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**QUESTION AND ANSWER FORUM:
THE PLACE OF LITERATURE IN THE USE OF
ENGLISH PROGRAMME**

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The question and answer forum for this issue of JESEL is a particularly interesting one in both context and content. Contextually, it is interesting that a question and answer could come from two members of the JESEL editorial board and in house affair you may say. As a departure from the usual system of answering questions from JESEL readers outside the board, we feel that this issue could reflect at least one of the various kinds of robust and serious academic discussions that take place among members of the board. The interesting context examines a vital area of English studies in Nigeria which deserves scholarly attention, the place of literature in the use of English programme in Nigeria tertiary institutions. Let us look at the exchange between Chukwuemeka and Wale below on the programme.

Chukwuemeka: Cullinan(1992:*ii) in her article "Leading with Literature" tells us that:

"Good literature is clearly the foundation of an effective language programme and is central to reading and writing in whole language"

Also, Glarzer (1993:20) in her book Reading comprehension says

"Literature- rich environment focus on functional and purposeful activities that guide and foster children to[i]take risk while learning and make decisions about learning [ii] self access how and what they learn and[iii] learn to think about ideas and write them.

Yet in our use of English curriculum nation-wide it appears that no provision is made to utilise or integrate literature in teaching of English language competence. Is it that there is no empirical basis to support such a provision for the use of a rich variety of literature and print books in the rich English studies

curriculum or is it that the experience of others in using literature to enhance English is not relevant to us? Why then is there no literature rich environment provided for the use of English programme?

WALE : Three questions can be seen from your contribution and to our understanding, each of these demands an answer. On the first question, there is a rational basis to include literature in our English studies programme in the second language environment. Professor Adebisi in his inaugural lecture titled Problem;Principles and Prospects of English Studies In An African University identifies three main components of English studies as Literature, Language studies and Use of English. Thus literature is one of the three major components to be recognised within an adequate English studies curriculum designed for us. What is more, within each of these components, literature has a role to play in its illustrative, illuminative, appreciative, evaluative, and creative aspects.

With particular reference to the Use of English component, there are of course empirical bases to support the Use of Literature and print books. A cursory look at some of the available books on the use of English around will show the abundance of extracts and reference to diverse areas of literature. See, for example, The Use Of English (1975), Afolayan and Newsom(1983) and Banjo and Bisong(1985). The plan of the Use of English programme for which the texts listed above are produced undoubtedly makes provision for literature in the curriculum. However, it should be already admitted that the implementation of the programme today is a far cry from the vision which its founders have for it. Thus, like many other lofty programmes in our educational system, the use of English programme has suffered from lack of essential recognition and support from the relevant agencies and authorities of education in Nigeria.

On the second question, to start with, there is no doubt that the answer is yes. Nigeria can learn a lot from the results of various researches carried out in mother tongue English speaking environments. However, English is a second language in the country and there must be some caution which should enable us to

recognise the fact that there is danger in making a wholesale transfer of experience of EMT environments to ESL environment. The EMT learner learns literature to widen his experience through acquiring certain humane and humanistic values. He already generally has a mastery of the language for communication purposes. On the contrary, the ESL learner has to learn the language to meet the communication needs and consequently his primary initial preoccupation with literature is for the purpose of learning the basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Of course, at the higher educational level, learners in both environment may also acquire literature as a means of acquiring advanced language skills and literacy creativity.

The contention here is that a new approach to a literature-based English curriculum, adapted rather than transferred from an EMT situation, has to be designed and followed in an ESL environment. This should take into consideration (a) the less favourable conditions of learning English in a non native environment, and (b) the goal of the ESL learner who acquires learning English to express and understand both his own native culture and English culture.

The third question seems to have been partially catered for by our answers of Questions 1 and 2 above. That is, the lack of proper implementation of what ought to be a virile use of English programme is what has prevented the programme from achieving its major objectives and goals, including providing a proper place for literature within the programme. Professor Afolayan (1979:6) states these goals of the programme thus:

... to have acquired various skills of varying complexity, beginning with the four basics skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In addition, there are also intermediate and advanced skills of analytic and evaluative comprehension, extensive, as well as rapid reading, complex writing skills involving not only various kinds of descriptive, narrative and analytical exercises but also long essays and scientific reporting.

Without any doubt, the successful achievement of the goals above requires abundant literature. Materials have to be provided in terms of texts (passages, magazines, print books, etc.) from diverse fields of human experience-conversation, literature, technology, history, statistics, etc. Students should not be made to learn abstract concept and ideas that do not derive from, explain or illustrate available literature.

Instead, they should be encouraged to work out texts, analyse and synthesise them, create them and criticise them in the course of performing the various tasks required by the course. By being in constant touch with literature in English, students will not only improve on their use of language but will also gain more knowledge from the various subjects they come across.

At this juncture, we shall use this forum to call the attention of the relevant bodies, agencies and authorities concerned with the funding, administration and presentation of the use of English programme to revive and sustain the programme. So far, the attempt to revive it through the Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP) has met with some difficulties and problems and needs to be reviewed (see Onukaogu and Olowu 1994).

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**ADEGBITE & ONUKAOGU: QUESTION & ANSWER
FORUM**

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