



Applying the Reader-Response Theory in Teaching Multicultural Short Stories to Develop Cultural Awareness to Young Learners

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Abstract

Aim: This article discusses the role of multicultural short stories for the enhancement of cultural awareness among secondary school students in Nigeria. Data were collected by selecting three stories of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages through purposive sampling from documents of multicultural short stories published by (NTA, 2010) Nigerian television authority and focus group interviews. In addition, the present study adopts the reader-response theory (Iser, 1978) in evaluating the selected three short stories. The findings showed the significance of teaching short stories that enhanced their intercultural knowledge of traditions, beliefs among different ethnic groups, imagination, and desires as well as intercultural sensitivity. Finally, it promotes their literary appreciation, particularly indigenous African literature.

Method and Theory Role of the Reader-Response Theory: This paper uses a qualitative approach and focus group interviews to collect and evaluate the data.

The paper also employed the works of previous scholars in justifying facts on teaching short stories for the development of cultural awareness of English as a foreign language in classroom contexts. For instance (Erkaya, 2005; Kaya, 2014; Kirgoz, 2012; Pardede, 2011; Strodt-Lopez, 1996) explained the values and benefits of incorporating short stories in teaching English as a foreign language in the classroom contexts. In addition, Reader-response theory (or it makes sense to talk of theories) is an umbrella term referring to several approaches toward the literary text analysis all shifting the undue emphasis on the author or the text to focus on the readers' interactions or transactions with the text. As such, the theory considers "a concern of the reader" (Bressler, 2007. P 80).

Conclusion: *This study explored how multicultural short stories help the students to learn more about different cultures and traditions of other peoples. Moreover, the study highlighted the benefits of multicultural short stories in the development of young learners' reading comprehension, and thinking skills, promoting sensitivity to other cultures, and redressing inequalities between leaders and their subjects. Finally, it argued that teaching multicultural short stories in the classroom served significance in the young learners' life as a source of personal, social, and political understanding among themselves.*

Keywords: *Reader-Response Theory, Teaching multicultural short stories, Cultural awareness, Relationships.*

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Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country located on the west coast of West Africa colonized by British administrators from 1900-1960. In addition, the country has six geopolitical zones which comprise; northwest, north central, northeastern, southwest, south-eastern, and south-south regions. The country has over five hundred different languages, apart from that, it has three major dominant languages. For instance, Hausa-Fulani occupied the northern part, Yoruba covers the southwestern part, Igbo people covers the southeastern part, and the south-south is occupied by the minority languages of Ijaw, Ibibio, and others (Akinmade, 2014; Newman, 2000; Okoro, 2012). After the independence, English is the official language in running government administration agencies, ministries, and private organizations such as; schools, hospitals, banks, companies and religious places, markets etc.

Nigeria as a developing country has its literary writers both in English and Nigerian languages. However, in the education sector, there is a provision in the curriculum to teach literature at lower and upper levels of secondary school education, university, and other tertiary institutions of learning. Teaching and learning indigenous and foreign literary works contribute toward the development of education in the country.

Short stories played a significant role in the enhancement of cultural awareness among secondary school students in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria. In addition, short stories as stated by different scholars and researchers universally believed that broaden the students' vocabulary development, and sentence construction and promote their imagination, and creativity in various aspects of human life (Davies, 2007; Garzón & Castañeda-Peña, 2015; M. Khatib, Rezaei, & Derakhshan, 2011; S. Khatib, 2011; Lazar, 2008; Midhin, 2015; Naqeeb, 2012; Zhao, 2010).

The impact of teaching multicultural short stories in the classroom encourages a variety of learning abilities such as thinking skills, socialization among different ethnic groups, cultural norms, values, and traditions (Buchtová & Stodolová, 2011; Cakir, 2006; Lazar, 2008; Yang & Yang, 2009). This paper is an attempt to contribute to the existing literature in the exploration of multicultural short stories to promote cultural awareness for young learners.

Objectives of the study

The present study intends to highlight the role of multicultural short stories in the development of cultural awareness among young learners studying literature in the classroom.

Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Literature: Role of the Reader-Response Theory

Reader-response theory (or it makes sense to talk of theories) is an umbrella term referring to several approaches toward the literary text analysis all shifting the undue emphasis on the author of the text to focus on the readers' interactions or transactions with the text. As such, the theory considers "a concern of the reader" (Bressler, 2007. P 80).

Literary scholars, educators, and researchers have applied the reader-response theory to teach or evaluate children's books, poems, and short stories to develop student's language skills, critical thinking, language acquisition, and vocabulary development (Bressler, 2007; Ghandehari, 2013; Harvey, 2013). As we observed, they have applied it to evaluate one work or genre. Therefore, this theory has rarely been applied in teaching short stories in a multicultural country like Nigeria. A comprehensive way for evaluating a multicultural short story for young learners.

Literary writers have their readers who deserved the position and right for expressing their views and ideas about a book written for them. To sum it short, the reader-response theory is the most appropriate theory to evaluate this selected multicultural short story to fill a huge gap. And when it is applied and analyzed the gap becomes clearer. Several studies (Nicholes, 2015a; Saniei, 2012; Shemshadsara, 2012; Yeganeh & Raeesi, 2015) discussed the role and benefits of teaching short stories for socio-cultural awareness in the classroom contexts.

Saniei (2012) highlights the impact of cultural awareness in language teaching to students. The study argued that language instructors should incorporate culture when teaching English language courses. Findings have shown the influence of culture in promoting students' interest in learning a second language in the classroom. Shemshadsara (2012) points out the role of cultural studies in teaching language in the classroom context. In his view, for the students to understand the language skills and develop their imagination and desire to learn a foreign language.

On his part, Nicholes (2015a) analyzed the influence of teaching short stories and English composition in China. The researcher provided a sample of short stories to the participants to read and analyzed 5 different components such as (1) personal understanding (2) personal written ideas (3) character's role in the stories (4) stories' modes of characterization (5) pre-reading writing. The findings revealed that it enhanced their cognitive thinking and learning activities.

Similarly, Yeganeh and Raeesi (2015) discussed the role of culture in teaching English as a foreign language which enhanced the students learning activities in the classroom. Finally, the results have shown that teaching culture played a positive impact on both teachers and students during discussions. Having discussed in the related studies that focused on teaching cultural awareness in the

EFL among learners, the study now turns to explaining the methodology and its findings.

Research method

This paper uses a qualitative approach and focus group interviews to collect and evaluate the data. The paper also employed the works of previous scholars in justifying facts on teaching short stories for the development of cultural awareness of English as a foreign language in classroom contexts. For instance (Erkaya, 2005; Kaya, 2014; Kirgoz, 2012; Pardede, 2011; Strodt-Lopez, 1996) explained the values and benefits of incorporating short stories in teaching English as a foreign language in the classroom contexts, such as:

- Motivating the young learners
- Promote spiritual development to the students
- Provide the students with a variety of choices for different interests and tastes.
- Teaching culture
- Also, can be used at all levels to teach language proficiency
- It improves the student's understanding of four language skills

Teaching Multicultural Short Stories

Dietrich and Ralph (1995) and suggested that instructors/teachers should guide their students by introducing the title of the multicultural short stories, the background information of the different languages used in the novels during the classroom activities. Therefore, this study aimed to shed light on the role of multicultural short stories in the development of cultural awareness among young learners. Furthermore, the study selected short stories in three major languages discussing different issues.

Several studies (Abdulaziz, 2011; Constantin, Cohen-Vida, & Popescu, 2015; Dressel, 2005; Simsek, 2014; Smolen & Oswald, 2010; Zhao, 2010) have reported the significance of teaching multicultural short stories in the English language teaching at all levels of students. This study facilitates our understanding of culture and cultural awareness integrated into teaching English as a second language. Unfortunately, none of these studies focus on teaching multicultural short stories written in African languages, particularly Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo languages. For instance, the Hausa short story of the chief and his subjects indicates how the chief treats their subjects unjustly over the broken-out disease and affected many people. The narration shows how their chief announced that all those people who had the disease should leave his kingdom and find another place to live. Furthermore, the story continues with the narration of an old woman who assists the people that left the kingdom with medicine to cure their disease. However, for the second story of Yoruba narration titled “The old man and his sugar cane”

There once lived an old man on his sugarcane plantation. The narration shows that the old is not willing to sell his sugar cane to anyone, if anybody attempted to take part will be in trouble, if it was a man, but if she is a girl or woman, he will keep her and make her his wife. People were afraid of his bad intention in the village. One of his neighbor’s daughters touch the sugar cane, and the old man saw them and shouted ha! ha! “Said you have stolen my sugar cane you must remain here with me as my wives.”

Interestingly, the third story of Igbo short stories called “The Magic Udara Tree” starts with A man who once had two wives. One of the wives had just one child named Ahamefula’s mother became very ill and died. He was left in the care

of his stepmother, but his stepmother did not like him. On market day Ahamefula's stepmother went to the market. She but Udara fruits, she gave all her children some to eat but did not give any to her stepson. Ahamefula took some seeds and planted them. Furthermore, by observing these three multicultural short stories the present study agreed with the assertion made by (Stempleski & Tomalin, 1993) who argued that cultural awareness covers three qualities:

- (i) Awareness of one's culturally-induced behavior
- (ii) Awareness of the culturally-induced behavior of others
- (iii) Ability to explain one's cultural standpoint

Data analysis and Findings

The researcher selected three short stories from Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo and focus group interviews with six students who volunteered to participate from proton and Tradewind halls. The audio tape recorder was used during the interactive sessions and transcribed. The participants responded based on their experience as readers of multicultural short stories, particularly in African literature. After the data was coded as suggested by (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) in which the present study was systematically categorized. Therefore, three outcomes emerged, and the reader's interpretation and enjoyment of reading were revealed.

Outcome 1: Young learners' interpretation of the Hausa short story

Student A. I enjoy the story because it enlightens me on leadership and its subjects. It is very nice it portrayed how leaders should be not ruled by their subjects with injustice.

Student B. I am happy how the king is punished by the bees sent by an old woman because of his bad leadership, so young people should not emulate the habit of the bad leader in the story when they grow up.

Outcome 2: Young learners' interpretation of the Yoruba short story

Student A. It is interesting, I wonder how such a person has a bad intention to deal with anybody who touched his sugar cane, he is not willing to sell it to the buyers why?

Student B. I pity the old man because he is not kind to everyone in his village, that is why everybody is afraid of him, particularly his neighbors. The story warns young learners not to take things that do not belong to them.

Outcome 3: Young learners' interpretation of the Igbo Short Story

Student A. This is one of my favorite stories, it is about family life in the African context that deals with polygamy issues, I like it because it enhanced my knowledge of intercultural awareness of tradition, and beliefs among different groups.

Student B. The story prompted my critical thinking and foster my emotional intelligence. I enjoyed it. It holds my attention and stimulates my imagination of how Udara tree grew up. I am happy.

In this study, the results strengthen the study of Liu and Lee (2011) and Amer (2012) emphasizing that when young learners read about multicultural short stories in class, they come to understand and appreciate them. Furthermore, teaching short stories helps young learners interpret information, analyze, recognize and participate in cooperative learning (Thapaliya, 2013).

Discussion on the selected multicultural Short Stories

By looking at the three selected multicultural short stories, the narrative of the chief and his subjects gave a scenario of leadership in a given African society. In that story, the king does not care about the condition of his subjects because of the disease that affected them. He eventually sent them out of his kingdom. This shows that the king did not consider an appeal made by his subjects to cure their disease and treat his subjects with justice. At the end of the story, it portrayed how the king received a severe punishment of bees sent by the old woman as a result of sending out his subjects from his kingdom.

Moreover, younger learners will bear in their mind to be good leaders in society by respecting people's views before taking any action. There were also nearly half of the students indicated that they like reading multicultural short stories in the classroom. However, in the focus group interviews conducted after the use of short stories for cultural awareness lessons, it was found that the students in general had rather positive views about interactive sessions.

Conclusion

This study explored how multicultural short stories help the students to learn more about different cultures and traditions of other peoples. Moreover, the study highlighted the benefits of multicultural short stories in the development of young learners' reading comprehension, and thinking skills, promoting sensitivity to other cultures, and redressing inequalities between leaders and their subjects. Finally, it argued that teaching multicultural short stories in the classroom served significance in the young learners' life as a source of personal, social, and political understanding among themselves.

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Appendix 1.**The Hausa short story****The chief and his subjects**

Long, long ago, in the kingdom of kanga, a bad disease broke out and affected many people. The chief consulted every oracle and all the wise men to find out what kind of disease was attacking many of his subjects but no one could come out with the answer. Finally, the chief called his subjects together and announced that all those who already had the disease should leave his kingdom and themselves another place to live. His sick subjects cried out, pleading that they should be given a chance to recover, but the chief would not hear of this. The next day, the poor, the sick people sadly set out on their journey to a known destination. Not long after they left the kingdom, they saw an old woman sitting by the roadside carrying a sack on her head. She had been crying for a long time. What is wrong? One of the subjects inquired. "I was cursed by the wicked ghost to carry this heavy sack because I would not let her take my grandkids. I am so weak, but I cannot put this sack down." The people held a quick meeting and decided to help the old woman put down the sack. As soon as the sack was put down, it opened up, releasing a lot of bees. These bees flew straight to the kingdom of Congo. The chief and his subjects were stung by the Bees. The old woman brought out a potion out of her personal belongings. Each person drank the potion and became well. Then the women took them to her own kingdom where they all lived happily as her subjects.

Appendix 2.**The Yoruba short story****The old man and his sugar-cane**

There once an old man in his sugar- cane plantation. The plantation was on the bank of a river. The old was very cunning and wicked, but the sugar-cane he grew in his plantation was very, very sweet. People always wanted to buy some from him or to take some to eat. But the old man would not give out or sell nay of his sugar-cane. Anybody that attempted to take part of the sugar-cane always got into trouble. If it was a man, he would kill the man. If it was a girl or grown woman he would keep her and make her his wife. Soon, everyone came to know of his evil deeds. One day mama Tola who had a melon farm near the old man’s sugar-cane plantation called her three daughters together. “I want you, my three daughter, to go our melon farm and harvest all the melons,” she said “Yes mama” they answered. “But you must be careful. You will have to cross the old man’s sugar-cane plantation to get into our farm. Do not even touch any of his sugar-cane. Do you hear me?” She asked “Yes mama” they answered. “Now you go. And be back before the sun goes down.” On their way into one of them broke off some sugar-cane quickly ate it. Her two sisters did not know what Tito had done. Later, when they are returning from the farm, the wicked man stood in their way said “Ha! Ha! Ha, I have caught you. You have stolen my sugar-cane. You must remain here as my wives.”

Appendix 3

The Igbo short story

The magic Udara tree

A man once had wives. One of the wives had just one child named Ahamefula. The other wife had many children. Ahamefula's mother became very ill and died. He was left in the care of his step-mother. But his stepmother did not like him. One Eke market day, Ahameefula's stepmother went to the market. She bought sweet udara fruits. She gave all her children some to eat, but did not give any to step son, Ahamefula. Ahamefula looked on, longing to have some of the fruit, while his step brothers ate. After they had eaten the fruits, they threw the seeds away. Ahamefula picked up all the udara seeds and planted them. He then sat down and sang this song:

My Udara tree

Grow, grow, grow

My stepmother bought some Udara fruit

She did not give me any

This life is strange

No one knows

What tomorrow will bring.

Suddenly, like magic, the Udara tree popped up through the ground. It grew and grew until it become a full ground tree! He jumped up and down with joy, dancing around the tree.

Again, there were popping sounds, as the magic tree fruited all over. The tree had so many fruits that it hardly had nay leaves. Ahamefula ran around the tree in excitement.

He hugged the tree, looked up and once again sang:

My Udara tree

Ripen, ripen, ripen

My stepmother bought some Udara fruit

She did not give me any

This life is unpredictable:

No one knows

What tomorrow will bring.

His step-mother and her sons were very surprised when they saw Ahamefula with a basketful of Udara fruits, However, they were too ashamed to ask him for any. They became very jealous of him.