USING LITERATURE IN ENHANCING CONTENT AREA INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between English language and literature in English could not be overestimated. This paper takes a look at the relevance of literature in enhancing content area instruction and how best to reap the fruits of collaborative approach. A three point frame work via statement of the objectives, the activities to be employed towards attainment of the objectives and the assessment techniques are proposed. The paper however, contends that in order to enhance continued learning of the language beyond the four corners of the classroom, some obstacles or challenges must not only be checked but also be well addressed in that literature provides an avenue for language in use.

Introduction

The status of English as a second language (L2) in Nigeria makes it a pre-requisite not only for educational purposes but also for professional and socio-cultural relationships. Indeed its effective teaching at all levels of education in Nigeria becomes imperative in that the language is not only a core-subject on the school curriculum but more importantly it is the vehicle by means of which all other subjects (with a few exceptions of courses offered in other languages) are driven. The need therefore, to improve its teaching and learning process foregrounds the stand of the paper in that it has direct links to the performance level of other fields of knowledge by the learners. Content area instruction is the teaching of the subject matter of other fields with an integrated aim of English language teaching. This is because the learning of the language is found to be very effective if other content teachers incorporate it in their instructions. Literature is central to language learning. The collaborative effort of the literature (content) teacher in enhancing English language learning could not be over-emphasized. This is sequel

to the fact that, literature facilitates the rate at which a student could master the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

Content Area Instruction

In a bid to make our discourse plain and unambiguous it becomes imperative to clear certain grounds. Thus, an examination of the concept of content area instruction becomes desirable. To Briton, Snow and Wesche (1989), content area instruction refers to "the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills". This goes to show that it is an integration of a particular content for instance mathematics, history, science, etc with second language aim. In other words, the content of these fields of knowledge are blended with linguistic pedagogy to integrate and facilitate the learning of L2. According to Krashen (1982), "in content area instruction, students can acquire the content area of the subject matter with comprehensible input and simultaneously increase their language skills". To achieve the goal of language skills improvement, the scholar states that, the focus of the teaching is on the authentic and meaningful input not on the grammatical form.

Two types of models in the content area instruction were put up by Briton, Snow and Wesche (1989). The first type is a theme based model in which selected topics or themes provide the content for students to learn. From the selected topics, the L2 teachers should extract language activities which follow naturally from the content material. For instance, teachers can select the topic of "marketing" and have the students engage in a variety of activities such as pricing, buying ad selling, window shopping, bargaining, comparing and contrasting available goods and prices and a host of others. Under such circumstances, student would be more familiar with the content and meaning of the topic. In this connection, Krashen and Terrell (1998), suggest that the L2 teachers must choose reading texts at an appropriate level of complexity and the topic has to hold students' interest to increase their motivation for learning.

The second type of content area approach is the adjunct model. This model emphasizes the importance of concurrently teaching the academic subject matter and foreign language skills (Briton et al, 1989). This can best be exemplified by using the subject matter of a given field of study say business studies to enhance the learning of English by the content teacher. Besides having access to the subject matter of business, the students could be helped to develop an understanding of technical vocabularies, use technical clues to determine meaning, answer various question types accurately, read diagrams, graphs, charts and make correct use of reference materials. In so doing, the four language skills

via, listening, speaking, reading and writing of the learners must have been enhanced to a certain level.

To achieve the enhancement however, content area teacher must be well committed to the success of not only the mastery of his subject matter but also that of the English language. At this juncture, we need to caution that it is not the duty of the content area teacher to teach the intricacies of the English language but should help towards proficiency in correct pronunciation of key words in his subject, correct spellings and of course good sentence construction both in speech and in writing in terms of the interaction that goes on in his class. In a research carried out by Custodio and Sutton (1998), it was found out that content area instruction often use authentic tasks centred around authentic materials, so it can help language minority students increase their motivation and provide more opportunities for them to explore prior knowledge.

Furthermore, in content area instruction, the use of sight words could help immensely. These according to Roe, Stoodt & Burns (1987) "are words students have memorized and are able to identify immediately". For instance, secondary school students usually have a good score of sight words that help them read content materials with understanding. Each time content teacher introduces a new technical or specialized term, that is important to the understanding of the content area, his goal is to turn the new word into a sight word for the students; the study of the subject would be inefficient if many of the important words had to be analysed carefully before recognition occurred.

The teacher can help impress new words on the students' memories and turn then into sight words by writing the words on the chalkboard, pronouncing and discussing them with the students. Knowledge of sight words also enable students to use contextual analysis. This is the use of context in which an unknown word occurs in order to identify the word (Roe et al, 1987). Contextual analysis skills are powerful tools for secondary students to use in reading area material and teachers will benefit greatly from helping students become aware of the context and its usefulness in word identification. Burns (1983), is of the opinion that a reader learns word meaning through experience, word association, concept development, contextual analysis, structural analysis and the dictionary. It therefore becomes the duty of the teacher to provide an enabling environment, for his/her students to have maximum contact with the language exposing them to various tasks, activities and language experience.

The Relevance of Literature to Language Learning

To say that literature plays a significant role in language learning is an understatement. In fact the two are like Romeo and Juliet, one cannot survive without the other. What then is literature? Several scholars have offered descriptions and explanations of the term literature, however, the definition given by Ojogan (2004), is found to be worthy of mention here. As he puts it,

> *Literature is essentially a medium of communication, which has as crucial to its nature an artistic value. There, as a means of communication, it must be purposeful to the extent of being instrumental to a change in the behaviour of the target audience. This change in behaviour is the result of knowledge, skills and feelings acquired through exposure to literary texts (p. 153).*

The definition above posited literature to depict the vicissitudes of life and living in the society. However, literature mirrors the society and using creative and imaginative techniques explains the society to the society via literary diets. These are the devices and tools for example, prose, poetry and drama used in literature art. These literary diets if well handled by the literature teachers can go a long way in promoting language proficiency in students. One of the most important values of literature is that it vitalizes language (Agbaje, 2006: 121; Agoamanam, 2007: 61). In reiterating the relevance of literature to language learning, Ojogan (2007: 154) posits that literature tends to open a vast opportunity for language acquisition by setting the pace for extensive reading.

Not by any means downplaying the point raised above, literature entails much more than the reading aspect of language, as "it provides the avenue for extensive, sustained and interesting reading, writing, listening and speaking. Literature is more than a resource used to develop literary skills it occupies a central place in the reading curriculum" (Jegede, 2005: 1, Eunice & Dalumo, 2007: 67). Thus, the four language skills could be enhanced via literature. Poetry (for example) in verse, provides opportunity to increase ones knowledge about people, places, things and events (Junaidu, 2004). Drama however could go a long way in providing the learner the opportunity to be in contact with the language thereby improving his/her communicative competence. Prose on the other hand sets the stage for vocabulary building and widening of the students' intellectual horizon. In concurrence with the above, Williams (1990), cited in Ojogan (2004: 155), is of the belief that the study of literature ... "confronts the students with various operations of language and the need to elucidate its meaning." This view was

shared by Agoamanam (2007: 62), who believes that literature could improve the exam performance of candidates in English language examinations. In fact if we were to try to list the number of linguists and scholars who go by the relevance of literature to language learning, certainly a large list would emerge. Thence, the point remains unbeaten; literature makes language learning versatile.

The Framework for the Collaborative Approach

Owing to the fact that literature simultaneously applies teaching activities that touches on the four language skills to enhance language development, this paper calls for the following to achieve the desired result in the collaboration bid:
Course Objectives:

The objectives of the collaborative should be geared towards the attainment of both the ability to comprehend the message (s) of the author and that of exploring the language style, techniques, diction and more importantly, the ability to make value judgement for a coherent argument for or against the position of the author. All these entails language use. In this connection, the literary diets to be used must:

i.   be in tune with the personal and educational experiences of the learners;
ii.   confront the learners with the need for peer group co-operative learning;
iii.   trigger students' rational and critical thinking abilities;
iv.   expose the students to language use by creating room for exchanging views (oral fluency);
v.   encourage creative and imaginative thinking ability through "essay writing competition"; and
vi.   give ample opportunities for the students to write or comment on the text learnt.

Class Activities

To make this approach explicit several class activities must be employed by the content (literature) teacher. However, text selection is an integral part in this regard as such care should be taken to select a text that is relevant to the level, age, interest, religious and socio-cultural background of the learners. In this same vein, we could select "A man of the people" for instance, which is relevant to the culture of the students, the current political dispensation and the elite in our midst. Thus, the class activities should include among others.

a.   Setting the stage – Before teaching the novel, general questions should be asked with regards to the content of the novel and in relation to the

political scene of the country. The teacher would surely be amazed at the political knowledge of his students. This could arouse their interest and their motivation to learn the new text.

b.   **Vocabulary Building:** The teacher should ask the students to note the new or difficult words as progress is made in reading the text and of course try to find their meaning within the context of the text and relate it with dictionary meaning.

c.   **Enhance the four skills** – Being attentive while a student is reading the novel enhances good listening ability, reading aloud or silently (by a student) promotes reading rate, engaging the students in interactive group discussions builds communication skills and writing feedback or comment based on the text ensures proficiency in written expressions. Thus, the literature teacher must provide room for these activities.

d.   **Group learning** – the students could be divided into groups. Each group would be assigned a different task that would push them towards frequenting the library to source relevant materials for their group work. For instance while one group is saddled with the responsibility of taking sides with Odili (elite) another would be implored to explain the reasons behind chief Nanga's actions, etc. there reports would be discussed in the subsequent classes.

Evaluation

There are numerous testing tools in language learning. However, to assess the students' English and content learning, we need to use written test e.g. multiple choice questions, essay questions, true or false questions to assess both the reading and writing abilities of the students. For listening and oral fluency we could record a play on TV or radio, ask the students to watch or listen and the questions would follow based on what they have watched or listened to. We could also engage the students in discussion of the prose, drama or poetry as the case may be. In fact we can only imagine how these activities translate into language learning abilities. As Sage (1987) puts it, it is in literature that the resources of the language are most fully and skilfully used".

Challenges

Even though, literature offers the reader the opportunity of knowing the various contexts and colouration in which language can be used, (Dalumo and Eunice, 2007: 66) a number of challenges could have the efficacy of thwarting these opportunities necessary for language learning. These include the following;

1. Non-challant attitude of the government, policy makers and principals for literature teaching in the schools.
2. The dearth of qualified literature teachers in the country.
3. Poor teaching style on the part of the available literature teachers in most schools.
4. Poor collaborative effort towards enhancing language learning skills on the part of the content area teachers.
5. Shortage of literary text in our school libraries.
6. Inadequate time on the school timetable.
7. Overcrowded classes.
8. Poor background in literature studies.

These must readily be addressed by stake-holders if any meaningful success is to be recorded in this context.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it becomes vivid that language is an indispensable tool for acquiring information and a catalyst for the exploration of knowledge. Suffice it to say that the teaching and learning of English language being the medium of instruction in Nigeria and a second language for that matter must be enhanced through various avenues. One of such avenues is the use of literature teaching as a collaborative effort towards English language learning. This becomes desirable because the relevance of literature to language learning cannot be doubted. A three point collaborative framework for enhancing language learning was proposed; these are the formulation of objectives the class activities to be employed and the assessment techniques to be used. These, if handled carefully by the content area teacher could go a long way in boosting language learning. However, the immeasurable benefits of such collaborative efforts are only attainable when certain inhibitors and bottlenecks are opened to level the grounds for easy accessibility of English language skills through literature.

Recommendations

Having identified some challenges that could have the efficacy of thwarting the success of this collaboration of English language learning with literature teaching, it becomes the final task of this paper to make some recommendations. Thus, it is suggested that:

1. Government and policy makers alike should encourage literature learning by making it a compulsory subject to offer at secondary school levels. In like manner, the principals or heads of schools should encourage their

students to choose literature courses amongst the elective courses they are to offer owing to its immense benefit in learning the language of education.

2. Teachers of English must constantly be produced to gauged the need of English language literature teachers at all levels. Caution must be taken to ensure quality-quantity equation.

3. English literature teachers must be given the opportunity to update their teaching style through seminars, workshops, conferences, and refresher courses.

4. The literature teachers must be enticed to help in the collaborative bid by giving them incentive to boost their zeal and commitment.

5. The school libraries must be equipped with up to date textbooks and reference, materials. The government, philanthropists organizations (in and outside the country) individuals, parents and teachers should assist in this direction.

6. Efforts should be made to increase the number of periods allocated to literature teaching.

7. Population glut in the classrooms can be checked by construction of more schools to decongest the classes. This could make the teachers' task easier and give the learners the opportunity to tap the fruits of the frame work judiciously.

8. Literature teaching should be introduced at upper level of the basic primary education level to ensure a solid foundation literature wise. Thence, the students could cultivate the culture of reading literary text even while at home.

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