Engaging Minds Through Poetry

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Effective writing requires engagement, but communicating this axiom to students could sometimes prove difficult. Nonetheless, teachers sometimes discover that their students can even write with their own voice when they employ certain genres, just as students' poems discussed in this article suggest that originality resulted from students' engagement with their selected subject matters. A first set of poems indicates that poetry writing gave students agency, and a second that it encouraged critical introspection. Consequently, students' poems provided a space for a genuine assessment of their writing competences. In analysing students' poems, this article posits that poetry writing can be included in expository writing instruction as a means for developing students' creativity, self-discovery and engagement in writing, as well as a tool for reflective practice.

Keywords: engagement, writing, poetry, voice, reflection.

Introduction

Inspired writers consciously engage their cognition, and as a result, communicate effectively if they have achieved sufficient command of the language of communication. This very simple assertion, the whole essence of teaching writing, particularly to non-native speakers, is difficult to impress on students who seemingly are using the language at a confidence level. Willingness to engage a topic engenders the generation of ideas and supporting evidence from pertinent sources, and then their appropriate organisation to communicate the writer's purpose. Moreover, a desire to communicate a (personal) perspective necessitates critical thinking which is enacted during reading of sources to obtain pertinent information and during the writing process.

Invariably, a good composition communicates the writer's intention through appropriate development and organisation of ideas.

Several factors, contextual and individual, could inhibit a teacher's attempt to affect students significantly such that they can imbibe and exhibit good writing behaviours. The context of learning may not support incisive literacy pursuits that elicit much writing in formal and non-formal situations– in essence, environment may not provoke robust literacy activities that require writing. Again, pedagogic practice may be limiting in several ways, for example, if writing is not a common practice in other courses taken by students, and if students have found a fit-all-style that pays off when they give back to lecturers what they are given in lectures in response to examination questions. In such

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a scenario, students could be very reluctant to indulge in writing tasks without feeling that the writing lecturer is exercising unnecessary powers (Williams, 2000). It is however gratifying when a teacher suddenly finds that something works with her students or that they *can* write when they employ certain genre, as Young (1999) and this writer discovered.

Towards the end of a semester-long battle between my third year undergraduate students and me, we discovered that they could write poetry, but more importantly for me that they could bring the qualities of writing that I had worked fruitlessly hard to bring to bear in their expository writing in poems. Besides, their poems suggest that they were not as nonchalant about doing things right as I thought. In discussing their poems here, I posit that: poetry writing by students can lead the teacher into their cognition for evaluation. Therefore, poems present a valid space for assessing with students their language/writing competences and ways of correcting, enhancing and exploring them, as relevant. Moreover, because these students exhibited superior sense of organisation in poems than they did in their compositions, poetry writing can be integrated into the teaching of expository writing. Again, since the genre gave them agency to speak about my practice and their own behaviour, poetry writing could be used for reflective practice.

Literature review

Poetry and language arts teaching

Sullivan (2009) opines that the exploration of poetry in many African low-book-access situations could be effective in teaching language, particularly, literacy skills. Expectedly, a teacher, as Esther Lieber, would engage ESL/bilingual children in writing, collaborating, assessing and commenting on their own poems (Burnaford, Aprill & Weiss 2001). But even

where book availability was not an issue, Young (1999) found that poetry writing was an effective communication tool among university students, their disciplines notwithstanding. Portions of poems illustrate.

The Giant Spiders of the Deep (Child)
Octopuses are the giant spiders of the deep.
Double cross one and you'll be gone,
bones and all. (Sullivan 2009: 167, citing
Cullinan, Scala & Schroder 1995)

Nature's Legos (University)
The spiral of life-DNA
What are its mysteries; Who can say?
What causes cancer, curse to the young
and to the old?
And what of deformation and mutation; the
story may never be told. (Young 1999: 20)

Moreover, poetry reading and interpretation facilitate poetry writing and other kinds of writing. Visual response to poems helps students recognise language use in writing, such as the arrangement of speech sounds, parts of speech, phrase patterns and lineation (Bearne 2002). Again, exploration of poems can provide intense lessons in grammar and vocabulary: "The syntactic manipulations of poetry and its specialized vocabulary can contribute to the language acquisition process, providing students with intense lessons in grammar and vocabulary" (Schultz 1996: 921).

Although Dobson (1974) agrees with Shultz, he cautions that since poems are linguistically loaded they should be reserved for students with interest in poetry or those that have advanced in their learning of English. Shultz (as Spack 1985), on the other hand, sees linguistic complexities of poems as the very reason intermediate learners should work on them, noting that by its nature, poetry attracts learner's active participation.

Even when the message is complex or incomplete, Spack (p.706) avers that a literature text "provides readers direction for constructing meaning from their own cognitive frameworks (*schemata*)." She further asserts that "by interpreting texts and considering alternative interpretations, students come to understand in a fundamental way how meaning can be created through reading" (p. 706). Exploring poetry in the classroom: "includes writing about poetry and drawing on poetry for other kinds of writing" (Bearne 2002: 109).

In addition to leading learners to develop sensitive response to poetry through analysis, the teacher guides them to explore ideas and frames in poetry in their own writing (Finch 2003). Gajdusek (1988), in identifying many communicative language teaching (CLT) functions served by exploring literature with ESL learners, adds that the study of poetry provides stimulus for writing and composition. According to (Bearne 2002),

> Poetry offers young writers scope in developing their ability to manage an increasingly wide range of forms. It also allows them to develop analytical, critical and evaluative ways of writing. It offers the experience of writing in a range of forms in order to make decisions about how, when and what to write (p. 109)

Ultimately, interaction with literature leads learners to discover language forms and patterns, as well as frameworks that they can apply in their own writing (Finch 2003; Shultz 1996). In addition, poems provide subject matters for discussion and brainstorming by students who work collaboratively in groups to interpret poems, create ideas and experiment with language. Smart (2010) suggests that, taking poems as points of departure, productive skills can be further extended by giving students tasks at different linguistic levels; for example, finding synonyms and antonyms of words at the lexical level, and writing a letter to a character in a poem at the discourse level.

Bearne (2002) recommends that teachers should allow learners to discover themselves in poetry, and to determine what they like and do not like. Further, Gajdusek (1988: 254) opines that learners' "interaction with the text can bring us new insights, new levels of experience in the ESL classroom." In consonance with this belief, experience shows that even students categorised as poor achievers contribute meaningfully to discussions on poetry. Bearne observed that "poetry proved to be an excellent vehicle for extending language use and demonstrating understanding" (p.112) among pupils who speak English as an Additional Language. Bearne further discovered with her pupils that poetry writing revealed diverse potentials among students which development the teacher can support.

Engaged writing

When learners analyse and write poems, they become alert to poetic forms around them (Bearne 2002), and they may be encouraged to develop their own poems and other types of writing as they use linguistic forms and writing frames encountered in literature. However, can the inclusion of poetry in language teaching help break mature students' unwillingness to engage topics, and exercise ownership of their writing to communicate effectively?

Some students do not demonstrate any intention of developing their own voice in their reading or writing. Hence, Lavelle (2001) posits that the belief students bring to a writing task determines the strategies they adopt, as well as writing outcomes. According to Lavelle, a writer's stylistic perspective results from belief about the writing process, and

writing styles represent qualitative variations in the ways that writers go about their writing tasks. The basic distinction is between a deep writing style, which involves beliefs about writing as a tool of meaning and a high degree of personal involvement, and surface writing style, which is basically reproductive or repetitive; the goal is just to get done or to please the teacher.

Three outcomes of degrees of engagement are "essay as argument," "essay as viewpoint" and "essay as arrangement," with "essay as argument" attracting the highest grade point (Lavelle 2001). The key difference between the types of essay is not necessarily difference in the information volunteered but on how the writer conceives the writing process and thereby utilises available data. According to Halasek (1999: 116), "successful critical reading and writing (defined as actively engaged reading and writing) are dependent upon a person's conscious efforts to represent others' words in terms of her own experiences, positions, and concerns." In exercising authority, the right to speak (Halasek 1996), writers develop their perspective, even if this depends on the appropriation of others' voices, to accomplish their own purpose (Sperling & Appleman 2011). Thus, those that write with engagement develop a "real sense of ownership and control... They monitor their growth over time. They are capable of reflective self-evaluation" (McCabe 1996: 342). By engaging a text (reading) or topic (writing), a student can question own and others' beliefs. " 'Good writing' ... pushes a student to reflect on, engage, and contend with her ways of knowing, engaging her in the process of ideological becoming" (Halasek, 1996: 120). Invariably, adequate engagement of an essay topic would present the teacher data for cognitive exploration of students' competences (Myers 1996).

Engagement is also important in the way that students read others' words and ideas or incorporate them into their own writing. Some students fail to realise– or are constrained by cultural context– that they have and should use the authority to speak. However, "the ability to write with voice and to imbue reading with voice" (Sperling & Appleman 2011: 71) can be taken away from students when a lecturer or institutional arrangement constrains students to reading with only a particular perspective (Lavelle 2001). The reader's voice, authority and subjectivity are usually undermined when a text is presented as, or a reader approaches a text as, an "authoritative discourse," one that is "untouchable, removed, and distanced; [and] its binding authority seems unquestionable"(Halasek 1996: 122). Thus, "those who read authoritatively do not achieve a dialogic understanding of a text" (Halasek: 122). On the other hand, those readers/writers who engage a text/topic achieve optimal meaning, are able to participate in the construction of knowledge, and when necessary, rework and reaccentuate others' voices after assimilating (Sperling & Appleman 2011) their meaning and perspectives.

Enacting voice and authority, which result from (or/and in) engagement, infuses life into a piece of writing. "Why was I surprised by such engagement and sophistication by my students?" Young (1999) asked; "Because these letters contrasted markedly with the two formal critical essays they had written previously in the course– which were not coherent or insightful." Engagement draws attention to a written text:

> the first thing that struck me was the quality of the writing about literature they exhibited: the questions and issues raised for critical thinking, the insight and agility with the process of literary interpretation,

the impressive array of intellectual skills that was brought to bear in assisting one another to understand the novel: analysis, synthesis, inference and speculation, integration of primary and secondary sources (Young 1999: 32).

Such was my excitement as I read night after night new postings to my mailbox. The poems my students emailed to me are different from their earlier writings. The poems not only have "voice" but also indicate students' proficiency in English language and mechanics of writing which were unutilised in previous writings submitted during the semester. Why any genre should elicit more commitment from student-writers than others do might be difficult to explain. However, students' commitment in one genre can serve as a means for teaching what they fail to appreciate or grasp in/about other genres, particularly, in this case, expository writing.

In the succeeding sections, I try to recapture the process that led to students of a developmental writing course to write poems, attempt some analysis of their poems to draw attention to students' hitherto dormant competences, and then suggest applications to which poetry writing can be put in writing instructions.

Methodology

This article, rather than being a result of a planned study, derives from opportune independent discoveries of both a teacher and a 75-member class of third year undergraduate students who took a required course in developmental writing skills. Nonetheless, the students and the process through which the poems discussed here were generated are an essential attribute of the classroom experience. To some extent, the poems helped to resolve a "conflict" that persisted between students and their lecturer, resulting from the former's resistance to the latter's insistence that they must write in a writing course.

The students had gained admission into their course of study because, among other requirements, they had a minimum credit pass in literature at ordinary level. In addition, they had taken reading and writing courses at earlier university levels. However, experience with their predecessors suggested that skills taught in literacy courses were unutilised by students, as was obvious during the execution of their long essay projects– their own scholarly creation– during their final years. Therefore, it was necessary that the students were made to write engagingly to engender adequate commitment to their writing, which, however, the students endeavoured to circumvent. In the execution of group works and individual tasks, they tended to miss the point– even when they seemed to have done well, there were signs of plagiarism. However, writing poetry gave the students and their teacher additional dimension to writing engagingly and creatively, but not without the usual friction.

Compelling students to do a writing task they had ignored for four weeks in twenty minutes produced the desired result. Although the assignment gave them the option of writing on a cherished object from any of suggested perspectives, they were only to write a poem during the class session, with the rider that any one of them could be called upon to read out their poems. Perhaps they had given the assignment some thought prior to the class– the poems read aloud showed potential. The students were therefore asked to develop their poems completely and submit by email, which most did.

The poems received revealed that the students had good grasp of the poetry genre. To explore their skill further, they were asked to write a second poem in which they would assess their learning experience in the writing

course. Both sets of poems are revealing about language skills that students possessed but had not brought to bear in their essay writing, and which could not be harnessed in the teaching-learning process to further their writing competences. Moreover, the genre gave them agency for reflective evaluation of different aspects of the developmental writing skills course in their second poems. The audacity of the second set of poems validates hook's (1994: 52) conceptualisation of the communicative power of poems: "For me, poetry was the place for the secret voice, for all that could not be directly stated or named, for all that would not be denied expression."

The poems are analysed and discussed here in terms of their most striking attributes.

Analysis and discussion of poems
An overview of the poems

The students' poems possess integrity, show personal voice (Bernstein 1996), and are appealing to read. Obviously, they gave serious thought to their subject of interest, exploring their own cognitive resources to develop original messages, rather than download or copy from the Internet or other sources. If they consulted materials in developing their poems, they engaged sources as relevant to their communication need. As a result, the students were as surprised as their lecturer was that they could write poems. Poetry seems to have given them agency; permitting self-discovery, and generation and organisation of ideas that in some cases were expressed in unique lineation and forms. In addition, they expressed their own perspectives on the objects they described in the first poem, and in their expression of their experience in the writing programme in the second. The organisational skills they could not apply in composition writing are evident in their poems; their language and discourse

skills became obvious. Their teacher could now explore their cognition through their poetry. Interestingly, the usual low-achieving students presented in their poems unique ideas, lineation and patterns; an indication that they possessed idiosyncratic resources that can be directed towards overcoming challenges in expository writing and critical reading.

Writing introspective poems helped the students to reflect on the course and reach into themselves to evaluate what they had learnt– a process that would likely have enabled them to register what they learnt in their consciousness better than if they did not do any form of introspection. In the past, students were asked to say in class how they would apply competences gained in certain circumstances. To the question, "What will you do if you have to answer a question in an exam?" would be the response: "I will draw up an outline first." Although simple, such exchange could help some students realise the importance of applying skills learnt beyond doing tasks within the particular writing course. Nonetheless, writing poetry was a much better exercise, as students prompted themselves and looked at the course as a whole to determine what they want to put down in their poems, bringing to the fore processes and skills learnt; and, in examining their experience, noted successes and failures of their efforts– this could ensure enduring learning.

Critical thinking, which is a missing link in students' writing, was harnessed in writing their poems (Shultz 1996). Moreover, students were able to apply the knowledge gained in O-level literature class in writing their poems. The poems demonstrate learners' active participation and engagement of their topics, with the result that some had distinct authority, with the writer exercising the right to speak (Halasek 1999) as this poem by Seun illustrates:

Books Are Divine

1 Between the front Board
And the back one
Lies a Sacred World
Formed by an Illuminated Soul

2 Many may differ though
Deterred still I won't be
My Judgement in granite is cast
Set for eternity to be
And never be altered

3 I hold my stand
And that I make bold
No matter who is chafed
No apology I offer

4 Though a martyr you make me
My breath stilled by force
Yet, out my blood will cry –
'Books are Divine!'

Below I discuss further qualities of writing, creativity and unique language features exhibited in the poems. Moreover, the reflective poems provide insight for appreciating student and teacher effort, even if just a lesson (and the virtue) in perseverance by both parties.

Qualities of good writing

Most of the poems have qualities of good writing in terms of generation, clustering and organisation of ideas; and they evince focus, clarity, coherence, unity and completeness. The poems satisfy these qualities by smoothly transitioning from one well-developed idea about the object (subject) to another, and give the reader a sense of accomplishment when finished, signalling completeness. Except for a metaphorical poem, the bewilderment that accompanied the reading of students' earlier writings was generally absent. In addition, in consonance with the assertion that "the best writing is that which carries some of the personality, the individuality of its author"

(Hunter College 1998), individuality was obvious in the creativity exhibited.

Creativity and literary skills

A piece of writing that engages a reader is likely a product of engaged writing. Many of the students reached deep into their inner selves to pull out memories and reflections, and to compose a message delivered with clarity and appeal, as is obvious in *The Picture of My Mother.*

Oh no!
What have you done?
You have reduced it to ashes
the only thing I had left of her
the picture......
of her face.......

Now it's gone
***** (omission)
The picture of my mother
*****

Am going to miss her for sure
But!
To damnation is my sorrow
for the picture...of her face
is imprinted in my heart
that no fire can ever burn
nor destroy...
The picture of my mother...
Aanu

Also exploring relationship, Temitope in a 26-line poem describes friendship and seven gifts symbolising a friendship– a friendship between her and her sister, ending *My Charm Bracelet* thus:

Losing it is my ‡fair [fear][1].
You give me a lift,
My birthday gift.

And no matter how simple or ordinary,
My beautiful bracelet remains
The best thing I have ever owned.

The appeal of some poems is in how their writers make the ordinary desirable. Bukky introduces her guitar in *To My Guitar- Ethel*:

Brown body, smooth and glossy
So sleek I can't resist
Strings and pegs that sparkle
They tempt my fingers to touch.

And of *My Brooch* Elizabeth writes:

Made from the finest silver,
Glittering in the dark, a piece of jewellery
so special,
My beautiful BROOCH,

Aanu's poem (presented earlier) on her mother's picture indicates that writing can be therapeutic; and all of the poems cited, that poetry writing facilitates self-actualisation and expression, revealing the self to self and to others. *A Eulogy to My Car* by Seye is another example:

I hear it speak to me,
The engine communes with me,
The smooth sound,
My mood it soothes.

In *My Aso Oke* Olihima not only delights in her Africanness and the fabric that promotes her African beauty but also intuitively, but unconsciously, patterns her poem to a design on the locally woven fabric she eulogises. Similarly, Idowu writes her poem on *My Eye* within a sketch of the face with two prominent inner circles representing the eyes. Esther on her part uses a font mimicking handwriting to describe

her passion for a pen given to her by her father, ending thus:

After all these,
what more can I say
My companion!
My inspiration!
My treasure!
That is my pen.

In *Ode to my Pen* Laolu illustrates the power of the pen, with part of the second part of her two-verse poem reaching deep to speak:

My pen
****
Trusted indeed
You do not hoard,
You bleed for free.
On tough missions,
You speak for me
Even when my lips tremble

Franklin takes the enigma of *My Pen* further in his second verse:

Danger looms
Joy booms
Lying low, seems useless
Rising high, new horizons broadened

His first verse (lines rearranged) is equally engrossing:

Enclosed in subtle fingers
Awaiting a push
The flowing liquid; the most enticing
Dancing with camaraderie
Patterned ink caresses the white bride

Beyond creating suspense, some of the poems give a sense of completeness of their

message, as does Gloria's six-verse poem on *My Jewellery*, with the last lines expressing her total satisfaction with her object of passion.

> This piece of diamond,
> Gold and of precious stones,
> Is my everlasting Jewel.

Joy's satisfaction with *My Pet*, her Bible, found expression in King James Bible English register. Rhoda, on the other hand, employed rhyming to enhance her obsession with *My Earring*:

> Oh beautiful substance
> You adorn my face with such elegance
> Simple but classy
> Making me look so sassy
> Your presence makes me glow
> Just like the fireflies glow
>
> The beauty is chicly
> Making me look so queenly
> With your presence on my face
> I feel like an ace

Rhoda, as most others, would have consulted her dictionary in developing her poem, an exercise many students shy away from while developing their expository writing.

Unique language features in the poems
Vocabulary and collocations: Beyond the search for appropriate rhyming words as in:

> Some play for treasure,
> But you are my pleasure   Bukky

engagement with their subject matters is further exhibited in the choice of words and collocations that the students were not noted for, for example:

Gloria:	limpid glass, certain soft cushion
Sunday:	bloodless war of academic pursuit
Frank:	subtle fingers, white bride, flowing liquid
Aret:	pristine, shameful disgrace, obvious glimmer, immortal embrace, smiley eye
Damilola:	big round blue balls
Olaoluwa:	eager fingers, tiny circular etchings, shiny silvery casing, sonorous sounds, warm essence, deepest core, the splendour of reality

Grammatical constructions: Similarly, unique grammatical constructions are observable in many of the poems. Exploring her imagination and moving from the present to the imagined and then to utopia, Aret used tense in her last lines to deliver idealism in *The Moon and I*:

First verse:	For a moment in the world, **it was just** the moon and I
Second verse:	For a moment in the world, **when it's just** the moon and I
Third verse:	So I close my eyes and then I fly
	Oh, the moon so beautiful so peaceful
	Then I imagine a world in immortal embrace
	A world with a smiley eye
	A world swearing never to cry
	Oh, I imagine a world when **it will be** just the moon and I

Longer constructions: Olaoluwa lures the reader to admire a *mere* laptop and an *ordinary* iPod by these inviting expressions:

on iPod
- like a shell just washed up on shore
- many a man with tapping fingers
- Pulsating through my weary ears
- to calm the troubled soul of the listener

on laptop

Its warm essence   Line 5

‡Feeling my deepest core with inspiration

There unfading   Line 10
I see my dreams, ideas and feelings come to life
And marvel at how things once abstract
‡A mere figment of the imagination
Become vivid by series of taps

Sing to me of battles long fought Line 20
By many a man with tapping fingers
And became to a lot the source of breakthrough
On the other hand, Nneamaka venerates rice as the essence of life using the simple sentence but complex noun phrases:

The essence of life
Is the abundance of rice.
Only the presence of rice
Gives meaning to life.

Further, on long construction, is the use of similes and metaphor, "like a shell just washed up on shore." Seyi says of a cake mixer: "beautifully adorned like a ‡prince, sitting majestically on his throne;" while Ayo's bracelet makes her "feel like a proud warrior in ancestral savannah" and "glow like the starry skies." Chigozie could say of *My CD Player*:

‡Like music it plays in my ears
Like food it satisfies me
Like water it quenches my thirst
****
Like the ‡rockings of a mother

Rachael matches Chigozie's choice of source of arranged sound when she writes of *My Talking Drum* (**Gangan**)

(None can play deaf to your beats)
They are as sweet as honey
And as melodious as the sounds from an orchestra

For Rhoda in *My Earrings*:

Your presence makes me glow
Just like the fireflies glow

Moreover, Bukky says of her guitar:

You thrill me when I'm ill at ease,
Like hot cocoa on a cold night

And Ezekiel of his car

The body glitters
Like diamond in the sun

Ayobami describes *My Bracelet* thus: "it is so bright as the morning sun, and clear as crystals ..." Similarly, Damilola says "Gold shines like the sun." However, although she recognises that gold, as emerald and diamond, is more to be desired, she writes:

None makes me feel
Like a princess.
[as her blue earrings]

Uwebu however says of her *Gold Loops*, they are:

Beloved like my mother
Unbreakable like my father

Such well-thought out expressions did not feature in students' essays.

So far, all examples have been taken from the first set of poems, tagged "passion poems." An example of a metaphorical poem is taken from the set tagged "reflections poems." Franklin, as it were, hid his perception of the lecturer, her exertion to gain student's compliance, the class and the outcome of the teaching-learning process by adopting metaphor as a "secret voice" (hook, 1994, p.52) in writing his reflection on the writing course in the *'Dawn of Reality'*:

Pestle digging the mortar
Strange bedfellows unwilling to unite
Letterings not letters
Spit deafen the enclosed orifice

Bleat bow to bark
Mesmerized like a plague
Rivulets drop from the structure
Wet Wellington on the shelf
Fly, Fly, Fly

The goldsmith; the cornerstone
Around into a polished marble
Meshed stones for supper
Head circled northwards and southwards
Punches rent the air
Ink over the papyrus
An arsenal fuelled for the journey

Using poetry in reflective practice

In the above poem, Franklin hid behind metaphors to express the resistance the class put up against the lecturer's effort ("Pestle digging the mortar [lecturer]. Strange bedfellows unwilling to unite" [students]) before they became "Meshed stones for supper" and began to appreciate their teacher ("Punches rent the air"). The reflection poems were as interesting as they were revealing about the students, their lecturer, the instructional process, and the outcome of efforts made by both parties. This second exercise was given for students to explore their poetry writing skills further and use it to express their angst, particularly due to one unwelcomed writing assignment after the other, and weigh this against what they had learnt during the semester.

Their poems on pains and gains of the writing course were variously titled in 34 submissions as summarised below:

Fifteen (15) used the words in the assignment with some modification, e.g. "A gain in the pain," "Painful but gainful."

Five (5) used the word "joy" or "joys" in their titles.

Five (5) "possessed" the course: a) My Companion; b) My Course, My all; c) My writing

Class; d) My New Passion–Writing; and e) "An invaluable treasure."

Nine (9) poems had titles that indicate diverse focuses:

a) 'The cross of success'
b) I can see clear and clear!
c) The bitter truth
d) 'Dawn of reality'
e) A worthy course
f) Beauty at last
g) Once an unfriendly course
h) Developmental writing skills!
i) Benefits derived from the writing course

The titles give insight to the writers' lines of thoughts. Reading the poems themselves, many themes emerge from learners' histories:

- Reflection on the course
- Reflection on the self before and after the programme
- Reflection on students attitude towards the teacher and writing
- Development path description
- Effort description
- Teacher assessment
- Fears and outcome/effect

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of these themes, but the poem below encapsulates most of the items and describes the teacher's initial worries and hope for the students:

The pains and gains of Developmental Writing

Writing
A language skill.
Writing
A communicative activity.
CLA 302
Developmental Writing Skills

A course with its many challenges
Contends with my orality
Strives against my instantaneity
Exposes me to a constant sense of failure
Because it never seems like I'm doing well.
Writing assignments upon writing
assignments
I pursued a false hope
That they would make my writing better
Only to be disappointed because
They did not make it easier to do
And the reason for this
I never did master the principles of
effective writing
I never fully and consciously immersed
myself into my writing

About turn!
It's time for a change in my attitude.
Paying more attention in class
Willing to enjoy Developmental writing on
purpose
I decided to read more
This has improved my language
experiences
As I am more acquainted with words
Syntax, semantics, word-smithing and
language flow.

Developmental Writing
Now I think before I write
Bearing in mind that writing is recursive
Has stages, and can't be instantaneous.
I no longer suffer from dearth of ideas
Or paucity of materials
I conduct researches
Question people to generate ideas
Engage in library search for books and
journals
Access useful information on the Internet
Now I always have something to say in my
writing.

Developmental Writing
I set out to know my audience
Their needs and their expectations
This helps in my choice of vocabulary
The tone and the overall presentation of
my essays

Developmental Writing
Now my essays are well-structured
Giving them a sense of organization

Developmental Writing
Though tedious
I have been able to master grammatical
conventions
And a solid working vocabulary

Developmental Writing
Now I focus on precision and clarity
I write drafts for my essays
I revise continuously
I edit the text
And to make my writing credible
I never forget to
Acknowledge and cite my sources

Developmental Writing
Now I interact with my writing
And I really write.   *Bosede*

As would be expected, not all students had similar experience as Bosede. In fact, Charles intimates in *The Cross of Success* that: "They say they've learnt nothing." To him "That's the words of lazy idiots." Nonetheless, *Beauty at Last* with its unique lineation says much about the course having achieved an attitude of engagement in writing among many of the student writers:

Beauty at last
    It hasn't been easy...

writing essays

again and again...

day and night

Yet at times,

all seems so frustrating

cancelling and rewriting

rolling papers into balls

tossing them here and there

But!

after the pains...

the stress...

of thinking and writing

the energy spent...

the nights lost...

the time taken...

never to be regained...

What comes out of it all

is an essay

that is great!

polished!

and outstanding!

Satisfaction fills your heart

your lips spread into a smile

and you say to yourself...

'Beauty At Last!'   *Aanuoluwa*

The reflection poems revealed to me that the poor quality of students' essays misled me into underestimating how much effort they were making to write better. The poems suggest that many of them took their assignments seriously, were not nonchalant, but directed their energies towards purposeful achievement of writing expertise. Apparently, they would have produced better essays if they knew what to do. Thus, lecturers and students need to ensure that students know what is expected– the students, by reading assigned texts, and the teacher, by checking assumptions about learner knowledge.

Conclusion

Getting students to write with voice through adequate exploration of a subject matter (through reading) had been a difficult task, perhaps because, explaining the concept of engaged writing requires cooperation from the students. Interestingly, the poems considered here show evidence of critical thinking. I hope to convince new sets of students to bring seriousness and commitment with which poetry is written to their regular composition writing. This would further encourage the achievement of autonomy in developing writing competences, and thereby the making of writers who are self-aware of their competence level and how to improve on it. No doubt, such students would observe the added advantage of scoring good grades in term papers and examinations while in the university.

Since students' poems result from intense engagement with a topic, they provide a platform for evaluating competences, with a view to helping writers to see and correct errors, as well as to develop potential creativity. Samples presented above suggest that students' poems present language and literary creativity that can be extended to other areas of writing. Similarly, products of intense effort yield texts that the teacher and students can work on to correct language forms, and for further instructions on areas that have not been properly internalised.

Consequent upon my experience with this set of students, I intend to introduce creative writing early to other students by having them write simple short poems in the classroom using sample frames that target the development of grammatical structures as well as creative use of language. This should ensure that most students quickly attain confidence in the genre, achieve fluency and respond more readily to other writing

assignments. With familiarity with poetic forms established, students can write their own poems using their own formats. Their poems would provide cognitive landscape that the teacher can assess, the result of which would direct future teaching and writing tasks to ensure that students gain adequately from the writing course. Moreover, the poems considered here will also serve as illustrations of what students should do in their writing.

Additional evidence from the analysis of students' poems is how empowering poetry writing could be, enabling learners to use it in reflective evaluation of elements in their learning experience. It would be enriching to see if in addition to recording their learning histories, students could use poetry to explore their understanding of writing skills, effectively using writing as a process of discovery.

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[1]   This sign‡ indicates the presence of error.

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Привлечение умов посредством поэзии

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Успешное создание литературных произведений требует полного погружения в тематику, но иногда эту аксиому сложно применить по отношению к студентам. Тем не менее преподаватели порой обнаруживают, что их студенты могут даже писать в своем собственном стиле, используя определенные жанры, так же как и стихи студентов, обсуждаемые в этой статье, демонстрируют, что оригинальность возникает в результате погружения студентами в выбранную тематику. Первая серия стихотворений показывает, что написание стихотворений дает студентам волю действий, а вторая, что оно призывает их к критическому самоанализу. Следовательно, стихи студентов предоставляют пространство для подлинной оценки их компетенции в сочинительстве. В данной статье приведен анализ стихотворений студентов, который показывает, что сочинение стихов может быть включено в обучение разъяснительному написанию как средство для развития студенческой креативности, самопознания и погружения в письменное творчество, а также в качестве инструмента для мыслительной практики.

Ключевые слова: погружение, сочинительство, поэзия, стиль, размышление.