

Towards Better Children's Literature for Addressing Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

Until recently, Literature was not a prerequisite even to those studying English Language at Masters or Ph.D level. To date, not all the universities in Nigeria require a credit pass in literature before a candidate is given admission to get a degree in English Language. This may be partly attributed to the negative perception the authorities have of the relevance of Literature to the development of a nation. Regrettably, even the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) which is charged with the responsibility of producing the curriculum for Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE), and which incorporates the teaching of Literature; does not provide a very rich and highly desired content for its products. Accordingly, this paper examines the current minimum curriculum (2012 edition), for English Language, with the view to critically ascertain its readiness in terms of addressing contemporary challenges in Nigeria, insecurity being one of them. It has been established here that insecurity in Nigeria can be partly attributed to lack of contemporary Literature courses at the NCE training institutions. The paper recommends the need for making Literature a compulsory subject right from the secondary school.

Introduction

English Language is one of the basic requirements for admission into the Nigerian tertiary education. This might have been the reason why the National Policy on Education

adopted the use of English as the medium of instruction from the fourth year of primary school. This continues up to the tertiary level in all disciplines, with the exception of Arabic and some portion of the courses taught in Hausa and Islamic Studies (Kamal, 1).

However, teaching English Language without due consideration to Literature may not add much value to the behavior or morality of Nigerian pupils. Apparently, one hardly sees difference of morality between a candidate with a credit in English Language and one with an ordinary pass or even a failed result. This clearly demonstrates that an important discipline like Literature is being neglected, and where it is offered, particularly at the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) curriculum, the content is neither very rich nor much desirable.

Accordingly, emphasis should not only be on the need to incorporate Literature from the grassroots, but it should be on desirable content, which obviously is lacking, especially in the NCE curriculum that produces teachers who eventually teach in both primary and upper basic levels. The menace of Boko Haram, kidnapping, armed robbery, cultism, among others, are not natural problems, neither shall we waste our precious time seeking for natural solution. In Nigeria, insecurity and many other problems are artificial, caused due to lack of patriotism, nationalism, sincerity, brotherhood, cooperation and other virtues.

Unfortunately, school, which is the second agent of socialization, seems to do little about the insecurity challenges facing Nigeria. Even in the NCE curriculum, right values are neither spread through Literature nor reflected in the objectives of NCE Literature curriculum under focus. Relatively, objectives are drawn based on the needs of society and are broadly classified into three domains: Cognitive domain – dealing primarily with knowledge, affective domain – dealing with behavior; and lastly, psycho-motor domain which is concerned with skills. The issue of insecurity which has become very problematic is predominantly an affective domain, being an aspect dealing with behavior modeling. It is pertinent to examine the concept of Literature, being the core aspect of this paper, and other related areas as a highlight to the discussion of the relevance of children's literature in addressing insecurity in Nigeria.

The Concept of Literature

The concept of Literature which originated from the Latin word “writing” has been commonly used since the eighteenth century to designate fictional and imaginative writing

such as poetry, prose and drama. In an expanded use, it also designates any other writing (including Philosophy, History and even scientific works addressed to general audience) that is especially distinguished in form, expression and emotional power (Simon,) With reference to imaginative writing, Literature is a piece of writing, a body of works of art, especially novels, plays and poems (in contrast to technical books and newspaper, magazine, etc) or piece of writing or printed information on a particular subject. Many commentators see Literature as a study that concerns itself with the representation of the whole range of human life and activities either in prose, poetry or dramatic form. This means that literature takes a closer look at all ramifications of human life, including the words and actions of people and expresses this in language that is not ordinary (figurative language.) From the foregoing, it is glaring that there is no single and acceptable definition of literature. It all depends on the perspective one approaches the concept from.

As we shall see later, none of the four objectives of teaching English as a single major course at the NCE program has any bearing on developing students' literary ability, let alone contributing meaningfully to the development of brotherhood, peace and stability in Nigeria which the country needs above anything else. Accordingly, teaching of Literature is necessary because of numerous advantages, which include:

- i. Transmission of Cultural Values
- ii. Character Development
- iii. Entertainment
- iv. Communication
- v. Inspiration
- vi. Analysis

Summarizing the stated points, one can deduce that Literature helps learners to develop their understanding of other cultures, inculcates tolerance and leans more on the need to love one another avoid war and learn other important things that cannot be found in regular English Language class. Similarly, when students enjoy and appreciate Literature, it gives them the ability to develop interest in books and reading as they move away from their studies and into their adult lives. As such, they have the confidence to approach and tackle new forms of books and writing, since they were exposed to a range of reading during their

school days. And they can gradually cherish the spirit of morality, patriotism and avoidance of vices

Children's Literature

It is not every form of a literary book that should be taught to innocent children; as it may cause more harm than good. The subject matter and story lines in children's literature must be in harmony with the age, cultural background and experience of the learners. However, it must reflect the changes that adolescents experience. Thus, young adult Literature reflects their experience with conflicts, focuses on themes that interest young people, includes young protagonists and mostly young characters, and has language that is common to children.

Accordingly, issues in children's literature should focus on friendship, love, relationship within families, relationship to authority figures, and peer pressure, diversity as it relates to gender, socio-cultural and or socio-economic status. Equally, important themes in children's literature may include drug abuse, depression, suicide, extremism, bullying etc. Additionally, literature written primarily for children, according to (Lesesne 4) should reflect on:

- i. The age and development of the children, by addressing their reading abilities, thinking levels and interest levels
- ii. Contemporary issues, problems, and experiences with characters to which adolescents can relate. This includes topics such as dealing with peer pressure, specifically relating to drugs, alcohol, and sexual experimentation; and facing the realities of addiction and pregnancy

Deducing from the foregoing citations, it is clear that children's Literature plays very important roles such that no educational system should ignore it. This is because it is commonly believed that charity begins at home. When desirable behaviors are injected or inculcated into the minds of young one, who are the leaders of tomorrow, and their behavior modeled positively, the future of such a society is certainly bright.

More so as Nigeria is a complex society with a lot of pressing and alarming challenges such as economic, political and more devastating security challenges. Specifically, the menace of insurgency mostly committed by misguided youths has claimed the lives of

many innocent Nigerians; among them are children and women. This is partly because the educational system has not accorded right position to the teaching and learning of Literature. The NCCE curriculum which produces NCE teachers does not fully recognize Literature or children's Literature. This, as we shall see later, becomes glaring when comparing English Language courses with the highly desirable Literature courses. Thus, the NCE students themselves are seriously backward in some aspects of training such as skills, knowledge and morality; let alone be capable to teach others effectively. Ironically, the NCE curriculum emphasizes more Language courses which do not, to some extent, add any value to the morality of those who passed them even with distinctions. And frankly speaking, while it is good to have good pronunciation, sound grammar, and a well articulated essay, it is also good for Nigerians to learn tolerance, sincerity, patriotism, respect, love and other good manners. In order to put everything into perspective, we observe the objectives of teaching English as a single major, as enshrined in the NCCE (2012) Minimum Standard. The objectives of the NCE English program are to:

- i. Develop the full English skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing for communicative purpose;
- ii. Make students to become confident and competent in the use of spoken and written English for various purposes.
- iii. Equip students to teach English effectively at the J.S.S level; and
- iv. Prepare students for further studies in the subject.

Expectedly, there should be synergy between the objectives and body of knowledge to be presented. The latter is always to make the realization of the former. Thus, having not seen even a single objective reflecting on Literature, one is liable not to expect any bearing of Literature courses in the main English single major NCCE curriculum. Meanwhile, perusing through the NCE English curriculum, though Literature courses are not captured boldly in the objectives, they however, featured only that they are not sufficient enough to address the contemporary lingering security challenges in Nigeria. The course outline is hereby presented, as extracted from NCCE (2012), for guidance:

Year I: First and Second Semester Courses

Course Codes	Course Titles	Credit (s)	Status
ENG111	Practical Listening Skills and Speech Work	2	C
ENG112	Introduction to Phonetics and Phonology	2	C
ENG113	Basic Grammar	1	C
ENG114	Introduction to Literature	1	C
ENG121	Basic Reading Skills and Comprehension	2	C
ENG122	English Language and Literature Methods	2	C
ENG123	Modern African Literature/Female Writers in Africa	2	C
Total			12

Regrettably, out of the seven available courses in NCE 100 Level First Semester, only two have the bearing of Literature and they only represent three credits units out of the twelve credit units. Accordingly, none of the two Literature courses is children oriented. Obviously, it is good having the course: **ENG 114, Introduction to Literature**, where teachers are introduced to the basic concepts of Literature, before determining a particular text where they see practically all the concepts learned theoretically. Notably, it is obvious that any foundation that is not solid is liable to fail. Thus, an important course like the Introduction to Literature should be reflected in two credit units, to pave way for enough teaching, training and acquisition of more versatile knowledge, unlike the way it has been captured in just one credit unit that invariably means one hour, which is grossly inadequate. Until the teachers are well trained in Literature, following the principle of learning which emphasizes the teaching of simple to complex, via teaching them enough concepts in the Introduction of Literature, they will certainly find it very difficult to read and clearly understand its genres. Therefore, if their understanding is fragile certainly it will affect their performance. Thus, in an attempt to teach or inculcate good values to the younger ones, they may end-up corrupting their minds. Consequently, the innocent children may develop avoidable hatred and enmity which is not healthy for any country, let alone Nigeria where we dearly need unity in diversity.

The second Literature course is **ENG 123, Modern African Literature/ Female Writers in Africa**. Not that the course is not relevant or does not yield good result; however, it will yield better result, particularly towards addressing insecurity, if emphasis is given to Traditional African Literature followed by Nigerian Literature where issues of national interests are freely discussed before Modern African Literature and Female Writers in Africa.

Year II: First and Second Semester Courses

Course Codes	Course Titles	Credit (s)	Status
ENG211	The Structure of English	2	C
ENG212	Applied English Linguistics	2	C
ENG213	Selected European Authors	2	C
ENG214	Research Method	2	C
ENG221	Composition	2	C
ENG222	Summary Writing II	1	C
ENG223	Critical Theory and Practical Criticism	2	C
ENG224	Young Adult Literature	1	C
Total			14

Instead of having Selected European Authors, it is better to have a course like Selected Nigerian Authors or at least, Selected African Authors. By so doing, the youths who are the future leaders will learn a lot about their immediate community and the history of their fatherland, unlike what the NCCE (2012) minimum standard suggests. The movement to be studied, according to the NCCE document, should include Elizabethan, Neoclassical, the Romantic, the Victorian and the Modernists demonstrated in selected works. If the movements are studied, they will contribute little to a Nigerian child who needs peace and unity in diversity more than anything else.

One of the objectives of teaching **ENG 223: Critical Theory and Practical Criticism** is to introduce students to great critical debates so that they can see how different schools of thought perceive literary production and their techniques of appreciation. Another one is to equip students with the skills of interpreting and evaluating literary texts. Sincerely

speaking, if the few Literature courses in the NCCE minimum standard have the same or similar objectives and focus, some of Nigerian's problems including that of insecurity, will be reduced.

Throughout the NCE Program, only one course bears Young Adult Literature which is another name for children's Literature. The course, according to the NCCE minimum standard, is designed to introduce the features, themes, trends of young adult Literature to trainees with the background of what their **challenges** are.

It is the only course that both the text title and authors names are familiar such that children feel at home. Expectedly, the authors are conversant with the contemporary challenges like that of insurgency. Therefore, until similar courses are given preference, the young generation will find it very difficult to understand the problems bedeviling their country, let alone taking corrective measures. Ironically, instead of allocating enough credit units to the Young Adult or (children's) literature, being an important course to teach the spirit of unity, cooperation, brotherhood and togetherness, it is only reflected in one credit unit.

Year 111: Second Semester Courses

Course Codes	Course Titles	Credit (s)	Status
ENG321	Long Essay	1	C
ENG322	Varieties of English and Stylistics	2	C
ENG323	Theatre and Drama in Education	1	E
ENG324	Language Testing	1	C
ENG325	Orature	1	E
Total			6

NCCE Minimum Standard (2012)

Considering the two Literature courses above, the contents of **ENG 323 Theatre and Drama in Education** seem to be more of methodology while **ENG 325 Orature** centers principally on oral tradition.

If truly Literature, particularly children's Literature will serve as a vehicle for addressing the menace of insecurity in Nigeria, the perspective this paper is agitating for, honestly, then is the need for a holistic review of the curriculum to be in consonance with

the security challenges of Nigeria. It is the advocacy of this paper that NCE English Language teachers need more rigorous Literature courses that will acquaint and make them highly versatile with pressing challenges like drug abuse, armed robbery, kidnapping, religious extremism, political thuggery and general insecurity based on Nigerian context. This is necessary because school is the second agent of socialization. It is the place that should purify and cleanse all the negative ideas the child might have acquired at home or among peers.

Accordingly, school can only do that when the curriculum is very rich, contains Literature courses that when a student pass them, the society will begin to see a change that will certainly transform it from savage to civilized, cruel to kind, and bad to good. Only a well-constructed Literature curriculum can do that; purely Language courses such as Basic Grammar, the Structure of English, Introduction to Phonetics and Phonology, etc, are not linked to behavior or morality.

Therefore, it is the belief of this paper that as far as English Language is concerned it is mainly through Literature that right values can be inculcated into the minds of Nigerian pupils who are the leaders of tomorrow to prepare them for a bright future. In doing so, care must be taken not to include every form of Literature course, especially at the early stage, as this can do more harm than good. For instance ENG 213 (Selected European Authors), being learnt by a young teacher who is trained to teach in primary or upper basic class will not add any substance to such a teacher. In fact, if care is not taken he may end up being infused with some negative ideas which he will extend to his innocent and highly fragile students or pupils. Thus, a scrutinized content of children's Literature is needed and, not just every literary text that appears interesting to the teachers.

Conclusively, since it is argued that no nation can rise above the level of its teachers, and many believe the expression "the earlier the better", the earlier The NCE curriculum for English Language becomes all-encompassing, taking into cognizance the incorporation of many desirable Literature courses, the better the change in some of the lingering anomalies, for improved security in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Considering the discussions above, the following recommendations are found worthy:

1. There is the need for a regular review of NCE curriculum to meet up with contemporary challenges.
2. There should be a striking balance between language and Literature courses in the NCE English curriculum.
3. Writers should focus their writings on the contemporary problems and challenges of Nigeria.
4. Emphasis should be given to Children's Literature as a solid foundation for learning more about Literature
5. Literature should be made compulsory in the secondary school and also requirement for admission into any course at the tertiary level.

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