

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF TEACHING ARABIC AND FRENCH LITERATURE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The issue of appropriate methodology for suitable teaching of literature of Arabic and French in Nigerian schools has continued to receive attention from educationists on how to make it more beneficial to society. Literature is to be for life’s sake; therefore, its teaching should be able to assist in solving day-to-day problems. This paper discovered and discussed the obstacles militating against effective Arabic and French language literature teaching. It discovered the prominent obstacles confronting effective teaching of the literature of these languages to be the shortage of competent teachers, non-availability of suitable textbooks, lukewarm attitude to the languages on the parts of the learners, and the parents and acute dearth of suitable instructional materials. The paper is survey research, deriving its sources from an extensive consultation of relevant literature and interaction with the stakeholders. While it should be stated that each language has its peculiarities, they have some common grounds. One of such common grounds is the application of the same methodology to some aspects of the two languages. It suggested a possible methodology to perfect the teaching and make the learners achieve the desired goals. Of the three genres of literature (prose, drama, and poetry), drama and prose were treated because they share numerous similarities. Teaching and understanding Arabic and French literature in Anglophone nations like Nigeria with a workable methodology yielded desired outcomes.

Keywords: *Arabic; French; learning; literature; methodology; teaching*

INTRODUCTION

The paper attempts to answer such questions as; what are the challenges confronting effective teaching of literature in Nigerian schools and the possible strategies to tackle these challenges.

Literature is defined as pieces of creative writing such as poems, plays, novels, and short stories, which have aesthetic or artistic value and cognitive, moral, philosophical, psychological, and cultural values. Literature is about an ethnic group. It expresses the culture and civilization of a group of people. It is the mirror of the human society in question (Onyemeluke, 2004). The fact remains indisputable that literature of foreign languages, especially Arabic and

French, requires adequate handling in our educational institutions and the need arises to provide a suitable methodology. Folorunsho (1997) has earlier addressed some of the factors responsible for this inadequacy as they affect the Arabic language. However, It is remarkable that those factors - including the government’s lukewarm attitude to these languages, the inadequacy of instructional materials, non-employment of competent specialists, acute dearth of suitable textbooks, learners’ and parents` lukewarm attitude, and hostile environmental factors-affect effective handling of literature of these languages adversely.

It is apposite to state that the challenges are not insurmountable if appropriate steps

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are taken to tackle them. Hoping that the factors will be adequately tackled, the present work attempts to examine the need and

- (a) Presenting the materials in the literature textbooks to arouse and maintain learners' interest in reading will, in turn, prepare them for the series of literature materials they will meet at various levels of their educational pursuit.
- (b) Building a permanent interest in and a taste for excellent reading of an in-depth variety.
- (c) Developing in students excellent reading habits that they need to achieve the long-term objectives of literature teaching in schools.

However, it should be pointed out that no methodologist has all the answers to questions of what to and how to teach (Abe & Lawal, 1995). Therefore, the activities and the references are given here are suggestions; they are not intended as a comprehensive list of possibilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aims for Teaching Literature

Literature is the use of language either in prose, poetry, or drama forms. The main aim, after the knowledge of the language, according to Okedara (1983), is to develop the act of literary appreciation in the students. Wabi (2020) opines that literature in any language imparts linguistic and moral values to the learners. He advocates the teaching of literature to enhance mutual coexistence in society (Wabi, 2020). Furthermore, Tijah et al. (2021) opine that the deterioration of moral, social, and educational values in societies could result from the absence of the teaching of literature in schools. It is evident that no society can develop effectively without proper moral existence in such a milieu. In addition, its aims have been noted to include the following:

- (a) To enable the learners to appreciate the beauty of the language and be conscious of the active and lively

suitable methodology for the teaching of literature in Nigerian schools and suggest ways of:

- linguistic styles used in prose and poetry.
- (b) To enable the learners to criticize constructively by pointing to the areas of attraction and repulsion in any literary discourse.
- (c) To raise the standard of expression of learners.
- (d) To convey to the learners about various types of knowledge that literature treats to widen their horizons.
- (e) To enable learners to read and understand both prose and poetry.
- (f) To assist the gifted ones among learners to compose poetry or practice writing speeches and addresses.
- (g) To equip learners with enough vocabulary (Lawal, 1991).

In more specific terms, Abe and Lawal (1995) observe that the teaching of literature should stimulate the students to find literature so rewarding that they continue reading after they leave school. The study of literature should prepare students for a worthwhile life, aid them in their study of language as it provides materials for language learning, and gives them intrinsic values such as enjoyment and appreciation of a work of art. In brief, literature helps the learners to develop a dependable world-view. Stressing this further, Olayiwola (2018) opined that

“...to consider the importance of literature in education is to consider the importance of cultural training which must parallel the scientific and technical training of any individual in society; it is in literature that we find the most sublime way of revealing our deepest essence, the real ideal of our existence as cosmic and social beings. It forces us to look at the reality which surrounds us and dream of aspired or even ignored realities and in this way it helps us find ourselves, making each gesture and each operation in a human action.” (p. 6)

The teachers of literature have three major responsibilities to their students. First, they must help their students to find vicarious experiences in literature by developing an appreciation for the literary forms. Then, they must help the students to relate literature to life. Finally, they must help them understand how the author's meaning can be successfully elicited through an artistic interpretation. These three responsibilities are mutually inclusive. As asserted by Abe and Lawal (1995), they help students:

- (a) To achieve self-understanding through evaluation and sharing of the experiences offered by the author.
- (b) To gain imaginative illumination through the many different images of life portrayed in the literary texts.
- (c) To achieve a balanced view of life through artistic excellence, which may be discovered when the raw material provided in literature is successfully developed in performance.

Guiding Principle

The watchwords for literature teachers should be activity and creativity. Literature studies can be meaningful and rewarding only when the student is freely and actively engaged in assimilating and organizing the material he encounters. According to Abe and Lawal (1995), as long as the emphasis is placed on the students' individual and group activity and creativity, literature offers opportunities second to none of the other areas of the curriculum.

Arabic and French literature teachers should recognize the fact that literature is a personification of life. The significance of literature in the training, socialization, and acculturation of the younger generation must be emphasized. According to Akinwale and Sesan (2020), since society has the moral and social obligations to cater to the moral, psychological and educational development of a child, literature has a laudable role to play. Literature is not a dreaded subject that is considered alien to the reality of life. Literary artists employ their creativity to

resolve societal problems (Gbadamosi et al., 2021). It is relevant to everyday life. Once the teacher is ready to put life in the subject and draw analogies between it and everyday events in life, a good start would have been made, and the students would be highly motivated to read the passages, sing them, act them and discuss them everywhere (Oseni, 1991).

It is also important to consider the linguistic capability of the learners in selecting the literary materials. This will increase the linguistic ability of the learners, their interpretation, and competency in the world-view. The texts to be selected for Arabic and French literature learners should be those at the learners' level of understanding. This will stimulate their interest and comprehension.

The Teaching of Arabic and French Drama: Some Basic Principles

Drama is one of the three components of literature. The other two are poetry and prose. It is a genre of literature that has to do with both words and actions. It employs the services or activities of all beings. It is simply the enactment of stories or narration of stories in dialogues and actions. According to Adelokun (1996),

“Drama mirrors life, and by this, it means that it has to do with life. It is the enactment of the cultural traits of the society. The source of drama of a society is got from the society; it functions to entertain, instruct and warn the society.” (p. 18)

Certain basic principles should guide us in teaching Arabic and French drama, and these include effective management of the time allotted to the topic to be handled. Abe and Lawal (1995) observe that it is essential that reading a literature text must not be allowed to drag on for too long a time if the reader is to experience its emotional appeal and sustain the interest. The time allotted to the teaching should be considered so as to achieve the necessary teaching objectives within the specified period.

The teaching of any play should be preceded by careful preparation, which is also an indispensable principle. Most of the schools' texts have elaborate introductory materials, which can facilitate the teachers' task of establishing a proper reception for the play (Okedara, 1983). If students are adequately briefed about a play, they will definitely yearn for details in it.

The introduction of the author and major characters in the elected play should form an integral part of the teaching. Students must read an anecdote on the author of any play selected to be taught. Introduction to the major characters in the play and the roles of such characters in the selected play should constitute an integral part of the teaching. If, for instance, the teacher intends to teach drama text like *Fadīllatu 'I-'Amid*, students must be taught that it is a work of Nigerian authorship, written by Zakariya Oseni, a Professor of Arabic literature at the University of Ilorin in Nigeria. They should then be taught about the major characters in the play, such as Ustadh 'Akhuli, Dean of a Faculty at the University of Kakadu, Hafisah, a female undergraduate of the University, Dada-a villager, Mundi-a brother to Ustadh Akhuli, Mariyat, the Dean's wife and Nana Fatimah a colleague of the Dean.

On the other hand, to teach a drama text in French, *Olurounbi ou Le prix d'un pari* by Professor Tunde Ajiboye (2001), could be selected. The writer, Tunde Ajiboye, a Nigerian and a Yoruba man, uses Yoruba folk stories. The story of Olurounbi, a trader that made a very painful promise. She fulfilled this promise to her personal detriment. The story is well known by almost all in the Yorubaland of Nigeria. The theme, setting, and names could not constitute any problem for the learners, especially the Yoruba learners of French. The teacher needs to concentrate on the language, which is not difficult. The learners can easily adapt and present such as a play. Similar texts with popular legends exist across different cultural settings.

Furthermore, the text to be taught must

be carefully selected. Abe and Lawal (1995) observe that the text to be selected must be within the readers' age, experience, background, and language. Once the text is outside the above, the reader loses interest and fails to see sense in reading such text. If the text is suited to the readers' ability, it may serve as a vehicle for understanding fiction. This requirement of selecting suitable text applies to both Arabic and French literature.

Discussion about the play must equally come as an integral part of the teaching. This can take different forms. Some important or central passages in the play can be read. Explanation of some ideas or vocabularies which may still be difficult can be done. Discussion of the figures of speech, plot development, themes, and characterization should be part of this.

The Teaching of Prose Writings in Arabic and French

The basic principles stated for the teaching of drama are also applicable to the teaching of prose works in the two languages. Additionally, the following methods are equally relevant in the teaching of prose.

- a) The teacher must read the selected text to the learners and then ask them in turn to read. The reading must go around the learners until the teacher is quite satisfied that their reading of the text is totally free from linguistic and grammatical errors.
- b) The teacher must single out new words, the rhetorical styles, and the social, political, and geographical implications in the text and explain them accordingly before the general meaning is explained. However, he is advised to test their ability first before he takes over the responsibility of explaining the above.
- c) The teacher must divide the text into sections in accordance with the related meaning and then explain the general meaning of each section. At this juncture, learners should have the

- d) opportunity to discuss the meaning and express their opinions.
- e) The teacher should endeavor to test the learners on criticism by providing another text with similar meaning with the text under study but composed by another author and request them to compare the two texts and express their views and criticisms on both texts.
- f) The teacher asks the learners to read the text for the second time in order to be sure that the learners have adequately noted all the corrections made earlier.
- g) The teacher encourages the learners to memorize some of the prose texts.
- h) The teacher should ask the learners to read the text at home before the time they may be having it in the class. The instructional periods could be devoted only to discussion, questions, and revision of the previous reading assignments. Students must be helped by giving them questions to guide their reading before and after each reading assignment. This should assist in training them to read with a purpose (Abe & Lawal, 1995).
- i) Teacher explains the narrative technique of writing; some can be simple while others intricate. Some authors use fictitious characters to present historical situations. Some writings use the first person, second or third person. Oftentimes, a writing will consist of several inter-woven techniques. All these ought to be explained by the teacher.
- j) Another important aspect in the studying of writings is the theme. A lot of the stories may be demonstrations or commentaries on some of the universal problems confronting the human race, sometimes, they seem to suggest certain kinds of solutions. The major point is for the students, through discussion, to understand and grasp the underlying themes of any writing (Okedara, 1983).

The principle enumerated above could be employed in teaching any prose texts in Arabic and French languages in particular and other foreign languages.

Teaching Aids for Drama and Prose Texts

Teaching aids or instructional materials constitute unavoidable factors in facilitating effective teaching-learning processes. In this light, drama and prose texts could be handled using aids such as wall pictures, film strips, flannel board, radio/tape recorders, blackboard, flash or word cards, charts, models, or objects.

Follow-up Works in Teaching Drama and Prose Texts

A good lesson must have a follow-up activity. As a follow-up in the teaching of drama and prose texts, Abe and Lawal (1995) submit that it could be rewarding:

- a) To have students act scenes or improvise dialogue. If this is done, it is best to give a few days for preparation.
- b) To have students write sketches of the main characters. There should be some amount of written work. Writing parallel episodes are valuable activity.
- c) To give pictorial illustrations of the story for identification. A Series of such pictures to be identified may do a good exercise for the students to arrange in sequence the happenings in writing.

As listed above, such activities will keep the class alert and make the otherwise indolent students participate actively in the exercise.

METHODOLOGY

This survey research attempts to establish facts and draw conclusions about the extant challenges confronting the effective teaching of literature in Nigerian schools. It derived information primarily from the consultation of relevant literature and engagement with the stakeholders. This method is adopted

because of its reliance on extant sound submissions, which served as background to our viewpoints in this paper. The method is not empirical, it requires no instruments for data collection, and it is not such that it is verifiable through scientific experimentation. For the reliability and validity of the sources, we ensured the authenticity of every literature consulted.

This paper suggested possible ways to perfect the teaching and make the learners achieve the desired goals. Of the three genres of literature, namely: prose, drama, and poetry, drama and prose were treated because they have many things in common.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Obstacles to Effective Teaching of Literature

This section examines the challenges confronting the effective teaching of Arabic and French literature in Nigerian schools. It has to be stated that the paper is not such an empirical study that requires the production and scoring of responses in questionnaires. Instead, it derived its information base from the early studies as acknowledged in the reference section.

Employment of Competent Teachers

It is noteworthy that adequate personnel are not provided to teach foreign languages in Nigerian schools effectively. This is highly due to the current global economic recession that affects the recruitment of competent hands. Folorunsho (1997) observes that a lot needs to be done regarding staffing the units of the foreign language in our schools and departments in our tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Furthermore, Folorunsho (2015) has proposed that,

“The concerned authorities should not only provide an adequate number of teachers or lecturers but should be sure that the competent ones with the sound linguistic background are employed. This is because the linguistic background of a lecturer has its own impact on the proficiency of his students in the language he teaches. The already over-burdened ones should also be

motivated in so many ways as the authorities may consider appropriate, in the interest of dedication, commitment, and efficiency.” (p.134)

Non-Availability of Suitable Textbooks

Another serious problem confronting foreign language learning in Nigeria, as earlier discovered (Folorunsho, 2015, p. 135), is the non-availability of suitable textbooks. The available ones are of foreign authorship written to teach the languages in the first instance to the native speakers of the languages. Such books are published in Egypt, France, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Canada to teach native speakers, especially Arabic and French. The defect inherent in the use of such books is obvious; they do not take cognizance of the environmental background of the Nigerian learners of these foreign languages.

According to Bidmos (1991), when Nigerian learners of foreign languages are taught with the help of such books, they become more familiar with the foreign environments and subsequently find it difficult to express the Nigerian ideas, environment, and culture in these foreign languages. Books to be used must be graded in accordance with the learners' level. These must also have bearings to a large extent on the background and culture of the learners if they are to mean anything to them (Folorunsho, 2015).

However, the problem is not insoluble. Teachers should show more dedication by replacing these unsuitable textbooks with their own contributions based on the learners' different levels and environments. The authorities should encourage these lecturers by accepting any reasonable academic input made at least for promotion purposes, especially for foreign language teachers in tertiary institutions. In this regard, emphasis must be shifted from the fame of the publisher to the value of the academic input.

Lukewarm Attitude to Foreign Languages

Due to some people's religious bias against Arabic, some language learners feel ashamed

to identify themselves as Arabic learners in society. The linguistic relationship between Arabic and Islam is noted as the root cause of this wrong notion.

In the case of French, some considered its study as the last option as they could not be placed in their desired course of study; this affects the learners' attitudes towards learning the language and its components. Their response is either dropping out of the course, which is common, or displaying a lukewarm response. In such a situation, much depends on the teacher. Teachers should devise means of motivating the students and creating an interest in their language. Though French is free from religious bigotry because it has no link with any religion, its foreign nature in society creates lukewarm attitudes towards it.

Some parents also share their nonchalant attitude toward the progress their children make in foreign languages. Many students are not given adequate encouragement by their parents, who themselves may even be Arabic or French scholars. For proficiency to be attained in any given language, Folurunsho (1997) suggests that the learners should be enthusiastic about learning it and deserving being encouraged by their parents.

Inadequacy of Instructional Materials

The relevance of teaching aids or instructional facilities in the effective teaching of foreign languages cannot be underestimated. Instructional materials include visuals and audio-visuals such as pictures, flashcards, posters, charts, tape recorder, radio, videos, television, and computers (Jamiu, 2018). While some of the institutions are adequately equipped, there are others with nothing to show in terms of facilities. It should be noted that the use of instructional materials in the teaching-learning process gives some educational benefits to both the teacher and the learners, as noted by Opeloye (1991) in the following list.

- a) The use of instructional materials encourages active learning. A student learns faster and retains knowledge longer if the material to be learned appeals to more than one of his senses. People tend to forget what they are told but are more likely to remember the experience they gain through observation, examination, and manipulation of the teaching tools.
- b) The use of instructional materials saves the teacher time and conserves his energy by minimizing over-verbalization. Over-verbalization means excessive use of words to communicate ideas, feelings, concepts, and knowledge characteristic of the traditional teachers.
- c) The effective use of audio-visual materials enriches learning by adding variety to it. The variety enlivens the lesson, thus getting rid of boredom. The depth and breadth of coverage provided by the instructional materials make the teaching and learning process pleasant and meaningful.
- d) The use of visual materials bridges time and space.
- e) For effective teaching and learning, instructional materials must be carefully chosen and used appropriately.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to suggest what it considers a workable methodology for teaching Arabic and French literature, respectively, in Nigerian educational institutions. This paper identified and discussed the obstacles militating against effective teaching of the literature of the two languages involved, as contained in some of the authorities we have cited in this paper. It discovered the prominent obstacles to be the shortage of competent teachers, non-availability of suitable textbooks, lukewarm attitude to the languages, and acute dearth of suitable instructional materials. It suggested appropriate solutions to these obstacles. It is noteworthy that the questions of what and how to teach cannot be

satisfactorily answered by a methodologist as various factors, including the learners' linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds, may not allow strict adherence to a particular method. What this paper has been able to do, therefore, is to provide what it views as the workable procedure for effective teaching of the literature of foreign languages, particularly Arabic and French, in Nigerian school.

RECOMMENDATION

- a) Arabic and French are foreign languages in Nigeria; in selecting texts for their teaching in schools, the status of these languages should be considered; the level of the learners and the cultural background should also not be scrapped.
- b) The teachers of these literary subjects should be included in the educational team that will select texts from time to time to have the best materials for the teaching and learning of the subject.
- c) The teaching and learning of literature remain major avenues for cultural preservation and its education to the younger ones. To procure texts for this important subject, the government should subsidize the cost of foreign literary texts or do duty on importing the texts for free. This will reduce the exorbitant fees of these texts in bookshops. The availability of these reading materials will boost the desired results.
- d) Non-governmental agencies should also be concerned about the teaching of literature and donate textbooks to schools to inculcate morals to these younger ones to impact desired ethos and ethics in these younger ones.
- e) Having reading carnivals or competitions among these younger ones will also enhance their reading ability and comprehension. Departments of foreign languages in our tertiary institutions should expose these learners to Arab and Francophone

environments to properly comprehend these environments and their literary products.

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