

## Children theatre as a driver to reawakening African morals and consciousness in the next generation.

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### Abstract

*The great debate about the way forward in the reawakening of African Morals and Consciousness in the new millennium has brought about the strong need for the indoctrination of Children. Children Theatre can be used by inculcating it in the educational curriculum. Children Theatre in African culture has done a great service to moral education since Theatre has been a safe way to expose kids to difficult situations and give them direct information. This is because education is founded on human nature and any education that is devoid of morality is incomplete and useless. In recent times, children Theatre has evolved as tools for moral education through emulation, repeat after me approach, stories with fictitious characters, proverbs, caution, prohibition, customs, practices, and religious beliefs of parents, among others. In order to interrogate these the qualitative research methodology was adopted using the primary and secondary materials. The findings of this study maintain that African parents employ the use of folktales, storytelling, and other forms of traditional methods to impact cultural knowledge into their children and wards. It is therefore a sin qua nun for children Theatre to be introduced in faculties of Arts to inform academics and society of the importance of moral reawakening to curb most of the ills of modern society from childhood*

**Key words:** Children Theatre, African Culture, Morals Ethics, Modernization



## Introduction

Africa as a continent is blessed with diverse, rich, humorous, and instructive culture, morals and values that has endowed the world towards her. These are visible and evident in their cultural practices, belief system and their way of life which made the Africans peculiar, distinct, and different from the Western world. This does not presume that the continent has the same culture, but they shared common and similar traits in cultural traditions and ideologies that are obvious in their cuisines, festivals, dressing, events, some practices cut across some countries within the Continent. Thus, these unique cultural values created a niche for the people and the continent and made them a sort after from the primordial era. So, when the African culture is compared with other cultures, there is a wide margin of differences in cultural shows and display. The erosion of these positive traditional and cultural system by civilization and modernization is the bone of contention in this work and how to resuscitate the eroded morals for the holistic development of the society and the next generation. Values are interrelated to ethics and they can be materials, profound, strict, ethics, style, communal or individualistic, People esteems are generally founded on customary strict and good rules that they stick to. Thus, values can be affected by what we see and hear. So, from the general level, aside from religion methods of reasoning and societies likewise have values. These qualities are dynamic and frequently change to meet the always developing nature of the public.<sup>1</sup>

## African Morals and Ethics in Families

The philosophical framework is based on the philosophy of morality as propounded by Churchill in 1982.<sup>2</sup> He sees morality as human behaviour and the practical activities of man. The ethical nature of the society is deep-rooted in the ideas, understandings and the general notion and pattern of what the society accept as good / bad, right/wrong behavioural patterns.

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<sup>1</sup>Igboin, Benson O. "Colonialism and African cultural values." *African Journal of History and Culture* 3, no. 6 (2011): 96-103.ss

<sup>2</sup>Churchill, Larry R. "The teaching of ethics and moral values in teaching: Some contemporary confusions." *The journal of higher education* 53, no. 3 (1982): 296-306.

The determinant factor is an unanimously approved standard of that society. Consequently, members consciously and intuitively obeyed and adhered to these mostly unwritten codes of the society. These regulate the physical and psychological behaviours that were openly applauded and commended within the society. Thus, it governs the psychodynamics processes of early childhood behavioural development abilities. Hence it breeds the essence of mutual respect, create collective coherence, and encouraging being, just, and fair to one another within the society. The African communities are made up of ethical systems that are functional, organised in nature and coordinate human characters within the communities such are moral values, ethical principles and practices, rules, and methods that regulator social and moral behavioural patterns.

From the primordial African view point all ideas and beliefs exhibited within the African societies are unwritten ethical laws that mold people's behaviours within the society. In the past, wider recognition and acceptance were not given to African morals and ethics. In the last three decades contemporary African thinkers gave sustainable focus and attention to African moral issues which has brought the African morals issues into the global world flood light. Ethics in Africa is personality-based thus it revolves around an individual's character, the quality of an individual character is very vital to the overall moral life of the society. Peculiarities in character is the major trait of the African moral system. Thus, difference in behavioural pattern revealed how the society has helped to mold the morals of the people within the family circle, villages, and the societies at large.

This is achieved through the creation of moral awareness among members, giving oral/moral knowledge and prominence to positive moral values and principles to show acceptance thereby encouraging emulation of positive behaviours. In a specific term, the African employs the medium of storytelling, proverbs, tales by moonlight, folktales, to pass across moral instructions to the younger generation. Hence such moral education instills moral fright on the society and compel the people to live within the ambit of the unwritten laws as guided by their consciences. Since the family is the first point of contact in a child life, it is at this point that the moral rules and principles are being meted out to children. Man as a social Animal showcases social statues

through culture. Thus, culture is the entirety of what a people is made up off. This implies that the belief system, social organisation/ stratum, norms, taboos, history, religious practices, language, dressing codes, foods, dance methods, greetings habits and philosophy are embedded in the cultural formation/structure of the people. Africans as a continent have various cultural practices that have some similar belief structures and values that make them unique. Some of this culture has distinctive features that ran across the continent of Africa which has brought universal cultural acceptance despite some slight variations in the culture and tradition according to countries. The element of uniqueness in culture and tradition in the African society is the first tool employed in the family cycle in educating children and inculcating morals into them early in life. Whenever this is missed/compromised in the early formation of child upbringing, values and morals become abjured because African culture and tradition lay much emphasis on family proper upbringing.

Parenting necessitates using interpersonal relationship to develop cultural emotion. According to most parents who learnt parenting practices from their own parents – some they accept and some they discard.<sup>3</sup> The parenting methods are passed on from one generation to the next, both desirable and undesirable practices are perpetuated. These practices mostly have cultural values which were passed from one parent to another. In the African system of parenting, different forms of upbringing styles are employed to mould a child to become a responsible adult. Parents logically insist on a child's acceptance of family values and ethics that can practically and positively influence behavioural pattern from childhood. These are achieved using different parenting styles such as strict parental practices, which is an upbringing method where children and wards are compelled to follow rules and regulations as specified by parents and the society. Any act of violations attracts severe punishment and stern warnings.

In like manner, some educated parents employ the permissive parental style in inculcating cultural morals and traditional

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<sup>3</sup>Santrock, John W. *Human adjustment*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006

principles in their children and wards. This gives a lot of freedom more than the strict parenting style because it allows less discipline, compel parents to fulfill their children's needs and demands and allows opportunity for loose communication gaps which results into slack bonding between parents and children. Despite these challenges, parents still find the opportunity to insist that their wards/children imbibe the family norms. To achieve this, parents engage methods that are suitable to them depending on their professions and availabilities; educational attainment; economic status; family background; religious belief; tribal affiliation; that can affect cultural orientation and parents' choice of style adopted. For proper mentoring and impartation of African values and traditional ethical practices into children/wards, African parents also employ some simple traits as vehicle of expression and communication. Hence, the use of nonverbal communication skill to interact with children right from childhood within the family circle has helped to achieve privacy within the family circle. Furthermore, to make sure that children are well guided, the extended family members such as uncles, aunties, grandparents, cousins, close family friends and community lend their voices to correct, direct, give correctional advice and training from childhood to adulthood.

### **Reawakening the Consciousness of self-esteem of the African Child**

Human advancement is diverse and can be described from physical, psychological, social, and enthusiastic perspectives. This improvement is unequivocally formed by one's social setting. It is difficult to isolate one's way of life while clarifying their improvement completely. These central points of interest incorporate language advancement; self-confidence; self-idea and character improvement. Language is a useful asset of correspondence that comprises of words utilised by a local area. It empowers us to pass down data starting with one age then unto the next thus making a rich social legacy. Hence, this paper reviews such issues as dialects that are utilised in African schools and what they mean for the advancement of an African youngsters. Additionally, confidence, self-idea and personality improvement are unequivocally installed in one's social setting. A sound confidence and positive self-idea sway a solid personality

advancement. It is in this way that a child ought to be prepped from establishment.

Personalities has to do with the attributes, qualities, social relations, jobs, and gathering of people participations that characterize what one's identity is. Characters can be centred around the past; what used to be valid for one, the present and what is valid for one now or the future. The individual one expects or wishes to turn into, the individual one feels committed to or attempt to become, or the individual one's apprehensions may turn into. Thus, the need to reawaken the awareness of our children to the excellence of the African culture cannot be over emphasized.

### **Modernisation and its effect on Children's Morals.**

Modernisation can be portrayed as "the cycle by which a juvenile territory changes due to wellsprings of data (conviction frameworks, direct codes, products and institutional models) from viably settled mechanical centres.<sup>4</sup> It is as such a pattern of progress and improvement through which the standard ascribes, be it social, monetary, exacting, political and social conditions are being advanced precisely and logically to satisfy overall rules with the introduction of current methods and materials. Modernisation can similarly be viewed as the connection by which a neighbourhood from having a regular, agrarian, natural culture to having a more standard, urbanised society, through this cycle, they change regarding characteristics and conviction, people, geography, and reasoning. For the present circumstance, modernisation speculation regards the 'customary' methodology as obsolete, hindering to headway and has a spot with the third world, while the forefront way of life is contemporary and has a spot with the western world. Modernisation in this manner serve as a pattern that draws a profound opening between the standard social orders and current societies, where it is acknowledged that the past is fair contrasted with the last referenced. This orders the standard social orders as wards of

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<sup>4</sup>Hall, Douglas T., and Benjamin Schneider. "Correlates of organizational identification as a function of career pattern and organizational type." In *Academy of Management Proceedings*, vol. 1972, no. 1, pp. 159-161. Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510: Academy of Management, 1972.

the western world when the developmental standard is concerned, yet if not, such friendly orders would be obligated for their own state of destitution and underdevelopment.

Modernisation seems to have helped in the progression of social resources and assurance of inheritance. As shown by critical observers during the involved work, it makes people appreciate and keep up friendly practices more, most especially in this "PC age". The positive credits and impacts of modernisation on friendly and typical resources fill in as current methodologies for managing these resources and inheritances in various organisations. Various vital social constructions are as of now stunningly modified and directed using present day equipment. Social mindfulness and socially different experiences are as of now being shared considering children utilisation of current advancement. Modernisation appears to have helped in the advancement of social assets and safeguarding of legacy. As per significant sources during the hands-on work, it causes individuals to appreciate and keep up social practices more, most particularly in this "PC age". The positive credits and effects of modernisation on social and normal assets fill in as current strategies for dealing with these assets and legacies in different networks. Numerous noteworthy social structures are currently elegantly rebuilt and overseen utilising present-day hardware. Social awareness and multifaceted encounters are currently being shared because of youngster's utilisation of present-day innovation.

### **The drifting away from Africanism**

Africanism is a symbolic feature of Africa which depict African and what Africans stood for. These are cultural features, materials and non-materials items of African origin and property that has gone through the medium of cultural transference and diverse transformations but still retained the African. Features. The western culture has greatly influenced the African traditional values and encouraged a drastic deviation from the acceptance of African cultural value system to imbibing the western culture hook line and sinker. This has given birth to acculturation and decrease in the reception of the African value system among the youth. The African traditional values and virtues that depict the Africans that was held in high esteem before now has been

relegated to the background. The younger generation has accepted and applied the western way of life as part and parcel of the accepted norms in the society. The beautiful African culture that has encouraged cultural awareness, unity, collectivism, brotherliness, communism, has been rebuffed and downplayed for the western culture which is seen as been more modernised and superior.<sup>5</sup> culture is the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts and society while agreed that culture is the complex whole of a man possession which cut across knowledge, morals, beliefs, arts, customs, technology and other things that can be shared or passed from generation to generation.<sup>6</sup> Going by this definition what makes African unique, different and special is her culture, traditional practices which is the way of life of the people which is synonymous to the people and an expression of their way of living. A deviation from this established African values, cultures and patterns represents a gradual eradication of African forms of identification because the culture distinguishes the people and shows their peculiarity in the mist of other cultures. Thus, this has had adverse effect on all African cultural elements such as African foods, crafts, artifacts, cultural values, virtues. Morals, languages, and ideals in a negative way. As exquisite as the African cultural elements are the drifting has submerged the sacredness and value placed on the African cultures thus the holistic acceptance of the western practices at the expense of the African values has eroded the African way of life.

Traditional and cultural values are the essential part of cultural system and culture is what describes a people's distinctiveness, and the values esteem as a people that differentiate them from other people. Cultures always try to preserve these values that are required for the survival of the people and once this is relegated or neglected the identity is affected.

### **Children theatre as a driving force for the reawakening of moral consciousness**

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<sup>5</sup>Akama, E. S. "Introduction to religious cultural studies." *Port Harcourt* (2012).

<sup>6</sup>Otite, A., and P. Ogionwo. "Problems of culture in Africa." *Ibadan: Opex* (2016)



Childhood is the years between 0 – 14 which is between the middle childhood and early adolescence. It is an era of development and social change in the life of youths. Many schools of thought see childhood differently. In Nigeria from 0 – 17 you cannot vote / be voted for but from 18 years you can vote and be voted for, “The United convention on the Right of the Child” sees a child as a being less than the age of 18 years. Children, adolescent, and minors are legally, culturally, and socially responsible to their parents and government to meet their needs. Children do not live-in isolation, they grow and develop within an environment practicing a moral tradition. By these they grow up to hold some basic moral and civic values and display obvious virtues within the society. Morals revolves around human behaviour and the practical activities of human behaviour. Children learn more from what they see than what they hear, because of the magnetic heart, aesthetic intrigued that appealed to them.

This is the age they are open to take instructions, explore their environment ask question before growing to form an opinion that will either be positive/negative. Children are attracted to items that are attractive and items that can be used to play. In most Africa homes this is the period to teach morals, inculcate cultural beliefs system, traditions and gives instructions that will mould the child for a better adulthood. One of the ways in inculcating morals in the African society is to teach by telling stories to children. Children theatre is the most appropriate place to achieve this because they perform the plays act the characters thereby learning and reawakening their consciousness about what Africa stands for.

Theatrical productions reinforce children thinking capabilities and enables children to be involve in critical thinking change bad perceptions and imbibe good ideas. Watching performance as a child helps to develop aesthetic and artistic feelings. In theatrical productions realities are converted to create new world, and ideas, children’s feelings such as laughter, fear, pity, sadness, happiness, joy are stimulated to correct their emotions thereby help in the development of the rightful values that will build them up in the society. Furthermore, many performances for young people are targeted at triggering the youth interest in creative and cultural, phenomenon. The production of cultural

and traditional plays of moral values with children as the regular audience will advance youth knowledge about Africa morals, values, etiquette, and help built the consciousness of African heritage in the conscious and subconscious of next generation which are the youth of today and leaders of tomorrow. Thus, encouraging the youth to form the habit of being a regular theatre goer can be a driver to reawakening for the African child. Even though theatre for children can be traced to 1903 in the United State of America and landmark achievement has been recorded. In Nigeria children's theatre has not flourished as a commercial theatre except in religious contexts where it is used for religious purpose.

**Methodology** Data collections and analyses were based on the qualitative research method. Primary and secondary materials were made used of five families of different backgrounds from Nigeria and Ghana were visually interviewed. In addition to this, resources were sourced on the Internet, involving cases of children morals in relation to family upbringing. Other approaches include newspapers and magazines as well as books published on African morals. In the cause of completing the studies there where direct interview used as well as information gained from the electronic media. In the cause of the primary data collection questionnaires were sent to families both in Nigeria and Ghana, responses from the questionnaires formed the bases of the visual meetings and discussions.

**Interviews:** Unstructured questionnaire was conducted among five families in Nigeria and Ghana- two families each from Lagos State, Delta State, Anambra State, Kano State and Adamawa State. Likewise, two families each from Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Tamale, Takoradi and Cape coast. Due to the restriction caused by the Covid 19 pandemic outbreak, the interview was carried out through Zoom. Ten copies of questionnaires were sent through the email address which were answered and sent back.

**Results:** It was discovered that parents in Africa employed the use of folktales, storytelling, and other traditional forms to inculcate morals into their children. For instance Ghana's Concert Party Theatre Troupe, a repertoire established majorly for children based using comedies and social satires was successful till the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Through this repertoire Efua T. Southerland established 1997 the 'Mmofra' foundation which means children

foundation as a non-profit organisation in Ghana. The organisation has a goal to improve the cultural and intellectual lives of Ghana youth by producing creative works that educate, improves, inculcate moral, values and impact the younger generations positively. Through this foundation Efua T Southerland stood as the first children cultural educator in Ghana; with this she played a prominent role in the development of children educational curricula, wrote several literatures, encourage traditional theatre and film productions for Ghanaian children. She championed the formal confirmation of the United Nations convention of the Child Right and became the first president of the National Commission on children from 1981-1991. She was the brain behind the PANAFEST- Pan Africa Festival of Theatre arts held in 1992. She established the Children Drama Development Project which was aimed at sourcing materials, this she achieved by employed the storytelling and drama performance to project the indigenous Ghanaian cultures and traditions.

It was gathered that in Ghana, the Efua Southerland founded repertoire known as Mmofra (children) foundation is still in existence even after 25years of the founder's death. Her aim of using the creative art to inculcate traditional morals, values and reposition the children's mind-set to accepting Ghanaian cultural practices are still vigorously pursued. These they have achieved through the years by exposing thousands of children to creative cultural programmes which employed the dramatic arts to passed traditional morals to the next generation.<sup>7</sup>

The research also discovered that there are no theatre companies which produce only children's productions in Nigeria. But there are religious based children theatre groups which produce sectional dramas based on religious morals belief system for their audience on special occasions. Children regular attendance of theatre/ being a member of a theatre group instills in children some level of self- belief attitude; increase their receptive nature; broadens their imaginative capacities; expose children to

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<sup>7</sup>Adams, Anne V., and Esi Sutherland-Addy, eds. *The Legacy of Efua Sutherland: Pan-African Cultural Activism*. Ayebia Clarke Pub Limited, 2007.

different collaborative methods; build mental alertness; increase their vocabulary; and develop their maximum concentration ability. These are qualities that children develop as they watch performance regularly thus it helps to bring to their re-embrace plays of moral, values and virtues they have watched in drama productions which helps to guide their behavioural pattern in the society.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, theatre as an art form with a unique characteristic of bringing issues to life as a realistic picture in the mind of the audience helps the audience to interact with the story line, react and take a decision. In theatrical production, actors relate with one another and by extension relate with audience thereby pass across their messages which mostly have influence on the audience. Seeing that children could learn and imbibe new ideas faster; they enjoy working in groups and learning new things and are physically active made the theatre a good recreational facility not only to play but also to learn. Thus, a regularly produced children drama with cultural values and virtues will be inbuilt in children value awareness. A child that is a regular theatre goer will most likely adopt some slangs, act, and way of life from some of the productions the child has been watching. Therefore, theatre has the capabilities to create awareness, instill in children, cultural, traditional values system through performances.

### **Recommendations**

There should be a children theatre companies as a recreational facility in every local government area in Africa especially in Nigeria where such theatres are not common. Furthermore, there should be a statutory law that states that children theatre companies should specialised in cultural and traditional plays that portrays African values and virtues.

The ministry of education should be mandated to create a curriculum for primary and secondary school's drama groups with themes on African ethics, cultural and traditional showing the African value system and what Africa stands for. These will enable the youth to learn more and be vast about their father's

land and reawakening the consciousness about the values and virtues that must be imbibe for generational continuity.

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