

## The Implications of Performance in the Teaching of Poetry at Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

There is no doubt, the importance of the literary aspect of English Language, as stipulated in the National Board for Technical Education (N.B.T.E) Curricula for students at National Diploma and Higher National Diploma levels in the polytechnics, can never be over emphasized. The curricula are designed in such a way that students study the three genres of literature before graduating with Higher National Diploma. Poetry, a more advanced, abstract and complex genre of literature, is taught at HND level and students are less interested as there are no explicit characters or actors. Hence, this study examined the implications of performance in the teaching of poetry and assessed the performances of HND students at Rufus Giwa Polytechnic Owo in order to demonstrate the viability of the approach. The study adopted the theoretical framework of situation cognition theory, through which, students' emotions were linked to learning in the course of demonstrating real life situations. The intervention was administered on five hundred students and the best one hundred scores on the basis of twenty-five scores from each faculty were selected and analysed. There was a significant increase in the previous mean score of 5.94 to 9.05. Hence, students had a better understanding of poetry and lecturers, also, had the opportunity a more defined method of making poetry an adventurous experience in the classroom, especially, for the students. Therefore, engaging students in the performance of study poems is recommending for students of tertiary institutions.

### INTRODUCTION

For ages, drama, an early form of art, has served as an effective means of entertaining people. Aside this, moral lessons are taught in order to correct societal ills. No wonder, literature is regarded as a reflection of life. It is interesting and fascinating to note that a good way of bringing life into the classroom is through dramatic performance. No wonder, Femi-Olaleye (2015) opines that drama is the genre of literature that is intended for or represented in performance by actors on stage or theatre. Meanwhile, Mahmud (2005) posits that drama is one of man's spontaneous ways of expressing himself. This later submission implies that drama can be used as an effective method of teaching in the classroom because teaching centres on self-expression.

It is imperative that drama, which is one of the three genres of literature, is interchangeably used with play because it involves action mixed with words. Another genre of literature is poetry, which refers to poems. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines a poem as a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for their sound and the images they suggest, not just for their obvious meanings. On poetry, Ogunmoyero, Ariyo, Ajibola & Olusa (2005) aver that:

*Poetry is the most obscure of the three genres of literature... it is a kind of poetry that uses elevated, compact, condensed structure of language to communicate one's feelings and emotions or imaginative experiences. It is heightened use of language and its speech is decorated. It is a very concentrated and intense means of communication.*

There are types of poetry which include, but not limited to, ballad, epic, elegy or dirge, lyric, ode sonnet, didactic poem, satire, panegyric, allegory, limerick, dramatic poetry or poetic drama and dramatic monologue. This research is to apply performance approach to the teaching of all types of poetry in English Language classroom by suiting the words to the actions and the actions to the words. More so, poetry is an important aspect of English courses in Higher National Diploma classes.

*Situated Cognition Theory of learning and performance is a relevant framework for this research. According to Russ-Eft (2011), this theory involves the use of aid by identifying "affordances," such as easy routes, resources, or strategies in teaching and training that takes place within rich contexts or situations (involving real life tasks or using media to simulate such situations). The employment of drama will serve as an aid and*

*demonstration of real life situations in students' understanding of poetry. He further explains thus:*

Situated cognition results from reasoning that occurs when the individual interacts with the social and physical situation. This theory seems close to an interactionist approach in that emphasis is placed on the mind, in the form of mental models, and on the affordances of the environment. This theory suggests that training should facilitate the development of trainee's mental models through problem-solving activities, particularly by using ill-defined problems... the instructors or the medium must anchor or situate trainees in simulated contexts, situations representing life experiences, or apprenticeships in real life situations.

From the above, it is clear that situated cognition theory provides a theoretical underpinning for a research that intends to examine the implications of performance on the teaching of poetry in a tertiary institution.

The teaching of drama and the use of drama in teaching have received attention from various scholars in the past. Such studies include Dowdy & Kaplan (2011), Dowdy (2008), El-Nady (2000), etc. Also, the teaching of poetry has been given scholarly attention (Dowdy 2002; Dowdy 2010). It is noteworthy that recent researches have applied multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approaches in teaching methods, and considering the fact that the application of dramatic or performance approach, which could be regarded as a genre in literature, to the teaching of poetry, another genre of literature, among students in a tertiary institution deserves scholarly attention, the research intends to examine the implications of performance in the teaching of selected students in the research.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study aims at conducting an investigation into the implications of teaching poetry through performance. The objectives are to:

- Test the effectiveness of performance in the teaching of poetry;
- Simplify and discuss difficult abstract concepts in poetry through performance;
- Recommend its application in the teaching of poetry at various levels.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Performance approach to the teaching of poetry, in the classroom, is in tandem with the argument of Austin (1962) in his book titled *How to do things with words*. However, his submission

bothers on the fact that there are actions in words. This implies that actions are foregrounded in all types of poetry which could be translated into performance.

Moore (2004) makes an apt reference to an old native American Proverb which states that "Tell me, and I'll forget; Show me, and I may not remember; Involve me, and I'll understand". This research indicates that using drama in the classroom as a means of teaching helps students learn academically, socially, and developmentally. This implies that students' involvement in the performance of poetry for teaching purpose provides room for better understanding and effective teaching.

There are various advantages of dramatic techniques in the teaching of poetry. These range from hands-on, experiential learning; engaging the mind, body, voice, and emotions to interpret; to learning with profound positive effects on students' cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. It is along this reasoning that El-Nady (2000) submits, on teaching through drama, that 'As a pedagogical process, drama can provide the means for connecting students' emotions and cognition. With drama as a teaching technique in the classroom, students' own concerns, interests, and needs are recognized.'

There is a close relationship between drama and theatre. It is, therefore, important to draw a line of distinction between the two concepts. Indeed, Wessels (1987) submits that 'drama in education uses the same tools employed by actors in theatre. However, the difference is that with theatre everything is contrived for the benefit of the audience and in classroom drama everything is contrived for the benefit of the learners.' Moreover, a theatre usually does not translate from book-form to stage performance but drama does.

Of a fact, Comajoan (2014) assesses the use of drama techniques as a methodology to teach infants English Language through the administration of questionnaires and the results portray that the teachers lack the required knowledge about the methodology. Therefore, researchers need to focus on applying dramatic techniques or performance to various aspects of English studies at various levels. This will create adequate awareness about various techniques of drama that have pedagogical potentials.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research was carried out at Rufus Giwa Polytechnic Owo. Five hundred students in

Higher National Diploma (HND 2) studying poetry as an aspect of English course shall serve as the research subjects. The students shall be selected purposively from four of the six faculties in the Institution. This was based on the background that some faculties have more students than others. Hence, students from the first four faculties with high number of students were selected on the basis of one hundred and twenty five (125) students from each faculty. The faculties are Faculty of Social Science and Communication Studies, Faculty of Business Studies, Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Applied Sciences. By this, two faculties are sciences while two faculties are social sciences.

The research was premised on the framework of situated cognition. The students were taught poetry through performance and basic dramatic techniques in first Semester. The research was done in line with the normal academic calendar and students' assessment took place at the usual examination period as scheduled by the institution since the students were not controlled in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020. This made research activities as natural as possible because the lecturers recorded their marks while the researchers retrieved the scripts of the students and extracted their scores in poetry. Indeed, the researchers made use of scripts of the same students in both HND 1 and HND 2. The results were analysed and extensively discussed. While, the recommendations were based on the results of the students.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

There students' scores were extracted and recorded. The poetry aspect of the course was based on 10 marks for Business Communication 1 and Business Communication 2 according to National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) stipulation as contained in the curriculum. The scores of students in HND 1 were recorded as Score A, while Score B reflected the scores of the students in HND 2.

For the purpose of the analysis, the twenty five scores were selected from each faculty on the basis in the range of 08-10 in HND 2. As such, one hundred students' scores were analysed and compared to their previous performance in HND 1. Further efforts on the analysis were made through the calculation of the mean scores for students' initial score in HND 1 when they were not taught through performance and their later scores in HND 2. Both mean scores were also analysed for the final mean score.

The scores are presented in a table:

**Table1.** Table of Students' Scores

S/N	Score A	Score B	Mean Score
1	06	09	7.5
2	05	10	7.5
3	04	08	6
4	03	07	5
5	06	08	7
6	07	10	8.5
7	07	09	8
8	05	08	6.5
9	07	10	8.5
10	06	09	7.5
11	10	10	10
12	08	10	9
13	04	08	6
14	06	08	7
15	07	10	8.5
16	04	09	6.5
17	03	08	5.5
18	04	10	7
19	06	09	7.5
20	08	10	9
21	07	10	8.5
22	07	10	8.5
23	07	09	8
24	05	08	6.5
25	07	10	8.5
26	06	09	7.5
27	07	10	8.5
28	07	09	8
29	03	07	5
30	06	08	7
31	07	10	8.5
32	07	09	8
33	05	08	6.5
34	07	10	8.5
35	06	09	7.5
36	10	10	10
37	08	10	9
38	04	08	6
39	06	08	7
40	07	10	8.5
41	04	09	6.5
42	03	08	5.5
43	04	10	7
44	06	09	7.5
45	04	10	7
46	06	09	7.5
47	08	10	9
48	07	10	8.5
49	04	08	6
50	06	08	7
51	03	10	6.5
52	07	09	8
53	06	09	7.5
54	07	10	8.5
55	07	09	8
56	05	08	6.5
57	07	10	8.5

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58	06	09	7.5
59	07	10	8.5
60	03	08	5.5
61	06	09	7.5
62	08	10	9
63	04	08	6
64	06	08	7
65	04	10	7
66	06	09	7.5
67	08	10	9
68	07	10	8.5
69	04	08	6
70	06	08	7
71	03	10	6.5
72	07	09	8
73	04	10	7
74	03	07	5
75	06	08	7
76	07	10	8.5
77	07	09	8
78	05	08	6.5
79	07	10	8.5
80	06	09	7.5
81	10	10	10
82	08	10	9
83	04	08	6
84	06	08	7
85	07	10	8.5
86	04	09	6.5
87	06	09	7.5
88	10	10	10
89	08	10	9
90	04	08	6
91	06	08	7
92	07	10	8.5
93	04	09	6.5
94	07	10	8.5
95	07	09	8
96	05	08	6.5
97	07	10	8.5
98	06	09	7.5
99	03	07	5
100	06	08	7
<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>5.94</b>	<b>9.05</b>	<b>7.5</b>

### DISCUSSION OF THE ANALYSIS

The purpose of the study is to investigate the implications of performance in the teaching of poetry among students of a higher institution. It was on the premise that student's scores were analysed before and after the intervention that the research was able to provide a comparative analysis of the results. From the results of the analysis, students' scores indicated that performance through acting of study poems enhance understanding of poems and expression of learning experiences. The students had the opportunity of being examined as was demonstrated through two different scores in

poetry. From Table 1, the average score of one hundred students was 5.94 out of a total score of 10. This implied that the students were a little above mean score in poetry and it was noted that students' performance were not poor. Meanwhile, there was a noticeable gap in the mean score of students' post-intervention scores. Which was 9.05. This brought the total mean score of pre and post-intervention scores to 7.5.

No doubt, the involvement of students in the performance of study poems reduced the examination questions to a mere explanation of thoughts, ideas and acts that were learnt during rehearsals and final performance. The relevance of performance in the teaching of poetry was highlighted through a significant improvement in the students' performance. This importance could never be overstressed due to the gap in the performances of the students.

The poetry genre of literature is being perceived as the most difficult, boring and less engaging genre of literature. One of the reasons is lack of explicit characters that could enhance easy understanding. Notwithstanding, the strategy of performance in poetry is a good way of demystifying complex ideas, issues and poetic voices. This would increase the students' interest in and general performance in Communication Skills, Use of English and Business Communication. Indeed, Akinkulere et al (2020)note that the employment of speech act approach in the teaching of English in Nigeria could enhance performance of students, not only during internal examinations in their schools but during external examinations which include but not limited to West African Senior School Certificate Examinations, National Business and Technical Examinations Board and National Examinations Council. Thus, every effort towards improving students' performance in English language could never be overemphasized.

It is noteworthy that the maturity of the students contributed in no small measure towards the performance of the selected poems. Therefore, applying the similar efforts in secondary school will require that teachers exert more energy and time in order to train the students. This would create a sense of engagement rather than engaging external actors. Should there be the need to engage non-student actors, it should be as minimal as possible. No wonder, Michelle and Gerald (2003) were able to establish the connection in writing, performance and reception of poetry. In consonance with this,

the outcome of this research further justifies the role of performance in poetry.

## CONCLUSION

The study provides evidence to support the appropriateness of performance in the teaching of poetry. The major aspect of the approach is the mastery and practice of the poems for the purpose of performance. The involvement of students as actors makes teaching poetry a fun. Based on the empirical facts from the data of the study, the implications of performance in the reaching of poetry provide a good opportunity for students' interest in studying study poems.

Furthermore, the students' performance show that the performance of poems could be adopted in the teaching of poetry in schools. Therefore, it has shed more light on a creative strategies of identifying poetic voices and poetic rendition in teaching poetry. Students are able to explore themes, setting, voice, subject matter unconsciously and independently as they perform.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Having discussed the findings and having drawn conclusions from the research work, the following are the recommendations of this study:

- It is observed that while some of the poems could be easily performed on stage, some were a bit complex. The study recommend that curriculum designers and reviewers should consider poems that could be performed on stage when selecting study poems. This should be done considering other factors such as age, interest, needs, current issues and level of students.
- In the age of virtual learning environment, students should be encouraged to perform poems written by them and share with the lecturer and other students. This will arouse their interest in poetry.
- The teaching strategy of performance should be deployed to enhance students' reception of poetry especially where students lack interest or score low in poetry.
- Students will explore the hidden meanings in poetry if they are involved in the performance. Hence, it is recommended that students should represent the actors or voices in the performance of study poems.
- Teachers or lecturers should create conscious interest in translating poems into performance as they are the guide on the side as the students get involved in performance.

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