Towards the Pragmatic Delivery of Literature in Post-Primary Schools in Nigeria

Onwugbufor, Ifeoma Catherine
Kwararafa University, Wukari – Taraba State
flyckeringhope@gmail.com

Abstract
The appraisal of approved curricula for the different levels of scholarship of Literature in English in Nigerian schools remains apposite considering the intense emergence of Literature in the last ten years as alternative means of wealth creation. In recognition of this therefore, a systematic re-assessment of the quality and delivery of ratified curricula for Literature in English is fundamental to revamping its pedagogical returns especially in intermediate levels of education. This paper attempts to assess this deficient curriculum in a dynamic world that emerges on a per-second basis, in which the child thrives more on practicality than on models alone. The matrix of assessment will be based on the demonstrable impartation of knowledge that should be ascertained against an exclusively pedagogical background. To this end, this paper attempts to ascertain the pedagogy for literature in post-primary schools against the backdrop of the expected end, in comparison with the delivery of the same and the viability of the curriculum in place. This evaluation will be collated from questionnaires and other related researches. These findings will strictly assess the wholeness of literature curriculum considering the peculiarity of the Nigerian teenage child within its learning environment.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Literature in English, Curriculum, Post-Primary Schools, Pragmatism

Introduction
It is basic to comprehend literature in its simplistic form. Literature is an art that narrates an event in the form of a story, and has a beginning and an end. A more intrinsic definition by Schilb and Clifford positions literature as not existing in a social vacuum, but a part of human relationships. The delivery of Literature in English in post-primary schools is as bungling as with the delivery of other subjects in post-primary schools previously researched by many scholars. It is noteworthy to establish that if the curriculum is faulty, the delivery will equally be defective. This is the reason many students especially from the science background lack interest in the study or appreciation of literature in current times. Formerly, the delivery of literature was interesting much like other arts such that students were usually interested in studying them owing to the uniqueness in its delivery - about sixty years ago or a little less.

The purpose of this paper is to re-evaluate literature curricula across board – from the higher basic to the high school level in order to identify why a student who is science-inclined would
rather offer a local language as an extra subject than literature. Many have argued that this reluctance stems from the bulkiness of literature books, while others maintain that the delivery takes the better part of the reason for the disinterestedness of students towards literature as a subject. Whatever be the reasons, literature is not only educative and informative but also therapeutic and should be appreciated and readily acceptable by students irrespective of their intellectual inclinations.

At this juncture, it becomes expedient to question the contents of the current literature curriculum and identify objectively the aspects that do not interest students. Again, introducing new structures and approaches is relevant even as literature is being relegated to the background as a subject that is meant only for students who intend to become lawyers or teachers in the future. The relevant questions which this research seeks to excavate are – What is wrong with the current literature curricula that stigmatizes it among students outside the humanities background? What should be the contents of the ideal literature curricula? Is the home movie industry taking the place of literature taught in the traditional classroom, in the hearts students in the post-primary level? These and many other queries will be raised and analyzed in the course of this study.

This paper seeks to promote the pragmatic teaching approach which enables the learner to reinvent new ways of solving social problems in his or her environment. The benefits of the pragmatic teaching approach are inexhaustible and the value has been found to be long-lasting. It is based on this that it is conveniently logical that Literature in English should be delivered to students in a practical manner. Side by side, this teaching approach also engulfs the exclusive form of education, a combination that perfectly suits the Nigerian student in a typical Nigerian situation. Pedagogical efforts in post-primary schools should be inclusive as these young individuals are honed and launched into serious academic exercises that determine their future interests and successes, irrespective of their physical, mental and social orientation.

Basically, an assessment of the current literature curricula is direly needed. Twenty years ago and beyond, literatures reputed as world literature, national literatures, regional literatures and so on, were inculcated in the post-primary school curriculum. This was the era of the J. P. Clarks, the Ola Rotimis, the Wole Soyinkas, the Cyprian Ekwensis, the Odia Ofeimuns, the Chinua Achebes, the Flora Nwapas, the Buchi Emechetas, the Niyi Osundares, the Tanure Ojaides, the Ayi Kwei Armahs, the Ngugi Wa Thiong’os, the Kalu Okpis, the Elechi Amadis, the Mariama Bas, the Nadine Gordimers, the Chukwuemeka Ikles, the Zulu Sofolas, the Ifeoma Okoyes, the Daniel Fagunwas, the Ama Ata Aidoos; and so on. These are renowned writers who produced valuable literatures not just for the sake of it, but were guided by reputable standards that accorded them the sublimity of purpose in the different genres of literature. Those were the days when outstanding works of literature were honoured because of their near-perfection in conveying universally-accepted motifs presented in very artistic manner such that every reader could see him or herself in the lines on the pages of the books.

Unfortunately, the markets are littered today with commercial literatures written only to entice a specific group in the society strictly for financial gains; nothing more. Such works added to the curricula are unbefitting and abstract; therefore, they do not impress on the students the eagerness to study them except when their successes are hinged on their ability to absorb the content. In such cases, the students speedily forget the content of these works as
soon as exams are over. It is therefore, in the place of this research to suggest that enactment of literature by students should be added to the curricula and establish if this will be more beneficial to literature students in the post-primary schools and also, spur the interests of students in other disciplines.

The evaluation of the current literature curriculum will be analyzed side by side with the consequences of the era of home movies which seems to have replaced the school literature curricula among students in the post-primary schools. This trend is an unwelcomed one which bastardizes the efficiency and relevance of the classroom. The logic guiding this study will be surmised by the result of interviews of literature teachers and aesthetes whose views are specified in the form of questionnaires.

**Pragmatism, Education & Pragmatism: The Utilitarian Curriculum**

It is no gainsaying that the delivery of literature in the past twenty years has depreciated in intent, content and approach due to the incomprehensiveness of approved pedagogics on national level on one hand; and an endemic and calculated misinterpretation of the curricula designed for literature on the other hand. The delivery of literature as part of school curriculum cannot be certified applicable until many aspects of implied pragmatism combined with categorical pragmatism is ingrained in the curriculum for the teaching of literature in the post-primary education level in Nigeria; the level after which the study of literature becomes a choice.

Pedagogical approaches and curricula cannot be practically discussed in isolation; the theory of Pragmatism is relevant. Pragmatism basically adopts a practical approach; and involves standards that are achievable. In reality, pragmatism consists of solving problems practically. What this means is that pragmatism deals with life as it is; and the central subject of pragmatism is activity. Pragmatism cannot be dissociated from thought and activity; the former taking its being from the latter. Pragmatism can also be referred to as instrumentalism and experimentalism. This is because by the former, thought is declared an instrument into the discovery of an activity, and again, pragmatism supports the methods of science which is experimental. The major advocates of pragmatism include Schiller, John Dewey and William James etc. repealed.

The basis of teaching and learning is Activity – this is what pragmatism achieves. It can therefore be surmised that pragmatism propels the activity on which pedagogical processes works. Pragmatism gives education the experimental flavor that facilitates life. What it means is that man can define his successes, refuse to fail and have a good future as all these are determined by his activities. So to fail, he knows what to do, and to win, he knows what to do as well. On the basis of this logic, pragmatism makes education a democratic endeavor – where the educated has the power of choice by his or her activity. What pragmatism achieves when immersed in pedagogical methods is that it teaches the learner to be independent – able to fit into any social life one is exposed to. That is where idealism and pragmatism disagree. While idealism gives authority to the teacher, pragmatism gives authority to the student. Education should have a social function, and Education should provide real-life experience to the child. In his online article, Malik remarks that education is not so much teaching the child things he ought to know, as encouraging him to learn for himself through experimental and creative activity. (Malik, 2016)
Every curriculum that is designed to guide academic delivery for growing students must reflect pragmatism. This is the only reason why this paper advocates the inclusion of practical literature in the study of literature in English. The era of theories is fast phasing out; practicality is taking over speedily, and every curriculum which lacks pragmatic objectives will achieve little or nothing. According to the findings in the questionnaires given out to over 40 teachers of Literature in English, eighty percent of them confirm that the teachers during class periods only manage to summarize the literature texts in fifteen minutes and straightway, begin to identify the literary terms existing in the texts. Unfortunately, only few students take the initiative to go home and read the texts from cover to back; while a higher number of students solely depend on the summary which the teacher provides in fifteen minutes. These are the students that will struggle to pass literature and may never want to go back to the study of same should they have a choice.

Typically, the Literature curriculum in Nigeria consists of a list of reading texts comprising novels, poetry, plays, figures of speech, and definition of literary terms. The teachers, who are already conversant with these texts, merely dictate their points of views and other information which they find relevant for the study. Although the students are expected to buy and read up these literature texts, little or no supervision of how much the student has gained. In many instances, the students do not really read these texts as they decide to rely on the sketchy details of the storyline which the teacher is able to share in class within a forty-minute class period. As a rule in developing academic curriculum for literature in English in this clime, Literature in English teachers commence teaching by introductory lessons on definitions of literary terms including metaphor, irony, theme, setting, diction, litotes, synecdoche, euphemism, simile, oxymoron, paradox, personification, characters and characterization, rhymes, rhythm, repetition, flashback, etc. Notes on these are verbalized for basic understanding followed an application of each to the specific literary text in question. The identification of each of these terms in the text takes the most part of the class periods allocated to Literature in English in that particular instance. The teacher subsequently, enables the students to cruise through the texts in order to identify the application of each of the literary terms but fails to ascertain that these are rightly or wrongly placed within these texts.

This is where pragmatic steps in; pragmatic teaching approach is the answer to the plethora of woes which children have to deal with in the process of education. Learning should be flexible and not fixed – this is what pragmatism extols. Because human life is dynamic, there can never be any fixed educational objectives. Life and education are one and the same; therefore, if life is dynamic, education is also dynamic. After all, what is education without life? And what is life without education? If there is any objective which pragmatism fosters, it is to encourage a child/student to create value out of life. What this implies is that the onus of instilling physical, social and intellectual development on the student lies on the teacher. Man is a social being; therefore, education should teach man to be socially developed so as to fit into any social life he may find himself in the future. Pragmatism seeks to achieve the cultivation of a dynamic, adaptable mind which will be resourceful and enterprising in all situations, the mind which will have powers to originate values in an unknown future through education. Education must foster competence in the children that they may be able to tackle the problems of future life.
If enactment in tandem with reading of literature texts is added to the curriculum, the practicality of life will dawn on the students who begin to feel the reality of life. This also leaves a lasting impression of the text in their minds. After all, education is ‘learning by doing’ according to pragmatism. In many instances, teachers fail to understand that many writers mostly write in ignorance even in their usage of literary terms. It is no longer new that many recommended reading literary texts are low-quality and commercialized literatures authored by people who are either close or are in some ways, acquainted with individuals in the Ministry of Education. Today, many recommended literature texts are below the standard of those read twenty years or more. Creative writers like Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi, Wole Soyinka, Chukwuemeka Ike, Nadine Godimer, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ama Ata Aidoo, Peggy Oppong etc. are hardly found today. The original copies of their works which are fast going extinct have been abandoned for commercial intents where books of only authors who are ready to play the ‘commission’ game are recommended for schools. While it is worthwhile to phase out older works and afford new writers the opportunity to be read, deciphering only the good literature whether regional, national or world literature – should be the primary aim of the stakeholders of Literature in English. By this, authors will be encouraged to churn out good works that should qualify to be recognized duly as regional, national or world literatures.

Eze Goes To School’ a national literature, addresses the prevailing circumstances under which a typical Nigerian child goes through the process of learning; as well as mirroring the different lessons of life thrown at it even while in an academic institution. Works of William Shakespeare describes the intrigues, hatred, villainy, betrayals, love, revenge/vendetta, affluence, power tussle and hunger, and fantastical elements that characterize human life all over the world. This is one of the major factors why many of Shakespeare’s works are proclaimed world literatures. By this, they are exposes of events and experiences which are universal in nature and widely accepted as experiences that cut across cultures, skin colors and economic factors. When pragmatic method of teaching is mentioned, activity-based method comes to mind. What pragmatic teaching method sets to achieve is to enable a child learn through its own personal knowledge. It accords the child the skill of dealing with problems in a practical but feasible manner. Pragmatism is synonymous with “Learning by Doing”.

What Is Wrong With the Current Delivery?

Literature is art. Literature is life. Human subsistence cannot be divorced from art which comprises literature as the chief. Other areas of academic efforts are studied along dual approaches – theoretical and practical. As such, the study of Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Agricultural Science, Data processing/Computer Science, Fine & Applied Arts etc., are studied using the dual approach that includes theory and practical. The greatest handicap which the delivery of literature in secondary schools in Nigeria experience is the lack of practicality that is associated with its curriculum. Unlike most other subjects, literature is usually summarized in class – a method which favors only gifted children, relegating the others who are not as smart, to the background of ignorance.

The essence of incorporating this dual approach is to facilitate the pedagogical objective of the specific academic area in order to establish long-lasting impression and knowledge which is total. In the fields mentioned above, the classroom provides the students with the basic
information required for adequate comprehension although some of these are encountered in much higher academic pursuits. But basically, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Agricultural Science, Data processing/Computer Science, Fine Arts, Music, Home Management/Food & Nutrition, French etc., in the post-primary internal and external examinations are all studied using the afore-mentioned dual pedagogical approach. In many other fields in higher levels of study, the practical aspects are more elaborate considering the SIWES (Students Industrial Work Experience Schemes) that affords students of this academic areas to officially work in related workplaces in order to demonstrate practically, the theories shared with them in the classroom. If this be the case, it is not out of place to apply the same dual pedagogical approach to the study of literature as well.

In the process of adopting the dual pedagogical approach, inclusive education has also been found useful in the education of students in the post-primary schools. Inclusive education refers to the form of education that creates an opportunity for all students (adults and children) to be taught within the same learning environment irrespective of the physical, mental, psychological and social challenges the child may be dealing with. Educationists and trained teachers posit that the best form of pedagogical approach is the inclusive-classroom. Thus, the pragmatic teaching approach provides a breeding environment for inclusive education. Thani defines Inclusive education as an approach that aims to address the learning needs of children and adults especially the ones that face threats of rejection and marginalization. Quoting from a UNESCO publication of 1994, Thani defines inclusive education from a pragmatic point of view, “Inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing excluding within and from education.”

The keyword in the above quote is “increased participation” which pragmatic teaching approach fosters. Thani further explains that inclusive education involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision which covers all children of appropriate age range and a conviction that is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. The benefits of inclusive education are abundant and indubitable; all of which sum up the aims and approach of the pragmatic teaching approach. Inclusion, therefore, is about creating interesting, varied and inspiring learning opportunities for all learners; ensuring all learners contribute and are never disadvantaged by methods, language or resources. In a nutshell, inclusive learning activities which motivate and enthuse learners is the best form of education and this is achieved by students enacting the literature works during their class lessons in order to leaving a lasting impression. This applies to every subject and even in Literature in English, enactment of plays, novels and poetry is the most effective way of ingraining in a child the lessons and contents of every piece of work.

**Home Movies: A Fad Displacing Pedagogical Intent**

The home movie industry in Nigeria is popularly known as Nollywood. Home movies refer to motion pictures enacted by a cast of three or more in a specific language that is sometimes translated for wider view, which are mostly watched at home for entertainment and education. In a web publication titled, ‘Influence of Nigerian Home Video Movies on Secondary School Students in Enugu South L.G.A.’ under the auspices of Samuel Kenneth James, movies have been defined as cultural artifacts created by special cultures which reflect
those cultures, and in turn affect them. Movie is entertainment, and a powerful method for educating or indoctrinating citizens.

In Nigeria, home movie as art officially kickstarted as an industry in 1993 with the production of an Igbo movie titled, ‘Living in Bondage’ in which the Igbo language was used and the cast and crew had Igbos in the majority. Subsequently, many Nigerian producers delved into the production of home movies in other Nigerian languages including Efik, Ibibio, Yoruba, Hausa, Bini and many other Igbo dialects. This was equally followed by a large following of Nigerians as the release of each movie was received with great expectations and appreciation. Gradually, the era of western movies addiction faded away, except for few with fantastical elements or sci-fiction.

Today, the home movie industry has outrun the soap operas and the stage plays which hitherto, was every Nigerian’s preference. Although many of these movies are rated, individuals outside the permitted audience also find a way of enjoying these movies. This means that in obnoxiously sexual scenes, lethal contents of crime scenes etc. specifically allowable for only audience that are above 18 years of age, is also been viewed by children. This is the part which becomes of interest in this research. The level at which these home movies have taken away the classroom effect which the study of Literature should impact on the children is therefore, lost in the wake of the addiction of today’s youths to home movies. What is more; the class has lost its value to the sometimes, obscene information passed on to children right under the watch of their own parents. It is obtainable in the Nigeria of today, for a child of 13 to remember the cast of a Nollywood movie than that of a novel recommended in its school curriculum for Literature.

Home movie making unfortunately supplants the victories that should be attributed to a classroom curriculum. In organized societies, movies are strictly aimed at entertaining and conscientising a particular group of people or addressing specific and endemic societal issues. Nigerian films mostly emphasize entertainment, ignoring the educational and developmental aspects of film (Ekweariri, 2015). The aims of the production of home movies in Nigeria is mainly for commercial reasons first and foremost, and entertainment; and not educational. The settings and style of these home movies are far from being realistic. Every rich Nigerian lives in a mansion where his wife strolls around in heavy make-up and expensive clothing. They fail to capture the fact that many rich Igbo men whom they mostly mirror, do not live in such flamboyance and their wives are not gorgeously dressed all the time as they are presented in these movies. Therefore, it is wrong to presume that these home movies are educational to a typical Nigerian child in the post-primary phase. Quoting from a source, Ekweariri observes that the main function of film, or rather art, is to inform, educate and entertain. The function of education is presently neglected to a great degree in the Nigerian film industry.

Movies are either historical in nature; or purely fictional. In whatever form they appear, they hardly educate as it is accessed by almost every group of individuals in the society. Taking an instance is the case of the very first instance of home movie produced by the group of novices in the Nigerian movie industry titled, ‘Living in Bondage’. This movie tells the story of a young man, Andy who is desperate to be rich. His best male friend Paulo, persuades him to join a secret cult and subsequently, obey the condition of becoming rich which is sacrificing his beautiful wife, Merit whom he loved dearly, to some mammon god. The consequences of
this action are enormous. Not only did the unhappy ghost of Merit haunt her husband, other members of the cult group run into different problems and the different people who are involved directly face one type of karma or the other, the wealth acquired by this means gradually disappear and the cult members lose their loved relations whom they sacrifice recklessly.

Although LIB is a movie that is aimed at conscientising young male adults to desist from desperation of getting rich by all means, young ladies are also cautioned to dissociate with men with questionable source of living. It is noteworthy to observe at this juncture, that old women and young children who have nothing directly to gain from the movie have access to this movie, and there is currently hardly an average Nigerian who is not conversant of the LIB storyline. The question here becomes, “What should an eight-year old Nigerian child who watches LIB with his/her parents gain at the end?” Considering the publicity of many movies in Nigeria, the less-affected are reached most of the times. A home movie which tells the story of a wicked mother-in-law is mostly viewed by children and teenagers whose times are bound to change long before they became mothers-in-laws; and that which tells the story of how a rich man was killed by his wicked family residing in the village through his association with them are actually youths who hardly visit their native towns or ever have been there. A situation where the young people could spend three to four hours watching television movie or videos could justify the fact that home videos/movies viewing among young people have engendered myriads of bad habits and behaviors (Njoku, 2016).

Conclusion

Literature in English as a subject in the post-primary level of education should be demonstrated to establish knowledge in the minds of the students. The delivery of the subject of Literature like all other subjects should not be limited to only textual analysis and identification of terms. The curriculum should be positioned pragmatically to achieve the aim for the introduction of the subject. Literature is not fun when the reader fails to remember the names of the villain, protagonist, settings etc. which is common in recent times among students of Literature. It is easy to find a student who read Chinua Achebe’s novel, ‘Things Fall Apart’ and is unable to list the names of his sons, or the names of his wives or the name of his special daughter. This is because practicality is not included in the curriculum and this adversely wanes the interest and knowledge of the students. Evaluating the impact of the competition of the traditional classroom with the home movie video, the Nigerian student is at a higher risk of learning less. As Kochhar rightly explains, for the achievement of comprehensive objectives of teaching different subjects, methods are needed which could expose the pupils to knowledge, and experiences helpful in the development of understanding, critical thinking, practical skills and interests to be developed through a particular subject.

References


Influence of Nigerian Home Video Movies on Secondary School Students in Enugu South L.G.A.


