

TEACHING OF ORAL LITERATURE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching oral literature in the primary school is necessary. Orature is good to be a part of the primary education curriculum. This all-important aspect of culture should be well taught by using good instructional techniques. The data for this article were sourced from the library. This article is mainly divided into the need for teaching oral literature in the primary school and the method of teaching it.

INTRODUCTION

Oral literature is a very important aspect of the culture of a people. This is because it is the language of the narrator. It can be Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Idoma etc. All the peoples of the world passed through the first stage of describing their environments literarily. This stage is the oral stage which involves the oral expressions of the environment by the people before they learn to read and write. So before the invention of the pen, literature was in existence. So after the oral form of literature, came the written form. The argument supporting the seniority of oral literature to its written form is that from the time someone is born, one starts to describe or express one's environment by the mouth before one learns to read and write.

The oral form of literature involves all literary works expressed by the mouth. The sub-genres of literature in this form include folktales, social stories, historical tales, tongue twisters, proverbs, songs, oral poems, riddles, jokes etc. Given the importance of this form of literature to man, there is no doubt that teaching it in the primary school should give somebody a concern. So it is necessary to state good methods by which the oral literature should be taught in the primary school.

Teaching oral literature in the primary school is a matter of necessity. It is so much important that it must be given due attention. This is because it is necessary for building the foundation of children in various respect.

IMPORTANCE OF ORAL LITERATURE

One of the reasons why it is necessary to teach oral literature in the primary school is that it helps to imbibe the sense of culture in children. By oral literature of a people, there is no doubt that the people's language is highlighted. Oral literature helps the children to talk, hum or sing in their native language. It makes the children to learn their form of literature that is composed and rendered directly in their language. Learning oral literature will help the children to imbibe high sense of their culture sensibility. They say the names of lexicons in their language and make constructions that are original of good knowledge of their culture. The much need for teaching children in their native language is the policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria on education which states that the reason is to "ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004:12). The importance of learning in one's indigenous language cannot be over emphasized. That is why Chumbow (1990:65) states that

the use of the mother tongue in teaching has much importance which include the orientation of the children in their culture. The mother tongue is also the means by which orientation in the cultural environment is made. Why it is that language is closely related to culture is that it is an expression of the common cultural experience of the members of the linguistic community who speak it. This point underscores the socio-cultural value of language to man. Given the psychological and socio-cultural importance of language to man, it follows that the mother tongue, is the first language learned by the child to express his ideas about himself and about the world in which he lives.

One other importance of teaching and learning the mother tongue of the children by the children is that it contributes a lot in drilling the children in their language. Practice makes perfect they say. When the children study oral literature, they will study tongue twisters which train people on speech productions. They give children tests on reciting tongue twists which involve saying jaw-breaking words very fast. They are used in testing by finding out how much fast one can say it before he starts to make mistakes of pronouncing the twisters. The twisters are used in practising speech productions without knowing it because some people use them for games and so do not take note of their training on speech production.

Oral literature gives life to literary works more than the written works of literature. That is the reason for which a good number of people adopt orature in their written works. The expressions that can be written in sentences are made lively when the author draws from oral literature. In such cases the authors use the characters that discuss in the work and by that exhibit the linguistic cultural milieu of the people within the native language area. That is what Ntiamokwa (2013:12) refers to when she makes her audience to learn that one language engineering society known as Otu Sxwakwa Igbo wants Igbo people to speak their language for the language of a people is their life. By this, she means that without placing their language foremost in whatever they do, they will not progress.

It has been found out that teaching children in their mother tongues enable them to learn fast and more. This is because teaching children in a foreign language disturbs their sense of understanding. For instance, teaching children in the English language will make them to think in English and then relate what they have learnt to Igbo cultural setting. This will make the children battle with translation, from one culture (English) to the other (Igbo). This indirect rule makes learning difficult and clumsy. But learning in the mother tongue is direct, clear and understood since it is their own language. Chimbow (1990:63-4) has it all:

The use of mother tongue in school in the first years of schooling enhances continuity in the child's learning process and therefore maximizes his intellectual development. The situation where a child uses one language at home, one that he is intimately related to psychologically and socio-culturally and has to switch on to a foreign language, vehicle of a foreign culture, psychologically distant from the child, creates a gap between the house and the school.

Oral literature provides the necessary educational foundation needed in the children for coping with the future work in diversified areas. Once children are comfortable with what they are taught at the initial stage, they then can cope with what would be taught later so far they are bit by bit arranged from known to unknown. So, it is necessary to ensure smooth transition of children from their home to their schools. This will make them to learn more. This is unlikely when they are treated to difficult stuffs immediately they set their feet into

the school for the first time. This makes children uncomfortable and so they would refuse to attend school any more. That is why the Federal Republic of Nigeria states in its policy of education that its goals for primary education include to “inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively and to lay a sound basis for scientific and reflexive thinking (2004:14). Chimbow (1990:63) holds the same view thus:

The mother tongue plays an important part in moulding child’s early concepts. In the respect, it should be noted that language is very closely related to the mind. It is the means by which we conceptualize and think so that we normally cannot think without language. This point emphasizes the psychological importance of language to man particularly, the mother tongue as the language first learnt by the child.

Oral literature contributes a lot to education. It contains a lot of knowledge which children learn from it. They can learn moral behaviour from oral literature as there abound folktales that portray crimes and the attendant punishment suffered by offenders to others. Children can learn this type of motif from the story of Tortoise that stole the public funds kept by Rat in a hole for the Animal kingdom that wanted to use the funds for building a hall. When Tortoise stole it, animals appointed Wren in place of Rat. So Wren placed the next collected money on top of a tree and Tortoise attempted to steal and fell down. In the fall, he broke his shell and so suffered the consequences. When the teacher asks the children who among them would like to be Tortoise, they will never agree. Okodo (2012:99) has earlier painted this picture thus:

So everybody trains his or her children morally so that they will be useful in their lives rather than behave in disregard to morality and so face the wrath of God both on earth and thereafter. As a result of upholding of morality, it is reflected in all the traditions of people all over the world. People teach their children some moral principles in various ways including telling them stories that depict rewards for good moral behaviours and punishment for disregard of good moral principles.

Oral literature contributes to national development. That it is taught in the indigenous languages is a good step towards national development with respect to the native linguistic expressions. If it is taught in the foreign languages, then the native languages will be kept out of it as a result of which they will remain in the cooler to be eroded away. It is a national development in the sense that literarily oral, there will be a thing of joy and pride as the national literature. This will grow further as some writers might copy them from their oral form and use them in the written perspective when various ethnic groups in Nigeria showcase their literature, they will also be collapsed into the making of the national literature of the country. Elemuo (2002:373) calls for national unity:

It is inevitable to know what national integration means. Various definitions of integration trail the subject itself. L. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Kleiner (1989:1085) define integration as “the bringing into equal membership of a common society, those groups or persons previously discriminated against on racial or cultural ground”. Simply put, it is an equal opportunity in the face of cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.

Having gone through a lot of ideas to substantiate the importance of oral literature to man, especially the child, there is a need to consider the method of teaching this all-important aspect of literature. This is because there is a good need for considering the methods which will help us achieve the importance of oral literature to children's education.

STEPS OF TEACHING ORAL LITERATURE

- a) **Introduction of the Topic:** The first thing the teacher should do is to indicate the subject he or she wants to teach and then the topic. He or she would mention the topic and spell it. After he would write it on the board before explaining it. The pupils will in turn pronounce the topic and spell it after the teacher.
- b) **Entering Behaviour:** The teacher will refresh the minds of the pupils on the topic of the previous lesson. He or she will ask them questions on the topic. Such questions will not only be relevant to the topic of the present lesson but also be a lead-up to the topic.
- c) **Instructional Aids:** The teacher will use very clear materials to illustrate his lesson. The aids would include the pictures of the oral literature – such characters include the Igbo trickster (Tortoise), Antelope, Lion, Tiger, Elephant, Squirrel on the side of animals, king, medicine man, farmer etc. on the side of men and spirits. The aids can be used to explain the themes of the story. If it is a case of a corrupt person meant to suffer for his punishment, the picture will portray him suffering an ill fate.
- d) **Instructional Technique:** The teacher can teach a song by reading out the words and the pupils would read after him or her. After the reading he would take the other and explain them very well so that pupils will understand the contents.

He or she will show the pictures of the characters as well as the themes of the song. He will help them visualize the characters and the themes so that they will easily understand the lesson. He or she will then copy out the song on the board. He or she will then sing the song first. When singing it again the pupils will sing after him or her. They will repeat the singing until they are able to sing it very well.

The next thing to do is to accompany the singing of the song with beats. This can be done by knocking on the table in the beating of the song. An improvised beating can be by striking softly on a tin. When the song has been well internalized, the pupils will act out the contents by demonstrating the ideas of the song. The roles of the characters will be shared by the pupils who will produce the contents of the song in a short scene.

- e) **Evaluation:** The teacher will end the lesson with an evaluation of the pupils' grasp of the lesson. The evaluation can be in the form of comprehension questions which the pupils will answer. The questions can be in objective form or essay questions. Part of the evaluation can be in the form of painting the characters and the themes.

Finally the teacher will go through the answers of the pupils and correct them. This will show their correct answers marked good and the wrong ones indicated.

Conclusion

Oral literature is a very important aspect of the people's way of life so it is very important that it should be a part of the pupils' course contents. This will go a long way in making pupils to be aware of their culture and be knowledgeable enough to learn other aspects of their folklore.

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