to eliminate the opposition. They can do the impossibility in order to retain power at all costs. The main qualification for holding political office is not based on past clean records of achievement, but seemed to be based on loyalty to the ruling party and to the leader. These are the class of people that are responsible for intolerance, electoral fraud, unlawful detention and creation of meaningless party systems with violence. Politics has become one of the important openings to social prestige and wealth and the people who acquire status through this channel find themselves in opposition with another group who got it by way of different channels like education. De Graft's (1974), *Sons and Daughters* is a dramatization of the conflict between a father and his cherished children over the former's choice of what he considered as good and well-paying professional education for the latter. The play demonstrates the tension and disagreement between two different generations in the early post independence Ghanaian society just like any African society. The older generation wanted their children to pursue those disciplines that could give them money and recognition. James 'the father' who represents the older generation and pre-colonial age is more interested in the money and

power which education could give. This explains why he lays emphasis on money. Money is what matters. Money rules the world this contrasts with the idealistic position of the younger generation who were more interested in those issues and involvements that could edify and humanize their society. Money was not seen as that important. Aaron who represents the younger generation explains it vividly Our society is sold on money. Nothing is worth anything unless it brings in money. The position of the younger generation contradicts that of the older generation. It is instructive to note that in the play, the champions of idealism prevail over the forces of materialism. Idealism builds a society while money tears it apart, this is one of the lessons in the play. The urge to amass money is still creating serious problems in Nigerian society.

In Lenrie Peters, *The Fence* is a poem of social lament as it reflects on the proverbial fence-sitting which in essence is a selfish attitude and does not encourage the development of the societies. In the present day Nigeria, many politicians are sitting on the fence, as they like to always work for the political party that is in 'power'. Such politicians hold high positions when their political parties are ruling but at any slight failure in election such people usually 'decamp' (deflect) join the parties that won election. These categories of politicians as found in Nigeria have no rigid policy or belief in any political manifestoes. They are selfish and greedy politician and their actions are inimical to the progress of the society. These types of politicians are still very much around, especially in Nigeria. Ola, Rotimi (1979) in his research "Our Husband Has Gone, Mad Again" satirizes the Nigerian attitudes to political system. The hero of the work Lejoka Brown demonstrates lust for power, deceit, politics of bitterness, which involved the assassination of political opponents, planning to rig elections, the use of the young ones as political thugs and violence during electioneering campaigns. The work written in 1977 exactly 20 years ago still fits perfectly to the present Nigeria political scene. In recent years, in Nigeria there had been many cases of assassinations such as the case of Funsho Williams in Lagos State as reported in Sunday Punch of July 30, 2006 and Ayo Daramola in Ekiti State in "Tell" Oct. 2006 and "The Nation" May 26 2007, which were linked to political violence, which causes destruction of public and private properties (Odunay, 2007; Oyetayo, 2006). The present political scene in Nigeria has shown that Nigerian Politicians have not learnt anything or have learnt very little from the mistakes made in the past. For instance "The Nation" (July 13, 2007) and "The Punch" (July 14, 2007) reported that the former governors of Jigawa, Abia, Plateau and Taraba States were charged by

the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission with allegedly laundering of several billions of Naira belonging to their respective states. These are just few cases of abuse of office in Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is a descriptive research in which survey method was employed. The researcher uses questionnaire to elicit information from the subjects.

Population of the study: The population of the study consists the student teachers who offer Language courses at the tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. The study focuses on this category of students because they had been studying Literature for many years and will teach the younger generations after graduating from the tertiary institutions. In addition, they are in position to juxtapose what they have learnt in various literary classes with the development of crises, values and virtues of their country.

Sample and sampling technique: The sample for the study was randomly selected from Faculties of Education in three Universities in Ekiti, Ondo and Ogun states, respectively all in the South-West Nigeria. Two hundred students were randomly selected from these three Institutions. The students offer literature as part of their language courses in addition to Education courses.

Research instruments: The research instrument used for the study was a questionnaire which contains 24 items based on the four research questions and hypotheses generated for the purpose of the study. The questionnaire is self-reporting type which allows the respondent to choose among four level options on Likert rating scale, strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The rating points are 4, 3, 2, 1, respectively. The questionnaire was divided into 4 main parts, each part addresses specific problems such as the use of literature to identify the contemporary values and virtues such as honesty, hard work and respect for Nigerians in the area of politics, economy and social life of the people and develop positive attitudes towards these value and virtues: Specifically, values and virtues in the area of honesty, hard work, respect for elders and sincerity are addressed.

Identify behaviour that had brought about development of crises in the past through literature. Specifically issues of corruption, thugery, rigging during election, arson, hostage taking, violence and assassination.

Identify ways of solving development of crises both past and present through literature. Such issue as enlightenment through the media, persuasion through reading and drama were also examined.

Identify influence of literature on students in development of good value and virtues.

The face and content validity of the instrument were established by language specialists at the University of Ado Ekiti. The reliability test was carried out on literature students who would not take part in the main study. The data collected from their responses was analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation. A reliability correlation coefficient of 0.75 was obtained which was considered good enough for the study.

Methods of data collection and analysis: The researcher personally visited the tertiary Institutions and administered the questionnaires on the subjects. The subjects were encouraged to fill the questionnaires and return them to the researcher the same day. The researcher also interview the subject.

The questionnaire which was constructed on a Likert rating scale was analyzed by the researcher and subjected to-t-test statistics.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 states that there is no significant difference between the abilities of students to identify and develop positive values whether they were taught literature or not in the secondary school.

The Table 1 shows that the calculated t 5.34 is greater than the table value 1.96 which implies that there is significant difference between students who were taught literature and those who were not taught in their ability to identify and develop positive values. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 2 states that there is no significant difference between the abilities of the students to identify and develop good virtues whether they were taught literature or not.

The Table 2 shows that the t-calculated 6.13 is greater than the table value 1.96. This implies that a significant difference exists between the students who were taught literature and those who were not in their abilities to identify and develop good virtues. The hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

The third hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the ability of the students to identify negative behaviours and develop positive behaviour that can lead to development of crisis whether they were taught literature or not.

The Table 3 shows that the calculated value 6.37 is greater than the table value, which means that significant difference, exists in the students' ability to identify negative behaviours after they were taught literature. Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 4 states that there is no significant difference between the contributions of those who were taught literature and those who were not to the development of their society.

Table 1: Difference between students' abilities to identify and develop positive value through literature

Variable	No	Mean	Df	t-cal	t-value	Result	Sig. level
Ability to identify positive values	200	4.36	199	5.34	1.96	Significant	0.05
Ability to develop positive values	200	5.56					

p<0.05

Table 2: Difference in the ability of the student to identify and develop good virtue

Variable	No	Mean	df	t-cal	t value	Result	Sig. level
Identification of good virtues	200	5.4	199	6.13	1.96	Signif icant	0.05
Development of good virtue	200	4.27					

p<0.05

Table 3: Difference in the ability of students to identify negative behaviour and develop positive behaviour that can lead to development crises

Variable	No	Mean	df	t-cal	Table	Result	Sig. level
Identification of negative behaviour	200	5.60	199	6.37	1.96	Significant	0.05
Develop positive behaviour.	200	4.37					

p<0.05

Table 4: Potentials to contribute to the development of the society

Variable	No	Mean	df	t.cal	t. value	Result	Sig. level
Potential to contribute to social develop	200	5.60	199	6.33	1.96	Significant	0.05
Inability to contribute to development of the society	200	4.30					

p<0.05

The Table 4 shows that the calculated value 6.33 is greater than the t value. This implies that significant difference exists between students who were taught literature and those who were not in their abilities to contribute to the development of their country.

DISCUSSION

The result of the data analyses of hypothesis one shows that there is significant difference between students who were taught literature in English and those who were not taught in their abilities to identify and develop positive value which can lead to the development of the society. Those who were taught literature can identify and develop positive values based on their experiences from the various characters studied in literature in English. The development and identification of positive values toward the development of one's society is one of the moral lessons derived from the work of De Grafts (1974), "Sons and Daughters" which exhibits the love of money and urge to a mass wealth at all costs by corrupt leaders at the expense of the masses. Soyinka's (1970) "Interpreters" highlights the identification of positive values by vibrant intellectuals in African society but their urge to pursue the value is usually daunted by other people who because of their selfish gains use their positions and wealth to frustrate these intellectuals. This action itself perhaps has been responsible for the backwardness of Nigeria as a nation and the series of the development of crises that are still pinning Nigeria down to the group of under developed nations. These findings correspond with the observation of Kolawole (2007) in a study presented on Nigerian politics that:

The influence of money on our politics is a constraint on the evolution of credible candidates into the public office. One may have the best ideas on governance, impeccable academic credentials and a sustainable history of tendency towards public service and deep sense of public spiritedness. But it will amount to nothing in our society if he seeks public office without a corresponding deep pocket.

From the submission of Professor Kolawole, the love of money is still a bane in the progress of Nigeria as a nation. This love of money leads to misuse of power and abuse of office. It also inhibits social development and provision of social amenities for the populace because the leader would swindle the money meant for the provision of social amenities and both physical and economic developments.

The findings of the data analysis in the hypothesis 2 show that there is significant difference between the students who were taught literature and those who were not in their abilities to identify good virtues. Virtues, as used in this study, are the thinking and doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong. It is believed that in a society, where most of the citizens have flare for positive virtues, do what is right and insist on doing what is right, there will be peace, progress and development in its entire ramification. Most of the literary work examined in the study juxtaposed the action of doing what is right and wrong most of the time. In Armah's (1969) "The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born" this idea is highlighted and because most of the people in that society highlighted in the work are doing wrong things, that society becomes a filthy one. Corruption is the order of the day, the masses are wallowing in abject poverty. All these are recurring themes in Achebe (1969) "No longer at Ease" and Soyinka (1970) "Interpreters".

The themes highlighted in the work of these authors are still present in Nigeria today. For instance, for the past two years, the southern part of Nigeria has been sieged by militant youths who engage in taking hostages. Some of these hostages were foreigners who were working in oil firms. The society is threatened by gun toting men. "The Nation" 13th July, 2007 reported "Gun men kidnapped another kid in Port Harcourt, ₦50 million ransom demanded" (Clarice, 2007). "Nigerian Tribune" July 13 also carried the same story. Punch July 14, 2007 reported that Gunmen kidnapped seven persons in Onitsha (Ibanga, 2007). The victims were working for a dredging company on the bank of river Niger. The above shows that the atmosphere in Nigeria may not support rapid industrial growth as investors will hesitate to do business in a nation where their lives and properties are unsafe. "Tribune" July 1, 2007 reports that 8 robbers, a police DSP was killed in a bank robbery in Benin, Edo State where the police was able to recover seven million Naira stolen from the bank. The results of the data analyses in hypothesis three indicates that there is significant difference between students who were taught literature in English and those who were not taught in their ability to identify negative behaviour that can bring about development of crises. A pertinent lesson derived from the literary work-study is the effects of negative behaviour on the individuals, family and the nation at large.

In the contemporary Nigerian society the incidents of violent behaviours seem to be on the increase. Cases of armed robbery, cultism and political violence are reported almost on daily basis.. "The Nation" (March 13, 2007) reports that no fewer than six persons were feared killed

and several others injured in a clash between a suspected cult and youth in Emede, Isoko south local government in Delta State (Olasanmi, 2007). The same study reported the warning handed down by the Lagos State governor to perpetrators of political violence. "Governor of Lagos State yesterday warned all perpetrators of violence at political campaigns and rallies to desist from the act or face the law" this shows that Nigeria is still witnessing political violence.

In the novels, poems and plays studied, the effect of negative behaviour usually results to assassination, poverty, family disintegration and political disturbance associated with serious violence, killing and coercion. In Ola Rotimi (1979) "Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again", the hero Chief Lejoka Brown sends his hired assassins to kill his political opponent. The opponent was attacked by the thugs. The report of his death was brought to Chief Lejoka Brown who was very happy not knowing that he was faked. A literary scholar would have read about the consequences of wrong behaviour and try to draw positive conclusion from the consequences of the actions of the characters he has studied. Literature in English inculcates in individual a sense of morality, responsibility and flare for history and good citizenship to mention only a few. When young ones are exposed to those literary works and the didactic elements are emphasized, the children are then exposed to the need to develop positive attitudes towards values and virtues and respect for elders.

The results of the data analyzed in Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference between students who were taught literature and those who were not in their contributions to the general development of their country. These findings are germane because literature teaches many things just like religion. It exposes the students to many things especially about culture, social life political life and consequences of man's interaction. It sensitizes the literary students about chains of reactions of individual behaviour, which could bring comfort, development, peace and safety to the society when those behaviours are positive ones. On the other hand, negative behaviours when manifested by majority of the people in the society will lead to social vices, assassination and the development of crises as shown from all the work of the authors reviewed for the study. The influence of Nigerian writers is significant because some of them like Nobel laureate winners Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, to mention a few have imparted moral lessons on their readers.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that if the students are exposed to literature in English from the secondary

schools, the lesson learnt from the various genres will influence their behaviours. Students will gain a lot from the lessons derived from various literature texts. It will expose the students not only to cultures. It will also allow them to learn a little about people's behaviour and consequences of their actions in the area of politics, social life and consequences of man's interaction. It sensitizes both the literature students and teacher to the need to always draw moral lessons from the genres studied.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings of the study it is recommended that, teachers of Literature in English should always emphasize the lessons derived from each literature text to learners. They should teach literature to reflect real life experience, which will enable the students to fix whatever lessons they have learnt to real life situation. The Nigerian government should make the teaching of literature in English compulsory in the secondary schools. It is recommended that the influence of literature on gender can be investigated in the area of moral developments.

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