

FOLKTALES: INDISPENSABLE INSTRUMENTS OF TEACHING AFRICAN CHILDREN MORAL EDUCATION IN THEIR “FIRST SCHOOL” (HOME)

Okafor Stella Amaka, PhD

Department of Igbo

Federal University of Education Zaria

okaforstella@gmail.com +2348135944778

and

Oyedeji Victor Abimbola, PhD

Department of Yoruba

Federal University of Education Zaria

Abstract

Home is regarded as the first school of a child. It is evident that a child needs to undergo some home training before he/she is later handed over to the classroom teachers for the continuity of both moral and formal education. This paper tries to discuss the vital roles that Yoruba folktales play in the course of imparting moral education into the children at home. In conclusion the paper calls for full embrace of folktales especially in our primary schools and post primary school levels. The paper observes that if this is done, there is going to be a great improvement in morals and attitude of our children in the society. The paper employs some textual analysis to buttress the significance of folktale in child upbringing. The paper implores and

advices the people concerned to inculcate African folkloric literatures in the education curriculum. The work makes use of some selected folktale narratives as data to clearly enumerate the instrumental roles that Yorùbá folktales could play in imparting desirable attitude into to the children in the society.

Statement of Research problem

In this contemporary society of ours especially the Yoruba, the rate at which moral values are declining is very alarming especially among the youths of this generation. Traditional folktales and other educative and moral teaching oratures are no longer in vogue in upbringing of a child as it used to be in the olden days in our schools and society at large. Yoruba folktales that used to be tools of imparting and transmitting values like moral etiquettes, good virtue, respect, honesty, hard work and a host of others are being replaced by exotic ones like cartoons, India films, Hip-hop music and other social media entertainments. This cultural transition has awkward effects on the lives of the youths especially on their understanding of the rich cultural narratives that could shape their lives toward becoming a morally upright individual in the society.

The replacement hypothetically raises some critical questions about the moral upbringing of African children especially in the Yoruba communities. Can the replacement of Yoruba folktales with exotic poetries and songs have any positive significance in the moral or social behaviour of a child? What effect does the fading tradition of storytelling have on the transmission of

traditional values? Are Yoruba folktales still relevant in addressing the moral challenges facing our youths today?

Objective of the study

The paper aims at drawing the attention of the concerned individuals to the instrumental roles that Yoruba folktales and other oral tradition can play in imparting moral education into the lives of our children especially when they are still young. Also, the paper will also discuss some of the educative Yoruba oratures that are instrumental in educating a child to be hardworking, honest, contented and respectful in the society.

Research Methodology

Some Yoruba traditional riddles (Àlò àpamò) and lyrical folktales shall be collected as data which shall be critically analyzed. These folktales relevance in moral upbringing of a child shall be discussed along with the analysis. The research shall gather its data from the available works of the scholars on Yoruba folktales and other oratures.

Introduction

Before a child receives formal education he/she is initially under the control and custody of the parents whose responsibility is to see that the child is morally, culturally, linguistically and socially trained. This home education buttresses the saying that “*Home is the first school of a child.*” and that ‘*charity begin at home*’.

African parents cherish morality a lot. It is believed that if a child is morally upright at the tender age of his life, apart from the fact that such a child will not derail from it, he tries also bound to succeed in life. Among the Yorùbá people for instance, education (formal) without moral etiquette is like a king without crown “a kawē ma ka ogbon”. Therefore, at home parents engage in some pedagogical activities to ensure that children inherit and emulate the morals and desirable attitudes that the family is known for. The always chorus these axioms to the hearing of their wards:

“Rántí ọmọ ẹni tí iwọ n’ ẹ”

(Remember the son of whom you are)

“Má borúkọ jẹ”

(Do not spoil the family name)

Ìwà rere lẹsọ ẹniyàn

(Good moral is an ornament of good person)

At the pre-adolescent age of a child, folktale is one of the useful devices that African parents make use in imparting desirable characters into their children. They have the belief that whatever training (formal or informal) a child receives at the tender age it is just like a foundation on which the child will build and shape his life and he will never deviate from it. Folktales go a long way in training children on cultural heritage, language, hardworking, endurance, honesty, faithfulness, love, contentment and a host of others. In a nutshell, folktales impacts are felt in every aspect of child’s behaviour. At times, folktales are used to criticize, commend, encourage or condemn any desirable or undesirable behaviour that a person may exhibit. Kehinde (2010) in

Oyedeki and Oyeyemi (2021) also acknowledges the importance of folktales in educating a child by saying that emphasis should be placed on folktales that can help in nation building, and those that can assist to address the situation whereby our esteemed values are steadily going towards disorder and disintegration

Folktales

Any group of people that share a common factor is referred to as folk while tale is defined as story telling which may be verbal or written.

Encyclopedia Americana defines folktale as traditional stories or legend that is passed down orally from one generation to the next and becomes part of a community tradition. Folktale is traditionally tabooed during the day so as to make children do their normal duties. It is therefore told in the night Majasan (1969:35).

Among the Yorùbá, folktales are used not only as a means of educating a child toward right path but also for amusement and entertainment. Kola (1986:26) also confirmed that these two aspects (entertainment and education) are reflected in the varied contents of folktales and their forms which are subtly adapted to the diversity of subjects refer to. He concludes that because of their recreational and educational values, folktales are socially very significant. Ajayi (1990:64) shared the same view on the importance of folktale among the Yorùbá people, he stressed that the great variety of contents and forms and their social importance make

folktales the most interesting and inspiring subject of study.

Types of Yorùbá folktales

Yorùbá folktale is majorly divided into two types. These are (1) Àlò àpamò and (2) Àlò àpagbè.

Àlò àpamò: - Àlò àpamò is always brief and intelligently tasking. It serves as an introductory piece before the main story (àlò àpagbè) is told. Àlò àpamò is just like riddles which require a lot of wisdom and intelligence before one can crack the nut of its meaning. Àlò àpamò is always used to test the reasoning skills of children. It is also one of warming up devices that a story teller uses in making sure that the children's attentions are not distracted by sleep or any other form of distraction as every child will like to participate in finding the solution to the 'problem'. Àlò àpamò is interrogative in nature. The correct answer is always appreciated by a round of applause while wrong answer from any child attracts simple and jocular mockery. Examples of alo apamo

Àlò àpamò (Yorùbá folk Answers riddles)

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| i. | Kí ló ń kan ọba níkòó? | Abẹ |
| | <i>(What gives the king a knock in the head?) (Razor blade)</i> | |
| ii. | Kí ló bọ sódò tí kò ró tómú? | Abere tabi owu |

*(What is that thing that enters (Needle or cotton)
 water without making sound?)*

iii. Kí ló ñ bá ọba mu otí? Esinsin

(Who wines with the king?) (fly)

The above examples of Àlọ àpamò shows that a lot of wisdom and knowledge are required to unfold the technical answers to the questions asked by the story teller. The denotative meanings of the above, Àlọ àpamò are:

- i. Razor blade can touch the head of a king anyhow during shaving or barbing
- ii. A needle and piece of cotton do not make any sound when thrown inside the water because they are very light.
- iii. A fly does not take permission neither does it respect the king before it enters the king's cup of wine to drink from it.

Àlọ Àpagbè(Yorùbá lyrical folktales): - After Àlọ apamo is the real story of the day or (the night) called Àlọ àpagbè. Unlike Àlọ àpamò, Àlọ àpagbè is long and more detailed. Alo apagbe employs lyrics and dancing devices as embellishment to the story. Narrator may even sing the folktale's song as introduction to his story. The prominent characteristics of folktale are the use of personification and anonymity. Some of the Yorùbá folktales (Àlọ àpagbè) are always centered on animals like tortoise, leopard, lion, dog, snail etc. These characters are personified as having the qualities of a normal human being. Examples of these folktales are;

- (i) “Ìjàpá àti Ìgbín”
(Tortoise and snail)
- (ii) “Ìjàpá àti ajá”
(Tortoise and dog)

In some cases, characters in Yorùbá folktales are anonymous. In this story telling the narrator does not tell the real name of the character, venue of the event and some other information. For instance, we always hear.

“*Nígba kan*” “*Once upon a time*”

“*Bàbá kan wà*” “*There lived a man*”

“*Ní ilú kan*” “*In a certain town*”

Characteristics of “Àló àpagbè” (Lyrical folktale)

- i. It is always interesting, simple and straight forward.
- ii. Action and plot contain magic and supernatural powers.
- iii. Characters always stand for different human qualities like good, evil, wisdom, foolishness, laziness etc.
- iv. Problems and conflicts are always clear.
- v. End can be tragic or comic.
- vi. Desirable deeds are usually rewarded while evil deeds attract punishment.

Moral Education

The lexicographic meaning of the word ‘moral,’ means the principles of right or wrong behaviour that are generally accepted by a society. Macmillan English dictionary (2007) goes further by illustrating that moral relates to the right and wrong and the way the people

should behave. It therefore means that moral can be good or bad, it can be desirable or undesirable. Moral can be look into in various perspectives such as religion, culture, education etc. This paper is basically preoccupied with the desirable moral education of our children using Yorùbá folktale as tools.

The word education has multi-tentaculous definitions. Many scholars have defined the concept in various intelligent ways; Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary defines it as the process of training and giving instruction. Fafunwa (1983) sees education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviours which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. The broad and detailed definition of Fafunwa has technically taken care of the definition concept normal education.

The Role of Folktale in Children Moral Education

While presenting his research instrument Okam(2002) view the role of folktale in three perspectives. Firstly, he sees it as mold, reflector and interpreter of social and literary experience of people. Secondly, he stresses that folktale helps a lot in educating, admonishing and conveying morals to the younger elements of society; and lastly it enhances knowledge of intricacy and aesthetic appeal of the linguistic basis of culture among the young.

Folktales guide behaviour of members of society. They control and maximize good qualities. At times folktales

are used for entertainment purpose. They are used to relax heavy or busy minds. When folktales are told people laugh and laughter is a good tonic to our lives. Through folktales some mysteries that are naturally believed are brought to light. Folktales establish the facts that surrounded such beliefs and assumptions. For instance, through folktale children know why heaven is far from earth, why tortoise has a bold head, why, bats come out in the night and why tortoise has rough shell.

Folktales are national heritage and culture. They are always preoccupies with human ways of lives in a given society and its language and these have been traditionally followed through generations. Before history books, novels, or short stories Yorùbá people did make use of some of their oral tradition (in which folktales are included) to entertain themselves, instruct the younger generations and keep their cultural records (Fafunwa A. 1989). In a nutshell folktales have been playing the roles of holy books before the advent of the Western and Arabian religionists.

Some selected Yorùbá folktales and their moral connotations

As earlier discussed, folktales are one of the instruments in moral upbringing of the young children. Folktales have the solutions to some of the undesirable characters that children tend to exhibit either at home or in the school; undesirable attitude like stealing, laziness, greed, stubbornness, etc. In other perspectives folktales reinforce and motivate children towards hard work, faithfulness, wisdom, courage, and all other good

behaviours that a child may wish to exhibit in a society. Below are the few folktales titles and their moral implications.

S/N	Folktale title	tations
1.	Ìjàpá àti Ìgbín. (Tortoise and Snail).	It preaches against stealing, pride, wickedness and greed.
2.	Ìjàpá àti Ajá. (Tortoise and Dog).	Preaches against betrayal, dishonesty and greed.
3.	Ìdògbé àti ọmọ ọlọsà. (Idogbe and the goddess of the river).	Warns against lack of contentment and disobedience.
4.	Ìjàpá àti Erin. (Tortoise and the Elephant).	Shows the dividends of wisdom and courage for doing a task that seems difficult.
5.	Ìjàpá àti àwọn Ẹranko. (Tortoise and the animals).	Preaches against laziness and stealing.
6.	Ọpọlọ àti Ẹfọn. (Frog and Buffalo).	Preaching that wisdom is stronger than might or power.

Recommendation

It is unequivocal to say that folktales play a prominent role in child's upbringing therefore the two educational arenas (Home and School) designed to mould the lives of our children should embrace the use of folktales in imparting moral into the children. Oyedeki (2010) rightly observes that folktale should be embedded into school curriculum (both primary and post primary).

Our new generation parents should stop being afro phobic to African fantastic oratures. They should take pain to create time for their children by sitting them down at the leisure hours and tell them traditional stories that will help in shaping their wards lives towards good morals instead of allowing them be so busy watching exotic and pornographic films at home. As Oyedeki (2010) rightly suggested that government through the ministry of education should include the folktales in Nigeria educational system. This will hold good prospect for both individual and nation at large.

Finally, media are not left behind in reviving the drowning folktales in our society. Kudos to African Magic Yorùbá that always air a folkloric programme called "AloIyaAgba" (The folktales of Grandma). Other media houses should emulate this as well. People and their culture are inseparable entities. Culture is just like flesh that is added to the skeleton. Folktale is part of our culture and it should not be thrown in the dungeon of forgetfulness.

Conclusion

This paper has to a reasonable extent discussed the undiscovered benefits of folktales to the moral upbringing of our children. It is believed that all the concerned citizens, institutions and parastatals would henceforth embrace this treasured aspect of our culture and use it instrumentally in imparting desirable attitude and character into our children. After all, before the advent of “Holy books” and western education oral tradition had been playing the roles of both Bible and Quran then. African children were not morally bankrupt as we have nowadays. Traditional norms and values were duly respected among the people.

References

- Ajayi, C. A. (2006) Ibadan: “*The Changing Roles of Mother as Teacher of her Pre-School Child*”: The Nigerian Experience. International Journal of Early Childhood (Unpublished).
- Babalola, A.[1979] *Akójopò Àlò Ìjàpá Apá kinní*. Ibadan. University Press Limited Encyclopedia Americana:Wikipedia
- Fafunwa, B. (1983) Ibadan: “*Cultural Heritage: Dimensions of Indigenous Nigerian Education*” Lagos/Institute of Education, University of Ibadan.
- Macmillan English Dictionary (2007) London: Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- Majasan, J. A. (1969) Lagos: Folk
- Okam, C. C. (2002) Jos: ‘*Reading in New Developments in Nigeria Education: Issues and Insightd*’, Deka

Publications.

Catherine S. & Angus S.(2003)*Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary*. Eleventh Edition

Oyedeji, C. K. (2010) Katsina: ‘*Campaign for Folktale Learning in Nigeria Educational Syatem*’. Joali FCE Katsina Vol. 1 No. 1. Pg 11.

Oyedeji, V.A, and Oyeyemi, O.J (2021) ‘Ìtàn àti Àlọ gégé bí Àká Ọgbón, Ìmò àti Ọye fún Èkó Ìwà Ọmọlúàbí Látúrò Yorùbá’. Ègín; Jónà Isé Akadá Ní Èdè Yorùbá, Fólúùmù Kẹfà. Pg 104-117