Genral Preference and Senior Secondary Schools Literature-in-English Achievement

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which genral preference of students would predict their achievement in Literature in English in selected senior secondary schools in Ibadan. Five research questions were asked while descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Simple random sample technique was used to select 500 students offering Literature in English in ten senior secondary schools in Ibadan Metropolis. Two research instruments were used in the study namely genral preference questionnaire r = .70 and Literature in English Achievement test r = .81. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, simple percentages, and regression analysis. The result shows that: the student preferred prose to any other genre (X = 2.57); the preference for prose has significant contribution to the achievement of the students in Literature in English (b = 0.463; + = 8.472; p < 0.05); and prose literature is the only genre capable of predicting students' achievement in Literature. Based on the findings, recommendations were made that students' interests should be developed in other genres not preferred through good instructional strategies for optimal performance.

Key words: Genral preference; Predictor; Achievement; Prose; Poetry; Drama

INTRODUCTION

The word Literature was derived from the Latin word literal which means a letter of the alphabet. In a wide sense, literature is taken to mean every expression in letters that is written down (Okolo, 1993). But to Scholars of literature the term does not apply to every form of written expressions it is limited to certain categories of written expressions which have artistic merit or aesthetic appeal.

Okolo further explained that literature is a work of art created with words either oral or written, whose value lies in its impressive nature and ability to arouse admiration.

The Oxford English dictionary (2002) defined Literature as pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novel, plays and poems.

Rees (1973) sees it as "writing which expresses and Communicates thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards life" Moody (1968), in his own words says:

> Literature springs from our in-born love of story or arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expressing in words some special aspects of human experience. It is usually set down in printed characters for us to read, though some forms of it are performed on certain accessions.

Literature, he further states, has different forms as poetry, drama, prose and the short story. All of these are works of imagination or works that give the individual the capacity for invention. He, however, tries to bring out the difference between literature and other subjects when he observes that: the writer of literature is not tied to fact in quite the same way as the historian, the economist or the scientist whose studies are absolutely based on what has actually happened, or on what actually does happen in the world of reality.

According to Owoeye (2003), the primary aim of literature is to give pleasure, to entertain those who voluntarily attend to it. It also brings us back to the

realities of human situations, problems, feelings and relationship. She further states that the importance of literature in the school curriculum cannot be underestimated. It plays an important role in the achievement of the goal that education aims at: the complete development of the individual.

Moody on the place of literature in the educational system says that:

> Literature offers a vast reservoir of human experience and of judgment, of experience, a development of imagination and an entry into human situations which otherwise might fall outside our Ken.

Furthermore, it develops the cognitive domain of the Individual as it develops the capacities for discrimination, judgment and decisions. It helps in language development as it is a tool for understanding language because it is easily learned in real situations and an endless series of situations in which language is heard or in use.

Literature helps towards training the learner in the skills of reading listening, speaking and writing as observed by Moody. He holds the view that literature is concerned with all aspects of man and the universe. It is therefore not surprising that literature plays important role in improving the learner's language and enlarging his awareness of life at home and school. It is also informative thereby helping the understanding of different cultures (Owoeye, 2003).

In the affective domain, it is used for the expression of feelings and emotions. It purges the mind of prejudices and preconceived ideas and makes it free and active. This is perhaps why Moody says that it "touches the moral life".

Anthony (2011) also pointed out that literature provides occasion for exercise of judgment about man and his conditions, in helping the development of the psychomotor skills. Literature provides an avenue for dramatization. Demonstration and active participation by the individual involved.

Saruq (2007) affirmed that literature is a piece of writing with dual roles--entertainment and education. These significant roles are derived from the stories it relates. The stories themselves came from the experiences that the author seeks to elucidate. In other words, Literature teaches and entertains through the experiences that such piece of writing conveys.

Literature according to her may be prose, poetry or drama piece. In whatever genre that the author decides to relay his/her message the centre point is that of teaching a moral lesson, albert entertaining an audience. Williams (2004) stressed that the study of literature in a first or second language confronts the students with various operations of language and the need to elucidate its meaning. Moreso, since literature organizes language in the most exemplary fashion, the second language learner must be aware of the importance of applying the language

of literature as a model for his own use. He further states that teaching of literature has the practical value of enabling the student to learn about the second language as well as use it.

However, Fakeye (2011) states that students are usually unable to understand the cultural background of the material used since the cultural background is not their own. They also affirmed that characters, theme, plot, values, attitudes, judgments and much of the vocabulary are not recognizable, and hence psychologically threatening. In view of these, different students have different genral preferences as regards to studying and learning of literature.

There are three main genres of literature known as poetry, prose and drama.

Poetry: There are as many definitions of poetry as the number of poets because of its involvement in the power of imagination, emotions and peculiar use of language. On this Ogunniyi and Olaogun (1985: 1) Opine that:

> A poem is made up of words the means by which we think about and express everything in life and about life itself. It is a creation of a sound mind and it usually concerns itself with exciting and important things to the poet.

Also, Ibitoye (2005) states that poetry is a form of writing stimulated by emotion and expressing a deep feeling that may be very difficult to explain in literary form. It is the act of uniting pleasure with truth by the help of imagination and reasoning. Poetry creates a vivid imagination expresses strong feelings and experiences using figurative language Okolo (2003).

Poetry is also a collection of poems. The diction deplored in poetry is more deep and richer than those treated in prose and drama. Due to the above, a poet is literarily permitted to use language the way. It pleases him.

This liberty with language by a poet is called poetic license. This is the freedom to change the system and normal rules of language in a special piece of writing in order to achieve a particular effect. This license allows a poet to create new words disobey rules of grammar, creates inversions and use archaic diction Ibitola (2005).

Dasylva and Jegede (2005, p. 5) while commenting on the characteristics of poetry state that what distinguishes poetry from other forms of literature is its exploitation of the resources of language and music. In other words, the distinguishing features of poetry are both intrinsic. According to them, the exploitation is intense, more frequent and more discriminate than we have in other forms of literature.

In his own view, Ibitola (2005, p. 7) affirmed that the language of poetry is expressed rhythmically and is characterized by the use of archaic language and precision of words. It makes use of stanza, metre, rhyme scheme and lines to express deep feelings and emotions. He explains further that poetry also makes use of dialogue

known as dramatic monologue. Here the poet makes use of invented characters and setting and concretizes ideas using figurative language.

On the sources of poetry, Dasylva and Jegede (2005, p. 4) explain that poetry arises from the effects of social life for example, songs to celebrate the arrival of a new baby; wedding songs, elegiac songs and dirges to mock. The departure to the great beyond of a beloved; religious hymns; chants celebrating courage or mocking human foibles; all handed down from one generation to another. Four major poetic forms include narrative poetry satirical poetry, dramatic poetry, and lyric and Ode poetry.

The objectives and aims of teaching poetry in school are succinctly described by Oguniyi and Olaogun (1985), when they insist that the objective of teaching poetry cannot be separated from the whole purpose of education that is, it exposes pupils to various aspects of life, hereby equipping them for the challenges of living in the society.

Prose: always written in plain and easily comprehended language it is said to be an ordinary non-metrical form of writing or spoken language. It is a long narrative with a wide range of characters, events and experiences. It is also made up of characters and written in a straight forward language.

Prose is a kind of writing that is not poetic. Ibitoye (2005) One major characteristics of a prose is the use of action. Action in prose is of two types; rising action. This is that stage in the growth and development of the plot, which proceeds, leading up to the climax. Falling action on the other hand is that stage of the prose which comes between the climax and the conclusion.

A prose lacks an established regular rhythm pattern associated with poetry. It makes use of continuous writing ideas are sometimes connected. It may also consist of dialogue, chapters and paragraphs. Furthermore, prose consists of cast, setting and resolution for example Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart", Elechi Amadi's Joys of motherhood. Prose is studied in schools so as to make the students recall the incidents in fiction that are probable in life and refine their sensibility.

Drama as a genre of literature is a representation of life, usually on the stage, and the essence of drama is not a real event but a representation of real (imagined) event. The element in representation that distinguishes drama from other genres is impersonation that is the assumption by human beings of personalities, characters, natures of entities other than their own drama makes use of dialogue between one cast and another or group of casts. It is usually divided into acts and scenes. A drama also requires the active participation of an audience (Atoyebi, 2012).

Elements of Drama as listed by Okolo (2003), includes Plots; plots of drama are divided into "acts" and "scenes". Drama has five essential parts which are introduction of the story where the characters and setting are introduced. Rising action, climax, falling action and denouement.

According to him, play wrights use dialogue to develop their plots. They revealed information about their characters such as their background and personality.

Characters play a pivotal role in drama as they reflect the personality of the protagonist and other related characters. Characters can be fictional or based on real, historical entities. It can be human, supernatural, mythical, divine, animal or personifications of an abstraction. There are round, stereotypical and stock characters in Marclow's drama The tragical history of Dr. Faustus, Faustus is the main character of the play. Setting refers to geographical location of the story time period, daily life style of the characters and climate of the story. Setting can take place in a house, school castle, forest, hospital or anywhere that the playwrights want to extend their scenes.

Theme is another prime element of drama as illustrated by Okolo (2003). It contains the central idea of the drama. It reflects innocence, experience, life, death, fate, madness, love, society, individual etc.. Thus it reflects the society as a whole for example the theme of Wole Soyinka's drama text "The trials of Brother Jero" reflects the commercialization of religious Institutions by the clerics.

Drama is taught in secondary schools in order to study the motives behind human actions and differentiate between dramatic truth and truth in real life.

Despite these numerous values and benefits literature in English confers on the learners, students performance in the subject at public examination is not satisfactory. This has been attributed to the fact that some students prefer drama as it draws fully upon the resources of language and is written primarily to be performed by actors on a stage. In front of spectators, it also has direct appeal, focusing the spectators' attention. Since drama is acted before an audience, it creates a communal experience that is intensified through interaction between actors and audience.

Some learners may be down to earth with poetry due to its richness and beauty of language and as poetry is also read for the pleasure it affords, representing language at its most perfect as it has been spoken, written, listened to by all conditions of men in all walks of life. Whereas prose fiction way be preferred by other students mainly because of the experience derived from reading prose fiction is more private and reflective than that of being part of an audience watching a dramatic work also, since the aim in studying a novel or a short story is to sharpen the student's awareness of life and to enable the student to share the imaginative experience of the author.

Prose non-friction otherwise referred to as "occasional literature" is also an important genre of literature may be chosen by some students because it deals with important issues. It also includes biographies and autobiographies. One of the unique benefits of such literature is that it touches on contemporary issues, not only in book form

but in essays and articles in popular or serious--minded Journals (Ezedinbu, 2011).

The above are some of reasons why students prefer one genre of literature to the other. However, it is necessary to note that negative attitude and prejudice could mar the proper understanding and learning of the genres of literature for which learners do not have preference.

In view of the findings from previous studies on problems of teaching and learning of literature in senior secondary schools, it is notable that much has not be done in the area of using genral preferences to predict achievement in literature in English. Hence, this study is set to fill the gap.

Statement of the Problem

Literature in English as an important subject at senior secondary school is taught for the numerous values and benefits it confers on the learners. Despite these numerous values, students' performance in the subject at public examination is not satisfactory. This has been attributed to the fact that students are more at home in one genre than another. Hence the study investigated the extent to which preference for particular literary genres would predict their achievement in literature in English in selected senior secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to give direction to the study
i.   Which of the literary genres is preferred by students?
ii. What is the relative contribution of genral preference to students' achievements in literature?
iii. Which of the genre will most predict students' achievement in literature?

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to throw light on how students genral preferences could predict their achievement in literature in English. The findings would help in suggesting ways of helping the learners to be aware of the values of learning literature in English as well as encouraging the students to offer the subject without any bias or sentiment as regards to the forms of literature. These will also lead to a kind of repositioning of literature in English in such a way that many students would prefer to offer the subject with all enthusiasm. Findings from the study would help to illuminate the particular genre of literature that constitutes difficulty to learners with a view to frontally addressing such for improved teaching and learning of the subject.

Scope of the Study

The study is delimited to investigating the extent to which students' genral preferences would predict their achievement in literature in English at senior secondary level. The study covers the Arts Students of the Senior Secondary Classes in some schools in Ibadan metropolis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is centered on determining the predictive effect of genral preference on student's achievement in literature. The descriptive survey design research methodology was adopted for the study in order to collect the data from the sample. The target population for this study comprises the entire literature in English students in senior secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis of Oyo state. The sample for this study comprised 500 students offering literature in English in senior secondary schools in Ibadan metropolis. The study adopted a two stage sampling technique. The first stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique to select 10 schools that were used for the study. The second stage of the sampling technique also involves the use of simple random sampling technique to select 50 students from each of the 10 schools to make up the sampling size. Two research instruments were used in this study namely; Genral Preference Questionnaire and Literature-in-English Achievement test. Genral Preference Questionnaire was centered on getting data concerning preference of respondents on the three genres of literature. The Questionnaire which was developed by the researcher was divided into 2 sections namely A and B. Section A is concerned with the students demographic information while section B contained 25 items constructed in a four likert scale ranging from strongly agree through strongly disagree. Literature-in-English Achievement Test comprised 25 items adapted from WASSCE (2009) Literature-in-English objective past question. The question covers the three genres of literature.

In order to establish the face validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to the scrutiny of my supervisor and was given to language lecturers in the faculty of education. University of Ibadan and their input was used to improve on the items. Thereafter, the questions was trial-tested in two schools outside the schools involved in the study and using Cronbach alpha, a reliability co-efficient of .81 was obtained meaning that it was found reliable.

The 25-items achievement test been a standardized test was also trial-tested in two different schools outside the schools selected for the study using test-retest method, reliability co-efficient of .70 was obtained.

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Head of Department of Teacher Education: The collection of data took a total of two weeks; each school taking a day. The researcher engaged the assistance of the literature teacher in each of the schools to help mobilized and organized the students for administration of the instruments. Before administration, the researcher and the teacher sensitized the respondents and put their minds at rest as regards the purpose of the exercise. The Genral preference questionnaire was administered first and literature achievement test followed later. The rationale behind administering the questionnaire first is that the researcher had the premonition that the students might

be unsettled by the achievement test, if it came first. The data collected for this study was analyzed using frequency count and simple percentage score. Also E test statistics was used to test differences of mean between male and female student genral preferences.

RESULTS

Answering the Research Questions

Research question 1 Which of the literary genres is preferred by the students?

Table 2
Students Preference for Literary Genres

		SD	D	A	SA	Mean	Std. D
1.	Poetry is more difficult to interpret than prose	53 (10.6)	86 (172)	195 (39.0)	166 (33.2)	2.95	.96
2.	I spent more time in reading poetry than drama text	89 (178)	188 (37.6)	119 (23.8)	104 (20.8)	2.48	1.01
3.	Poetry questions are very easy and they are easier to pass than prose	170 (34.0)	183 (36.6)	104 (20.8)	42 (8.4)	2.10	1.67
4.	I always do better in poetry examinations than in drama examination	193 (38.6)	186 (37.2)	78 (15.6)	43 (8.6)	1.94	.94
5.	Poetry diction are easier to understand than diction used in drama texts	234 (46.8)	134 (26.8)	131 (26.2)	1 (.2)	1.80	.84
6.	In my own view, poetry questions are more difficult to pass than any other literary genre	64 (12.8)	136 (27.2)	141 (28.2)	156 (31.2)	2.77	1.05
7.	I read more of poetry than prose text	142 (28.4)	141 (28.2)	156 (31.2)	57 (11.4)	2.24	1.01
	Weighted average					2.33	
8.	I find drama text easier to understand than prose text	19 (3.8)	122 (24.4)	268 (53.6)	91 (18.2)	2.86	.75
9.	I read more of drama text than any other genres	47 (9.4)	184 (36.8)	210 (42.0)	55 (11.0)	2.53	.84
10.	In my own view drama questions are very difficult and they are more difficult to pass than poetry questions	183 (36.6)	162 (32.4)	121 (24.2)	33 (6.6)	2.00	.94
11.	I prefer drama questions to poetry questions	42 (8.4)	79 (15.8)	204 (40.8)	164 (32.8)	2.94	1.01
12.	African drama texts are more difficult to interpret than African prose	113 (22.6)	193 (38.6)	124 (24.8)	66 (13.2)	2.27	.98
13.	I do better in drama examinations than poetry examinations	57 (11.4)	95 (19.0)	238 (47.6)	110 (22.0)	2.80	.91
14.	I enjoy acting drama in school more than participating in prose reading in class	110 (22.0)	92 (18.4)	167 (33.4)	130 (26.0)	2.63	1.10
15.	I consider drama literature to be more complex than any other genre	77 (15.4)	253 (50.6)	106 (21.2)	64 (12.8)	2.31	.88
	Weighted average					2.54	
16.	I read more of prose text than any other genre	66 (13.2)	223 (44.6)	171 (34.2)	40 (8.0)	2.37	.81
17.	I enjoy reading short stories on my own than reading poetry	55 (11.0)	124 (24.8)	220 (44.0)	96 (19.2)	2.69	.94
18.	Prose literature is usually boring than drama text	29 (5.8)	194 (38.8)	152 (30.4)	125 (25.0)	2.75	0.90
19.	Prose questions are very easy and they are easier to pass than poetry questions	79 (15.8)	183 (36.6)	124 (24.8)	110 (22.0)	2.51	1.03
20.	I put in my best in prose examination than in poetry examination	56 (11.2)	177 (35.4)	210 (42.0)	50 (10.0)	2.74	2.85
21.	I read prescribed novels before plays or poems	38 (7.6)	195 (39.0)	188 (37.6)	79 (15.8)	2.62	.84
22.	I find prose text easier to understand than drama text	65 (13.0)	249 (49.8)	100 (20.0)	86 (17.2)	2.41	.92
23.	I read more of African novel than African drama	33 (6.6)	200 (40.0)	130 (26.0)	121 (24.2)	2.61	1.02
24.	Prose language structure are more complex to comprehend than drama diction	128 (25.6)	97 (19.4)	198 (39.6)	77 (15.4)	2.45	1.03
25.	I read more of novels in my leisure time than drama texts	83 (16.6)	118 (23.6)	179 (35.8)	107 (21.4)	2.57	1.08
	Weighted average					2.57	

Table 2 presents the students preferences for literary genres. The table indicates that the students preferred prose more than any other genres (=2.57) followed by drama (=2.54) and poetry is the genre the students preferred least (=2.33) though the weighted averages show the preferences were very close to one another.
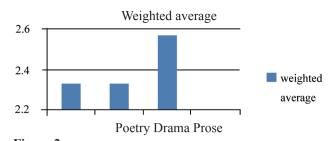
Figure 2
Bar Charts Representing the Student Genral Preferences

Research question 2 What is the relative contribution of genral preference to students' achievement in literature?

Table 3
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Relative Contribution of Prose, Poetry and Drama to Literature Achievement

Model	Unstandard-ized coefficients B	Std. error	Standardized coefficients Beta (B)	T	P Sig
(constant)	8.522	1.987		4.289	.000
Preference for poetry	-4.75e-02	-0.62	-.034	-.770	.442
Preference for drama	-3.46e.02	.67	-.023	-.514	.608
Preference for prose	6.543e.02	.044	.463	8.472	.014*
Sex	2.174	.367	.258	5.926	.000

* Dependent Variable: Achievement in Literature in English. * Significant of P < .05.

The Table above reveals that preferences for prose has significant relative contribution to the achievement of students in Literature-in-English (b=0.463; t=8.472; p<0.05). Others, that is preference for poetry and drama have no significant relative contribution.

Research question 3 Which of the genres will predict students' achievements in Literature in English?

Based on the information on table 3, it is only preference for prose that can predict students achievements in Literature-in English. (b = 0.463; t = 8.472; p < 0.05)

Summary of Findings

This study investigated the extent to which genral references would predict students achievement in Literature-in-English. Findings from the study revealed that:

Students preferred prose literature to any other genres. (= 2.57)

Preference for prose literature has significant contribution to their achievement in Literature-in-English (b = 0.463; t = 8.472; P < 0.05).

Preference for prose literature is the only predictor of students' achievement in Literature in English.

Discussion of Findings

The research question 1 states: Which of the literary genre is/are preferred by the students? The result shows that the students preferred prose literature more than any other genres. This is evidenced in the weighted average of [*=2.57]. It also revealed that the students preferred prose text than any other genre because they enjoy reading short stories on their own other than reading poetry or drama. Hence, they put in their best in prose aspect of literature examinations than in other aspects, as they affirmed that prose questions are very easy and they are easier to pass than any other literary genre. This finding is in support of Aluko (1990) who observed that students do not read poetry or drama on their own because it is not part of their lives. Hence they tend to avoid studying it.

The second research question tried to examine the relative contribution of genral preference to students achievement in Literature-in-English. The findings show that preference for prose has significant contribution to the achievement of the students in Literature-in-English p<0.05> meaning that the students put in their best in prose aspects of literature examination than in other aspects of literature. This implies that the students are learning the subject without being intimated with the necessary information on the values and prospects of the subject. This unfortunately proves that the finding of Lasisi (1987) as cited in Saruq (2007) who reported that literature students have fear instilled in them by their teachers that poetry and drama are difficult because they are written in verses.

The third research question tried to find out which of the genres will predict students achievements in Literature-in-English the findings show that it is only preferences for prose that will predict students achievement in Literature in English as shown in Table 3 (b = 0.463; += 8.472; p < 0.05) meaning that the students prefer reading more of prose texts than any other genre. This is because the students are taught more of prescribed novels before drama or poems. This finding also correspond with the findings of Aluko (1990) and Atoyebi (2011) who confirmed that teachers transferred negative attitude to the teaching of poetry and drama to their students which in-turn contributed to their poor performance in poetry and drama.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, it is very glaring that the students preferred prose literature to the other two literary genres which are drama and poetry. It can be concluded from this study that when students have preference for a particular genre of literature it implies that they have negative disposition to other genres. Efforts should therefore be made to enlist their interest in all genres of literature in order to maximize students' achievement in the subject.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations are made.

Government should encourage literature teachers by giving them special incentives that will motivate them to illuminate the particular genres of literature that constitutes difficulty to the learners. This will change the students' impression as regards the genres of literature. Nigeria English Studies Association should organize workshops and seminars where literature teachers in secondary schools would be trained on the use of method that promotes higher achievement and interest in poetry and drama. Parents Teachers Association (PTA) should build library where all prescribed prose, poetry and drama texts would be available for the students to borrowed and read on their own. Parents should encourage their children to listen to poems and radio drama in order to be more interested in them. Principals of secondary schools may separate the three genres of literature and they should be taught simultaneously so that equal time will be used for teaching each of the genres. The school authorities should set up poetry and drama club in school and prizes should be given to the best student, this will serve as motivation to the literature students. Teachers of literature should endeavor to change their lukewarm attitude towards the teaching of literature and teach the subject with all enthusiasm that will be contagious to their students. This is possible if the teacher acts as a model or mentor to the students, so that the students will see in the teachers, an effortless command of literature texts. The teacher should reveal the enthusiasm by propagating and encouraging emotional and aesthetic responses in students, so as to make the students become more sophisticated readers, capable of reading and understanding any literary text with little or no assistance from the teacher. Literature experts such as the poets, playwrights and novelist should try to produce literary text that are within the level of the learners and also make use of simple language and structures that the learners can easily comprehend.

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