
An Examination of the Difficulties Teachers Face in Teaching English Literature in Secondary Schools

Bashir Umar Farouq
Department of Arts and Humanities
School of General & Remedial Studies
Kano State Polytechnic
bayyaa@kanopoly.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The study investigates the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature in English in Nigerian senior secondary schools. In order to answer the questions of the study, the researcher adopted the descriptive analytical approach. The sample of the study consist of one hundred and one (101) male and female teachers of English and twenty (20) Heads of English section in six secondary schools in Dala Local Government, Kano State. The data of the study were collected, computed and analyzed using SPSS application and applying the Alpha Cronbach Method, Gutman coefficient for unequal halves, Split-half techniques, t-test independent sample and One Way ANOVA. The researcher found out that understanding these problems will help teachers, supervisors and syllabus designers to identify the problems and find solutions to improve the process of teaching literature. The study also revealed that there were no statistically significant differences attributed to teachers' gender, age or years of experience in the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature. In the light of these findings, the researchers suggested some recommendations for syllabus designers, supervisors and teachers to overcome the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature and to adopt more effective approaches to teaching literature. The study recommends that teachers should vary the techniques they used to adopt when teaching literature, and to be aware of the values of teaching English literature for the Nigerian society. The study also recommends that supervisors should pass their experience to teachers through training courses, workshops and micro-teaching to train English teachers to teach literature effectively.

Keywords: *Literature, English, Students, Teacher, Tribulation, Teaching*

Introduction

Literature in English is an integral part of the English curriculum in the Nigerian schools. It should be given appropriate attention so that the overall aim of teaching English can be achieved. Learning English literature by Nigerian students may not be an easy task because literature is culturally, linguistically, and socially alienated from those students. It has become the teachers' responsibility to exert more efforts to make learning literature an easier and more enjoyable and profitable experience in Nigerian students. In their attempts to do so, teachers should recognize the new concepts towards teaching literature as there is a mixture of different attitudes and beliefs in this field.

Based on literary discussions, the students could develop insightful responses concerning literal comprehension, personal connections, cross-cultural themes, interpretation, and evaluation of the text. Literature can also act as a powerful change agent by developing students' intercultural awareness. Theoretically speaking, literature can play a useful part in developing general language skills because the basic goal of teaching literature is to facilitate the learning of language and communication skills.

Beyond language, literature provides students with important comprehension and analysis tools. Through literature, students learn to identify and analyze conflicts, themes, issues, and characters. Good texts, whether classic or modern literature, contain some universal themes which apply to the students' present and future lives. Literature is also an entryway into another culture. Moreover, learning literature enables students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space, and to come to perceive traditions of thought, feeling and artistic form within the heritage the literature of such cultures endows (Carter & Long, 2011, p 2).

The greatest pleasure and satisfaction to be found in literature occurs where it brings back to the realities of human situations, problems, feelings, and relationships (Moody, 2014). Literary texts so often touch on common themes and values which range from individual concerns to social issues such as death, love, pollution, and ethnic conflicts. Even the genres, conventions and devices portrayed are universal. Poetry has rhythm, rhyme and figurative usage; short stories and novels have plots with crises, conflicts and resolutions. Literature offers universal themes which are relevant to students own experience. It, unlike many teaching inputs, is also a mirror that reflects and heightens each learner s perception of the social world. Thus, literary texts are open to multiple interpretation and genuine interaction (Duff & Maley, 2017:6). Students may relate the ideas, events and things found in literary texts to their own lives. It will help "to stimulate the imagination of our students, to develop their critical abilities, and to increase their emotional awareness"

(Lazar, 2010: 19). It also develops learners pleasure in reading. When EFL learners enjoy reading literature and have motivation to interact with a text, they will develop their reading proficiency. When they try to comprehend the meaning of the text, learners must make inferences, drawing both on content of the reading and their own experience. The reader is placed in an active international role in working with and making sense of this literary language (Brumfit and Carter, 2008: 15).

Therefore, literature is considered the backbone of any nation. It plays an essential role in creating a new generation capable of changing the life style and develops its culture. Literature is written for those who are sensitive and have a high sense of imagination; therefore, one cannot imagine learning English without learning its literature.

By learning literature, students learn to see a world through others eyes, observing human values and a different kind of living, and discovering others living in very different societies. They will understand and become broadly aware of the social, political, historical, cultural events happening in a certain society. Through literature, learners can deepen their cultural understanding. Consequently, the primary aim of literature is to give pleasure and to entertain those who voluntarily attend to it. In fact there has been an increasing interest in literature as a useful material for teaching a foreign language. English teachers and learners who have devoted themselves to serious teaching and learning want to teach and learn the best curricula and practices to achieve more efficient and effective proficiency in English.

In their attempts to achieve such proficiency among their students, Nigerian teachers face a number of problems in teaching the language skills in general and English literature (the short story, poetry, and drama) in particular. Clearly, the current teaching situation of literature in *English in Nigerian* secondary schools may not be contributing to the development of English language skills, if not hindering their development. Such situation can be attributed to the main features commonly practiced in teaching literature in the set students. These features mostly comprise teacher explaining text, students listening, students reading aloud, teacher asking questions, and students answering questions.

Apart from students reading aloud, it is the teacher who talks and the students who listen. However, to talk at length is not necessarily to teach successfully. On the contrary, effective teaching and learning is more likely to take place in classrooms where the interaction is not completely dominated by the teacher, and where a variety of activities are used. In classes intended for teaching literature in English in Nigerian secondary schools, there is usually more teacher-talk but also teacher-talk confined mainly to 'explanations of text'. This means that in most literature classes the opportunities for encouraging interaction, introducing a variety of teaching and learning activities, and developing language proficiency are limited by the amount and type of teacher-talk which usually takes place.

The current practice reflects the 'content approach' (Lazar, 2013) to literature teaching. In general, this approach concentrates on imparting detailed factual knowledge about a few specific texts. The reasons why the content approach is so widely used are historical rather than pedagogical. Traditionally, literature is a subject that has always been taught by a means of 'lectures' on the content of specific texts or poems, especially at university level (Knutson, 2018). Besides, it can be truly said that it is this university style that has filtered down into the secondary school education system. Moreover, in the past, literature was regarded as a body of specialized knowledge, with its own rules, structures, and facts, almost independent of the main stream of language (Lazar, 2003). This notion has helped to maintain the 'lecture-on-content' approach. Another major difficulty facing teachers while teaching literature in English in Nigerian secondary schools is students' lack of language competency. This difficulty is also compounded with the stigma attached to literature as being a difficult and uninteresting area. This also results in the students further drawing themselves away from literature. Pedagogically speaking, there are still some major problems or problems expressed by teachers. Therefore, it is worthwhile investigating these problems, identifying their causes, and prescribing effective remedies for these problems so that they will not damage the benefits that literature embodies. Understanding these problems will enable teachers, supervisors and syllabus designers to identify the areas where teachers need to improve most in order to make the best use of literature in English teaching.

Being previous teachers and now lecturers of English, the researchers observed that Nigerian teachers are facing a lot of problems in teaching the literary genres in English in Nigerian secondary school students which would affect the students' attitudes towards literature. These problems include three types: First, those related to the students such as using a content-based approach to teaching literature and students' overall lack of competency in English. Second, those problems related to the students such as the abundance of farfetched ideas in literary texts Third, those problems related to teachers such as the lack of the visual aids employed by teachers. Because literature has an emotive and figurative use of language and because there is a cultural gap and a lack of comprehending a discourse that is totally unfamiliar to the students' socio-cultural background, the teacher has to excite the imagination of students to make his or her teaching effective and refreshing. This study seeks to shed-light on these problems and propose some recommendations for overcoming them.

Purpose and Methodology of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature in English in Nigerian secondary school students, and to propose some solutions for them. The researchers designed a questionnaire to identify and analyze these problems. A panel of seventeen specialists in English literature and methodology at the Bayero University, Yusuf Maitama Sule University and Kano State Polytechnic validated the questionnaire. Consequently, one hundred eighty-four teachers whose native language is Hausa and who are specialized in teaching English in secondary schools in addition to twenty (20) English supervisors were inquired to complete the questionnaire.

Specifically, the aim of study is to investigate the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature in secondary school students. The objectives are:

1. Determine the level of the difficulty facing English teachers in teaching literature in *English in Nigerian* secondary school students.
2. Find out whether there are any statistically significant differences in the problems of teaching literature in English in Nigerian secondary school students attributed to teachers' gender and period of experience in addition to the students' gender.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on social learning theory. The behaviourist who propounded this theory were of the view that learning was better achieved by imitation, interaction and modeling. This theory which is propounded by Albert Bandura (1963) emphasizes that learners pay attention to the crucial details of the model's behavior.

English in the Nigerian Educational System

English is the only foreign language taught in Nigerian schools and institutions. Since 2001, English has been introduced to the Nigerian school curriculum for secondary schools. Historically, English was introduced in grade seven and starting from 1996, it was introduced in grade five. Being the only foreign language introduced as a compulsory subject, English is considered one of the major subjects at the Nigerian schools. Therefore, it has had a unique and prestigious status in the Nigerian education system. As one of the main goals of teaching any language is to enable learners to communicate fluently and effectively in situations where this language is used (Stern, 1983), Nigerian educators hope that after students study English

for a number of years, they will be able to communicate with the outside world and to use English in all aspects of their life.

What is literature?

In its broadest meaning, literature can be defined as imaginative or creative writing, especially of recognized artistic value. It comprises poetry, novels, essays, etc., and characterized by excellence of style and expression and by themes of general or enduring interest.

According to Moody (1981), the primary aim of literature is to give pleasure and to entertain those who voluntarily attend to it. The writer also mentions that the greatest pleasure and satisfaction to be found in literature occurs where it brings us back to the realities of human situations, problems, feelings and relationships.

Literature helps students understand and appreciate cultures and beliefs different from their own. "By constructing with the literary text a reality different from that of texts of information, students are given access to a world of attitudes, and values, collective imaginings and historical frames of reference that constitute the memory of a people or speech community. Thus literature and culture are inseparable" (Kramsch 2013: 175).

Carter (2001:3) states that literature is as old as human language, and as new as tomorrow's sunrise. And literature is everywhere, not only in books, but in videos, television, radio, CDs, computer, newspapers, and in all the media of communication where a story is told or an image is created. John McRae (2004) distinguishes between literature with a capital L - the classical texts such as Shakespeare, Dickens - and literature with a small l, which refers to popular fiction, fables and song lyrics. He also sees that the literature used in ELT classrooms today is no longer restricted to canonical texts from certain countries such as UK, USA, but includes the work of writers from a diverse range of countries and cultures using different forms of English. Therefore, literary texts can also be studied in their original forms or in simplified or abridged versions. An increasing number of stories in English are written specifically for learners of other languages. The types of literary texts that can be studied inside and outside the ELT classroom include short stories, poems, novels, plays, songs and lyrics.

Why is literature used in English language teaching?

Literature is a microcosm of an entire society, a little window that permits us to look into the cultural values, traditions, and lifestyles of people and as a person's word reflects character, literature reflects the unique character of a group of people who share a language (Keshta, 2000). Because literature teems with such precious human experiences and values, it should have a unique position in the language classroom curriculum. Moreover, literature and language complement each other. Since language and literature are inseparable, their teaching should be complementary to each other. Following are some of the reasons that necessitate the inclusion of literature in English language teaching:

Literature as a motivational Material

According to Lazar (1993), literature exposes students to complex themes and fresh, unexpected use of language. A good novel or a short story may be particularly gripping in that it involves students in the suspense of and unraveling the plot. A play may engage

students in complicated adult dilemmas, and a poem may elicit a powerful emotional response from students. If the materials are carefully chosen, students will feel that what they do in the classroom is relevant and meaningful to their own lives.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT PRESENTATION

Results related to the first question

"What are the problems facing English teachers in teaching poetry in *English in Nigerian* secondary school students?"

To answer this question the researcher used the frequencies, the sum of responses, means, standard deviation, the percentage weight and rank of each item of the questionnaire. The results concerning this sub- question are presented in table (4.2) below.

Frequencies, the sum of responses, means, standard deviation, the percentage weight and rank of teaching Poetry

S/N	Items of teaching poetry	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	% weight	Rank
1	Students lack clear aims and objectives for studying poetry.	687	3.734	1.056	74.67	7
2	Students do not experience the sense of pleasure and enjoyment that goes with the study of poetry.	656	3.565	1.217	71.30	16
3	Students lack background knowledge about the poets' lives and the prevailing social climate	728	3.957	0.867	79.13	3
4	Students concentrate on the content and ignore the language skills embedded in studying poetry.	731	3.973	0.858	79.46	2
5	Students face problems in the process of analyzing and assessing the poems, which results in the poems' misinterpretation.	724	3.935	0.967	78.70	4
6	Students are not properly guided about how to use the appropriate strategies for studying poetry.	658	3.576	1.109	71.52	13
7	Students' overall weakness in English language skills makes understanding the poems difficult.	748	4.065	0.990	81.30	1
8	Students feel burdened with implications of studying poems for the exam, which makes their study a difficult task to accomplish.	700	3.804	1.079	76.09	5
9	Students lack the ability to appreciate poetry, which is an essential requisite for enjoying and understanding it.	683	3.712	1.039	74.24	8
10	Students struggle hard and face a tough time to get the real meaning of the poems.	652	3.543	1.130	70.87	17

11	Students develop some psychological barriers to poetry learning resulting from the problems they undergo while studying it.	656	3.565	1.001	71.30	15
12	Students and teachers are obliged to translate the incomprehensible language into Arabic to get the meaning of the poems.	679	3.690	1.085	73.80	9
13	Poetry content and language are not in harmony with students age and interest.	636	3.457	1.173	69.13	22
14	The poems come from an alien culture, which sometimes contradicts students' Islamic culture and values.	643	3.495	1.219	69.89	18
15	The poems entail a lot of difficult figurative and symbolic language and diction, which makes it difficult for students to comprehend.	668	3.630	1.016	72.61	11
16	There is no benefit of studying poetry because its language is not used in daily life.	548	2.978	1.293	59.57	25
17	Language problems kill the sense of enjoyment of studying poetry,	637	3.462	1.191	69.24	20
18	Inappropriate methods are used in the process of teaching poetry	642	3.489	1.196	69.78	19
19	Not enough class time is allocated for teaching poetry.	618	3.359	1.132	67.17	24
20	Absence of any effective teaching aids (e.g. LCD, TV, films) which hinders teaching poetry.	699	3.799	1.115	75.98	6
21	Poetry is generally disliked due to the abundance of figurative language and images which students fail to interpret.	678	3.685	1.002	73.70	10
22	Linguistic structure in poetry can be confusing because of the use of irregular punctuation , capital letters and organization.	667	3.625	1.074	72.50	12
23	Students generally feel that poetry contributes very little to their language development compared to other genres.	656	3.565	1.006	71.30	14
24	Poetry is highly philosophical, which makes it difficult for students to understand.	637	3.462	1.125	69.24	21
25	The poems are full of unfamiliar themes and connotations.	622	3.380	1.095	67.61	23

Concerning the results presented in table (4.2) above, it is obvious that item (7) occupied the first rank with a percentage weight (81.30), item (4) whose percentage weight is (79.46) rank second; followed by item (3) with percentage weight (79.13), item (5), however, ranked fourth with percentage weight (78.70) and item (8) whose percentage weight is (76.09) occupied the fifth in terms of problems that English language teachers face in teaching literature for secondary school students. On the other hand, items (16), (19), (25) and (13) were the least frequent ones respectively. Items (16), for instance, whose percentage weight is (59.57) ranked twenty fifth, items (19) occupied the twenty fourth rank with a percentage weight (67.17) preceded by item (25) whose percentage weight is (67.61) and item (13) with a percentage weight of (69.13).

Results related to the second question "What are the problems facing English teachers in teaching drama in English in *Nigerian* secondary school students?" To answer this question the researcher used the frequencies, the sum of responses, means, standard deviation, the percentage weight and rank of each item from the questionnaire were calculated as shown in table below:

Frequencies, the sum of responses, means, standard deviation, the percentage weight and rank of teaching Drama

S/N	Items of teaching poetry	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	% weight	Rank
1	Students lack clear aims and objectives for studying drama.	688	3.739	1.049	74.78	7
2	Students do not experience the sense of pleasure and enjoyment that goes with study of drama.	628	3.413	1.282	68.26	18
3	Students lack background knowledge about the playwrights' lives and the prevailing social climate.	685	3.723	1.079	74.46	9
4	Students concentrate on the content and ignore the language skills embedded in studying drama.	734	3.989	0.856	79.78	2
5	Students face problems in the process of analyzing and assessing the play, which results in the play's misinterpretation.	690	3.750	1.020	75.00	5
6	Students are not properly guided about how to use the appropriate strategies for studying drama.	634	3.446	1.115	68.91	15
7	Students' overall weakness in English language skills makes understanding the play difficult.	737	4.005	0.967	80.11	1
8	Students feel burdened with implications of studying the play for the exam, which makes their study a difficult task to accomplish.	688	3.739	1.060	74.78	8
9	Students lack the ability to appreciate drama, which is an essential requisite for enjoying and understanding it.	695	3.777	0.980	75.54	4

10	Students struggle hard and face a tough time to get the real meaning of the play.	628	3.413	1.147	68.26	19
11	Students develop some psychological barriers to drama learning resulting from the problems they undergo while studying it.	668	3.630	0.932	72.61	11
12	Students and teachers are obliged to translate the incomprehensible language into Arabic to get the meaning of the play.	690	3.750	1.047	75.00	6
13	Drama content and language are not in harmony with students age and interest.	619	3.364	1.234	67.28	22
14	The play comes from an alien culture, which sometimes contradicts students' Islamic culture and values.	677	3.679	1.111	73.59	10
15	The play entails a lot of difficult figurative and symbolic language and diction, which makes it difficult for students to comprehend.	627	3.408	1.127	68.15	20
16	There is no benefit of studying drama because its language is not used in daily life.	565	3.071	1.164	61.41	25
17	Language problems kill the sense of enjoyment of studying drama.	633	3.440	1.163	68.80	16
18	Inappropriate methods are used in the process of teaching drama.	626	3.402	1.183	68.04	21
19	Not enough class time is allocated for teaching drama.	633	3.440	1.115	68.80	17
20	Absence of any effective teaching aids (e.g. LCD, TV, films) which hinders teaching drama.	713	3.875	1.107	77.50	3
21	The play is used as a text for translation, which discourages students to understand it.	640	3.478	1.126	69.57	12
22	The play abounds with a large number of characters, which hinders students' ability to follow up events.	636	3.457	1.173	69.13	14
23	The play contains an intricate overlapping and occasionally superstitious subplots.	612	3.326	1.122	66.52	23
24	The setting of the play causes some confusion.	610	3.315	1.116	66.30	24
25	Some quotations are written in a language which is different from everyday English.	637	3.462	1.096	69.24	13

In Table above it is noticed that the five items of the most difficulty in teaching drama are:

- No (7) "Students' overall weakness in English language skills makes understanding the play difficult." occupied the first rank in the hierarchy of problems with a percentage weight of (80.11 %).
- No (4) "Students concentrate on the content and ignore the language skills embedded in studying drama." occupied the second rank in terms of difficulty with a percentage weight of (75.78 %).
- No (20) "Absence of any effective teaching aids (LCD, TV, films) which hinders teaching drama." occupied the third most difficult item with a percentage weight of (77.50 %).
- No (9) "Students lack the ability to appreciate drama, which is an essential requisite for enjoying and understanding it." occupied the fourth rank in the hierarchy of difficulty with a percentage weight of (75.54%).
- No (5) "Students face problems in the process of analyzing and assessing the play, which results in the play's misinterpretation." occupied the fourth rank in the hierarchy of difficulty with a percentage weight of (75.00%).

In Table above it is also noticed that the four items of the least difficulty in teaching drama are:

- No (16) "There is no benefit of studying drama because its language is not used in daily life." occupied the twenty-fifth rank in the hierarchy of problems with a percentage weight of (61.41 %).
- No (24) "The setting of the play causes some confusion." occupied the twenty fourth rank in terms of difficulty with a percentage weight of (66.30 %).
- No (23) "The play contains an intricate overlapping and occasionally superstitious subplots." occupied the twenty-third most difficult item with a percentage weight of (66.52 %).
- No (13) "Drama content and language are not in harmony with students age and interest." occupied the twenty-second rank in the hierarchy of difficulty with a percentage weight of (67.28%).

Results related to the third question

"What is the level of difficulty facing English teachers in teaching literature genres in *English in Nigerian* secondary school students ?"

To answer this question the researcher used the frequencies to calculate summation of responses, means, standard deviation, the percentage weight and rank of each genre of the questionnaire, as shown in Table below:

Means, standard deviation , percentage weight and rank of each of the literary genres

Literary genres	No. of items	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	% weight	Rank
Short story	25	16291	88.538	12.862	70.83	3
Poetry		16653	90.505	13.161	72.40	1
Drama		16393	89.092	14.263	71.27	2
Total		49337	268.136	36.702	71.50	

Regarding the results concerning the level of problems facing English language teachers above, it can be observed that poetry ranked first ($m = 90.505$, $SD = 13,161$, and % weight = (72.40), followed by drama ($m = 89.092$, $SD = 14,263$, and % weight = (71.27), and short story occupied the third rank ($m = 88.538$, $SD = 12.862$, and % weight = (70.83)

Results related to the fourth question

"Are there any statistically significant differences attributed to teachers' years of experience in the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature in English in Nigerian?"

As shown in table below One Way ANOVA including variance sources, sum of squares, differences, mean squares, differences, mean square, f value, significance value , significance level due to teachers' years of experience was used to set an answer to the ninth sub question. This means the problems are the same for all teachers regardless of years of experience.

Analysis of variance for the literary genres according to the Teachers' years of experience

Component of literature	Source of variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Short story	Between Groups	805.505	3	268.502	1.640	0.182	not sig.
	Within Groups	29470.229	180	163.723			
	Total	30275.734	183				
Poetry	Between Groups	710.470	3	236.823	1.376	0.252	not sig.
	Within Groups	30985.525	180	172.142			
	Total	31695.995	183				
Drama	Between Groups	719.297	3	239.766	1.182	0.318	not sig.
	Within Groups	36508.132	180	202.823			
	Total	37227.429	183				
Total degree	Between Groups	4713.583	3	1571.194	1.170	0.323	not sig.
	Within Groups	241796.021	180	1343.311			
	Total	246509.603	183				

f value at (3,) d f. at (0.05) sig. level = 2.65f value at (3, 203) d f. at (0.01) sig. level = 3.88

With reference to the above, there are no statistically significant differences due to teachers' years of experience in the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature. That is to say the problems are the same for all teachers regardless of years of experience.

Findings

Based on the result of the investigation, the following findings emerged:

1. Over 76% of the participants agree that there are major problems facing English teachers in teaching the short story in *English in Nigerian* secondary school students. Those problems are due to Students' overall weakness in English language skills makes understanding the short story difficult
2. More than 76% of the participants mentioned that Students concentrate on the content and ignore the language skills embedded in studying poetry and lack of background knowledge about the poets' lives and the prevailing social climate causes the major problem.
3. Students face problems in the process of analyzing and assessing the poems, which results in the poems' misinterpretation and also feel burdened with implications of studying poems for the exam, which makes their study a difficult task to accomplish.

4. There are no statistically significant differences due to the students gender in the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature in English in Nigerian secondary school students.
5. There are no statistically significant differences in the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature in English in Nigerian secondary school students due to teachers gender.
6. There are no statistically significant differences due to the teachers' age in the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature in English in Nigerian secondary school students.
7. There are no statistically significant differences due to teachers' years of experience in the problems facing English teachers in teaching literature in English in Nigerian secondary school students.

Recommendation

1. Teachers are recommended to shift from the traditional teaching methods to the communicative approach that is based on the students' real involvement in the teaching learning process.
2. Teachers are recommended to begin with modern literature and to avoid old English vocabulary in teaching English in Nigerian students
3. Teachers should be aware of cultural barriers which may influence the understanding of literature in teaching English in Nigerian secondary school students.
4. Some literary works by Arab or Muslim authors should be added to the syllabus of literature in secondary schools because of religious peculiarities in Northern Nigeria.
5. Administrators are recommended to focus on training sessions, workshops and microteaching courses to train teachers to teach literature effectively

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