

Promoting PNG cultures & customs through literature teaching: An evaluation of literature programs in 12 PNG schools

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ABSTRACT

It is evident that many of Papua New Guinea (PNG) cultures, customs and traditions are slowly disappearing. This study was carried out to investigate whether teachers in the Secondary Schools teach literature to promote PNG cultures and customs. It also aims to find out whether there is a correlation between the Curriculum Division of the Education Department, The University of Goroka and the Secondary Schools and the extent to which these stakeholders collaborate to promote PNG cultures and customs through literature teaching.

INTRODUCTION

There have been discussions on the importance of traditions and cultures of PNG and how to preserve them. The researchers deemed that one way to preserve our cultures is through the teaching of literature in the schools hence, this research was carried out in order to ascertain the extent to which teaching of literature in the Secondary Schools promote PNG cultures and customs. It also survey the most common genres used in teaching literature. The research aim was also to investigate the responsibility of the Education Curriculum Division in terms of material production, the University of Goroka training program and the teaching of literature in the Secondary Schools.

RATIONALE

The purpose of this study was to explore teaching of PNG literature in schools to help promote the preservation and transmission of Melanesian traditional cultures and values reinforced in the statement found in the Preamble of the National Constitution guaranteeing respect for Melanesian cultural heritage which gives effect to the National Goals and Principles Goal No. 5 calling for PNG Ways. The National Curriculum Statement of PNG (2002, p. 17) reflects this aspect under the theme 5.2 'Our Way of Life' sub theme 5.2.1 'Cultural Relevance – traditional lives, our customs, traditions and values'. Accordingly, this study explored the teaching of literature in Secondary Schools, particularly PNG based literature that promotes PNG cultures, costumes and values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of commentators have discussed the importance of traditions and cultures of Papua New Guinea and how to preserve them (Soaba 1995; Kaima 1995; Winduo 1995, 2001; Narakobi 1990). Soaba (1995) citing Freud gives an analogy of the 'womb of space' where the richness of traditions and

cultures are preserved. Wombs being dormant, the task is left for the writers to unravel and bring meaning to what is kept in the womb. This seems a sacred phenomenon. Kaima (1995) for example writes about research and preservation of the oral traditions of PNG society. Oral traditions form a significant part of the process of preserving and promoting our cultures. He believes in the maintenance of the oral tradition for the future generation. "This important data bank" (Kaima 1995, p.75), is crucial so that in future it will serve to tell our children about our past. Similar views are raised by Winduo (1995) about the "people's cultures, values, beliefs and oral traditions" (p.103). A key point the writers emphasize is the need to preserve and keep our cultures and traditions alive.

The order and the cohesiveness of our society and its functions from the past to the present is what Papua New Guinean writers should articulate. When we read about our cultures and values we know the silenced world of our ancestors. In essence "we come to know ourselves better by discovering ourselves" (Winduo, 1995). Narakobi (1987) reinforces this in the Melanesian Way by maintaining our identity. Winduo (2001) states that some students studying literature at the universities or any other tertiary institutions have an understanding of literature and some do not. Of these students, some are literature teachers in secondary schools. Though they are literature teachers, they do not teach the subject "effectively" (p.14). He questions the quality of literature program in the colleges they were trained in. This is a real concern and the researchers feel that it is imperative to examine the current Lower and Upper Secondary Schools Syllabus to determine the extent to which literature texts, materials, and resources help promote the appreciation of the values of culture in PNG.

In the draft Syllabus for Lower Secondary (DOE 2006), it is stated that materials can be selected from what is available from the schools. By reading and being exposed to the materials available in the schools, students develop a sense of identity and belonging. This will shape them to interact with the environment and the people. By reading the literature material, it will also enhance and sharpen the other language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Furthermore students will be able to develop and understand the cultural values through literature texts.

Grant A. (2003, p. 1) in the article titled 'Using Literature by American Indians and Alaskan Native in Secondary Schools' shares the same sentiments as Winduo. The author explains the reasons why literature written by Native Americans can never take the place of literature written by native writers. Grant 1986 cited in 2003, stated that "literature is a powerful vehicle for the transmission and interpretation of a culture. People of all ages need to read a variety of literature to help them understand the principles underpinning the values and traditions of their own cultures and the cultures of others" (p. 1). Sina Va'ai in his address on 'Roles of USP in Developing and Promoting Pacific Literature' cited Esekia Solofa's concern about the importance of Pacific Literature being an integral part of our identity. Accordingly this aspect could be explored further in the teaching of it in the Universities, particularly in the Department of Language and Literature (Handout UPNG).

The literatures reviewed have indicated that there is no clear guideline from the Curriculum Division nor appropriate and relevant literature material to teach literature effectively. However, it has to be borne in mind that literature is a leeway to promoting and preserving one's own identity and way of life.

RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research was both quantitative and qualitative. The questionnaire forms were self-completion type to be answered by the respondents. The types of questions include checklist items, scaled items, categorical and filled in response. The data was collated into pre-coding summary sheet for analysis. The elements in the survey were literature teachers in selected secondary school teaching grades nine, ten, eleven and twelve in the four regions. One teacher was selected as sample for each grade 9 to 12, totaling four teachers for each school. The criteria for sampling included the four regions, urban and rural schools, government or mission schools and the four grades. Specific schools were selected in each region.

RESULTS

The research found out that the teachers were willing to teach literature to promote cultures and customs, however they were handicapped by the unavailability of relevant materials. Some literature materials that were available were insufficient. It was also found that many teachers could not differentiate between the different types of genres. For example, they did not know the difference between a short story and a novel. Hundred questionnaires were disseminated and fifty-nine responses were returned. Some respondents requested to be paid before they could answer the questions. Some questions were answered but not returned. Some of the respondents answered the questions wrongly and others did not answer some of the questions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Poetry

The research discovered that teachers in the secondary schools do want to teach literature using poems in order to promote PNG cultures and customs. However, they are hindered by the unavailability of relevant materials. Some teachers were also willing to teach but lacked the confidence because they were not trained adequately or not trained at all as there were no literature specialists during their time of training. Interestingly, two of the teachers' currently teaching literatures were graduates under the PVTE program. Teachers also raised concern that students are reluctant and not keen on discussing their cultures.

The use of poetry in the lessons were frequent as the teachers were comfortable teaching poetry. 68 % teach poetry. 32% do not teach poetry. Popular activities for poetry lessons were composition of poems, analyzing poem, poetry recital, and identifying elements of poetry. Of the 32%, some teachers did not respond or responded wrongly to the questionnaire. The wrong answers led the researchers to question the reading and comprehension ability of the teachers. It also questions the quality and capability of the teachers' comprehension of the concept of teaching literature. The most popular texts used for teaching poetry are *Through Melanesian Eyes* and *Poetry Speaks*.

Short Story

69 % of the teachers have indicated that they use short story in their lesson to test students' comprehension ability and do vocabulary exercises. The researchers observed that about 21% did not answer the question regarding the use of short story. Though the teachers did not answer that section, they still engaged students to do activities that are based on short story. One can draw the assumption that they create their own activities without the use of short story. This questions the teachers' understanding of what short story is.

The most commonly used short story texts are Moments in Melanesia, Toropo the Tenth Wife, Through Melanesian Eyes and not so popular ones are Lost in Jungle Way and My Childhood in Niugini. The stories in the books are Papua New Guinean stories.

The activities done were: identifying elements of short story, discussing and analyzing short stories in relations to their cultures, reading and comprehension, write their own stories, and role play. While others do research on historical culture and do oral presentation. Surprisingly about 10% respondents responded wrongly to the question. It was also noted that those who responded wrongly were graduates of the 1970's.

The most common activities were reading comprehension exercises, identifying the elements of the story and writing short stories. It could also be seen that many of the activities the students were engaged did not promote the cultures, customs and values of PNG. Few of them about 10% either listed wrong text or did not respond at all. For example, it was interesting to note that books like *To Kill A Mocking Bird* was referred to as a short story.

Drama

The most unpopular of all genres was drama as revealed in the research. Majority of the respondents about 69% did not indicate any answer nor responded accurately to the question. This was indicative of the question not being understood or the teachers' unfamiliarity with the concept of teaching drama.

The plays used were from Which Way Big Man and Five Other Plays' and Through Melanesian Eyes. Many of the teachers stated that they did not know how to teach drama. 31% of the respondents use drama for reading comprehension exercise. It is obvious that very little drama is taught in the schools.

Novels

The novels used in most of the schools are *The Crocodile*, *Canoes of the Dead*, *My Mother Calls Me Yaltep*, *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime* and *My Childhood in Niugini*.

The types of activities teachers engage their students in are identifying elements of novels, group discussion, book review and book report and writing stories. 85% of the respondents use novels in their lessons. However, 15% of the teachers did not respond. It can be seen here that there is no exercise that dwells on promoting customs and cultures of PNG.

Correlation between stakeholders

Most of the respondents indicated that there is clear stipulation in the grade (nine, ten, eleven and twelve) syllabus to teach literature in order to promote PNG culture.

They stated that the Curriculum Division does outline clearly the importance of reading and writing about PNG culture. However the majority of them responded that the syllabus does not indicate the importance of teaching literature to promote PNG culture.

Almost all the respondents said that the Curriculum Division does not provide enough PNG texts to teach literature effectively. Furthermore, there is lack of support from the Curriculum Division in terms of producing relevant materials for teaching in order to promote PNG culture. A further response was that the Department of National Education (NDOE) does not emphasize the concept of teaching literature in order to promote PNG culture.

The main finding in this section was that the respondents were adamant that there was no clear guideline in the syllabus that stresses the concept of teaching literature. If literature is to be taught in order to promote PNG culture, then the curriculum Division should provide sufficient and appropriate texts for literature teaching. The NDOE which is the pinnacle of the Education system should be taking the leading role in terms of policies and guidelines.

A handful of respondents mentioned that there should be a separate syllabus or a separate section in the syllabus that clearly states the importance of literature teaching that deals with PNG cultures and traditions.

Taking into account the above, the following are what the respondents have expressed on what the three stakeholders should do.

A. Curriculum Division (CD)

At the time of the research, it was found that there were more foreign books than Papua New Guinean as expressed by the teachers. They would like the Curriculum Division to fairly distribute to schools literature materials and to recommend the use of PNG literature textbooks.

They also would like to see clear instructions on writing in school curriculum that promotes PNG customs and cultures. The concept of National Writing Competition was also recommended. Another popular response was that they would like the Curriculum Division to produce and provide guidelines and teaching aids for teaching literature.

B. University of Goroka (UOG)

Some respondents would really like to see UOG, particularly the Language and Literature Department, to be supplied with relevant and up-to-date materials from the Curriculum Division. The respondents continued to state that, it would also be of vast benefit, because the students would then be familiar with literature teaching materials by the time they graduate. When they go to the

school to begin their teaching career, they would be familiar with the material and would be able to teach it effectively.

They also would like to see the department of language and literature focus more on literature materials that is PNG based than foreign. In order to promote PNG culture, they would like to be taught and exposed to PNG literature while undergoing training at UOG.

The general response indicated that there are inadequate courses in the literature strand offered at UOG and they would like to see more courses offered. A number of respondents expounded on the subject and suggested that UOG should offer a degree course solely on literature for those who are interested in pursuing a purely literature path.

Many respondents, particularly those who have taught for eleven years or more, would like to see UOG organize literature conferences and in-services. Others would like to see UOG provide guidelines and variety of teaching methods to teach literature effectively. UOG should recommend certain texts that are to be used to teach literature. These recommended texts should be readily available in the schools.

C. Secondary Schools (SS)

Very few have indicated that they have sufficient literature texts to teach genres like poem and novels. Even fewer suggested that literature lessons should cover all genres of literature. As a consequence of insufficient availability of literature materials, they only teach poetry, read short stories, novels and they read drama. They admitted that they do not have that many lessons in literature. Many would like to see the school focus more on PNG literature than literature from other regions. Some would like to see schools encourage young writers to write about PNG customs and traditions in order to promote PNG culture.

A number of them stated that time is an issue in the schools. The number of periods allocated to the language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing and language areas such as grammar & usage and vocabulary leaves them very little time to teach literature to its full capacity. In fact, there is no allocated period to teach literature as such, as some respondents have stated. Hence, if they are to teach any literature lesson, it is reading a book or a story and then do book review or book report which can be referred to as reading comprehension exercise.

Some of the respondents believe that one way to promote PNG culture is through students participating in cultural activities. Another point made by several respondents was that there were teachers who were not qualified to teach literature. Consequently, and as mentioned above, they resort to doing book report when students have completed reading a book. When a short story is completed, it is another comprehension exercise that the students are tasked to do. Teachers who have had very little training in teaching literature would like to see the recent or new graduates take leading role in teaching literature and run in-services in the schools. They would like them to teach drama using stories that are PNG based in order to promote the cultures of this country.

Graduates in the last ten years, have indicated doing appropriate exercises on literature such as analysis of the particular piece of genre, studying and discussing its elements, etc. They stressed that the hiccup at the schools at the moment is the unavailability of relevant and sufficient material in order to teach effectively.

Another reason why literature is not taught in schools is because, most, if not all, teaching is controlled by the idea of "*teaching to get students ready*" for the end of term or year tests and examinations. As literature is not examined, its place in the schools' program is not as salient as the other subjects.

From the discussion above, it is clearly shown that there is not enough PNG context material available in the schools to teach literature. The insufficient availability of relevant material leads them to teaching of foreign literature, which is more readily available.

D. Teachers perspective of teaching literature

Majority of them have indicated that they consider teaching literature as very important and some have considered teaching literature as not important. Most stated that teaching literature is beneficial for the students. But they are at the mercy of the unavailability of appropriate teaching material.

Conclusion

It can be clearly derived from this research that though teachers do want to teach literature in order to promote PNG customs and cultures they are handicapped by the unavailability or insufficient materials.

Some of the respondents have indicated that there is a dire need for the three stakeholders, viz, Curriculum Division, University of Goroka and the Secondary Schools to work closely together to come up with a syllabus that stipulates the importance of teaching literature in the schools to promote PNG customs and cultures. There is also the need for the three stakeholders to have personnel who should be continuously compiling and producing teaching materials that should be available at the Curriculum Division, the University of Goroka and more importantly these must be available at the Schools.

Recommendations

There is an obvious need for the Curriculum Division, the University of Goroka and the Secondary School to work closely together.

The Curriculum Division should produce more materials and guidelines for teaching literature.

The University of Goroka should have multiple copies of all texts from the Curriculum Division.

The same materials should also be disseminated to the schools.

When students come to University of Goroka to become teachers they should be exposed to all the teaching materials from the curriculum. When they go out to the schools to teach, they will be familiar with the materials in the schools as they would have been exposed to the material while undergoing training at UOG.

The University of Goroka should run workshop, seminar, in-services and conferences for teachers who have been teaching for more than 15 years.

Schools should make use of recent graduate to run in-services on how to teach literature.

The schools' program should program and allocate time to teach literature.

The schools should invite elders to give talk on the customs and traditions of the area.

The schools should have writers' club solely for the students to write about their cultures and traditions.

Teachers who have been teaching since the 1970s should go for refresher course.

The schools should continue to have yearly cultural shows.

Students should be made to wear traditional costume once a week.

Student should be made to tell traditional stories whether in class or in a forum in the school.

There should be competition for students to write traditional stories.

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