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Children Literature Education in Nigeria and the Challenges of Readership

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Abstract: Children, the leaders of tomorrow, are usually the hope and aspiration of every society. Hence, the literature which enhances the education especially the writing and readership skills of children need to be explored and encouraged. The paper x-ray child literature and the challenges of its teaching and readership in Nigeria. Also, the relevance children literature to the society in question is brought to light. The paper concludes that children literature education and readership help in developing and shaping the personality of the child in the society.

Keywords: children, literature, Nigeria, Society, challenges, readership.

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is a sub-genre of literature. It is usually unique and different from other genres because of its purpose which is mainly didactic and at the same time, its simplicity of language. These features of children's literature help in enhancing children's writing and reading skills. In spite of these advantages however, there is notable absence of reading culture among the youth in the Nigerian society today. This act of non-reading culture is distributing and alarming to all concerned educationists and educators in the country. Reading must not be seen as something done for examination alone; but for learning; for education; for knowledge etc. thus, wide and extensive reading enhances the opportunities for successes in both the school and outside. Therefore, children need to be trained to read.

The Direction of the Discourse

The paper attempts a review of the children literature education / teaching and its challenges in the Nigerian nation. Our thrust is on the concepts of literature education and readership. Thus, the aim of the paper is multi fold since it embraces many terms as mentioned above. Of great importance in this paper is the question of the relevance of children literature to our society.

The Terminologies Explained

It may be more appropriate to begin with the concept of education because of its seeming position in our society. Its width, scope or meaning perhaps is greater than that of literature.

What is Education?

The term education, in all human existence and as an activity is a universal thing engaged by all segments of the society. Various educationists and

educators define it in different ways. At primary school level for instance and in African culture, pupils make their meaning of education from certain speculative statements like 'traveling is part of education'. In fact, there is even a short story for primary school pupils (in Northern Nigeria) with title, 'Tafiya Mabudin Ilmi' (traveling, the key to knowledge). Same belief is shared by a popular Hausa oral poet, Musa Dankwairo that, 'tafiya' (traveling) enhances knowledge even without formal education or going to school. Similarly, there are many preconceived notions of education by different professionals. For example, a carpenter, a taxi driver, a plumber, a mason and above all, a teacher who see their different works as education. In deed, all are! However to many, education refers to school. On its definition, Schofield [1] believes that, education is from the word, 'educare' which means 'to form or to train'. And according to J. S. Farrant, education is, The total process of human learning by which knowledge is imported, facilities trained and skills developed [2].

Thus, according to the definition, the term education has no barrier that demarcates the formal from informal. Here, the concept may mean the formal or informal education. All is required is the learning the knowledge and the development of the faculties of the individual in the society.

The Concept Literature

According to Chapman [3], 'literature is the art of the uses of language and to Neil Skinner [4] it expresses the best and worst in a culture of a people through the medium of language. However, Taylor [5] debates that 'literature, like other arts, is essentially an imagination act, that is, an act of writer's imagination in selecting, ordering and interpretation life experience. In the case of literature, words are the medium of expression and it make little difference whether those

words are recorded in the living memory of a people or by some mechanical means such as writing, sound recording etc. anything that can be said about nature of lit holds true for both oral and written examples since they share a preoccupation with form, style, and social functions.

The paper however, famous Taylor's define which extends to and pits the motive of children literature.

Why Children Literature Education?

Now the questions, we are to ask at this point are why children literature? What is its value and justification? How does the individual and by extension, the society benefit from children literature? How does the genre enhance the development of mind? Why and how should it be part of our school curriculum? How can it be learned or studied? All the above questions are interesting and exciting for the reader. Thus, research in the nature of children literature will empower our minds and possibly redirect some already existing misconceptions about the relevance of the genre, children literature.

Some Features of Children Literature

- Moral and religious instructions
- Use of illustrations
- Well meaning messages
- Didactic purposes
- Simplicity of language

Children's literature is generally expected to promote and increase children's reading, writing and language skills and vocabulary development and enhance their reading urge especially when the story lines are aimed at child's and particular interest. Its purpose should be to impart literary knowledge to children which will in part re in force their life view and provide reasonable stimulus for objectives thinking.

However, in dealing with children's literature in schools, the three sub-genres poetry, drama and prose must be distinguished even though they are all imaginative and creative works targeted towards teaching moral lessons in character building. The difference between one genre and the other is structural. While poetry is composed in lines and stanzas with emphasis in acts and scenes and is meant to be acted on stage. On the other hand, prose is constructed in sentences, paragraphs and chapters. Similarly, on the issue of length prose function is the longest of the three genres.

However, in spite of the fact that they are all creative works set out to tell stories, the methodologies to be followed in delivering them are not the same,

Teaching Poetry

In teaching this genre, there are three activities that must be done. These are before, during and after the lesson.

Before

- a. The poetry lesson comprehensive poem must be selected.
- b. The pupils should be made to listen to tapes on the teacher the pupils should be made to listen to tapes on the teacher reading a portion of the poem to stimulate their interest.
- c. Let pupils predict what the poem is about by steaming than the picture related to the poem.
- d. Give them interesting govt's from the poem to stimulate interest.
- e. Group or pair the pupils to suggest what the poem is about doing this through the title or illustrations following the poem.

And during the poetry lesson, a teacher needs.

Write the poem boldly on the chalk or board, white board, or card board, and hang it in the class where all the pupils can see and read it.

Read the poem paying attention to features of rime, assonance, consonance, alliterations and regular metrical feet which are which the major sources of rhythm on poetry are. Without them, the poem will not be enjoyable.

Make the pupils read after him in a musical and attractive manner for enjoyment.

Make the pupils read in pairs and groups, by rows, etc Make the pupils do things, such as reading the poem, identifying the meaning of certain words and bringing out simple language terms in the poem.

And after the poetry lesson some activities such as the following can be undertaken. These include:

Memorization of the poem by the learners / pupils.

Reciting of the poet for enjoyment by the pupils.

Completion of certain deleted parts of the poem through close test by the pupils.

Demonstration of actions captured in the poem by the pupils.

Discussion of the main ideas of the poem by the pupils.

Dramatization of the major parts of the poem by the pupils.

Teaching of Drama

In teaching of drama it is appropriate for the teacher to allow the pupils to read the scene, and discuss it before proceeding to re-tell its plot.

Again, individual character roles should be assigned to pupils and rehearsal done for the purpose of acting the play or a particular act or scene in the case of longer plays.

Generally, some of the methods that can be used to teach drama texts to children are as presented below:

Role playing: play reading character by character
Play acting: memorization of interesting quotes from the play
discussion web, play re-telling – play-play rewriting – play completion, re-ordering jumbled events of a story etc. [6].

Teaching and Learning of Prose

The prose fiction is no doubt the longest genre among at he three genres of literature. Thus, this feature of it requires that the teacher should tell the story in brief so that he can motivate the pupils. It can be told in chapters or even in episodes after the (plot) the story has been narrated. MDG Paper 2004:66 [6] presents some of the techniques that can be used to teach prose. They are:

Story completion – story re-telling - dramatization of the story – story re-writing – story illustration – covering the stories – diagrams and sketches, - discussion based on the story line memorization of interesting quests from the story.

The Challenges of Readership

Many teachers now a day complain of non-availability of shore literary texts i.e. children literature texts in book market.

Again, the modes of delivery of t he genres, which are different, also cause challenges since the teacher must approach, the teaching of every genre.

Similarly, many schools teachers often complain of inability to get pupils to read numerous children literature texts because their attention is being carried away by the electronic media such as watching television, cable satellite programmes, the internet the radio. Etc.

The teachers are also not aware of the short literary texts that are available in the country. Furthermore, there is the problem of poverty which makes it difficult for some parents to afford to but the texts for their children. The fact also remains that, not many schools have enough of texts needed for learning for their pupils.

On the way forward to encourage our young ones to imbibe the culture of reading all hands must be on deck. The individuals, the parents, the government, and above all the teachers and the learners themselves must all come together to make it work. The individual encourages by at least words of mouth, the parents supports the efforts made by teachers by at least allowing watching irrelevant T.V. programmes at the expense of reading, the government providing books to schools and the teachers, taking all possible measures and applying all methodologies in making reading a success. And the side of the learners, they cooperate by doing reading.

When the above are observed, the significance of readership will be seen since it will introduce the learners to:

Learning new vocabularies and their usage

Knowing correct and standard language expression

Developing talent and other skills

Broadening of the learners' perception about life.

Knowing a number of children's literature texts on numerous topics etc.

CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion so far, it can be establishes that children literature education and readership aim at developing the personality of the individual in the society.

As we advanced the sole aim of education is the growth of the individual which stimulates the individual's innate capabilities to learn, create, and execute etc.

Literature and children literature in particular, we reasoned, is the genre that enhances children's learning skills in general which in turn re-in forces their life view.

Therefore, examining the roles children literature plays in shaping the life of the learners and by extension the advancement of the society, cannot be over emphasized since.

Children literature covers a wide range of topics / subject matter which include: honesty, truth, truthfulness, sincerity, history, culture, language, geography, ethnicity etc.

The challenges which must not be overlooked and significance which must not be misunderstood of readership of children literature also been presented.

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