

## Virtue Based Learning in Early Childhood Education: Folklores as the Missing Link

Lilian Nwanneka Onwuka<sup>1</sup>, Ngozi Diwunma Obidike<sup>2</sup> & Chinazor Chinonyelum Onwuka<sup>3</sup>  
Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,<sup>1&2</sup>  
Department of Educational Psychology, Federal College of Education (Technical) Asaba<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

*Folklores is one of the ways of making children in early childhood education learn virtues. It is the foundation of social relationships because it teaches the children the socially acceptable virtues. Folklores is a medium through which tradition and language of a society is propagated from generation to generation. Using folklores to teach virtues starts from the home to community and then to the school. Folklores is almost in extinction in the contemporary society and as such the children are drained of good character which makes up people's personality. This paper looks at virtues, meaning, types, importance and folklores as the missing link.*

**Keywords:** Virtue Based Learning, Early Childhood, Education, Folklores, Missing Link

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society's neglect of folklores has resulted in the dearth of virtue-based learning, increase in poor personalities and low moral integrity. Virtues are the fundamental elements in social relationships which are the basis of character development within any given society. In the traditional rural society, children were taught virtues and good character through folklores. It was used as relaxation and entertainment techniques yet lessons were passed on to the children. It varied from one society to another and were culturally based.

Folklores were practised then in the home (family) which was the first place for teaching virtues to children because it is where life journey begins. It is also a critical period in the life of every child for teaching virtue to. Again, what the child learns at this stage influences the child's adulthood. According to Aleke, Okeke and Okika (2017), early years of life are the most important for the formation of intelligence, personality and all round development of a child. Similarly, Cherry (2011) noted that early childhood is a time for remarkable cognitive, social and emotional development. The National Policy of Education (FRM 2013) describes Early Childhood Education as education given in an educational institution to children between the ages of 3-5 years prior to their entering of primary school. Apart from the home, the community or village was another place where virtues were taught. These teaching of virtues were done informally. For example, in the communities, virtues were taught during communal events such

as social gathering, marriages, burials and festivals. In the traditional rural society, it was also taught and practised during “egwu onwa” in the village squares after the day’s activities. In the public squares during the “egwu onwa”, activities such as dancing, storytelling, songs, proverbs, music and wrestling took place. As these activities went on, the elderly used it as opportunities to teach the young ones acceptable virtues of their communities. The participants were children, men, women, young and old. Stories of heroes, heroines and tales were passed to the children.

Today, the onus to teach children virtues through folklores fell on the school, home and community. When children transit to school, in the school time table, there is always a time for vernacular and in its scheme of work or content, folklores come up in form of storytelling, fairy tales, language and proverbs. The three agents; home, school and community reinforce one on other in using folklores to teach virtues to children.

## **2. Conceptual Clarification**

The conceptual clarification focused on the basic concepts of this paper, which are folklores,

### **2.1 Folklores**

Folklores have been defined severally by authors. [www.Wikipedia.free.encyclopedia](http://www.Wikipedia.free.encyclopedia) defined folklores as the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group which is made up of oral tradition – tales, proverbs and jokes among others. Barker and Rice (2012) describe folklores as the oral history of a certain group of people that is used to preserve its culture and identity in order to give meaning to their lives and surrounding. Banda and Morgan (2013) defined folklore as an umbrella term that is generally used to define different traditional oral communications that are usually disseminated informally from generation to generation. According to the authors folklore include myth, legend, riddles, fables, proverbs and idiom. Folklores is a collection of fictional stories about animals and people such as cultural myths, jokes, songs, tales and even quotes. In order words, it is a description of culture which has been passed down verbally from generation to generation. Folklore, in this context, is seen as part of people’s culture which includes fairy tales, music, jokes, proverbs, languages which are transmitted to children by older generation in their mother tongue with the intent of teaching them virtues.

Folklores were the instrument in the hands of families and communities then for teaching virtues and good character to children. This was mainly done after super and evenings when people were done with the day’s activities. Children sat round their mothers who narrated to them stories, sang songs and jokes. Onwuka, Obaji and Onwuka (2016) maintained that mothers participated more in reading stories, teaching songs, visiting libraries, museum and zoos than fathers. Currently, some of the stories, fairy tales and proverbs have been written down as novels, drama and songs. For example, Chinua Achebe, the famous Nobel Prize winner’s book,

Things fall Apart, was an example of folklores. Ejeckam (2011) compiled Ibo proverbs in a book titled wise sayings of Ibo proverb and there are many others. Folklores have the attribute of universality that is present in all cultures. Therefore learned, that is transmitted orally from one generation to another. They are made up of behaviour or belief which involves people's life experiences or their beliefs at a time or the other and they are superstitious which means they have no scientific evidence. There are different types of folklores and all these have ways of teaching virtues to children.

The following types of folklores were identified by Emery (2018): Ballard which according to the author is described as traditional poems or folk songs that tell a story. The author further opined that the songs describe true love, heroic adventures, scandal or tragic death. An example is the song about David, how he killed uncountable number of people and Saul killed thousands. Fairly tales, which Emery described as traditional stories intended primarily for children which recount human encounters within supernatural being which sometimes carries cautionary messages. Folk Art, another type of folklores which involves a range of artistic productions and craft for example painting, sculptures, pottery and furniture.

Folk dance or ethnic dance is another type and is any dance invented by common people of a particular region or culture handed down through tradition. These songs, most times, are informally learnt and performed at social gatherings. Folk songs, are traditional songs anonymously composed and handed down orally. Such songs can address social or political issues. Joke as another type of folklore is a humorous story or anecdote meant to provoke laughter.

Another is legend which is a traditional historical tale or collection of related tales popularly regarded as true but usually contain fact or fiction which provides normal lesson. Myth is another type and is a tradition story which usually features gods and heroes purported to give cosmic explanation of natural phenomena or cultural practice. Another is riddles. Riddles are linguistic puzzles posed in the form of a question concerning clues to its solution. Superstition which is an irrational belief usually involving supernatural forces is yet another. Finally, urban legend is another type, is an apocrypha story often taking the format of a cautionary tale. All these types of folklores play important roles in virtue –based learning in early childhood education. The importance of folklores in virtue-based learning cannot be overemphasized.

Folklore is the heartbeat of heritage that is capable of conveying moral lessons or teaches virtues to its people in their everyday lives. Folklores formally and informally represents the conduct and experiences of the people within a society from one generation to another. Mzimella (2016) opined that folklore consists of the expressive tradition of everyday people in everyday life. It represent acceptable behavior/virtues that each society cherishes. Folklore is a method of

transmitting culture or tradition to generations. It is a standard or benchmark created by societies to inspire their children to behave well by emulating heroes and heroines of the society. It is a vehicle for educating children on socially and morally accepted ways in the society. Uzor (2012) maintained that educating children early will promote peace. Lastly, it assists children to conform and be responsible members of their society. Folklore enhances the development of virtues.

Virtue is the foundation of children's character. Most of the professional ethics are rooted in virtues. Verlade (2013) believes that virtue is moral excellence in other words something that is praise worthy and positive about behaviour, character and disposition. Virtue, according to Springs (2017) is the moral excellence and exhibition of good behaviours. Hart (2017) opined that virtue is a universal behaviour that is recognized by people of many cultures. According to the author, virtues consist of the following: kindness, patience, handwork, confidence, honesty, truth, creativity, wisdom, compassion, love, courage and service. Virtue, in this context, is seen as good traits that make communal living, social relationships interesting and increase the wellbeing of the people. It is important to realize that as these children learn these virtues through listening to folklores and their mother tongue, they develop good character. Patrick and Didam (2013) stated that we are in a world of language. The authors further commented that language is also a medium of communication with the family and this language with family and society is mostly the mother tongue of the child. Folklores are taught to the children in the language which they have already acquired which is the mother tongue. Most professions have virtues which are peculiar to their profession. Verlade (2013) listed seven (7) virtues of learning and teaching which include; listening, asking questions, demonstrating patience, exhibiting humility, enjoying discovery, being courageous and seeking truth. According to the author learning provides children the opportunities to develop listening skills. The author maintained that listening is a virtue which helps one to accommodate and treat other people with kindness. Another virtue is learning and teaching is asking question. It is a virtue in the sense that good questions help children think through difficult matters and not to be carried away with the content of school work. Similarly demonstrating patience is another virtue according to Verlade in teaching and learning. Teaching and learning demands patience which leads to restraint and can also help one not to quicken decisions. Exhibiting humility is yet another virtue. This helps one to think less of oneself and think more of others. Humility will make one to realize the gaps in his/her knowledge. In the same vein, enjoying and discovering is another virtue in teaching and learning according to the author discovery relates to virtue in the sense that it deals with wonder and delight. Being courageous is a virtue in teaching and learning because according to Verlade it opposes fear which helps people enjoy both learning and teaching. Lastly is seeking truth which encourages people to seek and understand the truth about issues. Virtue is linked to ethics which many professions adopt which deals with abilities that are positive not negative,

when children learn them growing up will become adults with sound moral base, but where it is deficit children's moral base becomes weak.

## **2.2 Folklore: The Missing Link**

Folklores are one of the ancient traditional legacies that are nearing extinctions because there appears to be a gap between the older generation and the younger generation which is the missing link. The non-challant attitude to folklore by members of contemporary society has resulted in erosion of virtues in the children and society. When children are told stories, fairy tales, hear songs, see dances by their parents at home and in their communities, they learn and develop these virtues. Mothers most times, took up these responsibilities. Akpojotor (2015) maintained that when the mother is available, provides stimulating environment and adequate model, then the children's future is guaranteed. Today mothers do not spend quality time with their children, not to talk of teaching them virtues using folklores. Folklores help members of the family to have intimate relationships because it is something you do with the child not for the child because, it gives the family/ community members opportunity to spend quality time with children. Opera and Onyeburu (2012) believe said that a child's greatest need is spending quality time with the parents. Most of these children do not even speak or understand their mother tongue, how much more associating with members of the society. The Federal Government of Nigeria, in its National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013) made it mandatory that the medium of instruction for pre-primary and lower primary education should be the language of the immediate communities. Abidogun and Adebule (2013) observed that the provision of language teaching and learning in the National Policy on Education is no doubt laudable but effectively achieving the set goals and objectives in the areas of implementing this credible policy in the classroom is in doubt.

This attitude of children and their parents not speaking their mother tongue makes them not to be interested in vernacular lessons because in the school they are taught in English, at home, parents communicate with them still in English. Nakapodia (2011) maintained that in most of our existing pre-primary institutions, the medium of instruction is English Language. During vernacular lessons, the children are confused and even if the folklores are taught, they do not understand the folklore or the lessons it conveys, such as virtues because they do not speak nor understand it. In such a situation where the children cannot speak or understand their mother tongue because they were not taught by their parents, how then will folklore be used for teaching virtue? This undermines the teacher in using folklore to teach virtues.

Folklore has since been relegated to the background. Children no longer have respect for elders or have passion or are willing to serve and when they choose to serve, there must be gratification before they can help someone. In contemporary society, they look at folklore as old

fashioned and obsolete. As such, members of the society do not encourage their children to listen to folklores but they forget that some virtues such as empathy, compassion, hard work, respect, contentment, honesty, courage and service are learnt through proverbs which are part of folklores. For example, some of the proverbs compiled by Ejeckam (2011) have ways of inspiring children like “okuko gabu oke n’esi na eju” which means that “the chick that will be cock starts from conception” and it teaches courage, hard work and confidence. “Kama rijue afo dachie uzo kam buru afo okpo” means “rather than over eat and collapse on the road, I prefer to go on empty belly”. It teaches contentment, honesty and discourages the get rich quick syndrome, avoid rituals kidnapping or doing anything bad in order to make quick money. Aleke (2017) opined that parents’ attitude towards the use of mother tongue is alarming. The author further stated that some parents are against the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction in school and they see such schools as primitive and not qualified for their children. These folklore teach virtues. These children cannot understand and listen to these proverbs and even when they hear, they make no meaning to them. This is because the child have lost link with his/her mother tongue.

The society has been carried away by modern technologies. They prefer to watch foreign cultures, programmes on television, internet and mobile handsets. Parents prefer to buy handsets for their children to keep them busy so that they can concentrate on their own activities. Sometimes, even the parents when they are around concentrate on their handset, pinging. The children are left to learn violent tendencies and stereotypes as shown on mass media. They do not want to know the why, how and what effect mass media has on their children. Today, parents are extremely different from other generation. Adeola and Olafere (2012) opined that parents today experience a strong cultural pressure to act in the child’s best interest than parents in earlier generations. These children are not presented with good role models by their parents. This is why some of these children do not know the names of their towns or villages or their uncles and aunties’ and do not speak their mother tongue because they are living in the cities. Majority of these parents do not visit their villages, so how can they talk about folklores. A gap has been created since parents do not speak their mother tongue to their children and have no time teaching their child good reading habits.

Some of the folklores are written in form of novels. Unfortunately, children of today no longer ready novels. These novels would have exposed them to stories, jokes, ballard which will teach them virtues. Rather, they prefer to watch footballs and engage in all forms of internet activities like face book, whatsapp, twitter, instagram, among others. In those days, people increased their vocabularies through reading of novels, whether fiction, drama or prose. Mothers in those days found out time to take their children to public libraries to read and borrow books. Today, many parents are too busy to take their children to libraries and spend money in buying



luxurious goods such as handsets and dresses not novels from which children can acquire virtues. The children's priorities are placed on things that are not positive and will not enhance them morally, unlike virtues. From the literature above, is very clear that there is gap or missing link between the older generation who are supposed to teach children virtues using folklores and the children to be taught. This situation has created a vacuum which made virtue-based learning in early childhood education an uphill task.

### **3. Conclusion**

The dearth of virtue based learning in our society is as a result of home, school and community not giving children good start in life and negligence on mother tongue which is a medium of transmitting folklores. Folklore is the fundamental element in social relationships and formation of one's personality. Folklores are fast going into extinction leaving the children with foreign cultures which is distracting the children and draining them of good virtues. Parents, school administrators and community's need to awaken to their responsibilities.

### **4. Recommendations**

1. The Anambra State Universal Basic Education Boards (ASUBEB) should emphasis the teaching of children with mother tongue as specified in the National Policy on Education. This will make the children to develop love for folklores.
2. The ASUBEB should, through the head teachers, monitor and supervise vernacular lesson periods on the time table. This is to make sure that this period is properly utilized.
3. The teachers handling vernacular lessons must be teachers that are knowledgeable in the subject and have the skill and interest in teaching the children.
4. Contest competitions should be organized for children in school on folklores by the ASUBEB and head teachers.
5. Public sensitization mechanism should be set in motion by the state governments, using posters, workshops, seminars and conferences to educate the parents on the importance of folklores and effects of its extinction.
6. The state governments should encourage the writing of vernacular books, novels on folklores by sponsoring individuals to write books.

### **5. References**

- Abidogun, B. G. & Adebule, O. I. (2013). Contribution of mother tongue education in early childhood education. *Annual International Interdisciplinary Conference*, 1: 267-272.
- Akpojotor, R. U. (2015) Perception of mothers on the use of toys as an instrument for child's learning. *Journal of Research and Practice in Childhood Education*, 1(2),

- Aleke, D. I, Okeke O. J., & Okika C. I. ( 2017) Using mother tongue as a medium of instrument in teaching pre-primary school pupils: challenges and solutions. *Journal of Research and Practice in Childhood Education*, 3(1) 53-60.
- Barker, K. B. & Rice, C. (2012) Folk illusions: an unrecognized genre of folklore: *Journal of American Folklore* 125: 444-447.
- Butzkamn, W, (2003) we only learn language once. The role of mother tongue in FL Classrooms. Death of dogma. *Language learning Journal*, 1: 19-39.
- Cherry K (2011) Introduction to early childhood development retrieved from <http://www.psychology.aout.com/od/development/psychology/ss/Early.childhood>.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), *National Policy on Education*. Lagos, NERDC press.
- Mzimela, J. (2016) exploring the role of teaching using folklore in developing grade R. learners' mother tongue stud, *tribes tribas* 14 (2)129-137.
- Nakpodia, E .D. (2011) Early childhood education: its policy formulation and Implementation in Nigeria education system. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relation*, 5(3) 159-163.
- Patrick, J. M. & Didam, B. (2013) Mother tongue interference on English language pronunciation of Senior Primary Schools pupils in Nigeria, implication for pedagogy, *language in India* 13(8).
- Opera, I. M. & Onyekuru B. U. (2012). Influence of parenting styles on children cognitive development. *Journal of Childhood and Primary Education*, 9(1), 324-334.
- Onwuka, L . N, Obaji, T. & Onwuka , C. C. (2016 ). Mothers' involvement in children's homework completion in primary schools. *Journal of Research and Practice in Childhood Education*, 2(1), 248-260.
- Spring, (2017). *What is virtue education in childhood development education*. U.S. Montessori Academy.
- Uzor, F. C. (2012). *The child and the environment*. New York: John Wile and sons Inc.
- Verlade, R (2013) 7 Virtues of learning and teaching. <https://blog.sonlight.com/7-virtues-of-learning-and-teaching.html>.