



## LITERATURE MODULES IN THE USE OF ENGLISH CURRICULUM FOR NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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**ABSTRACT:** *English language remains the main medium through which other courses are taught in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The inclusion of the Use of English and Communication Skills into the polytechnic curriculum for all students is to enable them acquire necessary language and communication skills. This study examined the Literature Modules in the Use of English Curriculum of Nigerian Polytechnics and other technical institutions currently in use. All students, regardless of their areas of specialization, offer the Use of English course where literature modules are included. Some academic staff members as well as students sometimes question the rationale for teaching especially the Literature modules of the Use of English syllabus. This is because they consider it as a course which plays no essential role in meeting the country's manpower need. This research work evaluated the content and relevance of the curriculum as designed by the NBTE towards meeting Nigeria's technological drive. The findings reveal that the Nigerian polytechnic learners all need to be proficient in the Use of English and communication skills to be able to perform well in their professions. The study therefore concludes that polytechnic students cannot excel in their professional conduct with just the subject knowledge of their areas of specialization. The Use of English course is therefore necessary in providing all students with the language skills to help them cope effectively with the challenges of their professions.*

**KEYWORDS:** Curriculum, language skills, technical skills, profession, Literature modules.



## INTRODUCTION

Technical education is key to the technological growth and development of any country. There is no nation that can grow technically without technological education. Therefore, technical colleges, polytechnics as well as universities are established and designed to play crucial roles by providing skilled manpower in form of artisans, craftsmen and technicians in various trades. This then raises the question of the relevance of the literature component of the Use of English curriculum as contained in the *Preliminary Diploma Course Specifications* and *Curriculum* and the *General Studies Course Specifications for National and Higher National Programmes* as published by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), the academic regulatory body for Nigerian polytechnics, Kaduna. The curriculum specified explicitly that polytechnic education is to provide a broad-based education designed to sharpen students' communication skills, their realization of the need for cross-fertilization of ideas and inter-relatedness of various disciplines. Both technical competence and communication skills are critical to the English as Second Language (ESL) learners' functionality in social life. The Nigerian polytechnic graduates in various vocational areas need to be proficient both in theory and practice in the main medium of communication. It is not realistic for anybody to think that polytechnic products will pursue and excel in their academics with just the subject knowledge of their specific courses without being proficient in communication skills.

As contained in the curriculum specifications, students of National Diploma 1 are introduced to one of the genres of literary fiction. Another genre, the dramatic literature, is taught to ND 2 students. Textual materials are employed. In the first semester of HND 1 programme and in the final year, that is HND 2, students are exposed to literary appreciation. Although literature has been perceived to be the driving force that may develop students' interest in English learning, some lecturers as well as students do not value or support its inclusion in the curriculum of Nigerian polytechnics by NBTE for all students. Obasi (1985) points out that "many students of technological institutions in the country often wonder why they should be 'bothered' with courses other than those professional ones they are admitted to read. According to him, the teachers claim that English is one of the entry requirements and hence the students have qualified; there is no need for its study. He concludes that this skepticism of the intellectuals can be explained either in terms of acquired parochial intellectual orientation or in terms of their intellectual apathy." This apathy is clearly manifested in their handling of the literature modules. For example, some lecturers adopt the "take your book and read approach." Others prefer to give handouts while some just lecture. Mckay (1982) argues that literature has just a minimal contribution towards the teaching of grammar for the target language due to its use of unique and complex language structures which deviates from the natural or common language. Other scholars like William (1990) agree that the curriculum is well thought-out as by studying literature, the second language learner can internalize and consciously adopt the rhythms of natural speech (as in drama), economy and richness of diction (as in poetry), and rhetorical and organisational devices (as in prose). If literature is properly conceptualized and studied, it will lead to the attainment of both educational and professional objectives. These objectives are in line with the NBTE's specification.



## **THE CONCEPT OF LITERATURE**

The concept 'Literature' is used in two different senses. First, it is used to refer to any written or printed material on a subject that we can interact with to inform, teach or entertain. Second, it is used to refer to one of the school subjects studied by students, or a university discipline. It is the second sense that applies to us in this context.

As a subject or discipline, Mayhead (1965) considers works of History, Economics, Physics, Biology among others as the literature in those fields of human endeavour. Therefore, as a subject of study, there are some significant functions literature performs. In other words, the whole essence of developing literature as a school subject is for the students to derive some benefits. The following constitute the importance or benefits of Literature to the students or society:

- i. The knowledge of Literature forms the foundation upon which the users' proficiency in English language is built.
- ii. Literature provides entertainment for the reader. For example, comical plays enliven spectators and help to ease tension.
- iii. Students become creative, critical and analytical thinkers. That is learners can have a high level of critical, analytical and creative thinking skills in the subject knowledge and get the solutions to problems encountered in their professions.

### **Literature in the Polytechnic Syllabus**

A polytechnic is an institution that teaches technical skills in the sciences, business management and various other disciplines for the general development of society. Literature and society are inextricably interrelated—society influences literature so too does Literature influence society. The National Board for Technical Education (1977) has the following aims for the establishment of polytechnics in Nigeria:

- i. The inculcation of national consciousness and national identity.
- ii. The inculcation of the right type of values and the attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- iii. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.
- iv. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence, both mental and physical, as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

The Literature modules constitute part of English Language and Communication Skills for Preparatory National Diploma, National and Higher National Diploma.

### **Use of English Curriculum for Nigerian Polytechnics**

Curriculum refers to the sum of learning including the school subjects, topics, learning activities and the educational ends in an institution. Goals, objectives and intended outcomes provide the appropriate direction for the content and activities in the course programme, a framework for teachers' planning. The major aim of teaching the Use of English curriculum is



to deal with the various linguistic problems—grammar, lexis, semantics, phonology, spelling, and punctuation, among others—posed by English as a means of communication. It is also to enable students to read, write and speak English to the level of international intelligibility and to equip them with the tools for reflective, thinking and communication. It is therefore a medium for the inculcation of the goals a society aspires for. The modules are meant to introduce students to Literature through the explanation of the genres of Literature, the aspects of novel and the terminologies of drama and poetry, where the main objectives include enhancing the knowledge of Nigeria's cultural antecedents and improving the language skills of trainees. The modules include the following:

i. PEL 012 (English Language and Communication)

This is a Literature module for Preparatory National Diploma students.

The main goal of this module is "to help the trainees read Literature materials for enjoyment and appreciation and to enable them (students) have minimum requirement to undergo the National Diploma Course" (53). As such, the syllabus is created based on materials that are examinable and not necessarily useful for the individual or society. Much emphasis is on students acquiring passes for the National Diploma Programme. A consideration of Literature for mere examination purposes therefore limits its scope and impacts on the human experience because minds that produce works of Literature might have had a far greater vision than having such works read for just academic purposes.

ii. GNS 101 (Use of English1) and GNS 301 (Use of English 111)

These are the Use of English courses for National Diploma 1 and Higher National Diploma 1 students respectively. Both have Literature modules with the same goal that is to help students "appreciate literary works in English." However, appreciation in Literature is a broad concept. For example, what direction is such appreciation supposed to take? The syllabus seems not to have considered that this subject is meant for technical students, that is, what their needs for Literature are and the ideological leaning the subject should give. The syllabus should appreciate the fact that Literature in Nigerian polytechnics is also meant for technical students. It is this realization that should determine the course content. This will also help teachers to develop the appropriate teaching pattern and also give students an understanding of Literature.

iii. GNS 402 (Literary Appreciation and Oral Composition)

This course is meant for HND 1 students. This is where Literature is given a significant place in the polytechnic syllabus. Its goal is to impact analytical, evaluative and interpretative writing and speaking techniques to students. The main aim is to encourage creativity (22). This course lays emphasis on teaching the techniques of delivery in Communication and the introduction to literature to students.

From the Literature modules enumerated above, it could be observed from their performance objectives that there is a repetition of goals. For example, in PEL 012, one of the objectives of the module is to "distinguish between different types of Literature pieces; read and understand each genre, e.g., prose, poetry and drama, etc" (8). GNS 101 states: "Explain the meaning of literature ... Differentiate between the literature genres" (6). GNS 301: "Explain the term literature ... List the genres of literature (15). GNS 402 module requests students to list the different literary genres and to outline their salient features ... (22). This kind of repetition



makes Literature in Nigerian polytechnics to revolve around the same objectives. By these repetitions, only very little will be achieved in the course contents as it has been outlined. This therefore defeats the performance objectives as spelt out in the curriculum. Furthermore, the restriction of the modules to the teaching and study of Literature to literary appreciation hinders the application of Literature to the development of professional acumen.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This research is aimed at the utilitarian aspects of Literature in our society (polytechnics) and how to encourage students to study it. The following questions are therefore formulated:

- i. Can the literature modules of the Use of English curriculum as developed and implemented by NBTE bring about the needed technological growth?
- ii. Is the curriculum designed by NBTE deficient?
- iii. What is the relationship between Literature and technology?
- iv. How is Literature taught and learnt in the polytechnic?

### **Significance of the Study**

The research work is generally important as:

- i. It will establish the adequacy or otherwise of the Use of English Curriculum in meeting the needs of the students
- ii. It suggests ways of solving the problems encountered in the implementation of the curriculum
- iii. It will also serve as a source of secondary data to other researchers and as a guide for polytechnic curriculum designers especially in Nigeria
- iv. It will erase the erroneous attitudes of both students and some lecturers of polytechnic system on the place of Literature towards Nigeria's quest for technological advancement.

### **Research Methodology**

The following methods were adopted for the research work:

Population, sample size, primary and secondary data.

#### **a. Population**

The study area of this research work is the polytechnics in Nigeria. The population for the study was taken from six (6) representative polytechnics with a polytechnic each from the six geopolitical zones of the country. This was to enable each geo-political zone to have a representation which will sum up the general views as regards the study. Thus, Isa Mustapha Agwai 1 Polytechnic, Lafia (North Central); Imo State Polytechnic, Nekede (South East); The Polytechnic, Ibadan (South West); Edo State Polytechnic, Benin (South-South); Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, Bauchi (North-East) and Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna State (North



West). The population of this study shall therefore be the six polytechnics. The target population for the study consists of 100 HND students and five (5) lecturers that teach Use of English respectively from each sampled polytechnic (600 students and 30 lecturers). The HND students were chosen as respondents for the study since the researchers were of the opinion that they had spent enough time in the institutions to give a valid judgment on the English curriculum.

#### b. Sample Size

The sample is a subset of the population which is being investigated with the aim of generalizing the result. This sampling ensures a good representation in terms of geographical location and sponsorship. For this study, the sample size of 300 students was drawn from the population of 600 students and 30 lecturers.

#### c. Primary and Secondary Sources of Data

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data was sourced through the use of structured questionnaire while the secondary data was sourced through publications, journals, textbooks and other relevant materials related to the topic.

### Research Instrument and Its Administration

The research instrument used for the purpose of data collection was questionnaire. The instrument was structured to involve students and lecturers of English and Communication Skills in the polytechnics under study. This was meant to elicit responses from them. Furthermore, the instrument was divided into three sections: Sections A, B and C. Section A seeks for the demographic data of the respondents like age, sex, qualification and institution. Section B is made up of questions designed to elicit information on the main thrust of the research for lecturers. Section C was also designed to seek for students views on the main thrust of the study. This is to confirm that the respondents are the correct individuals knowledgeable and able to supply unbiased responses to questions in the questionnaire.

### Data Analysis

Data gotten from the lecturers and students in the field were analyzed using quantitative data analysis and simple percentages.

### Section A: Demographic Data of Respondents

#### Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percent
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	225	75
Female	75	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age range</b>		
20-25	81	27
26-30	60	20
31-35	42	14
36-40	63	21



41-45	39	13
46 & above	15	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: *Field work (2022)*

The table above shows the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. From the table above, 75% of the total respondents for the study were males while 25%, females. It therefore shows that more males were involved in the study than females.

The results on the age range of respondents show that 27% of the respondents were from the age bracket of 20-25. 20% of the respondents were within 26-30 age brackets. 14% of the respondents were within the age bracket of 31-35. 21% were 36-40. 13% of the total respondents were within the age bracket of 41-45, while 46 and above of the respondents were 5%. The result therefore shows that the age bracket of 20-25 respondents was the highest in the study. This age range of respondents can be critical and analytical enough to objectively and adequately respond to the questionnaires.

### Section B: Questionnaire for Students

s/n	Item	Response			Total
		A	D	UND	
1	Did you expect to study literature in the polytechnic?	<b>87(29%)</b>	198 (66%)	15(5%)	300(100)
2	Do you consider the study of literature necessary for polytechnic education?	<b>54(18%)</b>	234 (78%)	12(4%)	300(100)
3	Have you been able to buy all the recommended literature texts for the course?	45(15%)	240 (80%)	15(5%)	300(100)
4	Did the aspects of literature learnt help build your vocabulary more than other courses?	225(75%)	75 (25%)	<b>0(00)</b>	300(100)
5	Your core courses do not teach you much about human predicaments as aspects of literature you have been exposed to do.	69(23%)	231 (77%)	0(00)	300(100)



6	Would you recommend that the texts or poems to be selected for explication be for specific purposes?	201(67%)	79 (26%)	21(7%)	300 (100)
7	Does the study of literature in the polytechnic interest you?	39(13%)	249 (83%)	12(4%)	300 (100)

*Source: Field work (2022)*

From the table above, out of the 300 respondents for the study, 29% agreed that they anticipated the study of Literature in the Polytechnic curriculum; 66% disagreed and 5% of respondents were neutral. From these responses, it could be observed that most students did not expect the study of Literature in their chosen careers in the polytechnic education.

From the second question, 18% of the respondents agreed that the study of Literature is necessary for polytechnic education. 78% disagreed and 4% were undecided. From their responses, they agreed that the study of Literature is not necessary for polytechnic education.

Question 3 shows that only 15% of the respondents agreed that they have been able to buy all the recommended Literature texts, while 80% disagreed. This means that not many students bought all the recommended texts for explication. This further confirms their disregard and apathy for the course as they consider it irrelevant and a distraction from their core courses.

Question 4 seeks to know whether literature, more than their core courses, contribute in developing their vocabulary. 75% of the respondents agreed that the study of Literature helps them improve on vocabulary development and communication skills. 25% of the respondents disagreed. This shows that Literature, more than other courses, helps build their vocabulary.

On question 5, 77% of the respondents agreed that Literature teaches them most about human predicaments than their core courses do, while 23% disagreed.

Responses to question 6 show that 67% agreed that the materials selected for explication should be for specific purposes, while 26% disagreed that it is not necessary to select texts or poems based on special purposes.

For question 7, on whether or not literature interests students in polytechnic education, majority (83%) of the respondents disagreed, 13 of them agreed while 4% were undecided. This confirms their lack of interest in the study of Literature.






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**Section C: Questionnaire for Lecturers**


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s/n	Item	Response			Total
		A	D	UND	
1	You are conversant with the National Policy on Education (NPE) objectives.	12(40%)	15(50%)	3(10%)	30(100)
2	Do you strictly use the 1999 Use of English Course Specifications developed by NBTE for Nigerian polytechnics?	9(30%)	18(60%)	3(10%)	30(100)
3	Your students show interest in the class when aspects of Literature are taught	<b>9(30%)</b>	15(50%)	6(20%)	30(100)
4	Aspects of Literature teach your students the ability to evaluate, criticize and comment on aspects of life generally	<b>24(80%)</b>	6(20%)	<b>0(00)</b>	30(100)
5	Would you agree that the aim and objectives of including Literature modules in the polytechnic curriculum have been achieved?	12(40%)	15(50%)	3(10%)	30(100)
6	English language occupies a pride of place in Nigerian educational system	21(70%)	9(30%)	0(00)	30(100)
7	Do you believe that the teaching of Literature can be of value in the development of an individual?	18(60%)	9(30%)	3(10%)	30(100)

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*Source: Field work (2022)*



1. From the table above, it can be seen that, out of the 30 respondents, 40% agreed that they are conversant with the National Policy on Education (NPE), while 50% of them disagreed. 10% of the respondents were undecided.
2. The results from the respondents showed that 30% of the respondents agreed that they strictly use the 1999 Use of English course specifications developed by NBTE for polytechnics in Nigeria. 60% disagreed; 10% were neutral. The result therefore reveals that many Literature lecturers do not strictly use the 1999 Use of English Course Specifications developed by NBTE.
3. The results showed that only 30% of the respondents come alive in the class when aspects of Literature are taught. 50% of the respondents disagreed; 20% were undecided.
4. 80% of the respondents agreed that aspects of Literature teach their students the ability to evaluate, criticize and comment on aspects of life generally; 20% of the respondents disagreed.
5. The results showed that 40% of the respondents agreed that the aim and objectives of including Literature modules in the polytechnic curriculum have been achieved, while 60% disagreed. 10% of the respondents were undecided.
6. It can be seen from the table that 70% of the respondents agreed that English Language occupies a pride of place in Nigerian educational system. 30% of the respondents disagreed.
7. 60% of the respondents agreed that the teaching and learning of Literature can be of great value in the development of an individual, whereas 30% disagreed while 10% were neutral.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section analyses the extent to which findings of this study confirms or deviates from those of other researchers. The findings were analysed according to the research objectives for easy comprehension. The views on the thrust of the study were gotten from the sample population of 300 respondents (students) and 30 lecturers. From the study, it was discovered that most of the students did not envisage the study of Literature in their chosen careers in the polytechnic. This is because of their erroneous belief that the major courses of their areas of specialty are more relevant than the elective or borrowed ones. This view corroborates that of Obasi (1985) who states that “many students of technological institutions in the country often wonder why they should be 'bothered' with courses other than those professional ones they are admitted to read.” A research work by Kwasau (1996) has similar view. According to him, “The teaching of Literature in tertiary vocational institutions in Nigeria is bedeviled by a number of factors. One of such is the poor attitude of students coupled with a low motivation in the subject. These lead to failure of students to take the course seriously.”

The study shows that Literature helps improve learners' vocabulary development and communication skills. Brumfit (1985) agrees that teaching of Literature largely empowers the



linguistic and cultural maturity of the learner in ESL context. The findings of the study further revealed that Literature teaches students much about human predicaments more than their core courses do. Gbenedio (1996) advises that "Literature should be taught to all students, not just students in Arts and Social Sciences. Doing this has a groundswell of advantages." For example, an engineer needs to be efficient in communication. He also needs to be aware of the ethics of his profession to perform at the required level. Imagine that if what is said by the technologist does not correspond with what is meant, can work be done properly? An engineer who does not know the ethics of his profession cannot perform well. It is the study of Literature that is meant to expose trainees to such knowledge and ethics their main courses of specialization do not offer them. In the light of this therefore, whatever the professional field one is pursuing in the polytechnic, much can be gained from studying Literature. Therefore, technical competence, as well as communication skills, is critical to the polytechnic English as Second Language Learners' functionality in social life. The study therefore suggests that selection of literature materials for polytechnic students should reflect the learners' professional needs. In the same vein, Maley (2000) suggested that "literary texts to be used for teaching of English Language should have relevance and interest to learners as well as be appropriate to the level of the learners' comprehension."

The study also solicited views from lecturers that teach Literature. Their responses showed that not all lecturers are aware of the scope of the National Policy on Education's (NPE) specifications for the study of Literature, hence their inability to cover the curriculum strictly. Furthermore, due to the fact that the NBTE has signified that ND and HND course specifications are the minimum standards, any user polytechnic could modify it to suit its purpose (needs). This may be another reason why lecturers that teach Literature do not strictly adhere to its specifications. The curriculum therefore needs a review or an overhaul in order to achieve its stated objectives.

It was also revealed that most students do not come alive or feel excited in the class when aspects of Literature are taught by lecturers. The reason may be that the selected texts are either complex or uninteresting, or due to the lecturers' method of delivery. Selection of appropriate texts for students is therefore a very important step. Furthermore, the lecturers should encourage or ginger the students up in the classroom by teaching motivating material and themes—Literature of their interest—and getting them involved in the activities.

The responses from lecturers also revealed that the aim and objectives of including Literature modules in the polytechnic curriculum have not been achieved. This is evident from the learners' poor performance in both spoken and written English. This therefore calls for a review of the curriculum towards a more effective teaching and learning.

The findings of the study further revealed that English Language occupies a pride of place in the Nigerian educational system. It is the language of science and technology, the language approved for use in Nigeria's educational system right from primary to tertiary levels. The importance and centrality of English Language to Nigeria's educational system is confirmed by Ezulu (1995), who asserts that, "Hardly is any student of engineering technology or business tested on the road on his knowledge of particular discipline. Such a test takes place mostly in classrooms or in examinations. But every time an individual speaks anywhere, his English Language or communicative competence is being put to test." English Language therefore performs certain functions which not all languages can perform in our educational institutions. He further advises that, "It is therefore, worth the while acquiring mastery of this important



world language, for whoever does not should consider himself deprived of access to this world's brightest ideas and modern technologies." Again, the English Language is so important in Nigeria that it can make or mar learners' success in their chosen careers. The study concludes that the study of literature is very necessary as it has great value in the development of an individual and the society. For instance, Literature can expose the learners to aspects of traditional technology which, if developed, can upgrade the quality of rural life in Nigeria. Cultural awareness and enrichment can help students understand other cultures, ideologies, exposure and civilizations.

## CONCLUSION

The research work, using the functional approach, examined the problems and prospects of the study of the Literature modules in the Use of English curriculum for Nigerian polytechnics as designed and implemented by NBTE in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses and consequently proffer some recommendations for improving it. The research work appraised the role of Literature in academic context where, although trainees are not pursuing certificates in Literature, this course is need-oriented (Literature is not only relevant to technical education as it provides a way to the creative process applicable to science as well as the arts.) The premise of the study is that although the Literature component of the Use of English curriculum is designed to achieve certain objectives outlined in the NPE (1977), it is difficult due to its present form. It therefore needs a review towards the realization of its set aim and objectives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Having discussed the findings and drawn conclusions from the research work, the following recommendations are made:

### (a) Recommendations to NBTE

- i. The current Literature in English components of the General Studies syllabus should be reviewed and imbued with values that will foster the attainment of our national objectives.
- ii. There is a need for a more favourable and robust attitude towards the teaching of English in polytechnics by organizing regular workshops and seminars for lecturers like the National Commission for Colleges of Education.

### (b) Lecturers of English

- i. There is a need for lecturers to be conversant with the national policy on education specifications and its objectives. Lack of the knowledge of NPE has caused some confusion among teachers of English especially on the interpretation of the goals of Literature modules in the Use of English curriculum in Nigerian polytechnics.
- ii. As the use of appropriate teaching methods is one of the challenges faced by teachers, departments of English should embark on collaborative teaching; hence, the appropriate teaching method to be used depends very much on the situation and result desired by the teacher.



- iii. Polytechnic students must be encouraged or motivated by their teachers to be serious and improve on their written and spoken English. This will make them develop the right attitude towards this course.

(c) The Management

- i. Adequate materials, resources and facilities should also be provided for the effective implementation of the curriculum by both federal and state governments.
- ii. As many problems facing the curriculum arise out of the poor attitude to the subject by the authorities, teachers and students, there is a need for change of attitude.
- iii. There should be continuous training of members of staff through workshops, conferences and seminars.

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