

## ORAL LITERATURE AS A SPRING-BOARD FOR VALUE INCULCATION TO CHILDREN

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**ABSTRACT:** *It has been observed that societal ills and vices abound in every nooks and crannies of this country and all over the world. The rate at which the youths are involved in immoral behaviour is a thing of concern to everyone. Many people are of the opinion that the disregard for and loss of our rich indigenous cultural values that encourage morality and good behaviour which the children and youths of the past were known for are responsible for these ugly situations in the country today. Many children and youths do not speak their indigenous language (mother tongue) neither do they understand the culture and traditions of their people. This is not surprising as culture and tradition go hand in hand with language. This paper supports that the only way out is for us to return to our cultural tradition which the people of the past used in entertaining and educating their children and youths. The paper is of the view that oral literature (folktale), when used to lay solid foundation in upbringing and education of the youths, will go a long way in inculcating moral values to them. The paper also advises that parents and teachers should serve as the mirror or model through which the children imitate and imbibe the societal values and aid in curbing immoral behaviour in the society. It also aims proffering a teaching model by which Igbo folktale can serve as a tool for inculcating core values to children and youths.*

**KEYWORDS:** Oral literature, folktales, value inculcation, culture, tradition, children

### INTRODUCTION

Oral literature means oral works of high merit which are products of the creative use of imagination by the artist of the spoken words in pre-literate communities. Such works are composed mentally by the illiterate raconteur; Stored in the memory and then spoken, recited, chanted or sung on specific occasions (Ikwubuzo, 1993). It consists of both prose, verse, narratives, poems, songs, myths, rituals and dramas, proverbs, folktales and riddles. Values on the other hand is the collection of guiding principles; what one deems to be correct and desirable in life, especially regarding personal conduct. They are beliefs about what is right and wrong and what is important in life (Hornby, 2005). Ogunbameru and Rotimi (2006) observed that "values are all inclusive, deeply internalized personal feeling that direct actions". Thus, values may not be seen, but are recognized in the behaviour of the child. As leaders of tomorrow, the young ones are given the basic spiritual and cultural training to enable them take over the adult responsibilities in order to maintain and sustain the societal development. The use of Igbo oral literature (Folktale) as a tool for value inculcation to children and youths is the concern of this paper. The emphasis is on Igbo folktales.

**Historical Background to Value Inculcation to Children and Youths**

Prior to the introduction of modern education, it was the oral tradition that parents in the past used to express their ideas, values, norms, beliefs and culture and to pass them unto their children orally using their native language (mother tongue), and through the active participation in and passive observation of both formal and customary socio- religious, cultural and political institutions and events (Fafunwa, 1991). A family supplements for any deficiency that any elder family members discover in children's values and characters through the use of folktales, folksongs, proverbs and riddles as pedagogic tools. Parents, especially the mothers in the traditional families could be seen in their use of folktales, folksongs and riddles. Children sometimes stay with their parents especially in the night to hear folktales, proverbs and riddles centering on some of the legendary animals, for instance, tortoise, elephant or ants and the grasshoppers. These folktales, folksongs, proverbs and riddles and their interpretations are based on how the people perceive and construe their world. This may enhance the teaching of values which enable children to perceive and think of how to behave at any given time and situation. "This may create fertile ground for the children to develop the ability to understand the do's and don't's in the society and may enhance peace and harmony in the society" (Fiakpa, 2004).

In oral tradition, parental influence starts from the day a child is born. Mothers starts the training of the child in Igbo core values through folksongs (Lullaby). From then, the child begin to imbibe the values which are embedded in the song. Oral literature transmit important cultural and societal values, knowledge and behaviours. Most children grow up hearing folktales from their grandparents or parents and this rich oral tradition is instrumental in shaping their personality in their formative stages of life. It has the role of creating value-based, socially responsible and civil individuals. Similarly, oral literature have played a big role in preserving our culture and in doing so people do not make concerted efforts; they do it by merely living their daily life. Any action, work or participation in daily life is equivalent to living the culture and more so the transmission of the culture and values to the younger generations. Thus, parents, grandparents and elders are the mirror or models through which the children imitate the right moral values. This is corroborated by Oladele (1991) when he says that a child's behaviour is often a reflection of his home training and emulation of both parents and teachers, hence these adults should be alive to their responsibilities and practise what they preach. This is also in line with Onwuka (1991) as he noted that one of the best ways to teach anything is to present a concrete example of it because young people of today are quick to spot adults who say one thing and do another. This advice is for parents and teachers in their dealings with children and youths whether in their families (homes) or in the classes (school).

**Brief Survey of the Present Situations:**

With the present status of Nigeria families, there seems to be a cultural evolution which has influenced parent-child interactions. Most parents appear not to have the continuous contact with their children because of their absence in search of means of livelihood (Mgboro, 2003). A situation whereby some parents leave for work in the early hour of the day only to come back late at night when the children must have gone to sleep is not healthy for proper development of the child in terms of character formation which traditional system of education emphasized. Many

children and youths do not speak or understand their mother tongue (Igbo) forgetting that mother tongue is a value by itself. Since language is a means of transmitting the cultural traditions of ethnic groups, it then means that their inability to speak and understand their local language has also denied them the opportunity of understanding their culture and traditions. This is because culture and traditions essentially go hand in hand with language. It was observed that in some schools teachers use English in teaching Igbo folktales. This is absolutely wrong as Igbo cultural values cannot be properly explained using a foreign language.

In the same vein Ibli (2000) observes that in the modern societies, literature has become distanced from the daily life of most people. Many Nigerian youths and children have lost touch with their ethnic folklore. These days it is not common-place to find people gathered around a raconteur eagerly listening to fables, folktales, proverbs and riddles and other form of traditional literature which are reeled out by his sonorous voice". These days too, traditional festivals and ceremonies which created avenues for the enactment of the histrionics and renditions of songs associated with dramatic forms of traditional literature are becoming rare. Even when they are organized, one easily observes intrusions of varied manifestations of western culture.

Villages (the habitat and bedrock of African cultures and civilizations) are gradually all becoming urban layouts in which people do not choose their neighbours and children do not mix freely. There is no time for moonlight plays, games, and storytelling through which children learn the right attitude to life. The resultant effect is that children and youths are fast losing the values of Igbo culture and traditions. Little wonder, there are rising cases of juvenile delinquency, disruptive or anti-social behaviour, disobedience, dishonesty, stealing and other defiant behaviour that are generally associated with anti-social vices among youths. This ravaging phenomenon is the cause of some of the major problems faced by the Igbo (African) child today.

Ojukwu and Esimone (2014) observed that even "the power of religion is beginning to seem ineffective in fighting moral decadence in the society as the religious institutions themselves have indulged more in the pursuance of materialistic gains". The question then is, what is the way out? Where do we go from here? It is the position of this paper that one way to get rid of these societal vices is to return to the good old days core values of our ancestors, which must be used to lay the basic foundation for the education of our children. As mentioned earlier, these core values are embedded in our oral literature (folktales/folksongs). Since our fore fathers used them to educate their young ones and it worked for them, there is no reason why we cannot use it again today in our various families (homes) and in the classes (school system), to educate and entertain our children and youths so as to inculcate traditional values in them. This inculcation can be achieved through the performance and teaching of Igbo oral literature (folktales) at home and in the classroom so that the rich Igbo cultural heritage will not go into extinction. Parents and teachers should wake up to their responsibilities and act while the sun shines.

### **Using Igbo Folktales in Home Environment (Family)**

Hornby defines folktales as a very old traditional story from a particular place that was originally passed on to people in a spoken form. The term however is usually extended to include stories by

known authors which after they were printed, were adopted and transmitted orally by the people. As mentioned earlier, the Igbo nuclear or extended family functions as a school where grandparents, Parents, elders and other family member educate and prepare children for their adult life through folktales. One notable writer and a poet Schiller wrote "Deeper meaning reside in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in any truth that is taught in life".

Story telling is a very important way of spending leisure and pastime among the Igbos both young and old. The practice of storytelling has drastically changed and many children and young people are ignorant of the folktales their people used to instruct and entertain children in the past. Many of these folktales are accompanied with melodious songs or refrains which children find interesting and entertaining. They can be taught the songs and they can participate in the performance by singing along or by simply repeating the chorus as the mother, father or grandparent tells the story. The choruses are intended to make everybody take part in the story and also for keeping children/people awake when stories are told around the house hold fires. As they enjoy the story, they also imbibe the core values of the Igbo people which are embedded in the story. Stories should be told and performed in the children's ethnic language (Igbo) so that they can learn to appreciate and speak the language. The beauty, rhythms, sounds and tonal inflections of the language will create permanent impressions in the minds of the young ones. By so doing, the cultural traditions of the Igbos are being transmitted to the younger, generations through the language in storytelling. This is line with the advice by Natasha Post that "the great and the most powerful gift a parent can give their children is to pass their language and culture to him/her". This can be achieved through story telling in Igbo language.

Igbo folktales, apart from the amusement they give, are very useful for they are mostly didactic. Stories used to educate and entertain younger children must be carefully selected and must be appropriate for their age and level of understanding in terms of subject matter. The aim is to choose stories that inculcate in children such core values as love, courage, obedience, kindness, patience, sincerity, hard work, tolerance and forgiveness. As Okoye (2000) rightly observes that the "didactic purpose of oral literature (folktales) is achieved through a careful selection of themes (mainly involving an exhibition of some vices or wickedness) and manipulation of the story or songs in such a way as to result in the punishment of vice or the reward of virtue". For example, a typical character in most Igbo folktales is the tortoise (Mbe). He is usually presented as a crafty, greedy and unfaithful character who suffers at the end of his mischief. Several tales are told of this crafty animal. At one time he stole his in-law's pottage, and ended up losing the hair on his head. He also craftily took the elephant captive by pretending to be leading the elephant to his (the elephants's) installation as king. The elephant later fell into a hole concealed under the kings throne. Tortoise (Mbe) also tricked the dog into running a race against him, which he won through his craftiness, etc. Anyone listening to such stories are expected to learn to change one's negative attitude and character in the society.

The stories (Folktales) told to children have the following advantages according to Abatan (2014):

- a. They sensitize children to their immediate environment.
- b. They help the children to develop self-confidence.

- c. They also sharpen the children's survival instinct.
- d. Folktales increase the children's patriotism.
- e. They enhance moral development.

Below are some examples of Igbo folktales/folksongs for value inculcation and their English translation, and moral implications. This story is taken from Omalinze a Book of Igbo folktale.

**Title:** Anụ Tụrụ Agwa ga-alụ Ọnalụ (only the spotted animal will marry Ọnalụ)

Once upon a time, there lived a rich pregnant woman. Although she was very rich, the only thing she desired so much to eat was the caterpillar that usually fell from the tree near her house. All the animals including tortoise, leopard, goat etc use to gather there in search of the caterpillar. Because of the woman's pregnancy, she could not struggle with the animals in picking the caterpillar. She pleaded with them to allow her pick caterpillar. All of them refused except the animal called Ọgini that had compassion on the woman, gave her caterpillar and from that day promised to be supplying the woman with caterpillar until she delivers her baby. This woman was very pleased with the kindness shown to her by Ọgini. That explains why when she deliver her baby called Ọnalụ, she gave her in marriage to Ọgini instead of the other animals that were very rude to her in time of need.

This story is accompanied with a melodious song. The first animal to knock at the woman's door to ask for Ọnalụ hand in marriage was the goat.

Kpam! Kpam! Kpam!	-	kparanuma
Ole anụ na-akụ n'ụzọ?	-	kparanuma
Ole anụ na-akụ n'ụzọ?	-	kparanuma
O bu ewu na-akụ n'ụzọ	-	kparanuma
Wụwụrụ gị chighaa azụ	-	kparanuma
I nyere m egu ọna?	-	kparanuma
Oge m di ime Ọnalụ	-	kparanuma
Ọnalụ akụ ego e e	-	kparanuma
Anụ tūrū agwa ga-alụ Ọnalụ	-	kparanuma

Through this chorus, goat's request was turned down. Other animals, leopard, monkey, tortoise etc, took their turn to knock at the woman's door to ask for Ọnalụ's hand in marriage but their requests were rejected one after the other.

### Translation 1

Knock! Knock! Knock!	-	kparanuma
Which animal is knocking at the door?	-	kparanuma
Which animal is knocking at the door?	-	kparanuma
Goat is knocking at the door	-	kparanuma
You goatee go back	-	kparanuma
Did you give me caterpillar?	-	kparanuma
When I was pregnant of Ọnalụ	-	kparanuma

### Refrain

-	kparanuma
-	kparanuma
-	kparanuma
-	kparanuma
-	kparanuma
-	kparanuma
-	kparanuma

Ọnalụ is for wealth	-	kparanuma
Only the spotted animal will marry Ọnalụ	-	kparanuma

When it was the turn of Ọgini to knock at the door. The song was different:-

(2) Kpam! Kpam! Kpam!		kparanuma
Ole anụ na-akụ n'ụzọ?	-	kparanuma
Ole anụ na-akụ n'ụzọ?	-	kparanuma
Ọ bu ọgini na-akụ n'ụzọ	-	kparanuma
Gigiri gi batawa o o	-	kparanuma
I nyere m egu ọna O O	-	kparanuma
Oge m di ime . Ọnalụ o o	-	kparanuma
Ọ nalụ akụ nwa	-	kparanuma
Ọ bu gi ga-alụ Ọnalụ	-	kparanuma

## Translation 2

Knock! Knock! Knock! Knock!	-	kparanuma
Which animal is knocking at the door?	-	kparanuma
Which animal is knocking at the door?	-	kparanuma
Ọgini is knocking at the door	-	kparanuma
Gigiri you come inside O O	-	kparanuma
You gave me caterpillar to eat	-	kparanuma
When I was pregnant of Ọnalụ	-	kparanuma
Ọnalụ is a child for wealth O	-	kparanuma
You are the one to marry Ọnalụ O	-	kparanuma

## Refrain

And they lived happily ever

**Moral lesson from the story:** devotion to kindness. Children will imbibe the virtue of being kind to their parents, siblings, elderly ones and to everyone in the society.  
It pays to do good. Other Igbo folktale/folksongs include:

## (2) Omaraugo

**Theme:** Pride goes before a fall. Moral lesson: This story teaches humility, obedience, respect for elders, diligent to duty and that there is always retribution for every evil act.

## (3). Nwa Enwe Nne na Ukwu Udara (The motherless child and the Apple Tree):

**Theme:-** Perseverance and hard work are virtues.

**Moral lesson-** The story teaches that hard work does not kill, instead there is reward for hard work. The story condemns wickedness injustice and laziness.

## Using Igbo folktales in our School System

Value inculcation to our children using folktales should also be extended to our youths in schools. The story telling techniques should be worked into the school curricula at all level of education sector especially at the primary and secondary school levels. The stories told at this level may also be more complex and touch on every subject relevant to the Igbo philosophy, world view and



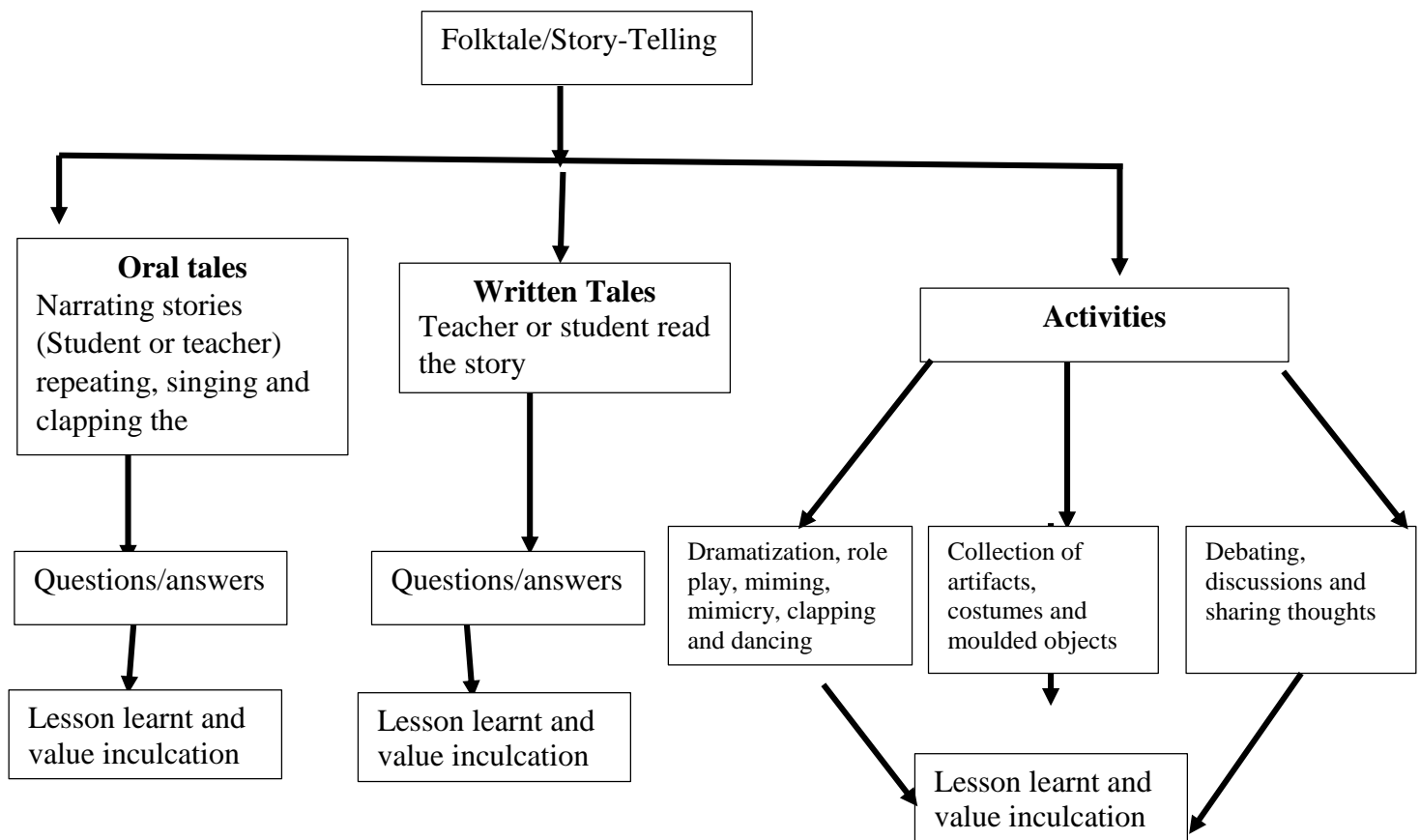
tradition. Ghost stories, fantasy, the supernatural and stories emanating from myths, legend and history are suitable for the up bringing of the youths. Proverbs and riddles should be made available to the youth. The art of conversation and the application of proverbs and riddles should be taught as well.

However, it has been observed that during the period of literature in Igbo language in the school-time table for example, the teachers sees it as a "time to rest" due to their lack of understanding of the important role of literature to the lives of the children and youths. Teachers usually tell the students to go outside and tell stories which the teacher will not even be there to supervise. The problem is that the teachers cannot give what they don't have. They were teaching the same way they were taught.

Oral literature especially folktales, proverbs, riddles supposed to be handled by a competent teacher who has the knowledge of story-telling art/techniques. The teachers must use Igbo language in teaching and she/he should desist from using English Language in telling Igbo stories. As mentioned earlier, Igbo culture and traditions which are embedded in the folktales cannot be properly explained using a foreign language.

The work of moulding and re moulding the minds of the youths with the core values abundantly found in our folklore is the primary duty of every parent and teachers in our school today. And teachers are advised to use the model suggested below for effective teaching of folktale that will result in the inculcation of our core values to our children and youths in order to have a crime free and better society.

**Below is a suggested teaching model for teachers of folklore (folktale) for value inculcation to children and youths**



**A diagrammatical representation of the teaching model for inculcating values to children and youths.**

(1) For oral tales, students should be made to narrate home-learned folktales in their classes, and they should be lectured less. Teacher or a class volunteer who knows the story could then narrate it, while the rest of the class joins in singing any accompanying songs or refrains. The story should not be taught, rather, students should be rather made to enjoy, focusing on value inculcation through entertainment, not on examination. This is corroborated by Ohiri- Aniche (1991) where she advised that "no matter the genre that is being dealt with, discussion and critical analysis should be kept at a low ebb". As the students enjoy the story, they also imbibe the core values of Igbo people which are embedded in the form and content of the story. Stories should be told and performed in Igbo language so that children/students could learn to appreciate and speak Igbo. Teachers must ensure that only Igbo language is used in narrating Igbo folktales.

(2) For written stories as contained in, perhaps, class reader, teacher could give students time to read silently before discussion takes place. After reading, or narration, the next step is to ensure



that everybody has understood the story.

(3) The teacher tried to find out if they understood the lesson through questioning technique - who did or said what and to whom? Where and when did such and such take place? The teacher also explains the meaning of words and structures, while culturally significant details and moral values are pointed out.

(4) Using some higher order questions, the teacher could lead the students to go beyond literal comprehension and gain useful insight about themselves, other people and the entire society. The teacher could ask the students on the elements they found interesting in the story and why? He could ask them their opinion on certain events and characters and the moral lessons they learnt from the story.

(5) Teacher should also introduce these other activities that makes for an interesting literature class:

(a) Dramatization, role- play, mimicry or mime. In these activities, students will learn to put themselves in the position of those characters they read in the stories. Teacher should create situation in the classroom that provide opportunities for students to take the role of any of the characters in the story.

(b) Students should be involved in collecting or creating relevant artifacts, costumes and moulded objects.

(c) Debating, discussing and sharing thoughts and feelings on issues raised in the story.

(d) Students should sing and dance the folksongs. As they learn the traditional lyrics and tunes, as they dance the traditional steps, they are participating in the Igbo cultural heritage.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper therefore recommends the following:

(a) Parents should endeavour to expose their children to the folktales of their community from their early stages even after they have been exposed to formal education (schooling).

(b) The teacher training programme should prepare teachers to cope effectively with the use of folktales/story/telling in the classroom situations.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, effort has been made to show how we can teach our children and youths the core values embedded in Igbo oral literature (folktales) in the families (home environment) and in the classes (schools). Parents and teachers are advised to wake up to their responsibilities of inculcating moral values to their children and youths so as to curb immoral behaviour that are prevalent in the society. Finally, a story-telling teaching model for inculcating values to children and youths is suggested for teachers. Finally, Igbos (Africans) themselves must cease to regard our oral literature as primitive.

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