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EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF AFRICAN FOLKTALES

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Abstract
African people are storytelling people. And these stories, usually about nature- plants, animals, the other aspects of the environment- are employed in daily conversations to mirror the ideas of the African people and their general outlook on life, conduct, and morals. It is such that they carry the traditions, culture, and life of the African people, not only as a means for the preservation of the African values but also as a means of communicating them to the next generation. This piece attempts to study the nature of African folktales, their types, and educational value. For the achievement of the aim and objectives of this work, the phenomenological and hermeneutic methods of inquiry will be employed. The Igwebuike theoretical framework will be used for the interpretation and understanding of the African reality and its relationships. This research discovered that apart from the African system of education, which is tied to roles such as farming, hunting, firewood gathering, etc., the African got much more instruction through tales, which has for centuries before the advent of Western education, served as an integrated classroom. It further recommended the employment of African indigenous folktales in educational institutions in Africa, more importantly, at the primary and secondary levels. In this way, the African will be taught within categories that he or she understands and appreciates.
Keywords: African, Folktales, Folk Narrative, Education, Integrated Classroom, Oral Tradition

Introduction

Conant (1953), an American philosopher and educationist, after visiting a number of educational institutions in the English-speaking world, wrote: "I do not believe that educational practices are an exportable commodity". By this, he did not mean that we cannot learn from current educational practices in countries other than ours. He rather emphasizes that education is sensitive to time and place. While some permanent features or attributes are observable, it is constantly changing, adapting themselves to new demands and circumstances. This is true of education in traditional African societies, which adopted methods that were conterminous with their time and circumstances. One of the basic instruments used at the time for teaching the young was folktales. Folktales conveyed meanings using concrete circumstances. Thus, Brosnan (1976) observes that the African form of education was never defined by definition or the use of abstract terminology, which is peculiar to the Western system of education.

Apart from the African system of education, which is tied to roles such as farming, hunting, firewood gathering, etc., the African got much more instruction through tales (Kanu 2015). This was in the main moral instructions given at night after the evening meal, on the way to farms or the stream, in the village square, or on moonlit nights. These traditional tales were preserved orally and are characteristically anonymous, timeless, and placeless. Those to be instructed sat on logs within the compound, and instruction was given by an elder or the head of the household. If the head of the household is not well or is absent, it is normal for the next in seniority to take his place. There are times when the boys sat with their father differently and the daughters with their mother, while the father told war stories, the mother told stories that would help the daughters take care of the home. Shorter (1973) avers that these stories were also used by Elders when judging cases in village courts. They tell them in such a way that people are able to pick up their meanings without any explanation. Thus, Zani (1972) observes that Africans are parable and story telling people. Their stories according to Rattray (1930) "mirror more or less accurately the ideas of the people and their general outlook".

Methodology

This research has adopted the qualitative method of investigation. This has been employed given its appropriateness for the study of the nature of the relationship between African folktales and education within the African context. Based on the qualitative method of inquiry, the document study or document analysis approach will be used by the researcher for the purpose of reviewing written materials on this subject and using their critical findings for the development of the present piece. Thus, primary and secondary materials will be consulted on African folktales and education during the course of this research. The phenomenological research design will be used for the understanding and description of the essence of the African folktale phenomenon among the African people (Berger, 2013). This will be based on lived experience, which will expand the knowledge about the folk tale phenomenon. Folk tale will, therefore, be studied as it is among the African people, focusing more on the Igbo-African culture area (Aspers and Corte, 2019). Following a better understanding of African folk tales will be a presentation of the critical findings of the researcher on African folk tales, especially as they relate to education.

Theoretical Framework

The Igwebuike theoretical framework will be employed for the underpinning and development of this paper for two reasons: first, because this work borders on the African traditional educational system, requiring the employment of African categories; second, it is based on the idea that indigenous peoples have worldviews and means of relating to the world. This worldview is rooted within indigenous epistemologies, cultures, and traditions with the understanding that we are all related- each aspect relates with the whole: the dynamics of reality are based on the relationships and experiences of interrelationships and interconnections (Kanu, 2021; Absolom, 2010). It is holistic in the sense that it encompasses the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical elements of being. It forms a framework to indigenize our thoughts and actions into active healing processes that simultaneously decolonize and indigenize. As a theory, it is whole, ecological, cyclical, and relational.

Igwebuike, the keyword, is a combination of three Igbo words: *Igwe,* a noun, which means *number* or *multitude* made up of entities with ontological identities and significance; however, part of an existential order in which every entity is in relation to the other (Kanu, 2022). *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is a noun, which means *strength* or *power* (Kanu, 2020). Put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power'. Beyond this literal sense, it is a unifying concept and an explanatory theory of African thought, especially that aspect concerning the human person's conception of the universe in which he or she lives (Kanu, 2023). It interprets the puzzle of our complex relationships and strives beyond all forms of particularities, peculiarities, paradoxes, and contradictions, and espouses the path of complementation, therefore, showing how realities can relate to one another in a mutually harmonized non-absolutistic mode (Kanu, 2024). This framework is significant, given that African folktales help the individual to understand the relationships within the African community and the relationship of this community with the material and spiritual worlds around.

African Folktales

African folktales are indigenous and traditional fictional stories whose principal characters are most often animals, but they can also be humans, gods, plants, and the like. They are referred

to as "Traditional" because the stories have been transmitted from narrator to narrator sufficiently to have acquired the form and style that is characteristic of traditional oral narratives. The transmission of African folktales is predominantly oral; however, with the emergence of literate societies in Africa, it is now common for traditional narratives to be transmitted by both oral and literary channels. African folktale does not denote a single kind of story but serves as an umbrella term for different genres of African traditional narrative fiction (Habsen, 2017).

Although African folktales, like African myths and legends, are narratives that are formed and transmitted predominantly in oral tradition, Habsen (2017) argues that folktales differ from myths and legends, "Most importantly, in terms of their poetics, folktales are presented as accounts of imaginary events, whereas myths and legends are formed as reports of actual events. Myths and legends make a claim, however strong or modest it may be, on the listener's belief, whereas folktales do not".

The major characteristics of African folktales are their religious character. They most times portray an aspect or aspects of the relationship of humans and gods, such as a deity rewarding or punishing human behavior, or a deity giving humans a lesson in the way of the world from the viewpoint of the gods; they are shared orally or handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth and not in writing; they generally follow straight forward story lines, which makes it easy to follow their plotlines; they incorporate simple characters, especially characters that are common to the African people, or taken from the categories that are common to them; they solve a central conflict or problem; demonstrate decision making; reinforce consequences; highlight shared values or moral lessons and take place in natural surroundings.

Folktales Telling as an Integrated Classroom

Nwachukwu (2009) defines folktales as stories that teach moral lessons, often with animals as characters. These stories are used to illustrate real-life events and day-to-day experiences within African communities. The character and behavior of animals in these stories help children to understand basic moral principles such as respect for elders, responsibility for self and others, and other important relationships within the community. During the storytelling process, the child is often encouraged to generate his/her answers to various moral questions posed in the stories. The elders (grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, teachers, and older siblings) generally tell these folktales to children.

Folktale telling in traditional African societies, from the perspective of Samson-Akpan (1986), can be "likened to an integrated classroom. Children, teenagers, adults attend and participate in it" (p. 67). It was guided by the dialogical method that gives proportionate places to the teacher (the elder- father or mother, etc.) and the student (children, slaves, students, etc.). It sees the teacher and the student as a community of inquiry; a community in the search for knowledge. Education and the educator are understood as midwives who are humane, self-effacing, caring, non-authoritative, collaborative, and academically unassuming. It recognizes the rights of the human person in their proper perspective. Taking from Anih (2004), it allows for the free interplay of the values of critical thinking, creative thinking, caring thinking, lateral thinking, higher order thinking, systemic thinking, and synergic thinking in the entire process

of learning. Thus, the teacher becomes the *educatore* (facilitator-learner), and the student *educandi* (student-learner).

In this dialogical process, both parties are learners, however, with a facilitator of the process. Dialogue is, here, an educational existential necessity. *Igwebuike* can be described as an interactive approach to learning, based on the interactive nature of the African universe. As Freire (1972) avers, without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education. Kanu (2015) avers that this provides the basic atmosphere for free high extension capacity thinking. The teacher is not placed in an intimidating ivory tower; he is part of this community of inquiry, and they work together for the overall good of the whole through critical and creative thinking that eliminates biased, distorted, provocative, and prejudiced reasoning. As Conner (2004) observes, people learn best when they have control over their learning.

Dimensions of African Folktales
African folktales focus on different dimensions of African life and world, while some focus on the creation of the African universe, others focus on the provision of explanations, historical backgrounds, and moral lessons. These dimensions will be discussed in this section of the paper under the following headings:

a. **Cosmogonic Folktales**: They are symbolic narratives of origin that explain the remotest origin of people, as well as the origin of their social, economic, and political institutions. The Supreme Being is the principal actor in these myths. This is born out of the fact that most people in the world (Greeks and Africans) see the world as the effect of a creating power. Even though such stories are not regarded as true occurrences, they are understood as holding varying degrees of profound truths. Examples of these stories include the Basare story of the creation of the world, which presents God as creating the world in several stages, or the Wassa story of creation, which presents God as creating the world as his wife (Abanuka, 1999).

Table 1: Cosmogonic folktales

S/N	FOLKTALE	LOCATION	CONTENT
1	Atum folktale	Egypt	In the beginning was nothing but Nun, the primal formless ocean which contained the seeds of everything to come, and from which even the gods emerged.
2	Mende folktale	Sierra Leone	God was formerly known as Ngewo and lived in a cave all alone. He created the world because he wanted things to talk and play with
3	Fon folktale	Benin republic	God created the world in four days. On the first day, God created the world in preparation for the creation of the human person. On the second day he created the human person. On the third day, the human person was given the gift of sight. On the fourth day, the human person was

			given the skills to master their environment.
4	Dinka folktale	South Sudan	God created the world through the blowing of his nose. Out of one of his nostrils came the tall Dinka of Southern Sudan. Out of the second nostrils came other dwarf human beings.
5	Wolof folktale	Senegal	God, known as Bur u Assaman or the King of the Sky, created the heavens above as his abode and the earth as the abode of men and women. He uses the sun and the moon, his left and right eyes, to watch what human beings are doing on the earth.

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This kind of folktales share the following features: they found in nearly every religious tradition and are often considered sacred accounts; they are stories usually with a plot and characters who are either deities, human-like figures, or animals, who often speak and transform easily (Leening and Leening, 1994; Eliade, 1963; Johnston, 2009); they are often set in a dim and nonspecific past, and as such the narration usually begins "at that time"; they address questions deeply meaningful to the society that shares them, revealing their central worldview and the framework for the self-identity of the culture in question (Long, 1963; Leening, 2001, 2010, 2011; and Leening and Leening, 2009).

b. **Etiological Folktales**: The concept etiology refers to the "cause". It offers explanations of how things came to be, how things are now, and why things are the way they are at present; it also offers explanations about how things were before and why. Etymologically, etiology comes from the Greek word "aetiologia", which means: "statement of a cause" or "giving a reason for". Moving away from natural phenomena, etiological folktales seek to explain the sacred rites and customary practices of a people. Such as the taboos of a clan, etc. A good number of these tales are also considered religious, given that they are related to the gods of the divine. Such a folktale could include the origin of the New Yam festival among the Igbo people, which explains the emergence of such a festival.

Table 2: Etiological folktales

S/N	FOLKTALE	LOCATION	CONTENT
1	Kono folktale	Siera Leone	God had promised human beings that they would live forever. He would give them new skins whenever they grew old. When they grew old, a dog was sent to deliver the new skin. On its way to deliver the skin, it saw animals feasting and joined. The snake knew of this message and stole the bag of new skin from the dog while it was feasting. This new skin was shared among the snakes to renew their skin.

			This was how human beings lost the promise of living forever.
2	Wolof folktale	Senegal	Death formally came to human beings disguised in the form of a man. But on one of its visits to recall a human being, it was given the beating of its life. Since then, God decided that death would come in an invisible form to avoid conflict. This explains how death came and why it now comes in its present invisible form.
3	Fante folktale	Ghana	Men and women were originally hunters and did not live in houses. One day, when they went out hunting and saw how birds of the air built their nests, they went back and began to build a house for themselves using sticks and grasses.
4	Ila folktale	Zambia	The first human being was eating food while sitting by a fire. A strong wind then carried the food from his hands and threw it into the fire. The fire was too much and so we could not get the food out of the fire. When the fire subsided, he took the food and tasted it. Then he discovered that food became sweeter and easier to eat. This explains how human beings began to cook their food.
5	Imilikenu folklore	Nigeria	At the beginning, God gave human beings palm trees, through which they met their basic needs. One day, Onyishi, the first human being, was taking a walk on his palm plantation and discovered that one of the palm trees had been hit by thunder and lightning and that something liquid was running down from it. He tasted it and discovered that it was very sweet. This was how the human person discovered palm wine, and since it was considered the blessing of Chukwu, it was used in major events.

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c. **Moral Folktales:** These are tales told to instill moral behaviour. Amali (2014) avers that "Moral tales point to attitudes and effects of behaviour. They demonstrate that good behaviour is positively rewarded and bad behaviour is punished". Paul (1992), adding to the perspective of Amali, argues that "they teach on why it is not good to be disobedient, greedy, lazy, etc.". Achufusi (1986) and Adeyemi (1997) opine that they are usually presented with a theme, always centred on the moral lesson to be taught. The moral lesson or lessons derived from this kind of folktales is what give it its unique

identity as a moral folktale, which is different from other folktales that simply passes an information without any moral lesson.

Table 3: Moral folktales

S/N	FOLKTALE	LOCATION	CONTENT
1	Zulu folktale	South Africa	God created man and decided that man would not see death. The chameleon was chosen by God to deliver the message. On the way, the chameleon was delayed as it went about chasing flies. This made God change his mind. The moral lesson is that procrastination or unnecessary delay is dangerous.
2	Biak folktale	Guinea	God sent a hero to be the master of human beings and to teach them how to live on earth. Having gained much recognition, the human hero became proud and disobedient to God. He went to a place where God asked him not to go, and since then whiled away and never returned. The moral lesson is that pride and disobedience bring the downfall of a man.
3	Malgasy folktale	Madagaska	God had a daughter called Earth, whom he blessed without reservation. When he saw the earth prosper exceedingly, he became interested and asked the earth to give him a share of her prosperity. But the earth refused. God became angry and decided to take away the breath of life. Since then, the human person dies and decays. The lesson is that we lose nothing in sharing but lose everything when we refuse to share.
4	Pygymy folktale	Burundi	One day, death was being pursued by the divine dogs, and it ran into a woman who opened her mouth for it to come into her. When God came around and asked her if she had seen death, she denied that she had ever seen anything like death. God became angry and said to her that since she had decided to harbor death, death would consume her and her family. Since then, death came into the world. The moral lesson is to keep away from lying.
5	Ila folktale	Zambia	God offered the first man and woman two bags. One holding life and the other holding death. They chose the one that was shining brightly, and from the choice they made, death came out and became part of their story. The moral lesson is that one needs to moderate his or her appetite.

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d. **Historical Folktales**: This kind of folktale is about the stories of heroes and heroines, who are presented as having gotten their power or wisdom from the Supreme Being. They are presented in many cases as models for humanity or as instruments employed by the divine for the achievement of the divine plan. These stories also reinforce the reality of the relationship between the divine and the human community. These kinds of tales include the Luyia story of God's creation of the man called Mwambu, who was the companion of God, or the Inri tale that presents Eri as a proto ancestor (Abanuka, 1999).

Table 4: Historical folktales

S/N	FOLKTALE	LOCATION	CONTENT
1	Dinka folktale	South Sudan	God created the world through the blowing of his nose. Out of one of his nostrils came the tall Dinka of Southern Sudan. Out of the second nostrils came other dwarf human beings. This tells the story or history of how the tall Dinka, the hero of South Sudan, emerged.
2	Lugubra folktale	Uganda	Jaki and Dribudu, the heroes of Lugubra, were presented as the last offspring of the first human beings created by God. They had both human and divine features.
3	Nri folktale	Nigeria	It presents the story of the Nri hero, whose name is Eri. He was created by Chukwu as the first human being that ever existed and from whom other human beings descended.
4	Ovoko folktale	Nigeria	Akpurokwe, the Ovoko hero, was visited by God when he was sick and dying. God made a fire and put some choice palm fruits in it. When it was roasted, he took one and asked Akpurokwe to eat one. After eating it, his cough stopped. He discovered for the people the medicinal value of the palm fruit.
5	Efik folktale	Nigeria	The heroes of the Efik people, Etetejid and Etaban were the first to be created by God. God placed them in his farm and asked them to work and eat from the farm. They served God faithfully for seven years. However, God became displeased with them when he discovered that Etaban stole some of his yams without the knowledge of her husband Etetejid. He then sent them out of his farm to go and cultivate their food on their own land.

Author created

e. **Explanatory Folktales:** Conspicuous among the very striking features of folktales among the African people is the ingenious way in which they are employed to explain facts and fancies that are familiar to primitive folk. Among the African people, these explanations offered by these tales are treated with respect. And this kind of tales are

very fundamental to the African people, as questions continually arise from time to time as people continue to encounter reality. Explanatory tales are employed to help people understand why reality is the way it is (Waterman, 1914; Franz, 1914). An example is the Mende tale that explains why different animals have different names, and also why animals wander about in search of something sweet to eat (Abanuka, 1999).

Table 5: Explanatory folktales

S/N	FOLKTALE	LOCATION	CONTENT
1	Fon folktale	Benin republic	God created the world in four days, explaining why the Fon people observe a four-day week to conform to the order of creation
2	Asante folktale	Akan of Ghana	Explaining how the first human beings became pregnant. It was a python that sprayed its belly with water and asked them to sleep together. This was how the first woman became pregnant and gave birth to a child. It is also explanatory of why the python is held sacred among the Akan people.
3	Mende folktale	Siera Leone	Animals were living in the same cave as the divine, but having failed in the law given to them, they were driven out of the cave and given a name. This explains how animals got their names.
4	Igala folktale	Nigeria	After God had settled human beings on the earth as a new home and lived among them, the woman pounding yams used the pestle mistakenly to hit God. This made him angry and made him move into the sky to avoid being disrespected by human beings again. This explains why God is not resident on earth.
5	Ewe folktale	Ghana	Mawu, the name for God, made man and woman out of clay and water. Since clay was very scarce at the time, when a human person dies, God would take the person's body in order to create another human being. This explains why human beings resemble each other.

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Critical Findings

At this point in this research, the researcher has come to the following critical findings relevant for this piece for further research in this area of the educational value of African folktales.

a. African folktales create the aperture for persons to express their emotions in a socially approved manner that would be inappropriate in any other form. With folktales, people can engage in projective fantasy by creating tales that contain realistic themes, using symbolism

and metaphoric projections on both the unconscious and conscious levels (McDaniels, 1992). The presence of the interplay of self-expression, symbolism, and creativity within the parameters of folktales will enrich and advance the educational process.

b. Given the nature of African folktales, which can be used in virtually all disciplines to convey knowledge and communicate ideas, African folktales have a special place in the educational process. For instance, historians, while questioning the historical accuracy of a tale, acknowledge that much information that is beyond history is contained in them. Such information borders on psychology, that is, human behavior during and the prevailing attitudes of people at the time when the folktale was created or written. Bruno (1976) in his work on the "Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairytales," observes that a lot can be learnt about the personality and emotional well-being of a child by analyzing the stories that attract his attention, which means that it can serve a human purpose in the investigation of the psychology of a child. Scholars of religion can also discover in folktales the religious beliefs and attitudes of a people. Sociologists and anthropologists can discover in folktales the cultures and traditions of a people.

c. African folktales have been very instrumental and popular among the African people in the education of children in Africa, given that it is very informative and challenge the imaginative faculty of the child. Thus, Odetola and Ademola (1987) aver that stories are very effective in imparting knowledge because they engage our imaginations, our hearts, and minds at the same time. They can trigger curiosity and tap into the unconscious inner struggles in the development process of a child, around questions about death, the afterlife, the beginning of the world, the end of the world, the origin of the human person, etc. Even if the responses are not completely satisfactory, it helps the cognitive development of the child.

d. The educative value of African folktales is holistic, multilateral, and integrative. Folktale has the capacity of engaging both children and adults on so many levels. And sometimes, because of the beauty of the stories and their flow, though not always logical, the human person easily retains them in memory for use as needed.

e. African folktales is such that almost every concept can be extracted from it and used for instructional value. This is important as they are replete with themes and sub-themes that can be examined in greater depth and from different perspectives.

f. In an educational environment, beginning with the folktale provides a kind of a safe didactic environment to discuss sensitive subjects. This safe, didactic environment or atmosphere is very fundamental for education.

g. Thus, Fafunwa (1974) avers that "the aim of traditional African education is multilateral and the end objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectful, skilled, co-operative and conforms to the social order of the day". African folktales contain within them educational orientations that direct the mind of the listener towards the good and away from the evil. The significance of folktales in educating the child is centered on the fact that each time it is told,

it arouses the child mentally- they could forget any other thing, but hardly do they forget stories told to them. The importance of these stories is that each time they remember them, they also remember the lesson or instruction that goes with the story. Thus, Ezeude (2009) observes that when students are told a story rather than read it, they retain more information from the story and are better able to retell it to someone else.

Conclusion

The foregoing has presented African folktales as anonymous, timeless stories of knowledge and wisdom transmitted orally among African people from one generation to the next, that is, handed down from parent to child, typically through tales by moonlight. With the understanding of folktales, this paper further studied the fundamental place of African traditional folktales in the communication of knowledge in traditional African societies, and their relevance for contemporary times. It describes the setting for folktales telling in traditional African societies as an integrated classroom or a community of inquiry, which reflects the modern system of education often referred to as the anagogical method of education. The idea of an integrated classroom provides the conducive atmosphere necessary for learning.

The paper further studied the different dimensions or types of African traditional folktales and their educational value. While revealing the educative content value of these tales, the research recommends that the use of folktales should be employed and promoted in the educational environments in Africa to enhance better communication between the teacher and the pupils. Even though it might be difficult to have our education system return to the pre-colonial era, there are still ways that the primary elements of traditional educational pedagogy can be reintroduced to fit into contemporary culture. For instance, policies could be made for media houses to introduce folklore programmes like Tales by Moonlight of NTA, Broadcasting Corporation of Abia State's Story Land, and *Nti Nara Rie*. These are programmes that children do not like to miss. Such programmes could be a vital means of educating the young. Even in schools, traditional stories that would help in the transmission of the African cultural heritage should be taught.

The consideration of African folktales as an integrated classroom is very significant, given the conducive atmosphere for learning that it provides. This is evident in its creation of the aperture for persons to express their emotions, its employability by virtually all disciplines to convey knowledge and communicate ideas, its effectiveness in the education of children, given that it is very informative and challenges the imaginative faculty of the child, its holistic, multilateral and integrative character, its nature such that every concept can be extracted from it and used for instructional value, its provision of a safe didactic environment to discuss sensitive subjects, its ability to inculcate morals, among others.

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