

The Relevance of Folktales in Igbo Child training: A way to curb the challenges of instability and corruption

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Abstract

This study examines the relevance of folktales in Igbo child training in curbing the challenges of instability and corruption. Folktale is a very important genre of traditional literature which plays a significant role in imparting tradition, culture, values, norms religious, education and social ideologies of the society to growing children. Folktales provide people an escape from the burdens and restrictions of society. They justify the institutions of a culture; teach morals and values and serve as forms of social control as well. We can easily see folktales that fulfil these functions-stories of wish-fulfilment and magic providing an escape from the drudgery of daily life, stories that explain the origins of a particular practice or idea, and stories that include morals or warnings about how to behave in the society. Of course, these are incredibly broad relevance, and they will manifest differently in different cultures. There are many more functions of folktales, or any kind of folklore, than just these. However, despite these

sterling qualities of folktales, the traditional approach is being endangered with extinction giving way to modern approaches which is culturally empty, this has brought instability and corruption. The need therefore arises for contrasting the traditional methods and modern approaches where the latter intervenes in the propagation of good morals in children and its sustenance in society. It is observed that children stand to benefit from lessons derivable from folktales. The study concludes that folktales have various lessons imbibed in them. Some of these lessons include discipline, moral uprightness, hard work and courage. And when this is done, the issue of instability and corruption will be long gone or reduced to barest minimum.

Keywords: folktales, training, values, instability, corruption.

Introduction

Folktales can be seen as a story passed down orally from generation to generation. Folktales are an integral part of the African oral society. They usually relate to, and elucidate the various cultural and traditional aspects of a society from which they evolve. Folktales perform salient functions of serving as sources of entertainment, enlightenment on cultural orientation and traditions of the people, educating the young of the various aspects of society. Since folktales portray the values and traditions of a society, where the young and adults alike learn through the events conveyed, the function of this traditional oral genre of folktales can therefore, not be over emphasized. African proverbs and stories draw upon the collective wisdom of oral peoples, express their structures of meaning, feeling, thought and expression and thus, serve important social and ethical purposes. Iyasere (1975, p.105) puts it as follows, "... the story itself is a primary form of the oral tradition, primary as a model of conveying culture, experience and values and as a means of transmitting

knowledge, wisdom, feeling and attitudes in oral societies.” Folktales are popular among the Igbo as well as people all over the world and fulfils the same functions all over the world. This is because storytelling is one of the principal avenues for informal education and entertainment for children in the traditional Igbo society. The practice of folktale telling was common in traditional societies in the past, where parents and other members of families told stories to young ones, usually after the evening meal. It is a lively process, which, as put by Samson-Akpan (1986, p. 67), can be “... likened to an integrated classroom. Children, teenagers and adults attend and participate in it.” In the past, the telling of folktales was a common practice in primary schools, where some class periods were dedicated to this activity. This paper elucidates folktales and the various educational values and functions derivable from them in preparing the child in this age and time. It is an aspect of traditional education from which children imbibe some of the needed lessons they should acquire from the society, which a traditional form of education seeks to achieve. Fafunwa (1974) observes that the aim of traditional African education is multilateral and the end objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectful, skilled, co-operative and conforms to the social order of the day.

Educational aims and objectives either in the traditional or modern fame, prepare a child to rise, develop and operate according to societal dictates and expectations. Igbo folktales contain educational orientations and events, which are useful for a child’s educational developmental process. Therefore, such issues which direct the mind for good and acceptable societal lifestyles and behaviour are contained and demonstrated in the folktales of the people. Exposing children to these tales should educate them in what the society expects of its members. By education here, this writer is referring to

the complete circle of a child's training process, which next to reading and writing, includes the building of character, behaviour, social attitude, and intellect. The paper also goes further to analyse the relevance of folktales in child training as a way to curb the challenges of instability and corruption. Folktale narration has been a traditional art in human societies since time immemorial. It is an art that offers very important functions in the traditional society in which it is practiced, and can also be applied in the present-day situation in the education of the child. Folktales perform didactic, entertainment, enlightenment and educative functions, among others. Life and societal activities are imbibed in and mirrored in the folktales of the people, capturing the norms and values of people who own the tales. Mbiti (1966) observes that:

Stories are to a certain extent the mirror of life; they reflect what the people do, what they think, how they live and have lived, their values, their joys and their sorrows. The stories are also a means of articulating man's response to his environment. This asserts the sterling qualities of folktales, which accord opportunities for the young and the old to interact, and the young learn from the events of the tales. These functions derived from folktale, can therefore be applied in the present-day situation in the education of children.

A lot of researches have been carried out which relate to the present study. Bersgma and Ruth E. (1969) as cited in Amali (2014) in their work *Tales Tiv Tell present Tiv folktales* written in the English language. It is one of the pioneering publications on Tiv Folktales which opened up their folktale genre to the world. The various categories of African folktales are analyzed. Skinner's Anthology of Hausa Literature (1980) highlights this group's tatsuniya (folktales) and other oral

genres of the Hausa people. He observes that the performance of folktales in Hausa land, is told in the evening hour. Children are expected to listen attentively and learn from the lessons contained in the tales. The traditional Gbagyi people have strong ties to traditional practices, one of which is folktales performance. This is the focus of discussion in a study by Amali (1986), where he reviews the impact of storytelling practice among the Gbagyi people. He observes folktale telling practice to have significant status in their traditional lifestyles. He further observes that folktales are employed for interpreting and analysing their cultural values, as well as playing the function of promoting and instilling moral discipline among the youths for the purpose of building moral uprightness and standard. Samson-Akpan (1986) analyses the impact of folktales in Education. The paper observes that folktales and folktale telling sessions imbibe dramatic and educative elements. These educative elements as presented in the paper include the structure and form of folktales, which arouse interest in the children and encourage group participation and mental alertness. The children learn of existing issues in the human and animal world as reflected through folktales.

Onu (2018) avers that Igbo folktales by their nature as well as their definitions, are regarded as fictitious, fabulous, mythical, totally removed from real life situation and events. In their appreciation in actual performance, one discovers that folktales exhibit some elements of truth that somehow translate into realism and true-life situation. This accounts for reason why real people on their appreciation react to them as if they are real stories. Folktales are introduced to a traditional Igbo child from infancy. This means that the traditional Igbo child starts appreciating folktales from infancy to adulthood.

Folktale is a mirror of the society. It explains some mysteries as Achebe (1987) explains that a story does many things. It entertains, it informs, it instructs. That is why it continues to exist and that is why the content remains stable. As Aku (2011) puts it, the story itself is a primary form of the oral tradition, primary as a model of conveying culture, experience and values and as a means transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feeling and attitudes in oral societies.

Egudu (1973) avers that folktale in Igbo culture enjoys popularity for some reasons: it serves a didactic purpose for rearing and it is a vibrant artistic genre with educational and socializing functions. This has transmitted the Igbo culture, norms and values through generations by orally narrating and memorized landmarks of their history, belief, ethics, tradition, codes and culture, values and practices. However, the art of storytelling is almost extinct in Igbo homes and schools. There is evidence that Igbo folktale tradition is seriously on the decline, due to the influence of modernization as a result of globalization about which the Igbo people have shown much enthusiasm. Equally, true is the fact modernity has a considerable extent taken the family and the folk community and given these functions to such formal institutions as the schools and the popular media.

Igbo folktales contain the people's culture, worldview, norms, spiritual life, their hopes and aspirations. In short, Igbo folktale contains Igbo man's total way of life. And absence of folktales in our homes and schools have brought instability and corruption in our society.

Education is a life activity, which entails passing through learning processes and acquiring knowledge and other skills for positive development. Folktales are generally known to be a source of entertainment; however, as this researcher has observed above, the folktale genre performs other functions,

one of which is education of children. Tshiwala-Amadi (1980) also observes that folktales serve many functions in African society. In addition to providing entertainment, they have certain didactic qualities. They are used to educate the young; they help to establish social norms.

Several functions are therefore derivable from this oral genre as observed by Adeyemi (1997) in reference to Yoruba folktales she observes that folktales can be used to inculcate in the children of preschool age virtues such as humility, gratitude, respect for elders and constituted authority, perseverance, conformity to societal norms, cooperation, hospitality, truthfulness, honesty, willingness to take advice, patriotism, courage and love, loyalty to one's fatherland, hard work and the fear of God.

We also have folktales which focus mainly on instilling moral behaviour. These tales point to attitudes and effects of behaviour. They demonstrate that good behaviour is positively rewarded and bad behaviour is punished. Paul (1992) opines that tales which show that good must be rewarded while evil does not and cannot go undetected and unpunished. They teach on why it is not good to be disobedient, greedy, lazy etc. This category of folktales aims at good upbringing and acceptable behaviour of children, and also checks indulgence in societal ills. This accounts for why in Igbo folktales, moral tales, issues such as acts of wickedness, theft, unfaithfulness, dishonesty, stinginess, hatred, corruption and the like are accordingly punished. Children are encouraged to imbibe good attitudes such as honesty, sincerity, love, generosity, kindness, faithfulness, helpfulness, stability and the like.

Serve as a means of enforcing conformity with social norms; of validating social institutions and religious beliefs and they

help to provide psychological freedom from some society-imposed restrictions.

A good example of an Igbo moral tale is the one about a co-wife, who took water from the pot of her co-wife and gave to her son. When the co-wife found out she demanded that the woman replace the water she took, she fetched water from Ogbagu river but the woman refused to accept it and insisted that she must fetch water from the stream of Olo. The stream of Olo is a dangerous river mostly at night but the woman insisted that the co-wife must fetch from that stream. When she went to the stream, the spirit water came out and the woman started singing to the mermaid. The mermaid showed her mercy and gave her a pot. Then the woman was instructed to break the pot in front of her co-wife as soon as she gets home. She walks home with the pot of water. As she reached home, the co-wife came out and she quickly broke the pot in her presence. Every piece of the broken pot turned into good things and the co-wife became jealous and she went to fetch her own water in the same stream. As she went, she saw the spirit water and became hostile to her, the spirit water gave her a pot and asked her to break it in the presence of her co-wife. She quickly broke it in the presence of her co-wife and every piece of the broken pot turned into wild snakes and scorpions and attacked the woman. She died from the snake bites and scorpion sting. The moral lesson from this tale is for us to be kind rather than wicked. It also encourages love for one another, and that punishment awaits all evil acts. Furthermore, it demonstrates that an innocent person always finds a rescuer when in danger.

The relevance of folktales in child training can be summarized thus:

1. It helps the child develop creative thinking as a natural process through which a person becomes

aware of a problem, difficulty or gap in information for which he has no previous knowledge.

2. It gives the child the opportunity of using imagination to decipher the truth and develop his intellectual ability. Their wits are tested by allowing them give quick answers to questions posed to them.
3. Obedience and respect are other contributions of folktales to children's development. Most stories and songs condemn bad behaviour. In Igbo folktales, good always triumphs over evil, truth over falsehood, honesty over dishonesty.
4. National consciousness and patriotism are inculcated into the child with the aid of folktale. Children learn bravery, selflessness etc. from legendary stories and songs that tell how heroes suffered greatly or even died for their people. Children were attracted to such characters and usually they aspire to be like them. Legendary stories give the child an undiluted insight into the history of his society. This type of story embodies the values, fears and assurances of the people who invented them.
5. Every story has a lesson to teach just as the stories about heroes and heroines encourage children to be brave in the defense of their society.
6. Folktale is used to satirize the deviant characters in the society thereby making them change their bad behaviour for good. For example, a wayward girl or woman in the society can be satirized. A woman who maltreats an orphan is also satirized. Equally, a man that beats his wife or neglects his responsibilities is satirized through satire, the society maintains its codes of conduct.

Bearing all the above in mind, exposing children to the folktale oral genre creates positive impacts on them. The main

problem that may be encountered in this process may be the lack of adequate documentation of folktales. However, there is hope in reviving the genre. On this note, Adeyemi (1997) opines:

Among the Chaga of East Africa, Ogres, tales are used in the discipline of very young children and lullabies are sung to put them in a good behaviour. In Finland, folktales have been collected, and restructured to serve as their national literature for the purpose of teaching their young ones. Folktales in incorporating morals are introduced to inculcate general attitudes and principles such as diligence and filial piety, and to ridicule laziness, rebelliousness and snobbishness.

Traditionally, children were not rude to the elders, children would ask their parents virtually everything and anything before they do them because of the fear and respect they had for their parents. But this day, children are rude and disrespectful to the elders and to their parents. Children no longer sit around fireplace at night to listen to stories. Stories that promote integrity, peace, unity, love and values. Now they prefer watching late night movies or playing video game in the comfort of their living rooms with popcorn and ice cream.

Folktales inculcate in the children of preschool age virtues such as humility, gratitude, respect for elders and constituted authority, perseverance, conformity to societal norms, cooperation, hospitality, truthfulness, honesty, willingness to take advice, patriotism, courage and love, loyalty to one's fatherland, hard work and the fear of God.

But now, the reverse is the case. Children are no longer conforming to societal norm, they lack cooperation, inhospitality, untruthfulness, dishonesty, unwillingness to take advice, unpatriotic no courage, hatred and disloyalty to one's fatherland, laziness, corruption, rebelliousness and snobbishness and no fear of God.

A typical African adores morality in his ways of life, this is developed from the roots as he needs good ways of lives so that he can relate well in the community. Morality has been internalized so much as it is an age-long value of life. John Mbiti observes:

Morals deal with the question of what is right and good, and what is wrong and evil in human conduct. African peoples have a deep sense of right and wrong. In the course of years, this moral sense has produced customs, rules, laws, traditions and taboos which can be observed in each society. Their morals are embedded in these systems of behaviours and conduct (1975).

These morals were sustained by the people's belief in Traditional Religion and its sanctity which were protected by the gods and spirits. They feared and dreaded violations of their custom and traditions because such offences were punished by immediate justice of gods and spirits with instant death etc.

With the emergency of Christianity, Africans left their culture and embraced the new culture of the whites which does not give immediate punishment to the offenders. So, people turned away from morality and modernization brought morality to the lowest ebb; lack of it increased with the jet age and its exposure of people to crime waves in internet and television: cinemas, video games and home videos. These new

ways of learning have taken the place of traditional ways of learning and brought various evil ways of life. Because no disciplinary measure or action was taken to punish the offenders; people cheat and make gains, naturally people would like a state of lawlessness from which they benefit.

Traditionally, folktale is used to inculcate morals to the children and this is done by words of mouth. Language and culture of a people are generally thought to be inseparable. The culture often gets its expression through the language. In Igbo land, language and culture are transmitted orally from generation to generation. Thus, the Igbo child gets his education from the society in general as the parents, relations, neighbours and peers are involved in his training. A child stands to get admonition, correction or instruction at any point in time from the adult or peer who happens to be around when it is needed.

Folktale telling is now presented to the child through television and radio programs. In this, they do not have close contact, physical contact and looking into the eye of the story teller. This is the reason why they no longer have feelings or emotions; corruption and instability abound in the society. They do not engage in question-and-answer sessions. The child is on his own with no one to explain things to him.

Conclusion

This paper studies the relevance of folktales in Igbo Child training: A way to curb the challenges of instability and corruption in Igbo land as it is obtainable in Igbo community and its evolution into today's world of digital technologies. Since indigenous folktales appear to dwindle, succumbing to the explosion of western influences. The study investigate how cultures through the use of folktales can make impact on children. And that culture is a strong tool for human survival, it is constantly changing and can be lost if not checked

because in recent times, it only exists in our minds. This paper therefore concludes that parents, teachers and society at large should make frantic efforts to engage in the traditional ways of instilling values, norms and moral to children by embracing folktale.

All is not lost, if the government, the parents, educational planners, publishers and teachers work together to halt the idea of using technologies to teach our children in place of storytelling. The involvement of all stakeholders in standing up to the utilization of folktales in the education of children is germane.

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