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IMPACT OF LITERATURE (LITERARY TEXTS) AS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY ON DEVELOPING READING AND WRITING SKILLS AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL II ESL STUDENTS IN LAGOS STATE.

Abstract:

This paper presented some research based opinions on the use of literature in language classroom especially for reading and writing skills development. It also sought to determine the impact of literature (literacy texts) as instructional strategy on developing reading and writing skills of students in Senior Secondary School, class II in ESL Classroom. The paper also attempted to establish various arguments in support of literature as authentic materials to be used in language classroom, especially in teaching the language skills of reading and writing. With stratified randomized sampling technique, 60 S.S II Students were selected from a Senior Secondary School, FCE(T), Akoka. The study used Descriptive survey and Quasi Experimental Method. A literary text titled "A Women in Her Prime" which is among the prescribed text for WAEC (West African Examination Council) was given to the students to read. There are two groups of respondents in this work, i.e the controlled (30) and experimental group (30). The experimental group was given a kind of guide or intervention on how to read and respond to questions in writing form. The students in these two groups were observed and accessed. In reading, students reading interest, speed, comprehension, word recognition and right pronunciation were measured using the scale of insufficient, average reading, good reading and excellent reading. In writing, students were asked to write on topics such as summary of ideas presented in the text, themes and subject matter, character etc. A random picking was done on which of the written essays to be used for analysis. The data gathered were analyzed using a paired sample t-test to compare the significant different between the performance of the controlled group and experimental group. The performance of those who were not exposed to the intervention /literary skills and instructional guide is ($X = 19.28$; $SD = 3.680$) while those in experimental group is ($X = 35.67$; $SD = 5.299$). This is shown in the calculated value (t-cal) of 13.127 which is greater than the critical value (t-crit) of 1.98 with 99 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. It is recommended that the literature of the targeted language should be used, taking into consideration the objective. Relevant classroom activities and techniques should be considered by teachers. The paper concluded by affirming that the use of literature is an adequate instructional strategy in ESL classroom, hence, should be employed by ESL teachers.

Keywords:

Literature, Language skills, Instructional Strategy, ESL, Intervention Assessment, Stylistic and Language Based Approach.

JEL Classification: A31

Introduction and Literature Review

The use of literature in language teaching is traced back to 19th century when dominantly, grammar translation was the order of the day and the most popular technique was the translation of literacy texts in mother tongue. Adversely, the use of literature in language classroom became obsolete even in the time of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Several arguments have since been put against and for the use of literature as an instructional strategy and authentic material for teaching in language classroom McKay, (1982) points out several ills of such approach to language teaching. In his arguments, he points out that literature lacks any contribution in the teaching of grammar which he considers as the most important goal of language teaching, considering the structural complexity of the unique use of language in literature. He furthers his opinion that literature does not help students to reach their academic and occupational goals. He also refers to the specific cultural viewpoints which are reflected in every piece of literature. There are several others with the same view but the voice of these practitioners who are against the use of literature in language classrooms are echoed in McKay's summations.

Contrary to this view, the use of literature in ESL classroom is enjoying a revival for number of reasons. From the middle of 1980's, the interest in literature as a teaching resource has been reviewed and continued till date. It was identified that lack of empirical research in support of the facilitative roles of literature is the main reason for the negative views (Maley, 2001).

Liaw, (2001) points that literacy works provide additional materials of grammar practice, vocabulary learning and translation. The arguments continue in support of the use of literature in language teaching. This is also evident from publications of text books on the role of literature for the purpose of teaching and learning language. We have examples of Duff & Maley, 1991; Gower and Pearson, 1986, Hill, 1986; Maley & Duff, 1989; Mc Rae, 1991; and Shreath, 2008 and list of others. Ghosen, (2002) and Ven, 2009 echo their sentiments that the motivational influence of literature in developing students' language skills acquisition, especially in reading and writing. The authenticity of literature as instructional strategy in teaching the English Language skills are further consolidated by Bekcher & Hirvels, 2000; Erkeya, 2005; Nasr, 2001.

In this paper therefore, a gross support for the use of literature as an instructional strategy in teaching the skills of reading and writing becomes a preoccupation.

Theoretical Framework

There is the need to assess students' proficiencies and performances both in reading and writing in order to determine the adequacy of literature as instructional strategy in language classroom. The goal of assessment in the context of the impact of literature in teaching reading and writing is not only to measure a student's present performance in reading and writing, but also to discover what the student would be able to do given both an appropriate instructional setting and appropriate instructional practices. In this paper, students were given a guided reading and some literary skills required in text interpretation in language classroom to acquire language skills. To accomplish this goal, we employ an assessment model called "intervention assessment" designed to elicit student strengths and needs, and to gain insights into the instructional processes that are likely to optimize students' achievement in reading and writing. Intervention assessment is based on the well-established concept of diagnostic teaching of reading. Intervention Assessment emphasizes both the identification of the areas of weakness

or difficulty and also the identification of the instructional conditions that enable the student to experience success. We considered the reading interest, reading comprehension, reading speed, word recognition and pronunciation against the checklist ranging from insufficient, average reading, good reading to excellent reading. For writing, organization of ideas in a logic manner, drawing inferences from reading, coherence, and mechanicals formed the checklist in grading students essay on given topics from the text.

This approach to assessment is grounded in the cognitive theory of Vygotsky (1978) and in the particular notion that optimal learning occurs within a “zone of proximal development.” In other words, as we work with students, we seek to understand the ways students read and write on their own, with no assistance or support from a teacher or a more capable peer, and we also seek to understand and observe the types of assistance or support that enable the student to successfully accomplish tasks that prove too difficult for the student to do alone. This is the method employed in this paper by creating two groups: Controlled and Experimental by “trying out” a variety of research-based instructional interventions that enable the student to experience success.

Also, in examining the place of literature in language classroom in ESL settings, it is noted that learning the language is the foremost goal and learning the language means learning the language skills. In other words, the improvement of language abilities such as comprehension, writing, reading, vocabulary, and other language skills should be focused in ESL classroom. The stylistic and language based model take cognizance of literature as a “text”. This makes it relevant with what ESL teachers need for their language classes (Carber & Long, 1991; Widdowsin, 1992; Mc Rae, 2008; Watson & Zygier, 2007). In case of language based, as the name implies, this model considers literature for language development and awareness purpose (Lazer, 1993). This paper therefore finds its root within these methodological approaches that prescribe an instructional design that show the direct integration of cognitive learning theory with prescribed instructional strategies.

Statement of Problem

It has been observed that the reading and writing abilities of students, especially in ESL classroom are going down the drains and the need to revive and emphasis on the acquisition and development of these skills become a serious task in ESL classroom. The need to develop the skills of reading and writing in language classroom is very crucial because of its important roles, not only for language skills acquisition purpose for English classroom but also for the general success in academics and professional goals. The skills of reading and writing are intertwined and embedded in the larger picture of literacy. (Daysen, 1992). Hence, the need to help students develop these skills hand-in-hand. . To develop these skills therefore, there is need to identify appropriate materials. This calls for re-internalizing literature as an instructional strategy in developing reading and writing skills, because in developing student’s writing skills, some levels of reading are required, and vice-versa. In other words, solving the reading and writing problems as dependent skills require materials that have authentic features for such task.

Purpose of the Study

Owing to the authentic and delightful nature of literature, it is believed to create some levels of motivation for the students. The use of literature in language classroom, especially in developing students’ reading and writing skills present opportunities to read

and write (Rubin & Hansen, 1986; Henson. Et.al, 1991). The purpose of this paper therefore is:

- To determine the significant difference in the performance of the students who are exposed to literacy skills and those who are not.

Research Question

- Is there any significant difference in the performance of students who are exposed to literary skills and those who are not?

Research Hypothesis

- There will be no significant difference in the performance of students who are exposed to literary skills and those who are not.

Methodology

This paper employed a descriptive survey and Quasi Experimental method. A literary text titled "A Woman in Her Prime" was recommended for student to be read. The students were given two weeks to read and respond to the text. There are two groups, the experimental and controlled. The experimental groups were given specific framework for creative responses to guide their reading and writing, while the controlled groups were only given the text to be read without any framework.

Population

The population of the study comprised of all Senior Secondary School II (SS II class) students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, in Lagos Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State.

Sample

Sixty (60) S.S. II students from F.C.E. (T), Secondary School were used. Thirty (30) for controlled and thirty (30) for experimental.

Instruments

The study did an observation of students' reading in the classroom on two occasions. The prescribed text were been read within the gap of two weeks. Questions were set to test the students' proficiency level both in reading and writing.

On reading, the following instruments (checklist)

Reading interest

Reading speed

Reading comprehension

Word recognition & Correct Pronunciation

On writing, the following topics were given to the students to write about:

Summary of the text, (i.e main idea),

Short essay on characters

Subject matter and themes identified in the text

Writing stories from the text.

Validation and reliability

The researcher developed the instruments based on what she set out to inquire. Other colleagues in the same field with similar orientation also helped in checking the question for validation and reliability. The result showed a correlation and level of consistency which further validated the instrument.

Procedure

The researcher personally observed the reading of the prescribed text on two occasions in a classroom settings and set questions to get information on student's level and ability to read and write. One research question was generated which the researcher based her test questions on. The respondents were grouped into two, that is, the controlled group which were 30 in number and the experimental group also 30. The researcher used her personally made checklist to award grades to the respondents.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Data collected were analyzed using t-test. The hypothesis was tested and the results are as discussed bellow.

Hypothesis (H₀): There will be no significant difference between the performance of students who are exposed to literary skills and those who are not.

Table 1: Difference between the performance of students who are exposed to literary skills and those who are not

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit.	Remark
Students who are not exposed to literacy skills	30	19.28	3.680	29	13.127	1.699	H ₀ is rejected
Students who are exposed to literacy skills	30	35.67	5.299				

$\alpha = 0.05$; $df = 179$; $t\text{-cal} = 13.127$; $t\text{-crit.} = 1.699$

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare significant difference between the performance of students who were exposed to literary skills and those who were not.

Table 1 showed the performance of those who were not exposed to literary skills ($X = 19.28$; $SD = 3.680$) and those who were exposed to literacy skills ($X = 35.67$; $SD = 5.299$). Also shown is the calculated value ($t\text{-cal}$) of 13.127 which is greater than the critical value ($t\text{-crit.}$) of 1.98 with 29 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. It therefore means that the formulated null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is upheld. This implies that there is significant difference between the performance of students who were exposed to literary skills and those who were not.

Having established that there is a difference, we then look which of the mean scores from the different set of scores is higher. In this case, it was found that the mean score ($X = 35.67$) of students exposed to literary skills is greater than the mean score ($X = 19.28$) of students who were not exposed to literacy skills. Therefore we can conclude that there was a significant increase in the students' performance of those exposed to literary skills than those who were not exposed to literary skills.

Conclusion

It is clear from our discussions in this paper that literature does have something very special to offer to language learning. It is also very evident that it is motivating and engaging, thus, has capacity to build students skills both in reading and writing beyond the classroom. The study has shown the value of literature, bringing us to understand the importance of the teacher in providing learning tasks directed at achieving the goals of language learning, especially the targeted skills. Using literature in the language classroom is a concept that has its focal point in language development. Thus, any syllabus based on this concept should base learning on language first. In other words, the development of language skills should always remain primary in ESL classes while using literature.

Evidently, apart from the review of different literature and practitioners who are in support of literature for language learning, the result of the findings in this paper has also established that literature is actually appropriate in language classroom.

Recommendations

Based on the survey of literatures read on this topic of discussion and the result of our findings, it is therefore recommended that:

1. Appropriate selection of text that can promote interest and interaction between the learners and texts should be done.
2. Teaching using literary texts should be representational rather than referential (Mc Rae, 1994).
3. Integrated activities and drills should be given to students to promote acquisition of skills.
4. Teaching should be goal oriented using literature of the targeted language.
5. More empirical research should be done on the use of literature in language classroom.
6. Literature generates creativity in language and imagination and should feature in any educational system that regards discovery and students' delights as essential components of learning process.

Topics for Further Studies.

- Reading and writing skills in developing students' communicative competence in Nigeria schools.
- Methodological issues on the use of literature for language skills development.

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