

## A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THEORIES AND DISCOURSES ON ORAL LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN: PEDAGOGICAL AND MORAL IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA CHILDREN

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### ABSTRACT

Oral literature, over the centuries, has been applauded to have winsome and efficacious effects on the audience to which it is targeted. While it has been relegated to the background because it lacks, so to speak, codification or it is not written down in black and white, its pedagogical input and importance in the parlance of early childhood education catches the attention of the researchers in this paper. A review of the theories and discourses on children in oral literature was done with a view to positioning it in the right place. The paper also mirrors the immense benefits that oral literature offers children at the early stage of their sojourn in academic life. While academic excellence had been and is being given prioritised attention, the importance of moral, which has become a sine qua non in the face and present phase of decadence, immorality, hooliganism and social breakdown that permeate human society calls for the attention of every human that live on the planet earth. Early childhood educators are not left out in providing succor and sanity needed to build up children that would take the mantle of leadership in the decades to come. The authors opine that if early childhood educators tenaciously hold to the dictate and tenet of National Policy on Education, as drafted by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education, oral literature would unequivocally serve as a compass that would positively direct the psyche of Nigerians in the appropriate direction from early childhood to late adulthood.

**Keywords:** Oral literature; Theories; Discourse; Children; Pedagogy; Moral

### INTRODUCTION

Oral literature has been adjudged as a powerful tool for the inculcation of moral and cultural values from time immemorial, more importantly in the pre-westernization period of African society. It is being used to educate children not only in imparting moral and morality but also in the cultural science, geography, history and legends of the society. Fafunwa (1981), Taiwo (1982), Boateng (1985), and Mosweunyane (2013) indicated that oral literature was the vehicle with which children and youth were educated into the society in all African countries before colonization. With this system, there was the establishment of a serene and sane society wherein everyone takes responsibility for his or her action and showed patriotism to the larger society. This education is embarked upon from the early childhood level in all African society and as reiterated by Okoro (2010) that there was social solidarity and belongingness ingrained in every citizen which started from cradle. This implies that Africans clearly understood the dynamics of education in any society that craved for sustainability, hence they started with their children very early in life using the right pedagogical method – Oral literature.

Oral literature has been defined in broad term to be any form of verbal art transmitted orally or delivered by the word of mouth (World Oral Literature Project, 2011). Jane Nandwa and Austin Bukenya defined it as ‘those utterances whether spoken, recited or sung, whose

composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic character of an accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression' (1983:1). Oral literature includes folktales, legends, riddles, songs, myths, proverbs, tongue-twisters, word games, epic poems, chants, recitations, life histories and the likes. Akinyemi Akintunde (2006) stated further that oral literary materials such as tongue twisters, lullabies, riddles and puzzles, songs, game poetry and folktales have been used in the pre-colonial Yoruba society to educate children and that has been the situation in all other African nations before colonization. Mbathio Sall (1979) at the 65<sup>th</sup> IFLA Council and General Conference in Bangkok, Thailand critically dealt on the importance of oral tradition for children and pointed out that oral traditions have a didactic range of vocation that is gradually disappearing in this twenty-first century. Reagan (2005) stressed that oral literature has the potential value as epistemological and pedagogical tools for modern thought and life but it is little recognized, untapped and not well defined in the academy. It implies that oral literature can be used to teach the modern issues or ideas but the power has not been tapped.

For many decades ago, Carter G. Woodson (1933) cited in Ukpokodu, has accentuated the need for educators to use oral literature as instructional methods in the classrooms in order to make children familiar with what has been in the past, present and the possibilities for the future as this would help children to recognize him/herself and become better individual in life. In actual fact, observing the practice in schools, especially at the elementary level, oral literature has been relegated to nothing or is not being used at all as pointed out that it lacked intellectual visibility and utility in education system (Reagan, 2005). Ruth Finnegan (1970) in her book, .... also that the concept of oral literature is unfamiliar to most people who are brought up in culture such as the contemporary Europe that lay emphasis on literacy and written tradition. Teachers, most of the time, teach literature to children as something to fill in the gap not necessarily to establish the importance of literature to life. This may be because of their poor understanding of the impact it may have upon the life of the children and the society at large or their lack of knowledge of the pedagogical values of it to children. Susan Verner (nd) in her blog has stated that using riddles, which is an aspect of oral literature, in the classroom have not been ventured into by English as a second language (ESL) teachers because they felt that humour in riddles does not cut across language barriers; but it should be pointed out that it has positive impact it might play in the educational system beyond what is envisaged. Odejobi, Cecilia.O.; Ajayi, Hannah.O. & Olokunlade, C. F. (2014). Ajayi, Odejobi and Ajayi, (2016) saw the invisibility of oral literature such as proverbs, riddles and ... in educating children and called for the use of various strategies to revitalize them in schools.

It is against this backdrop that this paper was written to carry out a systematic review of theories and discourses on oral literature for children. The essence is to determine how well this genre is receiving attention to establishing the pedagogical and moral implications for Nigerian children in this contemporary time. The study was carried out based on the objectives that identify the sort of studies focused on oral literature for children, assess the assumptions of such theories, the focus of the discourse and examine the pedagogical and moral implications of the studies on Nigerian children. From the objectives, research questions were asked to guide the study as follows:

- i. What studies are available on discourses of oral literature for children?
- ii. What are assumptions of the theories on oral literature for children?

- iii. What are the focuses of the discourses on oral literature for children?
- iv. Are there pedagogical and moral implications of the works for Nigerian children?

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted mixed methods namely the descriptive survey research design and qualitative methods. All studies focusing on African oral literature were the population for the study. The sample was selected using systematic review of literature. The criteria adopted for the selection of the sample are as follows: first the study must be on African oral literature. Second, the studies must be within the last two decades (2000 – 2019) to be qualified for selection. Third, the article must be situated in the African countries or focused on African ideology.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the findings are presented in line with the research questions raised for the study.

- i. Research Question 1: What studies are available on theories and discourses of oral literature for children?

**Table 1:** Frequency Distribution of Discourse Studies on Oral Literature for Children.

Legends	Folktales	Songs	Folklores	Riddles	Rhymes	Proverbs	Chants	Fairy tales	Myths
03	09	03	05	04	01	03	01	01	06
8.3%	25%	8.3%	13.8%	11.1%	2.7%	8.3%	2.7%	2.7%	16.6%
5	1	5	3	4	6	5	6	6	2

Table 1 shows that Folktales are the most available oral literature for children 9 (25%). This may be in line with what Carl Smith stated that folktales serve as an excellent and effective starting point for children because they are a clear and uncomplicated form of literature. Myths have the second place 6(16.6%), followed by folklores 5(13.8%). Riddles also were examined by scholars 4(11.1%) while legends, proverbs and songs have the same attention in literature and chants and fairytales have the least attention as found out in this paper. The implication is that oral literature with African children may be said to have not been as visible as written literature.

- ii. What are assumptions of the theories on oral literature for children?

The following theories and their assumptions have been identified in literature supporting oral literature for children: Functionality Theory, Diffusion Theory, Ecological Theory, Deconstruction Theory and Theory of Nativity.

Functionalism, also called structural-functional theory, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals in that society. Functionalism grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist, Hebert Spencer (1820–1903), who saw similarities between society and the human body; he argued

that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning (Spencer 1898). The parts of society that Spencer referred to were the social institutions, or patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs, such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy.

Functionality theory is linked to Emilie Durkheim. The assumption of the theory is that the society as a whole is very important and each aspect should work for the stability of the whole because each component cannot function alone. When one part of the society experiences a crisis, others must adapt to fill the void in some way (Crossman, 2019). This implies that oral literature as a component of culture should be used in all ramifications to ascertain the stability of the society at large for the benefits of all the sectors. Oral literature has been adjudged to possess the potency to sustain every context of the society if used appropriately and adequately (Asimeng-Boahene, 2018; Jones, 1995).

Another theory that fitly aligns with the functionality theory is Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory on children which has been useful in education. It is called ecological theory of child development (1979; 2005). It has made an incomparable input to the comprehension of how children and young people mature and progress in their formative years. His work has been applied in a raft of contexts and has an indelible on determinative foundation for social work's nascent and ecological perspective. Bronfenbrenner's ideas have also been embraced in various fields of human endeavours (Horwath, 2010; Sudbery, 2010). Moreover, his ecological theory has been widely cited and appropriated within areas such as family support to children 'in need'. In all of this, 'Bronfenbrenner sought to sort out and explicate the common principles of both ecology and system's thinking in a manner having application across various social scientific disciplines'. Bronfenbrenner postulates four systems that show the links culture may have on children. These he called the micro-system, the meso-system, the exo-system and the macro-system. While all the systems are of great concern to early childhood educators, the macro-system ties closely to the importance of oral literature as it is the enveloping, overarching sphere embracing culture primarily but it involves the polity and the economy. Macro-system is also seen as the arena where social and political policy is formed (Houstin, 2015).

It is noted too that the micro-system provides a circumstance in which a child spends most of his available time an intimate, one on one association in the company of significant people like the family or peer group. It should be mentioned that social situation also takes place at this system in which the cultural situation of the child is considered. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory also places much emphasis on the privilege of speech (oral) over writing. The apparent significance of and the importance of oral literature in communicating moral to the young children via oral literature is never neglected in his work.

In the same vein, the diffusion theory recognizes and relates with how individuals, societal and cultural influences interact with personality characteristics to determine and why someone will decide to use an innovation. Societal, cultural and individual influences are often tied together when diffusion of innovation occurs. Children are not left behind in what takes place in the society. In fact, young children are quickly affected with the happenings in the society. On this note, Salami, Ojedokun and Akinola (2019) maintained that societal and youth-related problems need to be well entrenched in the Social Studies curriculum. They further averred that Nigerian children should be kept abreast of the prevailing contemporary issues like Boko Haram, Yahoo Yahoo, suicide bombing, kidnapping, etc., be taught to the Nigerian children. These problematic issues could well be addressed with the tool of oral literature.

The work, 'African Oral Literature and Education. Interactions and Intersections' edited by Daniela Merolla (2016), expressed the theory of diffusion in oral literature for children. It is emphasized that diffusion education simply refers to education by immersion.

iii. What are the focuses of the discourses on oral literature for children?

The existing discourses on oral literature for children focused on various themes that may be ingrained in children through oral literature as: National Unity, Social justice, critical thinking, communicative power, (Asimeng-Boahene, 2018, 2014), Jones (1995) established the use of African proverbs in political, judicial, economic, social and cultural contexts and reiterated using it in presenting logical arguments in the legal tradition cases. Appiah et.al (2007) therefore referred to it as a 'treasure beyond price' that would help sustain the soul of any nation. Adeyemi Babatunde A. and Salaudeen Mujidat O. (2014) also established the power of proverbs in inculcating peace education. Ajayi, Hannah. O., Odejebi, Cecilia. O. and Ajayi, Tumininu. (2016) in their study also highlighted various tradition orature and moonlight songs that children used to enjoyed, drawing out the inherent values such as communalism, tolerance, prosocial behaviour, physical development, cognitive development to mention a few.

Salami, Ojedokun and Akinola (2019) maintain that most discourses on children remain predominantly Eurocentric but this assertion did not apply to Nigeria. Nigeria does not lag behind in providing what her children need to be holistic in their upbringing. Salami, et al. (2019) saw the assertion made by Raman (2000) as a serious challenge to African nations. They concluded that it is high time African nations woke up from their slumber and address issues relating to children with all the attention it deserves. Oral literature is one of the means through which children could be properly developed, brought up and nourished with the sole aim of behaving appropriately in the society. In sum, it was advised that every nation of the world should be what they termed 'child maniac'.

iv. Research Question 4: Are there pedagogical and moral implications of the works for Nigerian children?

The studies reviewed pointed out the pedagogical and moral implications of using oral literature for children in the twenty-first century. Modern society is characterised by diverse pathetic situations which require attention. It appears that the education system is incapable to tackling the issue. Modern society, with the broad and sophisticated technology is alienating relational value to individualism. Hence, the social and emotional attachment to one another that would breed empathy, openness, integrity, honesty, patriotism and other values are gradually being eroded. What pervades the society everywhere now is the idea of individualism, little or no concern for others nor the society's well-being. The implications of this have been crisis and conflicts, crime of different degrees, suicidal attempts and actions. The most worrisome part is that young ones are not left out in all these acts. What they see or experience everyday give no positive impression of future serene society but a chaotic one. To douse the tension, educational system should inject pedagogical procedure that is more relax by using more of oral literature in the classroom system than the rigid methods in operation that makes children detect schooling.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The paper has been able to examine studies that focused on oral literature for children in the African settings. It is therefore concluded that there should be a paradigm shift in the rigid education system that tire out children and make them detest schooling to incorporate more of oral literature beyond the commonest folktales, that would be more engaging and more relaxing.

Teachers need to be sensitized on the potency of all oral literature and trained on ways of making use of them in lesson preparation and delivery. Pre-service teachers' curriculum should be prepared to incorporate oral literature. It has been seen that oral literature occupies a significant place from time immemorial. It should not be made to go into extinction as it will continue to provide the necessary preservation of culture which could hardly be achieved by any other process. It cannot be denied that Western Education seems to have wrecked some havoc by ignorantly diverting our attention from gems that reside in our Oral Literature yet being conscious of this threat should wake up all from the slumber. While electronic gadgets too are gradually competing with oral literature and thereby eroding its significant position, a consciously exerted efforts should be made to position oral literacy where it belongs. Without any exaggeration, Oral Literacy had benefitted past generations and it shall unequivocally benefit the present generation if it is well rebranded.

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