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POETRY TEACHING CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGIES IN SENIOR SECONDARY IN ONUEKE EDUCATION ZONE OF EBONYI STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on the poetry teaching challenges and developmental strategies in senior secondary in Onueke Education Zone of Ebonyi State. The study employed a descriptive survey design and was carried out in the Onueke Education Zone of Ebonyi State. The population of the study constituted of 9,300 students and all the 182 English language and literature teachers. 320 students were sampled from the 15 secondary schools using simple balloting and a simple random sampling technique. Two sets of questionnaire were used to collect the data – teachers' questionnaire and students' questionnaire. The students' questionnaire contains gender information of the students. Subheadings were ascribed to the two sets of the questionnaire based on items of each research question. Students' questionnaire was based on the first two research questions and a null hypothesis while the teachers' questionnaire was based on the last two research questions. The two questionnaires were first validated by experts and a trial test was carried out. Then, the instrument was subjected to reliability test using Cronbach alpha method and values of 0.82 and 0.84 were obtained from students' and teachers' questionnaire respectively. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis at p value of .05 value. The findings showed that poetry possesses inherent problems itself because of its abstract nature and the present day methods teachers adopt in teaching poetry which are teacher oriented makes it difficult for students to learn poetry. Students show poor attitudes to learning poetry and skewing teaching to students would enhance students' comprehension of poetry. The null hypothesis showed no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students in the challenges of teaching poetry. Some of the recommendations were that: (1) students should be provided with poetry textbooks and that teachers should re-examine the methods they use in teaching poetry (2) They should adopt methods that are student-centred and employ strategies such as use of graphic organizers, group interaction etc. (3) Students should develop positive attitudes to learning poetry, and the government should organize workshops for teachers.

Keywords: Teaching, Poetry, Literature, Challenges, Strategies, Genres

Introduction

Literature is a subject that is taught in the Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria. Literature is considered crucial as it is a vehicle through which sensitive expressions are given to the inner-most thought and feelings of individuals as well as the community. It is a liberal art that

checks the societal excesses. Literature expresses hope, doubts, fears, conflict and problems that human beings experience in their everyday life. It helps the students to rise above their personal/individual cultural limitations, and at the same time imbues them with insight and richer experiences from the various texts they read (Afangideh, 2009; Smith, 2010).

Poetry is one of the genres of literature. Through the use of distinct style and rhythm the literary expressions are given intensity. Its quality, beauty and intensity of emotion are regarded as characteristics of poems[1]. Benton (2000) defines poetry as the concrete and artistic expression of the human mind with emotional and rhythmical language. Ihiegbunam (2006) states that a well-crafted phrase or two in poetry can help students see an expression in entirely new ways which can help them to gain insight that had evaded them many times and gain new understanding and strength. Smith (2010) re-echoes the words of Wordsworth that poetry is an imaginative expression of strong feelings usually rhythmical, spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion recollected in tranquillity. It is an art of employing words in such a way as to produce an illusion of imaginations and the art of doing by means of words.

Poems can be songs. They can be narrative, religious or humorous in content. The over-riding idea that cuts across them is that they are mostly didactive. The feature of a poem that gives it rhythm is consonance and assonance, rhyme alienation and the regular metrical feet (The Federal Government of Nigeria and Universal Basic Education (FGN-UBE), 2010). Poetry makes students share the imaginative life style in a great master piece so that their non-imaginative lives might be quickened. It teaches complexities of life, death and suffering gives profound joy and transforms people through provision of its entertainment (Fakeye and Temitayo, 2013). This shows that poetry is recreational itself and gives rebirth to life. This may be why Ushin (1996) is of the view that sharing experiences in poetry helps students, make them part of their lives and make their lives wider and meaningful. He further states that poetry illuminates the mind and purges the mind off prejudices and makes it free and active. Individuals can have their shape and taste changed and developed sympathy, empathy and express feelings and emotions.

Despite the congruent nature of poetry, teaching and learning poetry still experience a lot of bottleneck in most secondary schools. For instance, most students dislike learning poetry as Ucheoma (2007) and Afangideh (2009) lament. They state that although literature is quite useful to many secondary school students in Nigeria, many of them neglect it, except for those who know that it is a requirement for courses such as theatre arts, communication arts studies and law. Also, poetry seems to be the most difficult genre of literature which students tend to perform very poorly in and it is probably because of the abstract nature of poetry. This has been confirmed by the Senior Secondary School Chief Examiner's report (2011: 209) that

candidates performed very poorly in poetry and stressed that candidates were unable to discuss questions, due to poor use of language, and were unable to use figurative expressions as well as theme development in poems. He lamented that candidates in each case merely narrate poems and these made them score very low marks in examinations. Friske (1923) states that some of the difficulties in teaching poetry are non-possession of definite capacity for teaching poetry, lack of bearing a reasonable grasp of its historical and scientific basis and philosophical evolutions. Ogunike (2002) states that bad teaching kills learners' interest these made most of the students develop dislike for poetry before they enter secondary school. Ifegbasan (2007) is of the view that the entire teaching and learning process is largely dependent on the teacher. It is on this basis that students' performance in poetry or any other subject may depend on the ability of the teacher to master and present the subject matter in such a way that effective understanding of the lesson may be achieved. The teacher needs to grasp the content of the lesson and the methods of delivery. Conventional teaching method such as the lecture method which is teacher centred may not offer a solution to the abstract nature of poetry itself. That is why strategies that encourage students' involvement such as thematic strategies may be used as it may encourage students actively, emotionally and intellectually. This involves organization and search for value information while reading poetry (Yanksan, 1999). Graphic organizers can be used among students in pair involves brainstorming students in pairs on what they think they know, explain what they would need to listen carefully to when they hear/read the poem, have them record carefully, give them questions or topics that may be associated with the poem. Also the teacher can supervise them at intervals and let them record their findings. Poetry is meant to be read aloud and if students use their mouths, ears and bodies as well as their brain to process the words of poetry they can make more meaning from the poem (Jefferson, 2013)

Brainstorming the similarities and differences in students' reading of a poem may be necessary as it would lead to the creation of a class chart. Teaching poetry should be involving and interesting. This is because as Ogbe (1995) puts it that poetry is a subject full of ideas and cannot be taught by dull-witted minded teachers. Okonkwo (2015) is of the view that learning poetry would be made easier if teachers adopt the use of instructional materials as it would enable students recall with ease a greater percentage of what they were taught.

Most students do not like poetry and sometimes do not show much interest in it. They just study to pass exams, to be equipped with the requirement to pursue courses in the areas of their interest. As a result, most students who study poetry as a subject in schools perform poorly in literature. This poor performance in poetry has attracted the attention of this paper. This paper therefore is posed to investigate effective teaching of poetry, its impediments and how it would be sustained in students.

Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the inherent difficulties with poetry as a genre of literature?
2. What are the methods teachers of poetry adopt presently in teaching poetry that constitute a hindrance to students in learning poetry?
3. How could students' attitude toward learning of poetry constitutes impediment to poetry teaching and learning?
4. What are the ways that would be used to resuscitate teaching of poetry in schools?

Hypothesis: There is no significant mean difference in male and female students' responses on the methods teachers adopt presently in teaching poetry.

Research Method

The design of the study was a descriptive. Two sets of questionnaire were developed by the researcher to guide the four research questions, one questionnaire was addressed for the teachers, and the other was addressed to the students. The two sets of questionnaire were entitled: "Poetry Teaching Impediment and Resustainability Questionnaire" (PTIRQ) and "Poetry Learning Impediments and Resustainability Questionnaire" (PLIRQ) were meant for the teachers and the students respectively. The two sets of questionnaire were divided into two sections, each answered two research questions. Research questions one and two were meant for students to find out the inherent difficulties students conceive of poetry and the methods teachers use presently in teaching poetry that is ineffective for students' learning of poetry. While research questions three and four were used on the teachers to find out students' attitude that negatively affect students' learning of poetry and ways teachers conceive would enhance effective teaching of poetry. The Students questionnaire was divided into three sections – Section A was to elicit demographic information of the students which include student class, and gender while Sections B and C contain the questionnaire items. Each research question contains a sub-heading of the questionnaire item. The teachers' questionnaire contains only two sections and each section contains a sub-heading of the item. The questionnaire contains 24 question items, six for each question and were generated based on a 4-point scale – Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The respondents were required to mark (x) on the appropriate option. The instrument was subjected to face validation by experts, and a trail test was carried out. The two sets of questionnaire were further subjected to reliability test using cronbach alpha method and a value of 0.82 and 0.84 were obtained from the two – the teacher and the student questionnaire respectively. Based on the validation, factor analysis using cronbach alpha method was carried out by experts and all the question items were isolated. The area covered was Onueke Education Zone which comprises four Local Government Areas. These include: Ezza North, Ezza South, Ikwo and Ishielu Local Government Areas. The Zone comprises sixty four (64) approved public secondary schools – 11, 10, 23 and 20 schools

respectively, making them altogether 64 schools (Ebonyi State
Ministry of Information). From the total population of 9,300 students from the 64 schools, 320 students from 15 schools were used. While all the 182 teachers that teach Literature and English language as well as other languages such as Igbo and French languages were used. Research assistants were used in the distribution and collection of the data. On the spot distribution and collection were used. Three hundred and twenty questionnaires were distributed to students and collected. While only one hundred and eighty two (182) teachers questionnaires were distributed and collected back. In other words, on the spot distribution and collection was used.
Tables were presented based on the four research questions and a null hypothesis. Results were presented based on individual responses from each research question and a null hypothesis guided this study. Number was ascribed to each item. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypothesis at alpha of 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Table 1. Students' mean rating on inherent difficulties with poetry learning

S/N	Inherent difficulties in poetry	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Condensed use of words	3.4	1.01	Accepted
2	Abstract ideas	3.6	1.39	Accepted
3	Use of figurative words	3.5	1.01	Accepted
4	Poor linkages	2.77	1.13	Accepted
5	Devoid of straight forward sentences	3.8	1.76	Accepted
6	Arrival at meaning by guessing which can lead to misinterpretation	2.57	0.41	Accepted
	Grand mean	**3.77**		

Summary of results in table 1 indicates that poetry itself has inherent difficulties. This no doubt makes learning difficult for students.

Table 2. Students' mean rating on present day method of teaching poetry in schools

S/N	Present methods of teaching	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Teacher assigns prior reading of the poem to students	320	1.3	0.28	Reject
2	Teacher uses different materials for illustrations and explanation of poems	320	1.82	0.21	Reject
3	Teacher reads the poem in class alone	320	1.62	0.44	Reject
4	Teacher explains the poem alone	320	2.9	1.12	Reject

5	Teacher explains the poem alone and identifies figurative languages	320	2.1	0.34	Reject
6	Teacher gives assignments, marks and corrects students' work	320	2.07	0.35	Reject
	Grand mean		**2.07**		

Data in table 2 indicates that teachers in the school continuously adopt the use of conventional methods. Teaching is skewed towards teacher and does not allow the participation of students or allow students' interaction.

Table 3. Teachers' mean rating on students' poor attitude toward learning of poetry

S/N	Students' attitude toward learning of poetry	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Most students do not pay attention in the class	182	3.2	0.67	Accept
2	Some students attend poetry classes late	182	3.2	0.67	Accept
3	Some students dodge poetry classes	182	2.7	0.41	Accept
4	Some do not have poetry text where the approved poems are contained	182	2.7	0.41	Accept
5	Some students do not do assignments and poetry exercises	182	2.8	0.40	Accept
6	Most students do not read at home	182	3.3	0.66	Accept
	Grand mean		**2.98**		

Data in table 3 reveal that teachers agreed that students show poor attitude toward learning of poetry. The grand mean of 2.98 shows that most students do not help issues despite the importance of poetry in literature.

Table 4. Teachers' mean rating on strategies that may enhance poetry teaching

S/N	Strategies for enhancing poetry teaching	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Teachers should assign the topic to students to read on or before lesson begins	182	3.6	1.01	Accept
2	Teacher should use graphic organizers by calling back students' prior knowledge	182	3.8	1.051	Accept
3	Teacher should use paper, charts, columns webs or outlines to help analyse the information	182	3.7	1.52	Accept
4	Teacher should open response questions and make students draw similarities and differences	182	3.8	1.51	Accept
5	Teacher should read the poem aloud and involve students in creating charts	182	3.9	1.49	Accept
6	Teacher should divide the class in groups of six or more and encourage them to work in groups	182	3.9	1.49	Accept
	Grand mean		3.8		

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Table 4 reveals that teachers accept that a better means of teaching poetry is by allowing students' participation through assigning tasks and encouraging them to be actively involved in class.

Table 5.t-test statistics on male and female students' responses on effectiveness of the methods teachers presently adopt in teaching poetry

S/N	Present day method teachers adopt in teaching poetry	Sex of students	N	DF	$\overline{X}$	SD	t-cal	t-crit (0.05)	Decision
1	Teacher assigns prior reading of the poem to students	Male	160	158	1.3	0.28	0.35	1.98	Accept
		Female	160	158	1.2	0.30			
2.	Teacher does the reading of the poem in the class alone	Male	160	158	1.82	0.21	4.6	1.98	Accept
		Female	160	158	1.81	0.24			
3	Teacher does not use different materials for illustration	Male	160	158	1.62	0.44	0.32	1.98	Accept
		Female	160	158	1.61	0.42			
4.	Teacher explains and identifies figurative words in the poem	Male	160	158	2.9	1.12	0.01	1.98	Accept
		Female	160	158	2.8	1.02			
5.	Teacher explains the poem	Male	160	158	2.1	0.34	0.67	1.98	Accept
		Female	160	158	2.1	0.34			
6.	Teacher gives students assignment on the poem makes corrections	Male	160	158	2.07	0.35	0.65	1.98	Accept
		Female	160	158	2.07	0.34			

Data in table 5 show that t-cal values in all the items showed no significant difference in male and female students' responses in the effectiveness of present day method teachers adopt in teaching poetry.

Presentation of Findings

The findings of the study were based on the four research questions and a null hypothesis which guided the work. The findings of the study were as follows:

1. Poetry as a genre of literature possesses inherent difficulties which made it hard for students to understand it.
2. Students rated present day method teachers adopt as being teacher centred which makes it difficult for students to learn poetry.
3. Students have poor attitudes towards learning poetry.
4. Teachers accept that a better way of teaching poetry is to skew the lesson towards students which actively involves students.
5. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female students' responses on the present day teaching of poetry which offers no challenge to students.
6. It is surprising that most researchers and even teachers advocate child-centred method of teaching and yet

most teachers find it very difficult to tilt their lessons towards the students. This has continued to lead to students' poor performance especially as it concerns poetry teaching.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 indicates that students accepted that poetry has inherent problems in itself. Such inherent problems were condensed use of words, presents abstract ideas, figurative words, poor linkages, lack of straight forward sentences and arrive at meaning by guessing strategies which might be misinterpreted have means of 3.4, 3.6, 3.5, 2.77, 3.8 and 2.57 with grand mean of 3.27. This finding supports Ucheoma (2007) and Afangideh (2009) who noted that poetry seems to be the most difficult aspect of the three main genre of literature. However, Ihiegbuna (2009) emphatically expresses that a well-crafted phrase or two can help the student see an experience in entirely a new way which can help them build insight that had evaded them.

Table 2 shows that the difficulties in poetry also arise because of the way teachers presently present their lessons in poetry. Such conventional teachings which are teacher centred methods have been rated by students as teachers assign prior reading of the text, use of different materials for illustration, read the poem in the class alone, explain difficult words, explain the poem alone and identify figurative languages, give assignments, mark and give corrections have low means of 1.3, 1.82, 1.62, 2.9, 2.1 and 2.07 respectively. This shows that all the items were rejected. The finding are in line with Friske (1923) who suggested that some of the difficulties in teaching poetry were the result of non-possession of a definite capacity for teaching poetry, Similarly Ogbe (1995) noted that poetry is a subject full of ideas and cannot be taught by dull-witted minded teachers.

Table 3 reveals teachers' mean rating on the poor attitude of students toward the learning of poetry. The items presented were that studnts do not pay attention in poetry lessons are: late to classes, dodging of classes, do not have poetry texts, do not do assignments and exercises and that most students do not read at home have means of 3.2, 3.2, 2.7, 2.7, 2.8 and 3.3 respectively. This shows that students do not help issues as they have a high mean of lackadaisical attitudes toward learning poetry. This is in line with Ucheoma (2007) and Afangiden (2009) who noted that even though poetry is vital in the Nigerian educational system, yet many students neglect it, except those who know it is a requirement for courses they would want to pursue.

Table 4 reveals teachers' mean rating on strategies that would enhance effective teaching of poetry such as teachers to assign topic prior to the lesson, use graphic organizers to call students' background, analyse information using charts, columns web and outlines, use response questions, read poem aloud and create class chart and divide the class in groups of six or more for effective interaction among students have means of 3.6, 3.8, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9 and 3.9 with grand mean of 3.8. This finding is in line with Jefferson (2013) who suggests that assigning topics prior to the class, use of graphic organizers, drawing similarities, and differences involving the students in

activities etc. would make students later understand the poetry they read.

Table 5 indicates that no significant difference exists in the ratings of male and female students on the present day method teachers' use in poetry teaching. Both male and female students agree that the present day teachings of poetry teachers adopt are poor and inadequate and should therefore embrace students' participatory method of teaching for better comprehension of poetry.

Conclusion

Poetry teaching is crucial to learning literature. Effective poetry teaching and learning would result to better performance in literature as a subject. Although, poetry as a genre of literature has inherent problems, students' poor attitude and teachers' poor method of teaching compound the difficulties in achieving better performance in literature. Teachers themselves recognized that appropriate methods using prior knowledge of the students, graphic organizers, work group and tapping into group ideas etc. would surely provide avenue for a better performance of students. Different improved strategies and methods are advocated by scholars, yet most teachers insist on the old methods of teaching. Effective instruction coupled with positive attitudes of students toward poetry lessons would surely imbue students to greater heights in poetry and literature.

Recommendations

1. Since poetry possesses inherent difficulties itself, students' first step should have the texts that contains the poems and other relevant materials that would help facilitate their learning.
2. Teachers should re-examine the methods and strategies that they adopt in teaching poetry and stop using methods that are mostly teacher centred as had been confirmed by both the male and female students.
3. Teachers should adopt methods and strategies that are student involving such as active and activity methods, graphic organizers, group interactions that would showcase similarities and differences leading to producing class chart for a better comprehension.
4. Students should learn to develop positive attitudes towards poetry. They should be committed to study, ensure they attend classes and on time, do all assigned exercises and work hand in hand with their teachers.
5. Parents and even the ministry of education should provide poetry texts for their students and workshops and seminars that would help teachers learn modern and dynamic methods and strategies that would lead to better instructions.
6. Scholars have researched and have always recommended methods that are child involving. Teachers should endeavour to adopt these

recommendations for effective learning and effective instruction.

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