The Construction of Poetry Teaching in Ghanaian Senior High Schools Core English Language Textbooks

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to find out how poetry teaching was constructed in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks. The paper sought to ascertain which pedagogic theories as well as theories of literature underpinned the various poetry lessons in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks. Qualitative analysis was used to analyse the twenty lessons on poetry teaching in the three core English Language textbooks to ascertain how poetry teaching was constructed. For example, it was found that the poetry lessons in the three Core English Language textbooks were underpinned by multimodal pedagogy of poetry teaching – various approaches to teaching poetry such as writing, language learning, et cetera apart from text-based approach. In the case of the literature teaching approach, it was realised that poetry teaching was constructed predominantly in the textbooks as a way of learning

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about literary terminologies, interactive and language learning, exploratory learning, a way of drawing on students' experiences and many others. It was also observed that various identities for both teachers and students were constructed by the poetry lessons in the textbooks. For example, in some cases, the teacher was constructed as a reservoir of knowledge whereas students were seen as active and keen learners. Finally, as recommendation, the paper suggested that poetry teaching in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks should be more of multimodal and student-centered in order to minimise the apathy associated with it.

Introduction

"In a turbulent age, our schools and colleges must prepare the student to meet unprecedented and unpredictable problems. He needs to understand himself; he needs to work out harmonious relationship with the other people. He must achieve philosophy, an inner center from which to view in perspective the shifting society about him; he will influence for good or ill its future development. Any knowledge about man and society that schools can give him should be assimilated into the stream of his actual life" (Rosenblatt, 1978:3).

I have found this statement very intriguing because Rosenblatt has, in summary, admonished us teachers of literature to perceive literature, for that matter poetry, as an integral part of our lives and embrace it as such. As teachers of literature, she maintains, our task should aim at how we can make literature (poetry) lively and meaningful to our students. She states that we should, as teachers of poetry, strive to create opportunities for our students to explore poetry or literary texts, so that they would be able to think independently and critically. Through this, they would be able to surmount problems that are likely to affect them in life and thereby enjoy the benefits of literature of which poetry teaching forms an integral part.

It is however sad that although many literary works have been written and published on the teaching of poetry, especially at the High Schools and Colleges over the years, poetry continues to receive much apathy from both students and teachers. One reason for the way this problem has lingered on could be due to the way poetry is taught in schools and colleges. It is an undeniable

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fact that some teachers of English more often than not, lack the needed skills and ability to effectively teach poetry. More importantly, many teachers of English think that when it comes to teaching poetry, it is the technical aspects rather than the meaning that is very important. For example, they think that students should be forced to understand all the stiff figures of speech such as metaphors, oxymorons, synecdoches and iambic pentameters that are often embedded in poetry, in order for them to assimilate the lesson. But some leading theorists of poetry teaching such as Iser (1978); Hayhoe & Parker (1990) have argued that poetry is meant to be enjoyed and understood by students or learners in different ways; as such, teachers of poetry should create more opportunities for students to exhibit their talents in this respect. Indeed, a recent study conducted by Jackson (2005:1) has claimed that the study of poetry 'provides a way for young people to develop critical writing and thinking skills, gain confidence and become empowered citizens in their communities and beyond'.

Literature Review

Definition of Terms

1. *Definition of Poetry*

It is often quite difficult to provide exact definition for poetry, but I would like to offer one, which has been given by the Encarta World Dictionary as 'Literary works written in verse, in particular verse writing of high quality, great beauty, emotional sincerity or intensity, or profound insight'. This definition is revealing in that the purpose of poetry is to entertain and educate the reader through the use of diction and other valuable poetic devices such as metaphor, simile, alliteration, repetition and others.

2. *Definition of Curriculum*

Many scholars have written extensively in an attempt to define curriculum, but I would offer two explanations of curriculum as contextualise social process. Curriculum has been defined by Allan and Hunkins (1988:9) as 'a plan for action or written document that includes strategies for

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achieving desired goals or needs'. Another school of thought, David Pratt in Allan and Hunkins (1988) explains curriculum as an 'organised set of formal education and or training intentions'.

Both definitions offered by these authorities are similar in that both consider curriculum as a programme or policy document which is meant to be implemented including its contents, aims or intentions and skills. If curriculum is conceived as the above, then it will be prescriptive to the extent that poetry teaching could be constructed as an 'object that needs to be fetched' or learned in a particular way that is acceptable. And teaching poetry in this prescriptive manner might be the cause of the problem with poetry in Ghanaian Senior High Schools. However, if by contrast curriculum is conceived as a contextualised social process, then it could be seen as 'a practice oriented' (Cormbleth 1990:86/7). In this way, poetry teaching could be constructed as a contextualised act or practice in order to meet the needs of the Ghanaian students.

3. *Definition of 'construction of poetry teaching' as used in this study.*

The phrase 'construction of poetry teaching' is used in this paper to describe ways in which poetry teaching is conceptualised in the Ghanaian Senior High school Core English Language textbooks. In addition, the construction of poetry teaching means identifying what conceptualizations of poetry teaching are made evident through the examination of the lessons or activities on poetry in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Textbooks.

Statement of the Problem

Although poetry forms an integral part of the Ghanaian Senior High School English Language Curriculum, not much attention has been given to its teaching in the Ghanaian Senior High schools. In most cases, both students and teachers of English in some Ghanaian Senior High Schools consider poetry as a 'monster', which cannot be tamed. This perception of poetry as a genre of literature by some Ghanaian students and teachers in the Ghanaian Senior High Schools, has buttressed Adam's introductory statement to Dias and Hayhoe's (1988) work, *Developing Response to Poetry*, when he laments how the teaching of poetry continues to pose a challenge to both teachers and students in Secondary Schools thus:

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> …there is a considerable unease in the case of many teachers of English, especially
> secondary school level, about what exactly to do with poetry in the classroom and
> that, in consequence, relatively little poetry is used, particularly, in the first three
> years of secondary schooling… (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988: vii).

This observation by Adam, is relevant to this study in that my experience as a teacher of English at the Senior High School level in Ghana for a decade has revealed that some teachers of English are unwilling to teach poetry with the excuse that it is full of figures of speech which are difficult to teach. I can remember in those days, my students often referred to poetry as 'a monster and dreadful subject', and thus showed a cold attitude to its study. However, I believe the problem posed by poetry teaching is partly due to the minimal attention given to it in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks, as well as the Core English Language curriculum. For example, in the Ghanaian Senior High School English as second language textbooks of years 1, 2 and 3, which I used to collate data for this paper, only twenty (20) lessons are on poetry. To aggravate the situation of poetry teaching at this level, for some time now, the final year students of the Ghanaian Senior High Schools Core English Language candidates are merely asked to respond to ten (10) objective or multiple choice questions on the five selected African Poetry, which are studied for the period of three (3) years.

It is in line with some of these kinds of attitudes to teaching poetry in the Ghanaian Senior High Schools that I intend to advance arguments and suggestions in this paper to make the teaching of poetry at this level a bit more interesting to both teachers and students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how poetry teaching is perceived in Ghanaian Senior High School English Language Core textbooks, through the analysis of the poetry lessons in the textbooks. In addition, the paper aims to recommend that the National Core English Language textbook writers and curriculum planners for Ghanaian Senior High Schools should create more opportunities and better ways for teachers to teach poetry. For example, the paper seeks to

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advocate that Ghanaian teachers of poetry should do away with the prescriptive or regimented approach, which calls for giving a particular meaning or interpretation of the selected poetry; so that once students' responses are not in line with the teachers' ideas, then they (students) are wrong. Instead, they should put into practice various new approaches to the teaching of poetry as exemplified by leading literature teaching theorists such as Thomson (1987) and Eagleton (1983). Indeed, as a new teaching approach, Eagleton condemns the prescriptive approach to teaching poetry thus:

> Reading poetry in the new critical way meant committing yourself to nothing; all
>
> that poetry taught you was 'disinterestedness', a serene, speculative, impeccably
>
> even-handed rejection of anything in particular… in other words, a recipe for
>
> political status quo (Eagleton 1983:50).

Better still, to make poetry teaching and learning more interesting to both students and teachers in the Ghanaian Senior High Schools Core English Language textbooks, curriculum planners could include the pedagogy of multimodality approach to teaching and learning poetry at this level. (The New London Group, 1996). The proponents of this approach to teaching, and for that matter poetry, argue that teaching and learning can occur in different ways other than language, which often constitutes the traditional approach to teaching and learning. In particular, they posit that the meaning of a text can be realised in '… multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the radio, the spatial, the behavioural, and so on…'(New London Group 1994:64). What the proponents of the multimodal pedagogy of teaching are concerned with, which I think can be very helpful in promoting teaching and learning of poetry and indeed, literature in Ghanaian Senior High Schools, is that teachers of poetry should make poetry lessons and activities which accompany these lessons more practical and enticing to students. For example, poetry teachers can ask students to drammatise, draw, rewrite, express their feelings about the poem in terms of language, style, structure and many more. This underscores the assertion that teaching and learning, apart from

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'speech and writing are often accompanied by image, gesture, gaze, movement and posture' (Newfield & Stein 2006:7).

Significance of the Study

The paper aims to argue for the need to enhance the teaching of poetry in the Ghanaian Senior High Schools. In particular, the paper seeks to argue that poetry as a genre of literature should be given more attention in the Ghanaian Core English Language textbooks, the curriculum as well as the West African Examinations Council's final English Language paper. It is pertinent to mention that readers of this paper would realise that poetry teaching at the Ghanaian Senior High School level has become problematic as result of the minimal attention given to the genre in the Core English Language textbooks. In addition, it would be evident in the analyses of the activities that accompany the poetry lessons that because some of the activities in these textbooks do not allow adequate methods of exploratory learning, teachers are compelled to teach poetry in a very prescriptive or regimented manner; hence, the apathy shown to the study of poetry by students. Again, the paper wants to suggest better ways of teaching poetry in Ghanaian Senior High Schools through the analyses of the poetry lessons in the (SHS) English Language Core textbooks. Finally, the paper would inform the curriculum planners of Ghanaian Core English Language to improve upon the existing pedagogies of teaching and learning poetry. For example, they should infuse the pedagogy of multimodal approach (The New London Group, 1994) into teaching and learning of poetry at the (SHS) level in Ghana.

Research Questions

This paper aims to find answers to the following research questions:

(i) How is poetry teaching constructed in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks?

(ii) What teaching pedagogies underpin the activities that help to construct poetry teaching in these textbooks?

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(iii) What theories of literature teaching underpin the construction of poetry teaching in these textbooks?

(iv) What identities are constructed for teachers and students with regard to the activities which accompany the teaching and learning of the poems in these textbooks?

Methodology and Research Design

A combined methodology of qualitative and quantitative approaches has been used in this paper to gather the data to arrive at the findings and recommendations of this research work. In this regard, I have considered the ideas of Patton (1980), Denzin and Lincoln (1998) as well as those of Punch (2000) to be very important to this paper. Patton (1980) for example, defines a qualitative research as that which involves analysis and evaluation of data. He adds that qualitative research embraces data collection and thoughtful analysis of the materials involved in the research. I have found the aspect of Patton (1980), which emphasises the need for 'detailed description' of materials, relevant to this paper because to some extent, this is what the paper seeks to achieve. Indeed, in this paper, I shall describe the physical features of the three core English Language textbooks of Ghanaian High Schools, in order to see how they have helped to construct poetry teaching. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) have asserted that in a qualitative research, there is no uniform judgment or assessment; but rather there are many approaches which are used by the individuals to arrive at the outcome of the research. In this study, the lessons on poetry teaching in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks will be examined or described or analysed (Punch 2000). The purpose of doing this is to find out what literature teaching theories as well as teaching pedagogies or approaches have underpinned the poetry lessons, and how they have constructed poetry teaching in these textbooks.

As an aspect of qualitative research, my focus will be on textual analysis as well, to arrive at the findings in this research paper. Klein (1996:228) argues that textual analysis involves 'the identification, examination and evaluation of various techniques and tools used by the creator of a text'. No doubt this paper seeks to examine and identify the various techniques adopted by the textbook writers in the teaching of poetry. This process will try to identify which pedagogical

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theories have influenced the teaching and learning of the poems. It is through this these analyses that the ways poetry teaching has been constructed in the textbooks will be identified.

In addition, Fairclough maintains that textual analysis should take into account 'text structure and vocabulary' (Fairclough 1992:36). But in this paper, the focus will be on the lessons on poetry teaching in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks. The purpose of examining text structure and vocabulary as well as language is to ascertain how these elements help to construct poetry teaching in these textbooks.

Textual analysis will also consider if the lessons in the textbooks are influenced by multimodal pedagogy of teaching poetry, and how they help to construct poetry teaching. Cope and Kalanzis (2000:187/8) have argued '… all texts are multimodal… and no text can exist in a single mode, so that all texts are always multimodal although one modality among these can be dominate; and there are texts and objects of a semiotic kind which exist predominantly in a mode or modes other than the multimode of language …'

Finally, textual analysis will be in a form of quantitative analysis of the questions or activities in the lessons. I shall count the number of questions or activities that have accompanied each poem in the textbooks to ascertain which type or category of literature teaching approaches such as information retrieval, multiple choice questions, formalists approach, exploratory or active learning, creative writing skills, language learning, etc. By so doing, I shall obtain a fair idea about the percentage of the activities which are dominant in constructing poetry teaching in a particular way.

Description of Data

My data for this research work was based solely on the Core English Language Textbooks of Ghana at the Senior High School level. In all, three books namely, the Senior High School Book one, Senior High School Book two and Senior High School Book three were used. The three Core English Language textbooks were written by four writers namely, David Cobb, Denkabe, Olivia Sosu and Helen Amartey-Quarcoo. These books were published in the year 2000 by

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Unimax Macmillan Limited under the auspices of the Government of Ghana. The textbooks consist of unit lessons on language, reading comprehension, vocabulary and poetry. It is pertinent to mention that although multiple choice questions in poetry are important for Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Students during their final examination, which is often organised by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the textbook producers have not been able to make enough provision for these types of questions as one would have expected. Another interesting observation is that only one (1) – *A Plea for Mercy* out of the twenty poems is among the selected poems on which students are tested in the final examination. It is also interesting to note that this is the only Ghanaian poet whose work has been included in these textbooks.

The total number of lessons on poetry teaching in the three Ghanaian Senior High School Core English textbooks is twenty (20). These twenty poetry lessons embraced all categories of poems ranging from African, non-African or European and contemporary poems. The breakdown of the number of poetry lessons in these textbooks are as follows: The (SHS) book 1 has six poems namely, *superstition, A Plea for Mercy, Oral Poem, When you are Old, Follower* and *Criticizing poetry*. The (SHS) book 2 has eight (8) poetry lessons, namely, *All men come to the hills, Mother to son, The Charge of the Light Brigade, The Target, The People Went to War, White Shadows, Naming of Parts* and *In Memory of a poet*. Finally, the (SHS) book 3 has six lessons on poetry teaching namely, *Broad Daylight, Letter form a Contract Worker, Telephone Conversation, Curve me up when I die, Sonnet* and *Certitude*. The poems, including their poets, their nationality and birth dates are illustrated in the table below. Where there is a dash after a particular year, it shows that the poet is still alive. Let me also indicate that there are no dates of publication for some of the poems at the time of conducting this research. In addition, let me mention that some of them are not real poems, but mere activities to illustrate the teaching of poetry in these textbooks.

Corresponding Number	poem	Poet	Nationality/Date
1	Superstition	Karibo Mayi	Nigerian (1947-

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2	A Plea for Mercy	Kwesi Brew	Ghanaian (1928-2007)
3	Oral Poetry	No Poet	Ghanaian/Traditional
4	When You are Old	W.B. Yeats	Irish (1865-1939
5	Follower	Seamus Heaney	Irish (1939-
6	Criticising Poetry	No Poet	No Poet
7	All men come to the Hills	Roger Mais	Jamaican(1905-1955)
8	Mother to Son	Langston Hughes	American (1902-1967)
9	The Charge of the Light Brigade	Alfred Tennyson	British(1809-1892)
10	The Target	Ivor Gurney	English (1890-1937)
11	The People Went to War	Antonio Jacinto	Angolan (No Date Available)
12	White Shadows	James Kirkup	American (1918-
13	Naming of Parts	Henry Reed	English (1914-1986)
14	In Memory of a Poet	Joe De Graft	Ghanaian (1918-
15	Broad Daylight	James Kirkup	American (1918-
16	Letter from a Contract Worker	Antonio Jacinto	No Date Available
17	Sonnet	William Shakespeare	English (1564-1616)
18	Certitude	William	English (1564-1616)

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		Shakespeare	
19	Telephone Conversation	Wole Soyinka	Nigerian (1934-
20	Curve me up When I die	Gerda Mayer	German (1923-

General Classification of the Poetry Lessons in the Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language Textbooks

From the table, it is obvious that there are no contemporary Ghanaian and African poetry lessons in the Ghanaian Core English Language textbooks. By this, I mean there are no poems written within the last ten years in these textbooks. In all, the textbooks have nine Non-contemporary African and ten Non-African poetry lessons. One lesson in these textbooks as you can see from the table, does not illustrate any specific type of poetry, but merely a lesson on how to criticise poetry. Also, there are seven poetry lessons on the theme of social issues, five on war, one on colonialism and suppression, while political, traditional and love themes have two poetry lessons each.

In the (SHS) Core English Language book 1, which is made up of 207 pages, only nine pages are allocated to poetry teaching and learning. For the (SHS) book 2, eight pages are dedicated to poetry teaching out of 243 pages and the (SHS) book 3 has ten pages for poetry lessons out of 183 pages.

From the statistics and analyses shown above, it is apparent that poetry teaching has not been given as much space in these textbooks as one would have expected, given that poetry forms an integral part of the Core English Language Curriculum in Ghanaian Senior High Schools. In fact, for textbooks with such a high number of pages to have nearly less than ten pages given to poetry teaching and learning in each book, shows how poetry as a genre of literature has been backgrounded at this level of education in Ghana. This attitude to poetry has confirmed how both

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teachers and students perceive poetry in the Ghanaian Senior High Schools as I have indicated earlier in this paper.

In addition, for the producers of the Core English Language textbooks to give room to only two Ghanaian poets out of twenty poetry lessons in these textbooks is an indication of how poetry teaching has been de-emphasised as a genre of literature. Beyond this, ignoring contemporary poetry or poetry on youth or popular culture in these textbooks indicates the attitude of the publishers of these books toward youth or popular culture as a form of literature in Ghanaian High Schools.

I believe this might be one of the causes of the problem posed by poetry in the Ghanaian High Schools, since textbook producers have positioned poetry as a 'unique' aspect of literature that can be dealt with by special or well-trained people whose works they have included in these textbooks. This again underscores the value placed on the canonical works by the producers of these textbooks as sure texts that can be studied in Ghanaian Senior High Schools. Indeed, one would have expected the producers to have given adequate space to the works of Ghanaian poets as a way of promoting national literature, thereby serving as a source of motivation to the youth.

Semiotic Analysis of how Poetry Teaching is Constructed in Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language Textbooks

Textbook designers often take into consideration cover designs because they convey particular kinds of information to readers. I therefore consider it pertinent to discuss, in this paper, some physical features of the Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language textbooks. The importance of doing this is to enable my readers have some information which are conveyed in these textbooks. This underscores the ideas of Kress and Van Leeuwen, who, in (1996), are of the view that the use of designs, the highlighting of fonts, the colour, the images and many similar instances that are often portrayed on the front and back cover pages of textbooks are obvious examples of positioning the images of books.

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Each of the three Ghanaian High School Core English Language textbooks has the National Flag of Ghana embossed on its front cover. The presence of the National Flag on the covers of these textbooks signifies the political status of the textbooks. Indeed, in Ghana, production of textbooks from Primary Schools through to the Senior High Schools rests solely in the hands of the government, in collaboration with the Ghana Education Service. Let me mention that although other private or individual publishers and writers produce textbooks, their publications are not given official recognition as one can see in case of these textbooks.

On the top right front cover of the (SHS) Book 2 is embossed a miniature of National Flag of Ghana in addition to the big National Flag, which carries the inscriptions 'Ghana Government Property, Strictly Not For Sale' (Written in block letters on the book). This explains the rigid control the government of Ghana exercises over production of textbooks in the country. But it is strange to mention that the miniature flag has been absent on the front cover pages of the (SHS) Books 1, 2 and 3. It is strange because one would have expected the miniature flag to be embossed on the other two textbooks as well, in order to consolidate their national status.

Further, to reaffirm the political status of these books, it is worth mentioning that the colour design of each of the books represents the national colours of what they symbolised. Strictly speaking, each of the colours carries the history of the country. The red colour design of the (SHS) Book 1 symbolises the toil and blood of the Ghanaian heroes or warriors who laid down their lives during the country's independence from the colonialists in 1957. The yellow colour of the (SHS) Book 2 represents the gold mines and other mineral resources of the nation, Ghana. The green colour of the (SHS) Book 3 represents the natural vegetation, agriculture, prosperity and hope of the people of Ghana as a nation, while the Black Star, which is embossed on the yellow colour of the National Flag on each book, symbolises the numerous Ghanaians in the Diaspora.

Apart from the three colours showing the National Status of the books, the colours are also used to indicate recognition in terms of which of the books belongs to a particular class or level. Thus, the red colour is for (SHS) 1, the yellow colour is for (SHS) 2, while the green colour belongs to

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the (SHS) 3 class. Besides this, are pictures of four Senior High School students, two boys and two girls, who are adolescents, displayed on the front cover page of each book.

Three of these students are holding a copy each of the textbook. One girl, a student, stands with her hands clasped before her as she looks together with two boys into the book of the other girl who appears to be explaining something from the textbooks to the three of them. It is pertinent to mention that the equal number of male and female students displayed on the front cover page of the three books is an attempt to assert and encourage gender equality; and one can therefore assume it is a value the government and publishers want to promote. This also indicates how the government of Ghana is concerned with giving equal education to the girl child. More importantly, the fact that a girl is doing the explanation to her other colleagues can be seen as endorsing the point of view that boys are not the only reservoir of knowledge as society sometimes perceive them. With the representation of gender equality on the covers of these textbooks, it is possible to see that the government of Ghana espouses the value in McKinney's assertion that textbooks should provide equal representation of gender, social class and must avoid issues that impinge on '… stereotypical gender roles' (McKinney, 2005:3).

Another feature of the Ghanaian Core English Language textbooks is the lack of pictures or illustrations on their back cover pages. There are however the same instructions on the back cover of each of them about how to use the books. The uniformity in the instructions illustrates the kind of rigidity that characterises the production of these textbooks as well as showing how to identify them.

Analysis of the Poetry Lessons in the Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language Textbooks

In this section, I analyse each of the twenty poetry lessons in the Ghanaian Core English Language textbooks to ascertain what theories of teaching as well as literature teaching approaches might underpin the lessons, and how they contribute to the construction of poetry teaching. Here, I counted all the activities or lessons to ascertain which particular approach of teaching poetry is most prevalent and why. This approach is in line with the ideas I have outlined

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in the framework of analysis. In all, there are sixty (60) activities which accompany the twenty (20) poetry lessons in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Textbooks.

(i) **Exploratory Learning Method or Approach to Poetry Teaching in the Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language Textbooks.**

This approach considers activities which involve encouraging students to participate in poetry learning through various activities in order to come out with their own views or findings based on the type of poem being discussed. This is demonstrated by seven activities out of sixty, which represents (12%) of the total number. This approach involves students discovering for themselves without necessarily depending on the teacher for information. The exploratory learning takes different forms such as independent thinking on the part of students, critical thinking, drawing on students' general knowledge and sometimes eliciting their opinions on the issues under consideration. In the case of independent thinking for example, an example is found in poetry lesson one when students are asked whether they consider themselves 'lucky to be in Senior Secondary School'. This type of question requires of students to think on their own before providing the answer. Their answers can be different because although they come from one country, their experiences might be different. Then the question as to whether students are superstitious or not, as shown again in lesson 1, demands critical thinking in order to understand the word 'superstition' first before they can convincingly say that they are superstitious or not. In addition, as an example of exploratory learning which draws on students' knowledge, an example can be seen in lesson (1) when students are asked to identify other forms of superstition that they are likely to find in the poem and their communities. For students to handle this question, they need some knowledge of some beliefs and practices in their locality or community, which they consider to be superstitious, and based on these fore-knowledge about superstition, they can identify similar examples from the poem, before they go ahead to indicate whether they (the students) are superstitious or not. Another example of exploratory learning which involves eliciting students' opinions is seen in poem number (8) when students are to discuss the poem and come out with their views on the kind of metaphors and similes used in it. There is no doubt that this activity can embrace genuine deliberation among students on the

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poem before they come out with their findings or answers. Their answers may be right or wrong in this case because the metaphors and similes in this lesson are not explicit, and more importantly, they are extended metaphors. In the same vein, eliciting students' opinions can be seen in poem (2) which requires students to indicate what the poem is about and to indicate whether they consider the poem to be a successful one. Such an activity demands students' or individual responses depending on their level of understanding, and sometimes, different literary experiences with which the poem is read. In fact, in all these examples and many others in the poetry lessons, it is significant that students' active and genuine involvement or participation is paramount for a fruitful result. However, this type of approach to teaching and learning of poetry is not encouraged in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language poetry lessons. This, I believe might be the cause of the students' lackadaisical attitude to the learning of poetry as a genre of literature.

(ii) **Construction of Poetry Teaching through Interactive Learning in Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks.**

This type of learning takes the form of a conversation or chat between a group or pair of students during the teaching and learning process. It can also be defined as a collaborative learning among a group of students or pairs of students. During this type of learning, genuine discussion of issues takes place as students are allowed to express their views on the poem or poems in their various groups. Eight (8) activities out of sixty representing (13%) have demonstrated this approach. Interactive learning allows students to plan their own learning strategies such as areas to focus on, the duration the discussion would take, the kind of role each student or group members would play and so forth. This approach to teaching and learning poetry can be helpful to some introverted students to talk, especially when the group does not involve many members. Some poetry lessons which can be seen to have constructed poetry teaching as interactive approach in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks can be seen in poems '7, 8, 9,10, 11, and 19'. In lessons ten (10) and eleven (11), students are expected to be in groups and discuss their own views on war. This can be seen as interactive learning because it involves group work and students would certainly talk with one another. The activity can even call for

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genuine discussion among students where some of them can come out with their views on the war films or videos they normally watch at homes and cinemas. This approach can sometimes involve independent and critical thinking on the part of students, depending on the kind of activity involved. In lesson nineteen (19), the activity requires students to engage in role play as they act part of the poem. The acting activity is an interactive approach to poetry learning because students have to organise themselves into groups and discuss the poems for detailed understanding and the role each student should play, and how best these roles can be played in order to depict exactly what ideas are portrayed in the poem(s). Although there are other forms of interactive learning activities on poetry such as reading the poem aloud in pairs in these textbooks, I do not consider them as real interactive approaches of constructing poetry, for they do not require genuine interactive activities such discussion and acting part of the poems. Again, although this approach to teaching and learning poetry can instill confidence in the students in that they have to organise themselves well in order to perform their respective roles effectively, not enough activity has been given to this approach in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks; hence, students apathy towards poetry. This approach of learning poetry represents (12%) of the total activities, and constructs poetry teaching as a way of enhancing students writing skills.

(iii) Construction of Poetry Teaching as a way of Drawing on Students' Experiences and Contexts in Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Textbooks

This approach embraces the situation where activities or exercises meant to teach poetry in the Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language textbooks are linked to students' experiences or are drawn on their knowledge concerning the poems. Two (2) activities in the textbooks out of sixty representing (3%) are based on this type of approach. This approach is illustrated in the activities of lessons '1 & 2' of the poem entitled: Superstition and Oral Poetry as shown in the list of the poems presented in a table below. One of the activities which draw on superstition as students' prior knowledge and experience is seen in the poem when students are asked to link the exercise to their traditional beliefs about superstition. Such an exercise can enhance students' comprehension of the poem under discussion because the belief in superstition is an open secret

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in the Ghanaian culture. For example, in Ghana, there have been instances where brilliant Junior High Schools (JHS) Students cannot enter Senior High Schools (SHS) because they are believed to have been prevented from doing so by witches, wizards and even sorcerers in their families or society. I believe it is as a result of these beliefs that the writers seem to be tapping into an issue of concern and influence in the Ghanaian society.

The other lesson on Oral Poetry is yet an example of drawing on students' experiences and knowledge about African Traditional Ghanaian Literature. The artifacts used in this poetry lesson are symbols of history, tradition and culture in the Ghanaian context; therefore, using them constructs poetry teaching as a way of endorsing or promoting the Ghanaian culture. But then, being a lesson on such important social issues, one would have expected the producers of these textbooks to touch on more of such issues in the successive chapters and lessons in the textbooks, but they seem to have abandoned them.

(iv) Writing Tasks as Ways of Constructing Poetry Teaching in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Textbooks.

These types of activities engage students in writing their poems using the original poem as a model or starting point. Writing tasks can also ask students to respond to parts of the entire poem through writing. Four (4) activities out of sixty representing (7%) focus on this type of exercise or activity, is shown in the activities of lessons '1, 11, 20 and 12) as indicated in the poems. However, the writing tasks occurred in different forms and with different focus in each of the lessons they have accompanied. In lesson '1' activity'd', for example, students are asked to write their own poems about similar superstitions they know about. This kind of writing task can call for testing students' retentive memory and descriptive skills to compose poems on issues or events they consider to be superstitious. The activity can also require the knowledge of real experience of superstition on the part of students to compose good poems on this subject matter. The focus of this kind of writing task during poetry teaching, I think, is to make students learn about some cultural beliefs and practices within their community through writing about them. In lesson '11' activity 'c', the students are asked to write a play-script based on the setting of the

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poem. This demands a complete imaginative and creative ability of students to accomplish the task. This is because the setting of the poem can only be imagined, and it can take students of such a creative knowledge to effectively carry out this assignment.

A similar exercise is given to students in lesson '20' when they are asked to use the poem under consideration as a model to construct their own parody about how they might behave on completion (SHS). This is an example of Vygotsky's notion that students learn through imitation (Vygotsky 1978). Based on these analyses of the poetry lessons and the activities which accompanied them, it is apt to argue that poetry teaching is constructed in the Ghanaian Core English Language textbooks as inducing the skills of writing as well as creativity in students.

Multimodal Pedagogy or Approach to Teaching Poetry in the Ghanaian Core English Language Textbooks.

The New London Group (1994) has argued that teaching and learning, apart from talk or speech, can occur in many other ways such as dramatising, drawing and gestures. It is however, interesting to read that the multimodal pedagogy has only one lesson out of the sixty (60) activities which accompany the twenty (20) lessons on poetry in the Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language Textbooks to construct poetry teaching in this manner. The low representation of this approach in these textbooks is an attestation to the fact that the Ghanaian English Second Language Curriculum does not allow students to explore poetry, and I believe this might be one of the factors which contribute to students' lackadaisical attitude to the study of poetry.

Literature Teaching Approach to Teaching Poetry in the Ghanaian Core English Language Textbooks

In this regard, poetry teaching is constructed predominantly as identification of literary terminologies and figures of speech and how they contribute to the meaning of texts or poems. Such poetry teaching pedagogy requires students to identify rhyme, rhythm, simile, metaphors and the like in the poems. Through the analyses of the twenty lessons, twenty activities out of sixty have constructed poetry teaching in this manner. This represents (33%) of the total number

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of activities. This suggests the need for students to study the literary terminologies because they need to understand these terms and be able to identify them in poetry texts in order to appreciate poetry effectively. This approach of appreciating poetry, underscores the formalists' approach of learning poetry thereby constructing poetry teaching as such.

Another literature approach to teaching poetry, which is evident through the analyses of the poetry lessons, is the structuralists' approach. This approach includes activities or questions which demand students' knowledge about the structure, form and techniques of the poems. Five activities out of sixty, representing eight (8%) of the total number can be seen to be drawing on the structuralists' approach. For example, activity 'b' of lessons 17 & 18 can be seen as drawing on the structuralists' approach when students are asked to identify the differences and resemblances in both poems by considering techniques, structure of the poem, register and subject matter. This approach then constructs poetry teaching as structuralists' approach.

Findings

From the analyses of the twenty lessons on poetry in the Ghanaian Core English Language Textbooks, it has been realised that poetry teaching has been constructed in many interesting ways as follows:

Research Question 1: *How is poetry teaching constructed in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language textbooks?*

From the analyses of the various poetry lessons in the Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language Textbooks, poetry teaching is predominantly constructed as identification of literary terms such as metaphors, oxymorons, rhythms, rhymes, and etcetera. This is realised because twenty lessons out of the sixty lessons representing (33%) have been seen to have constructed poetry as such. This finding can be attributed to the nature of questions that are often asked in the Ghanaian final year national examination questions as far as core English Language is concerned. In fact, in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language curriculum final examination, students are often tested on multiple choice questions based on five selected African poetry.

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In addition, poetry teaching is constructed as exploratory or interactive learning whereby students are offered the opportunity to explore poetry and come out with their personal responses. Eight activities out of the sixty representing (13%) have constructed poetry teaching in this manner. We also see poetry teaching constructed as a way of drawing on Students' experiences and contexts in Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Textbooks. Two (2) activities in the textbooks out of sixty representing (3%) are based on this type of approach. Further, poetry teaching is constructed as a way of encouraging writing or creative writing among students. However, only four (4) activities out of sixty representing (7%) focus on this type of exercise or activity as shown in the activities of the lessons.

Research Question 2: *What teaching pedagogies underpin the activities that help to construct poetry teaching in these textbooks?*

One major teaching pedagogy which has underpinned the construction of poetry teaching in the Ghanaian (SHS) Core English Language Textbooks is the multimodal pedagogy of teaching. This approach, as postulated by the New London Group in (1994), considers teaching and learning as that which can occur in other modes such as dramatising, drawing and other visual modes apart from the written text. On dramatising, only one activity out of the sixty, representing (0.6%) uses this pedagogy. This however makes the lesson student-centered. The low occurrence of this pedagogy in the lessons might be due to the nature of the type of examination the Ghanaian Senior High School final year students write. Indeed, in Ghana, students are not examined in any multimodal form apart from the printing text. In the same vein, drawing and dramatising are not modes of examining students in the Ghanaian curriculum as far as official examinations are concerned, and I believe this might have accounted for the low featuring of these types of pedagogies in the textbooks.

Research Question 3: *What theories of literature teaching underpin the construction of poetry teaching in these textbooks?*

This question was asked to ascertain the kind of literature teaching theories which could be identified in the various lessons on poetry in the textbooks. From the analyses of the lessons, it

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has been realised that the structuralists' approach to teaching literature whereby learners are asked to explain literary terms such as oxymorons, synecdoches, rhythms, rhymes among others, are predominant features of the activities which accompanied the poetry lessons in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Textbooks. I believe this is so because of the type of examination which Ghanaian final year students are often subjected to. For example, as pointed out earlier, in Ghana, students in the final year are made to respond to multiple types of questions on five selected poems; and in most cases, these questions bother on issues surrounding identification of literary terms as mentioned above. However, it is pertinent to mention that this approach to teaching poetry as the textbooks writers sought to promote might be the major cause of students' apathy to learning poetry.

Research Question 4: *What identities are constructed for teachers and students with regard to the activities which accompany the* teaching *and learning of the poems in these textbooks?*

This question sought to find out the kind of identities constructed for both teachers and students based on the various activities which accompanied the poetry lessons in the textbooks. In particular, the question sought to find out whether the lessons construct teachers as reservoirs of knowledge from which students have to draw information or whether students' knowledge about the poems are tested as well. From the analyses, it has been realised that teachers are constructed as managers and purveyors of knowledge in the lessons, although students are often engaged in the activities such as being allowed to explore the poems in some lessons. For example, in the activities which require right or wrong answers such as identifying some literary terminologies, poetic devices, explaining some figures of speech, and the like, there are no doubt that teachers' inputs in these regards would be the overriding factor.

On the issue of constructing students' identity in the textbooks, it has been realised that students are constructed predominantly as low-level active learners than investigators or exploratory learners. Students are also constructed as examination candidates by the questions and activities which accompanied the poetry lessons in these textbooks. An example can be seen in the

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formalists' approach to teaching poetry when students are asked to identify and explain some literary terminologies and other poetic devices in the poems.

Finally, students are constructed as examination candidates who are expected to have knowledge of many aspects of the English Language. Frankly speaking, the Ghanaian Senior High School English Language curriculum is concerned with appropriate use of language. For example, there are always one hundred multiple choice questions in the core English Language Examination paper for the Ghanaian final year Senior School Students to respond to. These multiple choice questions comprise aspects such as vocabulary drills, synonyms, antonyms, lexis and structure, literature and the like. This indeed, constructs students as people 'who need to be guided by experts to become skill users of language in a range of texts' (Reed 2006:151).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the paper, it is recommended that poetry teaching should be made more flexible in the Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Curriculum to enable students develop keen interest in poetry. For example, the paper seeks to suggest that Ghanaian Senior High School Core English Language Curriculum planners should endeavour to include variant approaches to teaching poetry such as dramatisation instead of the prescriptive or teacher-centered approach to teaching poetry. In addition, the paper is of the view that when Ghanaian Core English Language Curriculum planners, together with the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) could introduce better ways of examining students with regard to poetry, it would promote students' interest in learning poetry. For example, during the final year examination, students could be asked to explore particular poems and express their personal responses about these poems, rather than making them respond to a few multiple choice questions on the poems. This approach may be seen as being in line with the views of learning theorists who are of the view that when students are allowed to explore concepts during teaching and learning, they are more informed than being taught by teachers (Watson 1976; Holford and Griffin 2003). Finally, the activities which call for language learning approach in the textbooks should be encouraged among students because these could be used to sharpen their language

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skills as well as to improve their stock of vocabulary as far as teaching and learning of English Language are concerned (Lazar 1993).

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