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## An Assessment of Performance of Bauchi State Senior Secondary School Students in Literature-in-English

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### Abstract

*This research attempts to make an assessment on the performance of students in Literature-in-English in senior secondary schools in Bauchi state in order to reveal the current situation. The research, therefore, investigated whether the students performed well in Literature-in-English and how its teaching was handled. The data for the research were obtained through the use of questionnaires which contained statements and questions for teachers and students respectively. The questionnaires were randomly distributed to twenty-two (22) teachers of Literature-in-English and one hundred and ten (110) students in the eleven (11) senior secondary schools offering the Literature-in-English within the nine (9) local government areas covered by the study in Bauchi state. The findings of the study revealed that the teaching of Literature-in-English did not get necessary support from the authorities concerned in that it is not taught in most public secondary schools and where it was taught, it was mostly handled by language specialists. The study also revealed that most students were not aware that Literature-in-English must be passed at the O level examination before they would be admitted to study some courses at the university. The combined results from both teachers and students showed little or no difference on the hypothesized points with regards to poor students' performance in Literature-in-English at senior secondary schools in Bauchi state. The study recommended among others that government should employ enough specialized teachers of Literature-in-English and provide relevant teaching and learning materials. The provision for organizing conferences, seminars, workshops and fresher trainings for teachers should be given due consideration to make them well-equipped with skills and new developments that would enhance effective learning of Literature-in-English.*

**Key words:** Literature-in-English, Assessment, Students' Performance, Senior Secondary Schools, Bauchi state.

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## Introduction

This research is an outcome of an investigation on the assessment of performance of Bauchi state senior secondary school students in Literature-in-English. The aim is to assess their performance in the subject while focusing on contents and methodology used for teaching the subject so as to reveal their performance in both internal and external examinations. The choice of the topic has been motivated by the role played by the Literature-in-English in making the students to develop a good habit towards reading various texts to expand the scope of their knowledge and to be successful in their academic career. This is so obvious because the subject has already become one of the most important subjects that serve as necessary requirements for admission into universities to study courses such as Law and English language, among others.

Literature-in-English is one of the subjects with a questionable students' performance in Nigerian senior secondary schools despite its significance in securing admission into higher institutions of learning. A significant number of researchers have pointed out that literature matters so much in our everyday thinking, our teaching and learning in school, our communicating with one another which inevitably arouses passions and creates problems (Abubakar 2011; Ihejirika 2014; Zumunta 2017). This premise, therefore, triggers a lot of research works in Literature in order to proffer solutions to the identified problems. Right from the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 into the Nigerian education system, Literature-in-

English used to be a compulsory subject for all the students in the junior classes of secondary schools. They can only drop it when they are promoted to senior classes. Even at that level, it only becomes optional for science students but compulsory for arts students (Zumunta, 2017). Since then, both public and private secondary schools in Nigeria teach Literature-in-English.

Furthermore, the subject becomes one of the prerequisites to study courses like English language and law in the Nigerian Universities. Although, a report has shown that not all secondary schools in Bauchi state offer Literature-in-English as a subject, only 23 percent of the total number of the schools taught it as a subject (Muhammad et al, 2022). Indeed, even among the very few arts students offering the subject, their performance in both internal and external examinations: Mock and Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) is still unsatisfactory. A Large percentage of the students fail the examinations which consequently deny them a chance to further their education into the Nigerian Universities (Zumunta, 2017). Consequently, the scenario has led to the conduct of this research to reveal the current performance in the state.

## Statement of the Problem

Making Literature-in-English a prerequisite to study courses like English Language, Literature-in-English, Mass Communication and Law in universities, has made the students' performance in the subject an issue of public concern. This could be one of the reasons that the subject has now received primacy in Nigeria's



secondary education system. Recently, there are a number of reports and outcries from experts, teachers and parents as to determine the students' performance in the subject in order to reveal the situation in the state and open up for next line of action. These calls are not unconnected to the findings of some recent research works that the subject is affected by shortage of well-trained teachers, poorly motivated teachers and students, inadequate teaching and learning facilities, poor quality and availability of relevant literature texts, large classes, poor reading culture, poorly coordinated supervisory activities and negative attitude of the authorities concerned towards Literature-in-English among others. On this basis, a research of this kind has to be conducted with the aim of revealing a clear picture of the students' performance on the subject in Bauchi state. This follows the absence of concrete empirical studies on the issue so far. Hence this research intends to fill in the gap. Therefore, the study is expected to provide relevant and necessary information to the policy makers, curriculum planners, literature specialists, parent/teachers' association and any other person concerned in Bauchi state and Nigeria at large.

### **The Concept of Literature**

The term "literature" is used basically in two different senses: First, it is literally used to refer to any written material on a subject. Second, it is a term used to refer to one of the school subjects studied by students as a discipline; and it is this second sense that this research is built upon. As a subject or discipline, Literature has been variously defined by different

scholars as it remains one of the multi-dimensional concepts whom their all-encompassing definition is always difficult. While some scholars looked at it as a form of norms and cultures associated with a given human society, others described it as a form of piece of 'work art' with its three broad genres – prose, poetry and drama. With the foregoing, it is now appropriate to review of the definitions and explore their central message(s) with regards to the concept of Literature.

According to Onuekwusi (2013: 5), "Literature is any imaginative and beautiful creation in words whether oral or written, which explores man as he struggles to survive in his existential position and which provides entertainment, information, education and excitement to its audience". Even though, the foregone definition centers on the meaning of literature from its purpose, however, the term covers not only imaginative creation in language but also factual part of literature that plays a crucial role. That is why the genre of prose includes aspects of fiction and non-fiction which are universally known. But in whatsoever the case may be, literature as the extract of this definition is the part of human life that is transmitted by use of conglomeration of words.

Owoeye (2003:104) on his own part defines Literature as "a writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards life". This definition shows that Literature is the representation of life through the medium of language. It is however, not an exact replica of life; it is an interpretation of life as life shapes itself in the minds of writers.



Meyer (1997) on the concept of Literature puts it that “written texts that are marked by careful use of language, including features such as creative metaphors, well-turned phrases, elegant syntax, rhyme, alliteration, meter are in a literary genre (poetry, prose fiction, or drama) and are read aesthetically as intended by the author and also contain many weak implicatures (which are deliberately somewhat open in interpretation)”.

According to Moody (1972) Literature springs from our in born love of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expression in words some special aspects of our human experience. Moody’s definition holds the view that human instinctive connection with stories and using language artistically are what gave birth to Literature. This situation gives human beings opportunity to express their experiences systematically.

### **Significance of Literature**

Literature has so many important functions contained in its subjects. It is a vital record of what people have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all. With regards to the benefits that every student can derive from literature, Ayo (2003: 23) deduces advantage on utmost utilization of Literature by saying the following:

...The utilities of Literature include: educational, cultural, recreational and socio-political advantages. Literature has the advantage to improving

the linguistics performance of the students as it keeps them with the ability to extensive reading from literary texts...Literature is of benefit to students’ ability to comprehend what they read.

More so, Slater (1987) proposes the inclusion of Literature in language classes because it contains valuable genuine materials, helps in developing readers’ cultural and linguistic enhancement. In the same development, Lazar (1997: 14-20) on the advantages of Literature, provides five reasons for using literature:

- (i) It is motivational;
- (ii) It encourages acquisition of language;
- (iii) It provides expansion of language awareness in students;
- (iv) It develops students’ ability to become interpretive;
- (v) It educates the whole person.

### **The Genres of Literature**

The word “Genre” is a French word adopted in English and it literally means kind, sort or style. Being used as a term in Literature, genre is used in literary discourse to denote types or classes of literature, for example, poetry, fiction and drama. A literary genre follows certain common compositions which distinguish it from another literary genre. These common conventions enable a reader to recognize a literary composition as belonging to a certain literary genre and prevent him from mistaking it for any other kind. The following are discussions of the three genres by reviewing their various definitions



offered by different scholars and researchers:

### Prose

In an ordinary or everyday use of language, the word “prose” basically means saying something in a straightforward way and not in a poetic way. The word was originated from Latin word ‘*prosa*’ which means ‘*straightforward discourse*’. Thus, what we speak and write for our ordinary purposes in a straightforward manner without any embellishment and regard for diction, imagery, sound and rhythm is prose. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines prose as “written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure”. With this definition, it can be said that any writing which is not in verse form could be regarded as prose.

Chen (2019: 512) defines prose as “a literary medium distinguished from poetry especially by its irregularity and variety of rhythm and its close correspondence to the patterns...fiction and drama fall within the scope of prose”. However, Chen continued to give more explanation of the term by giving another definition in a narrow sense and says “prose refers to a type of literary genres opposed to poetry, fiction and drama. And there are some features which make it possible to distinguish it from poetry drama and fiction.

Alexander (1963) quoted in Chen (2019: 513) categorized prose into three types: narrative, descriptive and argumentative. His categorization was however faulted for that the three categories are actually modes of expression always occur in the same piece of writing simultaneously. Thus, when this happens, it will be hard to

decide to which type a piece of prose writing should belong.

Furthermore, Kermode (1985) discusses the terms “prose” and “fiction.” Prose fiction refers literary works which are fictional and are presented in a narrative form. Fiction and narrative are words that distinguish prose fiction from any other form of narrative or fictional work. For example, drama is fiction but it is presented in dialogue and enacted on the stage and not narrated. The genre of prose fiction consists of the short story, the novella and the novel. Thus, fiction is therefore any form of narrative which deals, in part or in whole, with events that are not factual, but rather, are imaginary and invented by its author. Both poetry and prose can be fictional or factual.

### Poetry

Poetry is the oldest of the three major forms of literature with roots deep in the rituals and religious observances of antiquity. Hence, it was primarily oral, performance-oriented and public as it was, more often than not, a tool for supplication, communal tribal celebration and celebration of the supernatural as well as appreciation of the gifts of nature. From these early forms developed the personal and impersonal forms of poetry represented by the lyric on the one hand and the traditional epic and ballad in the other.

Having seen differently by scholars, there cannot be a single definition that will be comprehensive enough to accommodate the various shades of opinions and schools of thought regarding the exact nature of the genre. However, it can be argued that poetry as a form of literary expression embodies all the defining qualities of



literature such as imagination, creativity, suggestiveness or indirection and as a mirror reflecting the individual's perception of the world. These poetical and literary qualities apply to both oral and written forms of poetry except that the medium of expression and transmission are different. Below are some of the definitions of poetry by different scholars:

The first definition to be put forward here is the famous one by William Wordsworth (1805) as quoted in Andrew (2015: 191) which defines poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility". Based on his definition of poetry, many scholars hold the view that Wordsworth believes that poetry should express common human feelings and there should be no restriction in the expression of the experiences of the senses and sensibilities.

Another idea of Wordsworth is that the function of poetry is to give pleasure to readers by presenting the incidents and situations of their lives in a fascinating and unusual way with a colour of imagination. In the same vein, Wordsworth agrees with Aristotle that "poetry is the most philosophical of all writings. The subject of poetry is general and operative truth which is its own testimony".

### **Drama**

As a literary genre, drama is realized in performance and can be described as a "staged art." It is designed for the theatre because characters are assigned roles and they act out their roles as the action is enacted on stage. These characters can be human beings, dead or spiritual beings, animals, or abstract qualities. Drama is an

adaptation, recreation and reflection of reality on stage. It has unique characteristic that have come about in response to its peculiar nature. It is the most concrete of all genres of literature. It is difficult to separate drama from performance because during the stage performance of a play, drama brings life experiences realistically to the audience.

According to Esslin (1977: 9-13) the following can be regarded as definitions of drama:

1. Drama can be seen as a manifestation of the play instinct as in children who are playing mother and father.
2. Drama is something one goes to see, which is organized as something to be seen.
3. It is an enacted fiction, an art form based on mimetic action.
4. In arts, drama is the most elegant expression of thought nearest to the truth (reality).
5. It is the most concrete form in which art can recreate human situation, human relationship.

### **Literature-in-English as a Subject/Course of Study**

As a school subject, there are some significant functions Literature-in-English performs. Put differently, the whole essence of developing it as a school subject is for the students to derive some benefits. Ayo (2003:128) describes the benefits as the general utilities of Literature. According to him, "the utilities of Literature could be educational, cultural, moral, recreational and socio-political. Literature helps to develop the learner's linguistic performance because it arouses their zeal and keeps in them an ever-ready inclination to read. Moreover, it helps the learners to



develop fluency and the ability to comprehend what is read". Collie and Slater (1987) support the inclusion of Literature in the language classroom because it provides valuable authentic material, develops personal involvement and help contribute to readers' cultural as well as language enrichment. Still on the utilities of Literature, Lazar (1997) provides five reasons for using literature in English Language Teaching to include:

- 1) Motivating materials
- 2) Encouraging language acquisition
- 3) Expanding students' language awareness
- 4) Developing students' interpretative abilities
- 5) Educating the whole person.

More so, looking at Literature as a subject of study, Unoh (1981) as quoted in Ogunnaiké (2002: 338) opines that:

... a good literature can be an important aid to cultural assimilation or acculturation; language development and competence; conflict resolution; emotional development and stability; development of positive and good-oriented attitudes to life; a good liberal education, entertainment, relaxation and the sharing of vicarious experiences of positive value; the development of desired and desirable moral or other attributes; and as a consequence of all

these, a stable and mature personality.

The above quotation justifies that Literature is all about life. It is about what people have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is the interpretation of life and life shapes itself in the minds of the interpreters. We care for literature because we care for life, because we are interested in knowing the varied aspects of it, because we like to know how men and women live life and think about life.

### **Methodology**

Being a descriptive research, a survey research designed was adopted and used a sample of a definite population of an investigation to describe, explain and document what is in existence of the present status of the phenomenon under investigation. The population of this research includes all the senior secondary schools where Literature is being taught in Bauchi State. However, their large number necessitated a selection of a sample within the research's population for a smooth conduct of the research. Thus, as the state is divided into three senatorial districts, that division guided the selection of samples from the research's population. Out of the twenty (20) local government areas in the state, the south and north zones have seven (7) each, while the central zone has six (6). Two (2) local government areas were selected from each zone. The selected LGAs include Bauchi, Dass and Tafawa Balewa in Bauchi South, Misau, Dambam and Warji in Bauchi Central and lastly



Katagum, Jama'are and Giade in Bauchi North. To have a good sample for the study, two (2) secondary schools were selected in each local government. The respondents targeted in each school were ten (10) students and two (2) teachers to have the total number of one hundred and eighty (180) students and thirty-six (36) teachers, respectively. However, when the schools were identified, it was observed that the subject was taught in only eleven (11) schools out of the eighteen (18) focused and covered by the study. Therefore, a total number of one hundred and ten (110) students and twenty (22) teachers were finally used in the study.

The selection of the sample was guided by two different types of sampling techniques. These are purposive sampling and random sampling. The former was administered to enable the researcher to select only the schools in which the subject was taught while the latter was used to ensure that each student within a selected school had an equal chance of being selected.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were generated through reviewing relevant literatures and gathering responses from the people concerned as far as teaching and learning of Literature-in-English is concerned. To achieve this, the researcher in the first instance reviewed previous literatures on the subject matter and came up with some hypotheses. Secondly, on assessing the students' performance, the researcher with the support of teachers of Literature-in-English from the sampled schools selected ten (10) students for an experiment. This close or control group of students were taught the same topics using different

methods of teaching. Then the students were interviewed on the simplicity or otherwise of the methods used and also asked their general comment on the teaching and learning of Literature-in-English.

After these two activities, the researcher was guided by the information gathered and formed ten (10) statements and questions that eventually served as questionnaires. Two sets of structured questionnaires were formulated and distributed to teachers and students in the selected schools. For the teachers, open - statements were used while for the students, the questionnaire contained polar questions for them to respond with either 'yes' or 'no' options to avoid confusion.

### **Results and Discussion**

This section contains presentation, analysis and discussion of the findings of the data collected. The data were derived from the responses to the statements and questions by the teachers and the students respectively. Initially, the research has targeted eighteen (18) schools but in the process of data collection, the researcher found and realized that the subject was taught in only eleven (11) schools out of the eighteen (18) focused and covered by the study.

### **Overall Responses**

To sum it up, each of the ten points used for gathering the data for this research received a total number of one hundred and thirty-two (132) responses - twenty-two (22) from the teachers and one hundred and ten (110) from the students. In order to arrive at an overall result of the investigation, those responses of both the teachers



and the students were merged together and presented in the table below, using a condensed scale with three options: “AGREED”; “DISAGREED” and

“UNDECIDED”. So, the “YES” in the students’ responses were recorded as “AGREED” while “NO” was recorded as “DISAGREED”.

**Table 1: Showing the Overall Responses of both Teachers and Students**

Statement	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1	Agreed	86	65.15%
	Disagreed	10	7.58%
	Undecided	36	27.27%
2	Agreed	74	56.07%
	Disagreed	51	38.63%
	Undecided	07	5.30%
3	Agreed	46	34.84%
	Disagreed	83	62.88%
	Undecided	03	2.28%
4	Agreed	75	56.81%
	Disagreed	53	40.16%
	Undecided	04	3.03%
5	Agreed	80	60.60%
	Disagreed	34	25.76%
	Undecided	18	13.64%
6	Agreed	94	71.21%
	Disagreed	35	26.51%
	Undecided	03	2.28%
7	Agreed	29	21.97%
	Disagreed	95	71.97%
	Undecided	08	6.06%
8	Agreed	106	80.30%
	Disagreed	22	16.67%
	Undecided	04	3.03%



9	Agreed	114	86.37%
	Disagreed	14	10.60%
	Undecided	04	3.03%
10	Agreed	80	60.60%
	Disagreed	42	31.82%
	Undecided	10	7.58%

Looking at the table above, it can be understood that the combined result shows little or no difference in the view of both the teachers and the students on the hypothesized points with regards to poor students' performance in Literature-in-English at senior secondary schools. Both the teachers and the students virtually agreed with all the points hypothesized to be seen as the factors responsible for the problem under investigation and this supports the findings of Muhammad et al, (2022) that not all secondary schools in Bauchi state offer Literature-in-English as a subject. High number frequencies were recorded in agreement with the points, with the exception of point 3 in which eighty-three (83) was recorded in the "disagreed" column representing 62.88% of the total number of responses to that point. In the third point, it was discovered that students did not run away from Literature-in-English because of its inevitable connection with reading which obviously indicated that it should not be counted as one of the reasons for their failure in the subject. However, the high frequency of positive response on item six (6) which is ninety-four (94) (71.21%) indicates that the students agreed that they would be admitted in universities to study courses such as English, Law or History without passing Literature in their "O" level

examination. This is obviously impossible but their responses indicate that they were not aware.

### Conclusion

Based on the review of related documents and responses of the respondents, it can be concluded that students' performance in Literature-in-English is poor and this has a direct connection with several factors such as students' perception that it is a difficult subject and lack of necessary support from the authorities in terms of provision of ample literature specialists that will teach using simplified approach with necessary materials. Therefore, this suggests that there is a need for adopting appropriate strategies for improvement.

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