

Exploring the Theme of National Hope in the Poem “Homeless, Not Hopeless” For the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria



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ABSTRACT: Nigeria is currently bewildered with lots of challenges which are negatively affecting all the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be attained in 2030. This paper attempts to bring to the fore these challenges and how students' awareness and exploration of hope through Literature-in-English could serve as an antidote. It also presents various reasons Literature –in- English students should be advocates of sustainable development by inculcating right values and attitudes in bringing hope to the down trodden in the society at their different levels. It also reveals the need for poets, literary writers, artists, individuals, society, leaders, followers, curriculum planners and government to produce literary pieces that will enlighten Literature-in- English students about the change for development to both the oppressed and the oppressors. Students develop positive attitudes, right emotions, good moral values to bring hope to the hopeless in the society and orientating the society that all hope for better Nigeria is not lost. This can help to reduce rate of criminalities, morbidity and mortality, and insecurity across the states and making our leaders to act promptly to do the right things at the right time. Based on this overview, it is recommended that literary texts that teach good human relationship, discipline and national values among the leaders and the led should be recommended for Literature- in –English students as a driving force towards SDG 2030

KEY WORDS: Literature-in-English, Sustainable Development Goals, insecurity, “Homeless but not Hopeless”

INTRODUCTION

There are three genres of Literature: poetry, drama and prose. Poetry is a compilation of poems. The pronunciation of poetry is deeper and more special than those used in prose and drama. On the other hand, writing style of prose is always simple and plain language to understand with various events, experiences expressed through characters. Drama is illustrious from other genres of literature because of its imitation, that is, the supposition by human beings, characters and natures of creature other than their own. Drama makes use of conversation between one shed and another or group of cast. It is usually divided into acts and scenes. Drama also requires the active contribution of spectators. It brings life reality to the audience. (Shivaji, University 2015, Fakeye, 2015; Atoyebi, 2011).

According to Bishnu (2016) Poetry is written in stanzas or verse. Poetry is artistic and conventional form of art through which one can enjoy aesthetic pleasure, deeper knowledge, thoughts, rhythmic with colorful language in rendition or in reading. Its language is connotative as it deviates from normal linguistic form and highly figurative and may not be easily understood. Figurative language serves functional and artistic purposes.

Alemika (2015) express that many people perceive genres of Literature to be all out for stories but the in reality, they promote values and cultures of the land as they satirize, expose evils in the society. Various evils are bewildering the society ranging from corruption to insecurity. Forms of insecurity are physical insecurity-violent personal and property crimes; public insecurity-violent conflicts, insurgency and terrorism, economic insecurity-poverty, unemployment; social insecurity-illiteracy, ignorance, diseases or violations- denial of fundamental rights, by states and non- state actors, in different states; political states; political insecurity-denial of good and social democratic governance.

Atoyebi (2011) confirmed that teachers' negative attitude towards the teaching of poetry is a major factor that makes students to prefer prose than drama and poetry learning. Since the teachers are not having positive attitudes in teaching poetry then this can contribute to students' negative attitude or non-chant attitude towards learning of poem and thereby never to be able to enjoy or appreciate values of poetry. To corroborate this, Fakeye (2012) also conducted a study on “General preference and Senior Secondary Schools Literature-in-English Achievement” and the study revealed that students preferred prose literature to the other two genres drama and poetry. The preference for prose is an indication that they have negative disposition for poetry and drama.

Exploring the Theme of National Hope in the Poem “Homeless, Not Hopeless” For the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

All possible efforts should be made to encourage students to create interest in learning other genres of literature to excel and record good performance in Literature-in-English.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Literature- in-English students from Senior Secondary 1-3 in Arts classes are the target audience since Literature-in-English is made a compulsory subject for Arts students. The state of one’s emotion has a lot to do about the good state of such a being. Literature is a type of subject that speaks volume about our emotions. In every society, we always have the rich and the poor, leaders and the led in one way or the other, they have roles to play in the society as they relate and interact. When there is any neglect of such roles, there is bound to be conflicts or troubles. This study focusses on economic insecurity- poverty, denial of fundamental rights by states and non-state actors, political-insecurity- denial of good and social democratic governance across the globe which could be as a result of lack of information and adequate knowledge on how to prevent such and bring about required solution. Through exploration of literary texts, student’s interest, emotion could be walked upon positively against the wrongs and negatives of the individuals at different levels in our society to have a better society where rights of individuals are respected and human beings are not dehumanized. The leaders in different offices from Federal to State and Local Governments are to do what is expected of them at the right time and not to see themselves as thin gods. This can help to stop injustice between the ruled and the rulers.

Justification for the Study: The Need for Literature Students and Literary Writers to Embrace and Propagate Hope to the Poor and Helpless in the society.

Huges (2007) opines that poetry has been marginalized in teaching of Literature -in- English classrooms. Poetry should be taught to engage students to promote and enhance literacy skills. Through various researches it has been discovered our senses are awakened in connecting to others, and guide us to possess, think and synthesis metaphorically. Through the use of language and rhythms of poetry, oral language skills are built and well developed. There is a likelihood that children with adequate development of language skills may be more opportune to perform better in reading and writing. This has also helped in creating new applications in developing the students’ literacies outside of the school premises and can assist teachers in enhancing literacy power of poetry. Poetry should not be appreciated for its aesthetic entertainment only but should possess a central position in our lives. It helps to connect us to ourselves and other people. Poetry is appreciated for its brevity and ability to express magnitude of meanings in a limited space and appeals to minds.

Through poetry there is effectiveness in use of sound for great meanings especially when poem is read loudly. Students can act drama of poems studied like choral reading, dance drama or even role play. It assists students to play with words. The usage of language and rhythm in poems draws attention of students and make it easy for them to gain more oral and written vocabulary. Students are to be encouraged to share their feelings, individually and in groups. Giving opportunity to students in such discussions and performances will encourage students to create interest in poetry. Hughes 2007.

Literature is a work of art written through an author’s imaginative powers as a means of expressing feelings, emotions, transmitting cultural values and norms. It serves as a powerful instrument of entertainment, relaxation and education. In line with this, Literature aligns with the paradigm of sustainable development viz. economic, social and environmental sustainability.(Fakeye 2015, Atoyebi 2012 & Khan 1995) Literary text with themes for the hopeless to keep hope with relevance to sustainable development is uncommon. Often times, scholars in Africa perceive development in relation to social-economic, social political, technological advancement but not to help or encourage the hopeless in action. True development must bring hope to the poor in real action to have sustainable development that entails meeting human needs, ensuring social justice, and guarantying self-reliant society. A society that cares bears the burden of all.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Morale (2018) citing Brundtland (1987) describes sustainable development as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (p.17)*”. Sustainable development establishes satisfying developmental human goals, needs and aligning and maintaining ability never to deviate from natural systems to make available to the society and economy, those natural resources and ecosystem services. It requires adequate management of resources without lack or deficit but with great profits continually and consistently, avoiding every stoppage, hindrances or obstacles of any kind. Sustainable development seeks to balance the economic environmental and social dimensions of development in a long term and global perspectives. It implies a broad view of human welfare, a long-term perspective about the consequences of today’s activities, and full involvement of civil society to reach viable solutions (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2011, P.3).

Literature- in- English has a major role to promote moral, linguistic, intellectual, economic and social development. There is no mincing word that Nigeria is currently facing lots of problems that affect three major areas: social, economic and environmental in

Exploring the Theme of National Hope in the Poem “Homeless, Not Hopeless” For the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

realizing a sustainable development. The challenges include abject poverty, hardships, insecurity, homelessness, hunger, malnourishment and various related health issues. Anyanwu (2017) also attests to the various social, economic and environmental problems ravaging Nigeria presently.

Committed, serious Literature students can be real stake holders to bring about the desired sustainable development as they interact with literary texts and translate into action knowledge gained to bring about plausible solutions to problems ravaging our country. Students learnt to synthesize, analyze, appreciate, interpret the plot, setting, character, style applied in the text individually and corporately. Students are free to react or interpret studied text orally or in written form but poetry is mainly for oral rendition to have the maximum beauty expected. Students infer and draw meanings to text through observations, experiences, beliefs, reactions and thoughts from their environment and can form ideas or suggest plausible solutions to likely problems encountered in the text read. Literature is a subject through which students' emotion, feelings; manner could be developed or built positively to have good human relations. They can have change of character from negative to positive when they realize that nemesis will surely catch up with people sooner or later. More also that there is always a pay day for good or bad characters.

Literature in English mirrors life and the ills of the society, texts with themes that promote good human relationships, moral values, traditions and culture, civic rights that promote universal lesson should be encouraged selected for students to study and to have sustainable development. This present study posits that it is expedient that literary writers emphasize on good human relations between the poor and the rich, leaders and followers and generally not to lose hope for better future. Endurance, sacrifice, contentment social inequalities, homelessness/ destitute, alms and alms giving are themes of the poem.

Virtually every country in the world promise to improve the planet and the lives of its citizens by 2030. 17-life-changing goals have been outlined by UN in 2015. These goals are known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), include ending extreme poverty, giving people better healthcare, and achieving equality among women.(Sightsavers) Going through the study of this poem, the poem discusses about eight out of the 17 life-changing goals: 1. No poverty. (1st goal) 2. Zero hunger (2nd goal) 3. Good health (3rd goal). 4. Education (4th goal) 5. Clean water (6th goal) 6. Economic growth (8th goal) 7. No inequality (10th goal) 8. Sustainability (11th goal).

1. No poverty: To end poverty, everyone should have basic healthcare, security and education.(Goal 1)
2. Zero hunger: Globally, one in nine people are undernourished. This goal aims to end hunger.(Goal 2)
3. Good health: Ensuring people live healthy lives can cut child mortality and raise life expectancy. (Goal 3)
4. Education: The UN wants everyone to have access to inclusive, equitable quality education. (Goal 4)
5. Clean water: Clean water protects people from disease, yet three in 10 people lack access to it(Goal 6)
6. Economic growth: The aim is for sustainable economic growth and decent employment all (Goal 8)
7. No inequality: The poorest 40 per cent of the population should be able to grow their income faster than average.(Goal 10)
8. Sustainability: The UN wants to increase affordable housing and make settlements inclusive, safe and sustainable.(Goal 11)

This poem enlightens the students to have perception on the situation of the masses and encourage them to be aware of things to work on as leaders of tomorrow to help our nation to attain these goals gradually as the whole world progressively awaits the reality of the 17 goals in 2030. Students would not just read the poem to pass but bear in them how to bring to actualization of eradicating poverty, end hunger, no to ill-health, people not having access to good education, lack of economic growth and empowerment, as revealed in the lives of beggars, inequality and no to unsustainable affordable housing and insecurity.

Meaning and Relevance of “Homeless but not Hopeless” to Sustainable Development

The poem *Homeless but not Hopeless* is written by Sola Owonibi. The poem discusses about the wretched beggars but they are hopeful that there is a better life to live, though it may not be on earth here but in heaven. The beggars affirm their nativity of the street but can only access abode under bridges. This reveals the natives' sufferings in their own land. How someone can be a native of a land and the only place to lay one's head is under bridge that they find it difficult to have a roof over their head? The beggars represent the poor masses of our land. The beggars (the poor) are more than the rich people (leaders) of the globe and the beggars realize that they are more in number than those that are rich that they are relevant in the existence of the rich. This is true for the rich cannot do without the poor for one reason or the other. The rich enjoy “you slump in the warmth of your beds” reveals the sweet rest of the rich which can be the luxuries the rich enjoy “you slump in the warmth of your beds” at the heat of loved ones” They have people around them that are loved but the beggars also embrace their own company. (lack, loneliness, poverty,)The beggars make use of ‘cardboard beds laid on stinks’ This explains more about the poor condition of the masses that are unable to have beds to sleep on for comfort and to ease themselves of the hardship and rigorous begging for alms in the day. Poor environmental conditions full of pollutions and unhygienic that can lead to diseases .They have endurance as they are hopeful of better days. The beggars are not out to be pitied and they are not reacting to their situation but are responding because they know

Exploring the Theme of National Hope in the Poem “Homeless, Not Hopeless” For the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

that the shelter that they lack presently cannot determine their future which is their hope for better tomorrow on this earth or in the world beyond. The beggar are not folding their arms but they persist in their act of begging, realizing that they help the rich as they give them alms which is a means through which God blesses the rich.

Summarily everybody in the society has one role or the other to play and if one shacks his/ her responsibility it affects others. A recent example, in the month of October, 2020 in Nigeria, the youths started a peaceful protest in Lagos that gradually spread to other parts of the nation like wild fire. The protest lasted for more than one week. The youths were out there to rise against the brutality of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (#EndSARS). The youths believed that the killings and oppressions on youths is out of place and must be stopped. It was like nobody in place of authority to bring solution responded promptly until the cold blooded killing of some youths in Lekki on 20th October, 2020 and which degenerated to destroying of houses, various valuable properties both of government and individuals. Generally, people across the globe detest the killings of the youths.

To sustain the expected development towards 2030 *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* Literature as an art work has a lot to offer through the different genres of Literature. Literature teaching helps to correct the ills in the society, to encourage the discouraged and to bring hope to the hopeless. In the poem “Homeless but not Hopeless” is to let courage rise in the students even as youths to know that they must not lose hope to have a desired nation that is better than what we are experiencing now.

The poem encourages the down trodden in the society that they need endurance in their homeless condition to push through to have the required and expected development that will bring them to the lime light of the hope and never to give up or to think that destruction of properties will bring solution. Also, the leaders should know that though they have their edifices, mansions like sand as they amass wealth that neglecting the poor may not be good because a hungry man is an angry man. They cannot remain up there forever as age will tell on them in the nearest future.

In corroborating the explanation and discourse of the poem in the above paragraphs, Okafor (2020) also identified four major themes of the poem:

1. Destitution/ poverty/homelessness
2. Life after Death (Immortality)/Death as a Transition
3. Sacrifice/Endurance/Contentment.
4. Social Inequality

THEMES OF THE POEM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Poverty

The World Bank Organization describes poverty in this way

“Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter.

Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor.

Poverty is not having access to school and not having a job, is fear of the future, living one day at a time.

Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways.

Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape.

So, poverty is a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.”

Considering the theme of poverty, destitute and hunger in this poem in stanza one

Stanza 1: We are the natives of the street
holed-up under bridges
We are major fragments of the globe
necessary part of your existence

As the day chameleons to night

you slump in the warmth of your bed
and the heat of loved ones
we also embrace the cozy
Cardboard beds laid on stinks
as same night injects us with cool breeze
and endurance

The beggar’s life style is full of lack, no home, no food nothing to lay claim to that can be of comfort or succor to them. They absolutely depend on the rich for every help. No food to eat until they receive alms. They sleep under the bridge and could not

Exploring the Theme of National Hope in the Poem “Homeless, Not Hopeless” For the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

even rest their heads in any place in the day time. They have to move up and down begging for food. In this state of poverty it is clear that the rich must give to the poor for their blessings to come. This implies that the rich cannot experience more riches unless they give to the beggars. This reveals that we all need ourselves and no reason to look down on the poor. Bearing in mind that the sustainable goals of numbers 1-4 require us working with the aim to eradicate poverty, no to hunger and to enjoy clean water and enjoy good health. It is in the comfort of the poor masses that even the rich people in our society can enjoy their wealth.

The theme of sacrifice, endurance and content are obvious as the beggars live a sacrificial life for the privilege in the society. They play their roles with endurance, perseverance, and contentment, with the expectation of a better life in the hereafter. Our leaders are to learn and emulate these from the beggars. If people in government or leadership positions can endure to sacrifice the lion share of money they take as largess or never to loot our treasuries in the nation and be contented and judiciously plan for the future then the nation will be able to cater well for the needs of the society. Students studying this poem, may learn to have ability to sacrifice, endure and have spirit of contentment to build their families and society and nation at large. This can go a long way to build a well sustainable nation to better the lots of the present and future generation of Nigeria

The language of the poem is simple. The diction consists of everyday words that the within the reach of any one and therefore, easy to understand. An average reader can read and understand. So, it can be assumed that the author of the poem intentionally make use of simple language because he wants the masses to read and grasp the message of rising up to have a mentality of moving forward for desired development and not to be a monument that is stagnant and is not experiencing development. The use of simple language in the poem will encourage students to create interest in studying poetry and their awareness is drawn to have hope of better future their own lives and for a better tomorrow. It is noteworthy that the poet uses some literary devices to drive home his points.

Some of the figures of speech employed are

Metaphor:

Examples: As the day *chameleons* to night (1.5)
You *slump* in the warmth of your bed (1.6)

Oxymoron:

Examples: We also embrace the *cozy cardboard beds laid on stinks*
As the same night injects us with *cool breeze and endurance*

Pun:

Examples: We are the *lacks that take your lack*

Antithesis:

Examples: We are homeless, not hopeless

Repetition:

Examples: *we, your, day, lack*

Personification:

Examples: When death *opens* the gate to the second phase

Contrast:

Contrast between the living conditions of the beggars and those of the privilege (

Euphemism:

Examples: We are *native of the street* (1.1), instead of, we are *beggars*

The title of the poem can be satirical even for the students as they go about their studies in Secondary school days. Moving up and down daily to attain educational achievement may make them to be ‘homeless’ away from their parents waiting with great endurance on their teachers as they are trained and disciplined to succeed in their academics, not to be hopeless in life. They are encouraged to study hard to have bright future, to attain development and also to become helpers that the nation desires to have a new Nigeria that people are hoping for. Education and Literature- in -English are good weapons of change indeed.

The beggars give a description of the life they live under the bridge in midst of dirt with cardboard as their beds. They accept their home as they refer to themselves as “native of the street holed-up under bridge” They lament and bemoans their beggarly status as they describe their present abode under the bridge in the midst of dirt with cardboard as their beds. They have accepted this as home, hence referring to themselves as “native of the street holed-up under bridge”. The condition of the abode makes it difficult for them to have sound sleep (They hold conference with the indigenes of the elusive world). In the morning they pack their

Exploring the Theme of National Hope in the Poem “Homeless, Not Hopeless” For the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

belongings in bundles and continue their daily business of begging for alms, desiring to have enough to sustain them for the day. Okafor 2019

The beggars continue to emphasize their usefulness to the society that does not care about them. They see themselves as living sacrificial lives. Though they lack the basic needs and comforts of life, they help the society to fulfill their (‘we are the lacks that take their lack’). The basic needs the beggars lack are inclusive in the 17-life-changing goals of 2030 Sustainability which have been outlined by UN in 2015. 2030. The government should bear in mind that from the toiling of the masses they collect taxes and little or nothing to show in providing good roads, lack of good electricity supply, no pipe borne water. Virtually every system is collapsing in Nigeria. Lecturers in public universities have been on strike over nine months this year 2020. Parents and students are like beggars in this poem presently in Nigeria only because the leaders are not thinking of the future of our country for a good future. However, they are hopeful of a better life in the life-after (‘this makes us richer at hereafter’). Though they are homeless on earth, they are hopeful of an eternal bliss, which those who enjoy the comfort of life on earth now may not have access to because they are eating their own eternal bliss now in their earthly home. It is this hope that makes the earthly conditions of homelessness and destitution bearable for the beggars and the masses. To be truthful, there must be doggedness on the part of the masses never to compromise their like a leaders to experience the goodies of their hope on earth and in heaven.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Literature students to participate effectively in development of the country, the following recommendations are made:
2. Literary texts that promote enhancement of the 17 life-changing goals for development of sustainability should be recommended
Literary texts that focus on good human relations that crave for good virtues should be recommended.
3. School counselors from time to time should counsel students on essence of seeing beyond today to hope for better future in their individual lives, others and the nation at large
4. Students are to have awareness that for national development we must all contribute our quota no matter how big or small. A dream work is a team work. No one is an island on its own.
5. Poets, play wrights and literary writers should be encouraged to write literary works that would enlighten and change Literature students’ horizons and perceptions about the neglect of masses the leaders.
6. Curriculum planners and government should recommend texts for Literature-in-English students that center on how to teach good human relationship, good character, virtues, discipline and national values among the leaders and the led, that are not self-centeredness but promote unity and harmony among people of Nigeria as a vehicle of National development, a driving force towards *SDGs of 2030*.

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Exploring the Theme of National Hope in the Poem “Homeless, Not Hopeless” For the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

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