
PROMOTING LEARNING IN EARLY YEARS USING FOLKTALES IN CLASSROOM

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***Abstract:** This paper attempts to explore the importance of using folktale in teaching infant and promoting learning in early years. It has been observed that most of the children in their early year classes in Nigeria are unable to develop learning skills. When conventional method of teaching is used in teaching infants, it only consider the child as young adult as teaching are carried out without recourse to the tender age of the child, which against the pedagogical process. This is why the use of folklores/folktales becomes necessary at the child's early years in order to achieve curricular objectives. This has contributed to the recently observed negative transfer of knowledge that pupils exhibits as they transits from one school level to the other. Nothing compares with proper foundation in teaching the child how to learn well and be ready for the academic life ahead. This paper also examined the concept of folktale as an effective tool in teaching and learning by infant in the early years; it discusses the correct attitudes to be instilled in the child that would facilitate learning readiness; it identify the role of folktales in building reading-readiness, creating interest and building children vocabulary skills in their early years. Finally it concluded with the recommendations that would aid learning in their early years by eliminating baroness, monotony and promote the needed motivation to learn.*

Key Words: Folktale, Myths,

Introduction

Promoting learning in early years is as important as the national philosophy of education itself. This is because; learning begins at the very early years of the child. Wrong foundation given to the child can not only be dangerous but tantamount to enshrining mediocrity and half-baked citizen into the national and societal mainstream. A folktale is a type of traditional story that tries to explain something, or which is meant to help people behave well in the world. Such stories usually are fiction-based with magical or supernatural elements, and they often are woven around talking animals, royalty, peasants or mythical creatures. Initially passed down through oral tradition, they were a major means of educating and entertaining prior to the development of printed materials and modern technologies, and they remain instrumental in preserving aspects of the culture in which they develop. Therefore, folktales and stories/fables that usually begins with "once upon a time..." has rich lesson to teach the child about morale, discipline, self-satisfaction, decency, the appraisal of good and the punishment of evils etc all these haven been taught the child in the early years to a long way to corroborate the old Ecclesiastical saying "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov.

22.6). Children are said to be very fearful, naïve and timid at their early years and need the assistance of adults to scaffold them of their innate negative behaviour, moods and emotions, as such the use of folktale becomes apt in building self-confidence in them. That is why the use of folktale should take over from the conventional classroom teaching and learning methods, (Egede, 2011 & Chenube, 1989). Using folktales at the early years is like a trained counsellor working with an absurd on the counselling desk. In the case, the child is the absurd while the teacher is the counsellor, who must do everything to model the behaviour of the child. Suffices it to say, that the use of folktale in promoting learning at the early years has been neglected in the country. Hence children as they turn 18 to 25 these days in their various higher institutions, are better described as 'deviants', no etiquette, no decency, no decorum, not intelligent and not articulate. Exactly how to define what is or is not a folktale is under debate, but stories that fall into this category generally exhibit some very distinguishable characteristics, such as starting with "once upon a time" and ending with "and they all lived happily ever after." They traditionally feature fantastic elements or magic, as well as creatures such as giants, goblins, fairies, elves and dwarfs. They are usually fairly short, often taking just a few minutes to tell or read, and the plots often are melodramatic in nature, featuring a conflict between a hero and villain where everything ends happily, good triumphs and justice properly is served. Another trait of a folktale is that it survives through or is well known by multiple generations. Initially, people passed down these stories orally, and this method of sharing the tales, coupled with general difficulties and slowness in travel, often resulted in more than one version of the same story developing. Even so, the heart of the plots and the reasons for telling them typically remain the same, mirroring the values and culture of the society from which they originated.

Realism and Purpose

In general, these stories usually are fiction, meaning that the people, places and events depicted are largely imaginary. In fact, people usually readily admit that they probably aren't true. They are connected closely to legends, however, in that people sometimes come to see at least one aspect or character as real. A good example might be a tale about a witch told among a group that believes witches really exist. Regardless of how true audiences believe the stories are, folktales almost always provide some practical or moral lesson. Alternately, it can explain how something works or came into being. *The Three Little Pigs*, for example, teaches that being willing to work and thinking critically about how to prepare can protect someone against intruders or general danger. The fact that people can derive and apply practical meaning from the characters and plots is part of what makes them so popular and enduring as means of promoting learning in early years.

Reasons for Initial Common Use

Before the Internet, newspapers, radio, television and other types of media, it wasn't possible to rely on technology to pass the time, and much of the world was illiterate. People relied on storytellers for both entertainment and education as a result. Furthermore, groups needed ways to preserve their cultures. Folktales met all these needs,

providing long-lasting lessons while being constructed in a way members of a group could understand based on their experiences and beliefs.

Rise to Print

In 1450, when Johan Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press, the emergence of the book publishing industry made it possible for people to publish books within a variety of genres. In the 1800s, Europeans actively began collecting regional folktales into books in an effort to record and preserve their cultural history. Examples of people who were involved in this movement are Joseph Jacobs from England, Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm from Germany and Peter Asbjornsen and Moe Jorgen from Norway. Their versions of these stories can still be found in anthologies and picture books throughout the world. Since the National Policy on Education is Government White paper has underlined and spelt out in clear and unequivocal terms the philosophy and objectives that underlie its investment in early years education; it becomes pertinent that in order to achieve this lofty ideas enshrined therein; effective learning methods should be sort. Thus, folktales as taught in early years is relevant to the quest of a disciplined and proactive citizenry and in consonance with the realities of her environment and the global world (which begins from the child's early years). Again, the National Policy on Education as it affects ECCE or early years education Act include: Early childhood/Pre-primary education as referred to in the document as the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school (0 – 6). It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. The purpose of pre-primary education shall be to:

- a. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- b. Prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- c. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (or on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc);
- d. Inculcate social norms;
- e. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc;
- f. Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit;
- g. Learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
- h. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, through play.

Early Childhood Care and Education has gained global attention. According to Diawara (2013), at the World forum on Education for All held in Dakar in 2000, the international community made a commitment to expanding and improving comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education, especially for the most valuable and disadvantaged children. To achieve this all important milestone scholars are advocating for the use of folktales (oral literature) in the teaching and learning at this early years of the child. This is because the child's absolved mind is too young to comprehend abstract concepts, ideas or knowledge, making it hard for the child to learn and development self-

actualization. However, the use of oral literature in the form of folktales, folklores, legendary, myths etc, will not only give a mental picture of body of moral knowledge passed across in the course of the story to the child but will help them to retain this knowledge for long even till adulthood. It is generally believed, that while reading is hard, hearing view sweet tales to the child is more permanent in the child than any other method of teaching.

Concept of Teaching and Learning and Classroom Management

According to Oputa-Imala (2006) teaching is a science as well as an art. He further added the assertion that "no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers (National Policy on Education, Revised 2004)" from the above teaching is seen as a service profession and the teacher guides and directs learning services. Learning on the other hand has been generally agreed as that outcome of teaching which results in the modification of learners' behaviour through the process of constant practice. According to Okoye, (2006), talking about the factors that affects teaching and learning in the early years posits, "The learners' age or readiness shows his level of maturity for learning certain tasks. If the child is not ready for a particular task, teaching becomes cumbersome. Maturation represents the natural development and growth of the abilities and potentialities of the child which are present at birth. These qualities develop in a gradual process..." from the above, it is established that the teacher must development good teaching methods that suits the child early age of life. Often most teachers takes the child to be little adults and wish to instruct, teach or pass certain concepts, ideas and knowledge to them, without the recourse to their disequilibrium mind. This is where the choice of oral literature as a means of teaching in the early years comes to play significant role in teaching and learning in the early childhood care centres. Contributing further, Okoye (2006) added that to reduce monotony, better variety of teaching methods and to keep the child at alert and ready to learn, the use of folktale, stories, riddles etc is very necessary. He said this will make children to be actively engaged in the classroom, provide good learning conditions and make the teacher to be infectious to the children.

According to Egbuchulem (2006), managing the classroom is not as simple as it sounds as it requires adequate preparations by the teacher especially in the early childhood classes. The child is full of emotion and any disturbance of that emotions can lead to emotional breakdown; which will ruin teaching and learning in most cases. He thus advocates for the teachers readiness, and careful planning in the choice of subject matter to teach, methods of teaching and general mental readiness. When literature texts are told in form of folktales instead of readable text, it promotes learning faster than when used as text. For instance, literature texts like *My Father's Car* by S.M.O. Aka; *Oliver Twist* by George Allen, etc when well narrated in the form of folktales, can help the absorbent mind of the child to develop positive self concept, pride in his personal belongings like the characters in the literature texts from where the stories are read. Since children like to imitate and develop affectively and psychosocially by modelling their lives with the characters they read or hear from their literature texts.

According to Dembo, (2000) teaches need to understand children method of learning, which forms their individual differences in order to effectively impart learning in them. He added that the term methods of learning are learning strategies. Learning strategies are the methods children use to acquire informant. It generally observed amongst early years children that their interest in learning comes from play. This is why Maria Montessori advocates the "Play-way" method of teaching and learning for the child's early years, (Lillard, 2005).

Concept of Oral/Folktales and Promoting Active and Effective Learning via folktales in Early Years

According to Fayose (1995), folktales embody the child world of make-belief, magic and enchantment and the child's desire for excitement and action. He said that in most folk stores the main characters often go on one type of journey or another. The journey takes the characters from their main base to distant lands such as the land of the spirits or the land where the travellers only reach after much hardship. Kolade, (2011), posit that literature being a multi tentacle-octopus, literature does not have a single definition; that is why some scholars who have tried to define literature viewed it from different perspectives. Wellek and Warren (1970) defined literature as a great book, which whatever their subjects, are notable for literary form or aesthetic worth in combination with general intellectual distinction. Cobin (1996) looked at literature from another angle. He defined literature as anything that one says or writes that reveals a synthesis of experience and imagination, regardless of the form it takes. We can deduce from Cobin's definition that literature as anything that one says or writes that reveals a synthesis of experience and imagination, regardless of the form it takes. We can also deduce from his definition that literature is all about human experience and imagination. According to Encarta Dictionary (2009), folktale is a story or legend that is passed down orally from one generation to the next and becomes part of a community's tradition. Literature has been said to mean the totality of all happenings in the society. Oral literature is the same with oral tradition which means a community's cultural and historical background preserved and passed on from one generation to the next in spoken stories and song, as distinct from being written down. "Besides being a goldmine for scholars, [Oral Literature in Africa] is a delight for the general reader... The people and animals and spirits of Africa live, laugh, weep and quarrel between the covers of this book." — *Journal of African and Asian Studies*. In the African folk tales, the stories reflect the culture where diverse types of animals abound. The animals and birds are often accorded human attributes, so it is not uncommon to find animals talking, singing or demonstrating other human characteristics such as greed, jealousy, honesty etc. The setting in many of the stories exposes the reader to landform and climate in Africa. References are often made to different seasons such as dry or rainy season and their effect on vegetation. Folktales, generic term for the various kinds of narrative prose literature found in the oral traditions of the world. One of the many forms of folklore, folktales are heard and remembered, and they are subject to various alterations in the course of retellings. As they are diffused (transmitted through a culture), some folktales may pass in and out of written literature (for example, the "Rip Van Winkle" story), and some stories of literary origin may cross over into oral tradition (for example, the anecdote about George Washington and the cherry tree). Nevertheless,

an essential trait of folktales—and all folk literature—is their diffusion, and their passage from one generation to another, by word of mouth.

Mythology, the body of myths of a particular culture, and the study and interpretation of such myths. A myth may be broadly defined as a narrative that through many retellings has become an accepted tradition in a society. By this definition, the term *mythology* might include all traditional tales, from the creation stories of ancient Egypt to the sagas of Icelandic literature to the American folktale of Paul Bunyan. The principal kinds of folktales are myths (see *Mythology*), legends, and *Märchen*, or fairy tales. In common usage, these terms are interchangeable; they refer to any highly imaginative concept or narrative and usually carry an implication of falsehood and incredibility. To folklorists, however, each of the three represents a distinct form of the folktale. Other forms include animal tales and fables, tall tales, formula tales, jokes and anecdotes, as well as cante fables (folk stories partly in song or verse). See also *Ballad*. Myths are universal, occurring in almost all cultures. They typically date from a time before the introduction of writing, when they were passed orally from one generation to the next. Myths deal with basic questions about the nature of the world and human experience, and because of their all-encompassing nature, myths can illuminate many aspects of a culture. Abominable Snowman or Yeti, legendary wild man of the Himalayas. Reports of sightings have come from Nepal (where the creature is known as Yeti) and from parts of China, Siberia, and other areas in Asia. Sightings have also been reported in North America, where the Abominable Snowman is called Bigfoot in the United States and Sasquatch in Canada. These creatures are said to be elusive; to be heavily built, apelike, hairy, and malodorous, with facial features resembling those of a human being; and to communicate by grunts, cries, or whistles. The “wild man of the woods” is a familiar figure in folklore.

References to such a figure include the Russian *leshii*, Enkidu of the Gilgamesh Epic, Silenus and the satyrs in Greek mythology, and Grendel in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. Contemporary reports of the Abominable Snowman, therefore, are regarded by some as little more than modern variations on an ancient mythological theme, and some sightings have indeed proved to be hoaxes. However, it has been argued that the widespread presence of these creatures in folklore indicates that they have actually existed since ancient times and may still inhabit remote regions of the earth. Some theorists propose that the sightings are of an unknown species of ape or of isolated surviving Neandertal specimens. Other theorists associate sightings of these creatures with the activity of extraterrestrial beings. Consider the following folktale extracts. Cyprain Ekwensi – **The Boa Suitor** talk about the stories of this beautiful girl who refuse to marry from among her own people and married a boa disguised as a man. She is taken to a far off country where she was subjected to much humiliation before she was being rescued, brought back home and chastised to be humble. Cyprain Ekwensi – **The Rain Maker** – Another mixed collection employing smuggling, poaching and juvenile delinquency. Nwapa, Flora – **Mammy Water** her best known children’s book and its sequel. The

adventure of Deke both illustrated by artist Obiora Udechukwu, fantasy tales based on the mythological figure of the mermaid.

The Story of the Leopard, the Tortoise, and the Bush Rat

At the time of the great famine all the animals were very thin and weak from want of food; but there was one exception, and that was the tortoise and all his family, who were quite fat, and did not seem to suffer at all. Even the leopard was very thin, in spite of the arrangement he had made with the animals to bring him their old grandmothers and mothers for food. In the early days of the famine (as you will remember) the leopard had killed the mother of the tortoise, in consequence of which the tortoise was very angry with the leopard, and determined if possible to be revenged upon him. The tortoise, who was very clever, had discovered a shallow lake full of fish in the middle of the forest, and every morning he used to go to the lake and, without much trouble, bring back enough food for himself and his family. One day the leopard met the tortoise and noticed how fat he was. As he was very thin himself he decided to watch the tortoise, so the next morning, he hid himself in the long grass near the tortoise's house and waited very patiently, until at last the tortoise came along leopard sprang out, and said to the tortoise:

"What have you got in that basket?"

The tortoise, as he did not want to lose his breakfast, replied that he was carrying firewood back to his home. Unfortunately for the tortoise the leopard had a very acute sense of smell, and knew it once that there was fish in the basket, so he said:

"I know there is fish in there, and I am going to eat it."

The tortoise, not being in a position to refuse, as he was such a poor creature, said:

"Very well. Let us sit down under this shady tree, and if you will make a fire I will go to my house and get pepper, oil, and salt, and then we will feed together."

To this the leopard agreed, and began to search about for dry wood, and started the fire. In the meantime the tortoise waddled off to his house, and very soon returned with the pepper, salt, and oil; he also brought a long piece of cane tie-tie, which is very strong. This he put on the ground, and began boiling the fish.

Then he said to the leopard:

"While we are waiting for the fish to cook, let us play at tying one another up to a tree. You may tie me up first, and when I say 'Tighten,' you must lose the rope and when I say 'Loosen,' you must tighten the rope."

The leopard, who was very hungry, thought this game would make the time pass more quickly until the fish was cooked, so he said he would play. The tortoise then stood with his back to the tree and said, "Loosen the rope," and the leopard in accordance with the rules of the game, began to tie up the tortoise. Very soon the tortoise shouted out, "Tighten!" and the leopard at once unfastened the tie-tie, and the tortoise was free. The tortoise then said, "Now, leopard, it is your turn;" So the leopard stood up against the tree and called out to the tortoise to loosen the rope, and the tortoise at once very quickly

passed the rope several times round the leopard and got him fast to the tree. Then the leopard said, "Tighten the rope," but instead of playing the game in accordance with the rules he had laid down, the tortoise ran faster and faster with the rope round the leopard talking great care, however, to keep out of reach of the leopard's claws, and very soon had the leopard so securely fastened that it was quite impossible for him to free himself. All this time the leopard was calling out to the tortoise to let him go, as he was tired of the game; but the tortoise only laughed, and sat down at the fireside and commenced his meal. When he had finished he packed up the remainder of the fish for his family, and prepared to go, but before he started he said to the leopard:

"You killed my mother and now you want to take my fish. It is not likely that I am going to the lake to get fish for you, so I shall leave you here to starve." He then threw the remains of the pepper and salt into the leopard's eyes and quietly went on his way, leaving the leopard roaring with pain all that day and throughout the night the leopard was calling out for someone to release him, and vowing all sorts of vengeance on the tortoise; but no one came, as the people and animals of the forest do not like to hear the leopard's voice.

In the morning, when the animals began to go about to get their food, the leopard called out to everyone he saw to come and untie him, but they all refused, as they knew that if they did so the leopard would most likely kill them at once and eat them. At last a bush rat came near and saw the leopard tied up to the tree and asked him what was the matter, so the leopard told him that he has been playing a game of "tight" and "loose" with the tortoise, and that he had tied him up and left him there to starve. The leopard then implored the bush rat to cut the ropes with his sharp teeth. The bush rat was very sorry for the leopard; but at the same time he knew that, if he let the leopard go, he would most likely be killed and eaten, so he hesitated and said that he did not quite see his way to cutting the ropes. But this bush rat, being rather kind-hearted, and having had some experience of traps himself, could sympathise with the leopard in his uncomfortable position. He therefore, thought for a time, and then hit upon a plan. He first started to dig a hole under the tree, quite regardless of the leopard's cries. When he had finished the hole he came out and cut one of the ropes and immediately ran into his hole, and waited there to see what would happen; but although the leopard struggled frantically, he could not get loose, as the tortoise had tied him up so fast. After a time, when he saw that there was no stranger, the bush rat crept out again and very carefully bit through another rope, and then retired to his hole as before. Again nothing happened, and he began to feel more confidence, so he bit several strands through one after the other until at least the leopard was free. The leopard who was ravenous with hunger, instead of being grateful to the bush rat, directly he was free, made a dash at the bush rat with his big paw, but just missed him, as the bush rat had dived for his hole; but he was not quite quick enough to escape altogether, and the leopard's sharp claws scored his back and left marks which he carried to his grave.

Ever since then the bush rats have had white spots on their skins, which represent the marks of the leopard's claws.

Why the Cat Kills Rats

ANSA was King of Calabar for fifty years. He has a very faithful cat as a housekeeper, and a rat was his house-boy. The king was an obstinate, headstrong man, but was very fond of the cat, who had been in his store for many years. The rat, who was very poor, fell in love with one of the king's servant girls, but was unable to give her any presents as he had no money. At last he thought of the king's store, so in the night-time, being quite small, he had little difficulty, having made a hole in the roof, in getting into the store. He then stole corn and native pears, and presented them to his sweetheart. At the end of the month, when the cat had to render her account of the things in the store to the king, it was found that a lot of corn and native pears were missing. The king was very angry at this, and asked the cat for an explanation. But the cat could not account for the loss, until one of her friends told her that the rat had been stealing the corn and giving it to the girl. When the cat told the king, he called the girl before him and had her flogged. The rat he handed over to the cat to deal with, and dismissed them both from his service. The cat was so angry at this that she killed and ate the rat, and ever since that time whenever a cat sees a rat she kills and eats it.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the use of folktales as a means of facilitating learning in the child from the early years cannot be over emphasised, as a single means of promoting the educational development of the child from the infancy. The study was able to point out the various forms literature can be narrated in stories form for the child to gain better perception of abstract concepts. The study also revealed that folktales which formed part of the curriculum in the early 70s and 80s, became unpopular in the 90s and the early part of 2000.

Recommendations

However, the study wishes to suggest the re-inclusion of this process of learning in the early years as a matter of urgency to instil in the child the ability to learn faster. Also the paper wishes to recommend thus

- Most children literature texts, be told in the form of folktale in early childhood classes to promoting learning.
- That teacher training institutes and colleges include oral literature in the study curriculum to promote the skill of folktales in the teachers
- The mass media promote folktale in the media to instil learning in the child from the home front.
- Further comparative research be made on the use of the conventional classroom teaching methods and the use of play-way and story-telling (or folktale) in teaching and learning in the early years of the child.

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