Transmitting African Cultural Values through Storytelling: A Phenomenological Explication of Children Education for National Development

By

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Abstract

The import of storytelling as a transmitter of cultural and moral values has been greatly undermined by the influx of uncensored and uncritical acceptance of foreign cultures and lifestyles amongst African children. The result is that African stories are not being told, if they are told, they are relayed as illustrations of western stereotypes about Africa. It is against this backdrop that this paper takes a critical look at the import of storytelling as a teaching method in the transmission of African cultural and moral values in African primary and secondary schools, in order to promote national development. It situates this discourse within the context of the African cultural, moral, and educational value system. The paper adopts the phenomenological method to critically explore the phenomenon of storytelling as a teaching method. It also recommends that storytelling as a teaching method be included into the primary and secondary school syllabus in Africa in order to develop meaningful national development.

Keywords: *Cultural Values; Moral Values; Storytelling; National Development; Phenomenology*

Introduction

Culture is considered as one of the main pillars of development and sustenance of communities and no society can progress in its absence. This is because culture is the identity where common values, attitudes, preferences and knowledge are attributed to the behaviour in a particular social group, and has a positive influence on national development in any given society. Although the challenges of survival and development facing different nations may sometimes be similar but the approaches towards tackling and resolving these challenges differ from one nation to the other due to cultural peculiarities. There is therefore the need for a jealous preservation and sustainability of a peoples' cultural and moral values. Transmitting cultural and moral values from one generation to another in order to engender national development, is a function of a well defined qualitative education through the use of appropriate teaching method. This paper proposes a revival of oral storytelling as a method of teaching in African primary and secondary schools.

African cultural and Moral Values

Culture could be defined in various ways, Jain defines culture as "the complex and elaborate system of meanings and behaviours that defines the way of life for a group or society" (2005, pp.186-214). Tylor defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1961, p.20). These principles or aspects of culture make up what can be

referred to as cultural values. Culture has also been described as "the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment" (Asiwaju, 1997, p.22). Asiwaju describes culture as what gives order and meaning to the linguistic, social, political, economic, aesthetic, religious and philosophical modes and organisation of a people, nation or ethnic group. Accordingly, culture is the cardinal characteristic or hallmark of the distinction as well as the connection between one people and another.

Values are essential elements of culture and every society has a set of values which are unique to it. There cannot be a society without values. This is because "the possession of a system of values is a cardinal feature that makes a society properly so called" (Owosho, 2016, p.123). In the view of Kanu, value system is the cultural outlook of the people, and the understanding of the value system of the people is the understanding of the belief system and cultural system of the people in question (2010, p.149). Africa has a set of cultural and moral values that are unique to it such as sense of community, language, respect for elders and constituted traditional authority, dignity for human life, honesty, sense of hospitality, faithfulness, religiosity, good sense of human relations among others. These values are the fundamental ideals that would engender genuine national development.

It is important to emphasize that African cultural values centred on human worth and form a comprehensive system, which has behind it some identifiable metaphysical beliefs about man and his world. There is an endless interraction, intermingling and interpenetration of forces, which simply explains why Africans view the world as one of unity and mutual compatibility among all things (Unah,1999, pp.37-38). There is a symbiotic relation among the Africans. The African discovers and actualises himself in the midst of the community. This explains why African social values are both individual and community centred. Thus being the case, it is therefore not a surprise that human dignity and respect for human life are of supreme importance in African moral values. For a typical traditional African personality, what is morally good is what befits human being, it is what is decent for man – what brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity and joy to man and his community, hence the need to safeguard these values.

Unfortunately, there has been a regrettable decadence in the core of African cultural values. This is partly due to a number of reasons owing from the influx and uncritical acceptance of foreign cultural values. This is because the sense of communalism which used to be the philosophy of Afrocentrism is gradually been replaced with egocentrism, which is one of the characteristics of Eurocentrism. In traditional Africa, morality was always linked to the community; the sole criterion of goodness was the welfare and well-being of the community. Negative influence of mass media also have negative effect on African cultural values. Television for instance can serve as models for building and nurturing children's behaviour and character (Douglas, 1996, pp.675-702). However, some programmes promote negative values such as violence, aggressive behaviours and disrespect to parents or adults, which to certain extent has negatively influenced the behaviours of African young generation today. Researches have shown that a child could be influenced by listening to stories and watching animated stories or anime (Mahar, 2003, pp.110-117). The influx could either be positive or negative, depending on the content. Also, foreign religion especially Islam and Christianity, which has led to the disintegration of African traditional institutions.

There can be no doubt about the fact that the influence of the west uprooted the cultural, social, political, economic and moral systems of traditional Africa and restructured to meet the needs of the west. It is important to stress that this was not only the case during the colonial period but it is still continuing up to the present. As a matter of fact the phenomenon has grown to become a crisis of cultural and moral values for Africa in the contemporary period. It poses a threat to the survival of African culture and moral values when we accept European moral

values wholly and treat them as the only standard for being civilized and morally good, while castigating anything African as backward.

I asked the questions in my work titled: "The Challenge of Modernity: A Philosophical Appraisal of Moral Values in Traditional African Culture", that, why are the African youths disinterested in traditional African cultural and moral values? What makes Western values more attractive to them? Should we say that African values are inferior to Western values? (Owosho, 2016, p.134). I also made the point that there is no weak or strong culture neither is there an inferior cultural values nor superior cultural values. Every culture is unique and original in its own rights. This is because all cultures are composed of sets of behaviour that are accepted as norms by the people within each culture (Ibid, p.134). Africans have rich cultural values that have global recognition.

The massive influx and influence of western values notwithstanding, it would be anthropologically fallacious to say that Western values have completely destroyed the whole of African culture and moral values as this is paradoxically not possible. Both the western European and African moral values have their ontological status imbedded in their cultures independently. The infiltration and adoption of Western values into our system hook line and sinker have brought abnormality into our society. The introduction of such Western values into our political and economic lives has rendered the society backwards. There is therefore the need for a cultural revival, of our moral values in order for Africa to witness genuine progress and development. This can be achieve through education.

Phenomenological Approach

In using storytelling as a teaching method of transmitting African cultural values to children for national development and to secure the future of Africa, this paper adopts the phenomenological approach. Phenomenological approach would help bring out the meaning, essence and the pedagogical implications of oral method of storytelling as a teaching method for transmitting African cultural and moral values. In *Ideas*, Husserl defines phenomenology as "the science of the essence of consciousness" (2002). In this sense, phenomenology focuses on an individual's first-hand experiences rather than the abstract experience of others. It emphasizes explaining the meaning of things through an individual's perspectives and self-experiences.

Phenomenology inspires self-searching, self-experiences, and new learning. It also requires a motivated inquiry into knowledge and a desire to learn about self and others. Phenomenological learning is related to the search for the meaning of self-experiences and perceptions. Children in the process of learning must be encouraged to describe, investigate, and explain their feelings, experiences, and thoughts. They describe their experiences, consider possible meanings, and understand the essences of their experiences in relation to the topics of learning. The children's self-experiences include feelings, thoughts, responses, and the relationship between self and others, which include other students, teachers, learning topics, and so on. If we ask students about their self-experiences, the answers will include images, intuitions, ideas, innovations, inquiries, creativities, perceptions, understanding, and perspectives. Children's education should focus on these by means of its curriculum implementations. The phenomenological approach would be applied in this paper for the explication of the oral storytelling method as a method of teaching and transmitting African cultural values.

Storytelling

A Story in its broadest sense could be said to be anything that is told or recounted, normally in the form of a causally linked set of events or happening, whether true or fictitious. It is a medium for sharing and a vehicle for assessing and interpreting, events, experiences and

concepts to an audience. Stories link the past, present and future experience. Telling story therefore is an intrinsic and essential part of human experience. Dujmovic defines storytelling as '" the art of narrating a tale from memory rather than reading" (2006, pp.111-126)). Storytelling is considered to be one of the oldest forms of art, reaching back to prehistoric times. It is the oldest form of remembering. An Indian proverb says, "tell me a fact and I will learn. Tell me a truth and I will believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever". This proverb shows that people preferred to listen to storytelling than facts and theories.

In ancient times, long before written language was developed, people told stories to preserve the history, traditions, desires and taboos of their social groups. Each generation relate their stories to the next, which in turn told the stories to the youth of generation that followed them. It is important to state that, all cultures have since prehistory, passed along such tales through the oral tradition, and they have always been an essential part of our humanness. Some stories were told just for entertainment. Others were told to share the history of a group of people and also to teach lessons and transmit values and beliefs. Some were also intended to explain natural phenomena - such as the changing of the seasons and the cycle of night and day - and usually involved the people's gods and others and other religious beliefs. "Certain stories were accompanied by music and were sung instead of recited. These stories remained in a constant process of variation, depending on the memory, talent or purpose of the storytellers" (Anderson, 2005, p.81). Storytelling is used to preserve cultural norms of a people, their values and traditions from one generation to another.

Storytelling is also better described as a living art. Like music and dance, it is brought to life in performance. Dujmovic explained that, a story will be altered by the storyteller's background as a result of his/her choice of setting and detail, and the rapport established with the audience (2006, p.77). As a form of art, storytelling provides a rich form of language of delivering messages that assist one in making meaning of one's world, as well as communicating meaning to others. Storytelling engages our thinking and emotions and can lead to the creation of mental imagery. This means that stories are embedded in people's mind and it requires storytelling to convey it from the mind to the audience. Storytelling is therefore a veritable tool of communicating the knowledge of things that have been stored in the mind.

Storytelling as a Method of Teaching

Storytelling can be used as a method of teaching in order to enhance learning process. It is the original form of teaching (Ibid, p.76). Storytelling can serve as a means of developing learning by reinforcing thinking strategies. For example, comparing, classifying, predicting, problem-solving, hypothesizing, planning and so on Carefully selected stories can also be usedto develop other subjects in the curriculum.

Williams defined storytelling as an instructional strategy that can play major roles in preparing students to learn (2020). This is because by using storytelling as a teaching method, the teacher can act as an instructor. Storytelling as a teaching method enhances the capacity for qualitative teaching and learning process in the classroom. Storytelling is a form of art that can be appropriated to deliver message in such a meaningful way. It is a type of communication between the storyteller and the audience. In this context, the teacher is the storyteller and the pupils, the audience. As a storyteller, the teacher occupies a vantage position by standing and teaching the pupils directly. Using the storytelling method, the teacher not only teach pupils according to the stipulated syllabus, but also tell stories to drive home his point in order to make teaching become more meaningful. While listening to stories, children develop a sense of structure that will later help them to understand the more complex stories of literature.
Storytelling is a direct expression of a literary and cultural heritage; and through them, that cultural heritage is appreciated, understood and kept alive. Through storytelling, listeners experience a vicarious feeling for the past and a oneness with various cultures of the present as

they gain insights into the motives and patterns of human behaviour. Storytelling as a viable method of teaching enables students to explore and discover the existential imports of their basic existence as human beings. Through storytelling, students can engage in active participation by visualising and internalising the novel character and virtues of a legend told in a story.

Pedagogical Implications of Oral Method of Storytelling

Development of imaginative capability: Storytelling exercises the imagination. Through storytelling, children can become personally involved in a story as they identify with the character and try to interpret the naratives and illustrations. This imaginative experience helps children to develop their own creative powers. Amato et-al write:

> With a developed imagination and a rich emotional world, with intense curiosity and spontaneity, the juveniles to whom a narrating story is addressed, are involved easily in the story, they are identified with the characters and the situations that have been recounted, and as a result the story that is developed via the verbal speech, is transformed into experiential reality, in the conscience of the juveniles listeners, and to influence not only pedagogically, fulfilling in the best way the aims of learning and teaching (1973, pp.161-181).

Development of positive attitude: Storytelling are motivating and can help develop in children positive attitudes towards learning. "In this way the storytelling is a fabulous opportunity for the children to develop the ability on their concentration, so as to listen and receive the messages that are addressed to them" (Tucker, 2006, pp.54-58). Alongside they cultivate their own ability to narrate their own story, to create narrations that will include their own experiences and as a result to externalize their thoughts and emotions, their psychic world and their imagination.

Socio-cultural development: Social development as well as cultural development include social skills, ethics, characters, way of living with others and responsibility for furthering the common good (Berman, 1997). In this case, transmitting good moral values could influence socio-cultural development. The existential import of the teacher, occupying a vantage position, standing directly in front of the children and communicating knowledge, using the oral storytelling method will certainly have influence on children's cognitive and socio cultural development.

Enhancement of social experience: It is imperative to state that listening to stories in class is a shared social experience. Reading and writing are often individual activities; storytelling provokes a shared response of laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation, which is not only enjoyable but can help build up child's confidence and encourage social and emotional development (Dujmovic, 2006, p.78).

Improvement of prediction skills: Listening to stories develops the children's listening and concentrating skills and consequently develops their ability to make prediction. Children enjoys listening to stories over and over again. This frequent repetition allows certain ideas and concepts to be acquired while others are being overly reinforced. Some stories contain natural repetition of key ideas and concepts, which eventually help children to remember every detail, so they can gradually learn to anticipate what is about to happen next in the story. Such experiences will allow children to understand the overall meaning of a story and to relate it to their personal experience.

Promotion of spontaneous feedbacks: Oral storytelling encourages immediate response from students thereby providing the teacher the opportunity to make instant evaluation of the students' understanding of the story. The emotional and personal involvement of the teacher (storyteller) and the student is the motive upon which the educational and pedagogical function of the oral storytelling is based. Also the participation of the students and the teacher in the educational procedure, the emotional and spiritual involvement in it, the experiential learning, are the main conditions for evaluating the success storytelling method of teaching.. The result is more completed, when there is the creative feedback of the communicative relationship between the transmitter (storyteller) and the receiver (students) of pedagogy (Olson, 1988, pp.27-36).

Promotion of Communalistic Relations: Storytelling promotes the spirit of communalistic relations among the children. The authentic African is known and identified in, by and through his community. This is simply because community is the life-wire and heartbeat of African existence. The African idea of security and its value depends on personal identification with and within the community.

Moral and Socio-Cultural Education for National Development

Development is essentially about the development of the human person. The implication of this statement is that the moral development of the citizens constitute the moral development of a state. Morality according to Omoregbe is rooted in man's nature and the right understanding of man's nature is necessary for the right understanding of morality (2012, p.102). Moral development is therefore an essential part of national development. National development is the ability of a country to improve the social well-being of its citizens through the provisions of such amenities as medical care, infrastructure, quality education and other social services (Ako and James, 2018, p.79). Moral education functions to develop a sense of moral values in children. According to Denga, morality is basically concerned with the development of sound character in the child so that virtues like goodness, rightness, truth, respect for law and authority, forgiveness, honesty, sympathy, diligence, obedience among other virtues are internalised by the child (2011, p.70). Sound moral and cultural values no doubt will go a long way in influencing meaningful and enduring development. Africa's moral and cultural values constitute the very core of Africa's cultural heritage. It is the responsibility of African nations to ensure the preservation of Africa's cultural heritage. One of the recommended ways of preserving these cultural heritages is through transmission from generation to generation. A better way of doing this is through functional education. As Denga rightly puts it, "education will be meaningless if it is not directed at solving societal problems, conserving the cultural heritage, inventing and discovering new ideas and technology that are essential tools for cultural improvement" (Ibid, p.80). It is in this respect that this paper recommends the oral storytelling method of teaching as a viable method of preserving and transmitting Africa's cultural values in order to achieve meaningful and sustainable national development and also to guard jealously, Africa's future.

Conclusion

Using the tool of phenomenology, this paper has examined the importance of storytelling method of teaching in transmitting and preserving Africa's cultural heritage. In most societies across the globe, cultural values are passed from one generation to the next. It is the duty of every functional education to transmit the culture of the society from one generation to the next. Storytelling should be incorporated as a subject into the teaching curriculum in African schools at both the kindergarten and primary levels as a method of transmitting African cultural and moral values system in order to preserve our future. Copying

of foreign values without proper censorship is inimical to development, and will only destroy humanity, which is the basis of African value system. In building Africa's tomorrow, it is imperative to rejuvenate and guard jealously, Africa's cultural and moral value systems. Africa needs to come up with a system of children's education that places emphasis on cultural and moral values.

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