

LITERATURE AN INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE IN SCHOOLS AND THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

The trust of this paper is to examine the subject of concern which is moral decadence amongst school students considering the instrument of Literature in English to amend such decadence; thus looking vividly into the roles of literature in bringing about a better mind. This could be achieved through the provision of various experiences of other cultures, provision of insight into the nature and potentials of man, enhancement of constructive thought on important issues and ideas, development of competency in the use of language and the spirit of creativity. Fifteen item questions was design for the purpose, in addition to reading from some Literature in English books reviewed. The field report from the items revealed that Literature can improve the morals of students as it reflects the thinking patter and prevalence of occurrence in the society. Misconduct and decadence found in the school system amidst students and the society which ranges from; violence, deceit, selfishness, financial embezzlement, all-cultic society, robbery and so on can be ameliorated if the method in which teachers teach literature depicts the morality as found in literary works. Empirical studies reviewed in the paper revealed how Literature in English can be used to minimize, curb and abrogate the miscreants in the school system through the morality it portrays. In view of this, suggestions on how to make literature perform its enviable roles in making a better man are recommended.

Keywords

Literary work of art, Moral decadence, Society, School

1. Introduction

Our society as well as the schools system has been polluted by the so called evil of humanity, thereby causing moral decadence in our environment; decadence which ranges from politics, culture, education, and governance. Although we have some form of art that has been in place to shape the decadence as found in schools and the society. Forms of art like: religion and culture. Religion through various means has been used to checkmate the moral decadence in the society, either through the morality in the Bible, the Koran or through traditional means. People are also taught morality through culture, which is the totality of the behavioural pattern and the ways of life of a group of people living together, their norms, values and believes are obeyed and respected by people of such community. In this, morality is internalized. All of this work of arts and epics provide the society with the guided principles of life.

Unfortunately, all this forms of art have not been able to ameliorate immorality in the society. Consequently, this paper sets out to; look at the prospect of exploiting literary work of art, to draw attention to the various immoral behaviour with a view to crave for a change in the society. The study delves on what goes on in the school, since the school is the place where most of the miscreants found in the society are being established and leaders of tomorrow's society

eventually emanates from such system, literature, being a major literary work as the focus. This paper major on ways through which literature has been used to portray morality in the society and how this can be internalise into the mind of the system that breeds leaders in the society.

Literature is being taught in schools merely for examination purposes, reading is only emphasis for examinations. Although reading makes a full man, goes an old axiom. Taking up anything and everything to read on the bookshelf would not really bring about desired effect; only a deep, thoughtful and reflective literature has the potential to do that. Literature must be seen, encouraged, cultivated, and recognized for its worth, if a new age group of full man is to advance, which is the main reason for this study. Works of great ancient poet like Plato Sappho, Horace and Virgil, Shakespeare's sonnets, notable poetries by John Keats, Wordsworth, Tennyson and William Blake, Wole Soyinke, Clark, Ngogi, are undying and immutable. It is during the course of meditating and reading such great literary and poetic works, that one comprehend, appreciate and understands life itself. Through them men were able to have a better perspective of the different facets of life. In a lot of ways, it can provide one with different viewpoint, where one looks at life from an entire standpoint as been informed by literature. Lives of talented and inspired achievers and personalities, who have made immeasurable contribution to society, are delineated in their accounts. These literary works help the readers to have acumen into the lives and times of these distinguished people, while also serving as a platform of ideas.

Languages has been said to be the building blocks to literature. But literature and its study cannot be limited to only language study; in fact literature is too loaded and fortified to be confined to an educational curriculum. Having a degree in language and literature is perhaps incapable to present and impart the richness and immeasurable ingredients enclose in literature. Literature is definitely much more than its literary meaning, which it as 'an acquaintance of letters'. In fact, it is the basis and mounding block of an enriched life; it affix and expand on what 'life' is to 'living'. Allen (1993) points out that literature exposes students to more than one culture and view of life and empowers them to accommodate differences or shift in situations in which they find themselves.

There are legion of misconducts amidst students both boys and girls and most especially in the society at large in recent times. There has been drastic increase in moral decadence which ranges from; aiding and abetting crime, financial embezzlement, and disloyalty, abuse of office, violence, and deceit. Even students in schools are now involved in cult activities through which they perpetrate evil by terrorizing, inflicting pain, robbing and even killing, which is gradually exhibited in the society. All this decadence are some of the reasons why countries especially third world countries have been faced with setback since the time most of them gained independence up to this moment; they have not been truly independent but living in the shadow of it.

2. Review of Literature

Literature is a work of art using language in its specific form. It is language in action. Literature is created from imagination, shaped by an individual and put in different forms, depending on what medium the individual want to. The beauty of literature lies in the way the writer uses ordinary re-occurrence to create effect with the use of language devices, such as: smile, metaphor e. t. c. Bennet (1973) sees literature as the acquisition of a tongue and a new way of looking at the world. Literature helps in opinion formation and moral development, if properly taught. McGregor and Bright (1970) expresses in his thought that literature is an essential part of education, because it raises the level at which the mind can function, gives form and meaning to the date of experience, widens and deepens experience itself, offers attitudes, set out moral issues and deals with matters of truth, goodness and beauty, not as abstraction, but as concrete instances.

3. Importance of Literature

“Literature adds to morality, it doesn’t simply describe it. It enriches and give meaning to the fullness of the necessary capability that daily life requires; and in this respect, it irrigates the wasteland that our lives have already become”-C.S. Lewis. This quote is perhaps to me the most appropriate portrayal of the importance of literature to life. Literature is a reminder of stories, epics, sacred scriptures and classical works of ancient and modern times that have influence on who we are and what we have become either positively or negatively. Literature does not only describe the realities and intricacies of man reality but also adds to it.

Literature is therefore not merely a representation of what is; but rather what ought to be, it is a value addition. Literary works are representation of the thinking patterns and social custom prevalent in the society. They are illustration of what is contained in a man’s life and what such life is in stages. Classical literature works serve as a food for thought and a tonic for imagination and creativity.

Yarlot (1968) explains the functions and importance of literature by noting that, it extends knowledge sharpen sensitivity, release from tension, foster the acquisition of knowledge of literary heritage and sound attitude/value, and mood. Literature thus makes minds work and recreate the level of otherwise unattainable and discipline controls and satisfies emotions to make life meaningful. Adeyanju (1978) noted the fact that the educative values of literature include the realization of literary values in text selected, inculcation of universal values in students who think, act and live only on tribes and inculcation of civilized values in mind.

Literature is a refuge of our fantasy; a way of becoming someone you've always wanted to become - for both the writer and the reader. Even though sometimes may be seen to have nothing to do with the real world, literature still satisfies our need for fiction, for bulging our own individualities in fictional personalities of becoming a character in the book we read. Astill (1991) sees the role and importance of literature from three perspectives; developmental, therapeutic, criticism. She noted that our sense of communication is improved through the use of language, our minds are sharpened and our sense of appreciation is broadened when literature is properly used to effect change and facilitate instruction. Making literary work available and accessible to an individual is the same thing as giving him/her the opportunity to explore the finest of all education. Inferably, the lack of such exposure to classic literary work is tantamount to rubbing an individual from an opportunity to grow to his/ her fullest as an individual.

4. Review of Related Empirical Studies

In some related studies examined on how literature has been instrumental towards correcting and making the society as it ought to be. Derick Ariyan (1999) observed that literature plays an important role in all our lives and in the society at large. In his work “novels: Holding the mirror up to nature”. He narrowed his focus by considering just three British novels from the long 18th century, specifically: *The Monk*, by Gregory Lewis, *Evelina* by Francis Burney, and *Oroonoko* by Aphra Behn.

The Monk is a novel that looked at and into the depravity of a catholic Monk—with his evolution from being a respected man of God, to a repulsive and offensive person. There were a lot of controversies during the time of this novel, which emanates probably because of the subject matters contained in the book: sex, murder, rape, incest, and perhaps the most provocative of all a dirty look of hypocrisy and horrible dishonesty in the house of God

Evelina, a novel written by Francis Burney present the view that mirrored image is not necessarily what it portrays, it is actually encouraging. The main character, Evelina, is a delightful innocent young lady, who was destitute, rundown and deprived of her rightly place in the class-based socioeconomic structure of 18th Century England. She lost her mother when she was just a leaning to call her by name (a baby), her father on the other hand rejected her very existence never wanting to have anything doing with her, and the only person she could associate with as a friend is her modest yet wholly loving and affectionate guardian; the Reverend Villars. However, despite the unfortunate situations of her upbringing, Evelina's character rose to prominent: through her manners, her innocent character, as well the unblemished purity of her personality; she is a charming individual of her own right. In the novel, Evelina steps into the world (England in this case)forgetting what her unfavourable upbringing was and through her eyes we can see the frivolity of society-at-large, and the glibness, and insincerity of some of its citizens, as well as, on the rare occasions, those few individuals that, like Evelina, radiate a softness of heart, and gentleness of spirit—examples to align our own selves with. As a “mirror” the book depict that wealth and notoriety is nothing to be compared to “class”- who a person really his and that notoriety and wealth, do not always provide “class”.

Oroonoko by Aphra Behn portrays the abhorrence of slavery and the slave trade. Behn in his novel performs to such a high-standard, that which all writers endeavor to do, that being, not to tell the reader how they should feel, but rather shows us, through the kingly manners and humane personality of the novels protagonist, Oroonoko. The method and technique through which he portray actions and character in the novel, gives the reader a sense of the human-variable in the evil institution of slavery-something often unnoticed and ignored in slavery's defence. Behn exposes a character that is human, tragic, and revealing. The unalloyed reflection of reality, and from the point of view of the slave, is what this book offers to society and to its readers.And like the latter portion of Lionel Trilling's remark on novels, he suggests that novels give signal of the direction of man's soul thus; it becomes a likelihood of hope. Through the hope offered to the mind, one will be condemned of his own disgusting feature, thereby having a turnaround towards a path of restoration and atonement for his malefactions, what a powerful gadget the novel can be.

It is thus explicit enough that literature as a reflection of reality, and like a mirror, exposes the nature of one's true self by so doing, we have supported the broader phenomenon in “Literature” that literature does indeed play an important role in our lives and our society.

Furthermore, the work of Robert Muponde of the university of Witwaters in his novel “Under the tongue” (1996) looked into by Yvonne Vera portrays the agony and disorientation suffered by a girl child during and after brutal rape by her father, which brought about cumulative tale of unrelieved pain and unspeakable sadness. The narrative of absolute loss sublimate into a sublime aesthetic experience through the finely honed metaphors of subjection and recuperation, stasis and motion, trauma and resilience. The novel according to Vera is in itself an instance of the unveiling of embodied atrocities that girl childhood faces in the society. Vera in this novel exploits the idea of the rape of the girl child in a situation in which the entire country is swallowed up in a war of liberation as rather incongruous, but also as something that should place the struggles of traumatized and silenced voiced on an equal footing with the national liberation struggles. Her work demonstrates that these counter-pointing narratives of suffering and loss initiate the beginnings of knowledge and subjective consciousness in the society, all animated by the figure of an abused girl child.

The paper has looked at the ways in which literature has been used to mirror occurrence in the society and as instrument in sharpening the society. Using literature in moulding the character of students in school through the morality portrays is thus of grave importance.

5. Significance of the Study

The implication of this study is of massive importance to both students and the society at large. In the sense that, it is a free and fear society that one can lead a successful and peaceful life. How could this be attained? If not through the curbing of moral decadence in schools, because morality in behaviour starts from schools, where people are being tutored under a particular authority, which is the school system. Literature in its present form is to be seen as a means of persuasion and change of heart. Therefore both society and school will enjoy relative peace if people are convinced of their bad behaviours.

6. Methodology

The target population consists of teachers of secondary schools in Akoko area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Due to largeness, there may not be room for easy access to the population, but the research employed random sampling in choosing four secondary schools. A total population of (40) teachers were randomly sampled from the four selected secondary schools.

Questionnaire instrument were administered on literature as an instrument of change in our school system. The questions were constructed to enable the respondent to give a 'yes' or 'no' answer. The questionnaire is entitled: Teachers Questionnaire on Literature an Instrument of Change (TQLIC). In analysing the collected data, each questionnaire was treated separately and simple percentage was used to analyse the variables. The scores were tabulated to avoid misleading interpretation of the research question.

7. Results

As would be expected, subjects were distributed evenly throughout the type classification tables by examining the roles literature can play as an instrument through which the world can be a better place by focusing on the following research question:

- i. Will the study of literature improve the moral qualities of students?
- ii. Is literature an instrument that portrays the thinking pattern and prevalence of the occurrence in the society?
- iii. Does the method in which teachers teach literature depict the morality as found in literary works?

Table One: Will the study of literature improve the moral qualities in students

Schools	No of teachers	No of yes	No of no	Yes%	No%
Esedo high school, Iwaro oka	10	46	4	92	8
St. Patricks college, Iwaro Oka	10	44	6	88	12
Oroke High School, Akunbga Akoko	10	42	8	84	16
Ajuta High School, Ogbagi Akoko	10	37	13	74	26
TOTAL	40	169	31	338	62

The responses to this question shows that there is an overwhelming percentage of ‘yes’ (338) as against ‘no’ (62). That is, a good number of the respondents recognize that the study of literature will improve the moral qualities of students in our secondary schools. This is to show that literature helps the reader to gain insight into the native and potentials of man. It helps to develop either desirable or undesirable attitude to certain phenomenon.

Table Two: Is literature an instrument that portrays the thinking pattern and prevalence of the occurrence in the society

Schools	No of teacher	No of yes	No of no	Yes%	No%
Esedo high school, iwaro oka	10	44	6	88	12
St. Patricks college, Iwaro Oka	10	44	6	88	12
Oroke High School, Akunbga Akoko	10	45	5	90	10
Ajuta High School, Ogbagi Akoko	10	42	8	84	16
TOTAL	40	175	25	350	50

350 yes as against 50 no responses to the question stated above shows that a larger percentage of the respondents are positive that literature portrays the thinking pattern and prevalence of occurrence in the society as seen in review works on literature.

Table Three: Does the method in which teachers teach literature in schools depict morality as found in literary works?

Schools	No of teacher	No of yes	No of no	Yes%	No%
Esedo high school, iwaro oka	10	28	2	80	20
St. Patricks college, Iwaro Oka	10	16	14	60	40
Oroke High School, Akunbga Akoko	10	25	5	75	15
Ajuta High School, Ogbagi Akoko	10	25	5	75	15
TOTAL	40	94	26	290	90

Responses to this table also shows that a larger percentage of teachers see that the teaching method used when it comes to literature does not really make a balance between the lessons depicted in it and the way it is being internalized.

Table Four: Is literature considered important in the school curriculum?

Schools	No of teacher	No of yes	No of no	Yes%	No%
Esedo high school, iwaro oka	10	13	7	64	35
St. Patricks college, Iwaro Oka	10	13	7	65	35
Oroke High School, Akunbga Akoko	10	17	3	85	15
Ajuta High School, Ogbagi Akoko	10	11	9	55	45
TOTAL	40	54	26	269	130

8. Discussion

The study of literature in English will improve the moral quality of students. This is evident from the analysis from this study on the view of teachers on the role literature plays in our lives and in the society at large. The result of which showed that the study of literary work will definitely improve the moral qualities of students and that literature purely portrays the thinking pattern and prevalence of occurrence in the society

Literature is such an enormous expense and the immeasurable realm of its influence is far beyond reaches of quantification; let alone comprehension. Literature is instrumental and mirrors the society as it portrays social phenomena, politics or new ideologies.

Allen (1993), points out that literature based curriculum exposes students to a more than one culture and empowers them to accommodate differences or shift in situations in which they find themselves. Literature helps the reader to gain insight into the nature and potentials of man. It helps him to develop either desirable or undesirable attitude to certain phenomenon.

The study of literary work will definitely improve the moral qualities of students as literature purely portrays the thinking pattern and prevalence of occurrence in the society. Bright (1970) states that the experience of literature is an essential part of education because it raises the level at which the mind can function, gives form and meaning to the date of experience, widens and deepens experience itself, offers attitudes, set out moral issues and deals with matters of truth, goodness and beauty not as abstractions but as concrete instances.

From the roles of literature such as provision of various experiences of other culture, provisions of insight to the native and potentials of man, enhancement of constructive thought on important issues and ideas etc. It becomes obvious that the study of literature should be encouraged by the government, school authorities and individuals. This is a sure way to sensitize people on the need to develop positive attitude by individuals for their moral upliftment and for the interest of our communities.

9. Conclusion

The findings of this study have so far supported the researcher assumption on the role and importance of literature in our school system. As a result of the findings of this study, the following conclusion can be drawn. It is interesting to find that people also have the same view

with the researcher on the importance literature. How it depicts the pattern and prevalence of occurrence in the society and how the morality it portrays can be used as instrumental in shaping the moral decadence found in our school system today.

10. Recommendation

The study centered on the roles and important prospects of literature as instrumental to students' moral behaviour. In view of these findings the following recommendations have been offered both for the eradication of the problems that affects proper utilization of literary work as well as making the prospect of the role of literature to boost the learning and morality of students. For literature to perform its essential roles of being instrumental to students' behaviour in nation building, the following suggestions should be of much help:

- i. Literature should be an obligatory subject in the school curriculum as the English language.
- ii. Literature books should be provided by the school authorities and government. This will help indigent students take advantage of the library to develop their reading skills.
- iii. Ministry of education should organize seminars for literature teachers to improve their knowledge of literature.
- iv. Literature specialist or English specialist should be allowed to teach literature.

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