

A Thematic Study of Selected Nigerian Children's Literary Texts

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Abstract- This study was set to investigate the subject-matter of each of selected children's literature, highlight the common themes of selected children's storybooks and assess the appropriateness of the themes of the selected children's storybooks to the cultural and social adjustment to society's expected norms and values. Primary and secondary sources were used in data collection. The primary source comprised 15 purposively selected children's books, five each from age range four to six, seven to nine and ten to twelve, respectively. The secondary source included books, journal articles and the Internet. Data were analysed using social semiotic theory with insights from Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. The study found that all the storybooks selected for this study have varying subject matters. The major themes of children's literature in Nigeria are crime and punishment, the value of education, reward for hard work and good virtue, bad habits and their consequences, and disobedience and their aftermaths. The study asserts that the themes of selected texts are relevant to the contemporary Nigerian social context. All the storybooks under investigation in this study took cognisance of the cultural milieus of the readers, and the themes are appropriate for the target audiences; and for the education of the target audience. Therefore, more literary texts should be written to sustain the tempo. Authors of children's books should de-emphasise heavy reliance of oral tradition and emphasise other aspects such as suitability and enjoyment so as to foster engagement and promote good reading culture among children.

Keywords: Children, Children literature, Children's Literacy Text, Literature, Storybook

I. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature, for long, has not been given serious attention by scholars even though children's literature is as important or perhaps more important than adult literature. Studying children's literature will allow authors of children's books to understand this special genre. Books for children contain expressions of human emotions, desires, and beliefs.

They are also intended to shape the thoughts, ways of life and value systems of children who are the readers. Mwanzi (1982:3) sees literature as crucial to a child's mental, psychological and social development. Literature stimulates children's imagination and sharpens their awareness of the world. It is a means of attaining a deeper understanding of other people's cultures.

Bratton (1981), Sutherland (1990), Tucker (1991), Nodelman (1996) and Marks (2003) argue that childhood is an important stage of human development. For instance, Tucker (1991:180) contends that childhood is an important stage of human development; therefore, children have to learn conventions through some stories which help them to build up ways of predicting the immediate future.

This observation could suggest that children internalise what they read in books, and internalisation can mould their behaviour through adulthood. This is corroborated by Benton and Fox's (1985) assertion that children project what they read in stories into their behaviour. Such projections can determine the kind of image children form out of the stories they read.

Scholars all over the world, such as Oberstein (1996), Huck (2001), Chapleau (2004), Nodelman and Reimer (2008) and Jarrar (2010), have argued that children's literature was conservative in its didactic approach to instilling proper behaviour in children. In her introduction, Butler (1980: 9) asserts that 'Without the help of adults, a baby or a small child has no chance at all of discovering books, of starting on the road to that unique association with the printed world which the mature reader knows and loves.' Based on this premise, Smith (1990: 160) emphasises that 'Books for Children are in many ways the most

important books in the world.' Similarly, cognitive psychologists such as Bruning, Schraw, Ronning and Glover (1995) have always stressed the importance of understanding language structure when reading a composed text or in discourse in a language repertoire. Hence, Bruning, Schraw, Ronning and Glover (1995: 241) stress that, 'Children's knowledge about the highest level of language structure - discourse - also is vital to their learning to read.'

Books have always been a source of information, comfort and pleasure to those who know how to use them. Children are better informed about the world around them through information in books. They acquire knowledge about their environment, how to adapt to it, and the norms and values of their societies through lessons in stories (Igudia, 2018a).

Also, books could play the role of a good comforter, considering the hypothetical instances in books and counselling messages in books which have always been a therapy to many readers in discomfoting circumstances. All these add to the invaluable benefits of books and children's literature.

Children's literature also provides ample opportunities to understand other people's cultures and values. A country like Nigeria, with diverse ethnic and cultural groups, affords the children easy opportunities for national orientation, integration and unity. Odejide and James (1982: 516) remark that:

Literature is acknowledged as a rich source for helping children to clarify their own values, understand themselves, and examine and appreciate the complexity of the world around them and of human relations. In this respect "regional fiction" is invaluable because it gives pictures of child life in particular areas of the world by reflecting how people live, the circumstances and situations that determine how they live, their customs and feelings, and the changes that are taking place in their society.

It also sheds light on their cultural expectations and the roles each person played in the traditional society and is expected to play in a modern one. This, in part, explains the growing interest in literature across cultures.

Early experience of the difference between good and bad virtues in life's journey is a vehicle for avoiding future disasters. In books, several critical situations are solved in hypothetical statements that guide the child on how such problems are solved in real-life situations. So, language plays a pivotal role in transmitting all the benefits of books to children.

It is the main channel for communicating the author's ideas about the culture and the concomitant experiences to the readers. Based on this background, Sackeyfio (2016: 6) posits that since children all over the world represent the future, writers of children's literature "commit to using their artistry in ways that foreground the preservation of African cultural integrity in a globalised world of fractured identity and misplaced value.

" She adds that using culture to project African cultural heritage in children's books serves three functions: "It creates the bridge between oral tradition and lliterature. Second, African cultural values are still relevant in modern settings, and her children's books reflect this. Third, cultural contents from Nigeria and other African cultures are rich in didactic elements."

Research Questions

1. What is the subject-matter of each of the selected children's literature?
2. What are the categorisation of the thematic pre-occupations of the selected texts for the study?
3. How appropriate are the themes of the selected children's storybooks to the cultural and social adjustment to society's expected norms and values?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to UNESCO (2006), early childhood is the period from birth through age 8. The focus of this study, however, exceeds this period as the educational system is the basis for grading in this study. Article 1 of the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) defines a child as a person below the age of 18 (unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger). The same convention recognises that children's ages in

some countries are lower than 18, encouraging such countries to adjust to 18.

This definition cannot be adopted as a working definition for this study because the interest of this study is on children in the Nigerian educational system within the primary school system. This implies that the concept of childhood in the study is limited to children under 12.

According to Huck and Kuhn (1968), children seek to know the truth about the world; they want to discover themselves and where they belong. To achieve this, children need to look into the contrasting experiences of others. They need to know what is 'right' in their society. They search for inner peace and understanding of the universe. Literature transmits these cultural values to them on the pages of books.

Huck and Kuhn further add that children's literature helps in children's development by providing insight into human behaviour, enjoyment, new perspectives, vicarious experience, wisdom, beauty and inspiration, all of which help in children's development. Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (2005) support this view in their observation that children's literature imparts both personal and academic values to children.

Igudia (2023), corroborating the opinion of Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (2005), identifies these values as enjoyment, imagination and inspiration, vicarious experience, understanding and empathy, linguistic and cultural heritage, moral reasoning, and literary and artistic preferences, while the academic values include improving reading skills, developing writing voice and style, learning content and promoting art appreciation.

Children's literature is a literary category that caters to children's interest. It is material written and produced for the information or entertainment of children and young adults under some parental or guardian's control. Children's literature covers books published for children who are not yet interested in adult literature (Igudia, 2015). This definition cannot be considered adequate because an all-inclusive definition of children's literature is yet to be conceived. Authorities have attempted to define children's literature using parameters such as the size

of texts, content, author's intention, language of presentation, subject matter in the text, and characterisation.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2014: 163) opines that:

Because literature provides enjoyment and relaxation, it has become a veritable tool for inculcation and internalisation of moral and ethical principles, norms, cultural ideals, identity and heritage into children. A good children's or juveniles' literary text can through its captivating quality, impact on a child so deeply that he/she unconsciously identifies with it in his/her personality, identity, self-perception, his/her world view in general and the immediate environment in particular.

The above assertion accounts for why the relationship between stories in children's books are inexplicably intertwined with morality. In other words, every child's literary text has one or more moral lesson to impact on the children audience (Igudia, 2022).

III. METHODOLOGY

Primary and secondary sources were used in data collection. The primary source comprised 15 purposively selected children's books, five each from age range four to six, seven to nine and ten to twelve, respectively. The secondary source included books, journal articles and the Internet. Data were analysed using social semiotic theory with insights from Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, following the research questions of this study.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Research Question One: What is the subject-matter and the categorisations of each of the 15 selected children's literature?

Anthonia Ekpa's *Catty and the Chase*

This is a story of betrayal of trust. Catty the Cat and Raymond the Mouse used to be jolly friends who lived happily and peacefully until Raymond developed the habit of greed. While Catty is hard-working, fetching the food the two friends will eat, Raymond will only cook it and eat to his full. Not only that, Raymond will also eat all the fish in the pot of soup. Catty does not like this. After several warnings, Catty decided to break up and start cooking

his own food to avoid regular clashes with his friend, Raymond. One day, Catty buys a fishing net and hook and goes to fish in the river. He catches five fish and decides to smoke them for preservation. Raymond is tempted when the smell of Catty's dry fish catches his attention. He eats up all the fish. When Catty returns, he becomes furious and goes after Raymond who scampers into a burrow outside the house for safety. That is the end of their friendship till the present day.

This story is meant for children between the ages of four and six. It is categorised as a fable, as animals assume human statuses, living in huts in an organised family lifestyle similar to humans.

Nadia (in *Nadia and Other Stories*) written by Hadiza Suleman

This story emphasises the bitter prize of disobedience. Nadia, a kitten, defies the advice and warning of her mother not to go into the wild for fear of getting lost in the forest. She eventually gets lost in the forest and learns her lesson in a hard way. This story is meant for children between the ages of four and six. The storybook is also categorised under fable and pastoral as animals are created to live in huts within the forest in an organised family lifestyle similar to those of humans. The fact that they did not bear their species' names but those of humans typifies them as human archetypes.

Muriola Awosemo's Fox Joe Junior

This story focuses on the theme of stubbornness and impetuosity in personal decisions. Fox Joe is clever and is too confident. In one of his demonstrations of cleverness, he jumps into a fire and never comes out alive. The death of his father affects Fox Joe Junior so badly that it takes the effort of Lion the King to make him overcome the effect of his father's death. Unfortunately, Fox Joe Junior takes after the ways of his late father by not heeding the advice of the other, more experienced animals. One day, he jumps through the window in the king's palace. Unknown to him, a well is at the back of the window. He falls inside the well. Just like his father, Fox Joe Junior never came out of the well alive. The storybook is also categorised under fable as animals are given the attributes of human beings.

Mathew Adeta's Mother Finch and the Farmer

This is a story of patience, endurance and unity of purpose. Mother Finch makes her nest on the tree on Mr Ajayi's farm. Mr Ajayi cannot continue with his plan to cultivate his land. He has to wait until the Mother Finch chicks are hatched and mature enough to fly. Each time Mother Finch goes out to fetch food for her chicks, she instructs the chicks to monitor every move of Mr Ajayi and his labourers. This the chicks relate to their mother whenever she returns to feed them. At the right time, Mother Finch takes all the seven chicks out, and they fly away, never to return to Mr Ajayi's farm. Mr Ajayi then cuts down the tree and continues with his plan to cultivate his land. Mother Finch and the Farmer is categorised under fable as animals are given human attributes.

Fatima Pam's Mustapha and the Pirates of Babani

Mustapha and the Pirates of Babani is a story with the theme of costly prizes of disobedience and stubbornness. It is the story of a boy, Mustapha, whose quest for adventure brought him into the mysterious land of the strange creature called the fish pirates. In a riverine village, Mustapha attempts a fishing expedition and is drifted away by the tide to encounter the terror of the fish pirates. He experiences horrible circumstances. His encounter with a giant crab almost ends his life. The intervention of a giant snail who gives him a ride out of the deadly cave is his saving grace. He opens his eyes to find his family around him at the seashore, trying to revive him.

Mustapha and the Pirates of Babani is a fairy tale, as the creatures and events in the text are hardly imagined in real life. They can only be possible in children's dream worlds.

Salamatu Sule's Oma the Drummer Queen

Oma the Drummer Queen has the themes of punishment for disobedience, the price of patience and the reward for labour. It is the story of a poor and humble hunter, Aremu, who disobeys the custom of the land by hunting on a day forbidden for hunters to hunt. He is punished for his gross disobedience. Aremu carries out the punishment judiciously; for that, he was rewarded with an old drum which brought fame and fortune to his family. His only daughter inherits the drum and becomes the best

drummer in the land. Like her father, her skill in drumming brought fame and fortune to her as she completed her secondary education with flying colours and her prowess in drumming took her beyond her immediate territories. To her, the future is bright.

Oma the Drummer Queen is a fairy tale. The wonder of a mysterious god who throws a drum from heaven, the whole magic of the ancient drum, and the king's healing through the prodigious mastery of drumming by a very young girl can only be possible in the dreamland of fairy tales.

Olajire Olanlokun's the Mystery Woman of Aporo
This is a story that emphasises reward for good and punishment for evil. It is the story of a beautiful goddess of the Aporo River who visits the village of Alaifo at long, irregular intervals. Her visit is to reward both the good and the bad people of Alaifo. On this very visit, the river goddess rewarded the good people with wonderful gifts while the bad ones were disgraced. This, in a way, helps to sanitise the entire village.

The story can be categorised as a fairy tale because the mystery of the river goddess of Aporo and all the paraphernalia during her visit to Alaifo are unrealistic. The idea of a strange, ageless goddess rewarding the people of Alaifo according to their deeds symbolises the "happy ever after" ending of a fairy tale.

Solomon Igunare's How Mosquito Began to Bite Man

In the storybook, Man and other animals live together in the same community. One day, Man and some other animals are discussing under a tree when a Mosquito flies in noisily. This does not go down well with Man, who orders Mosquito out and calls him a noisy skeleton. Mosquito is not happy with Man for this insult. He, too, retaliates with further insult on Man. Man then promises to crush Mosquito under his foot. Mosquito leaves and is not happy with the insult he receives from Man. He decides to deal with Man so that Man will never forget him. One day as Man is sleeping with his wife at night, Mosquito sneaks in through the dark and starts biting Man and his wife all through the night. They are infested with malaria

parasites, a situation which resulted in them being admitted to the hospital. Mosquito later reveals to them that he is responsible for their illness. Man becomes afraid and scared of mosquitoes. Ever since then, Mosquito continues to bite Man.

This story brings to the fore the proverb that pride goes before a fall. Man believes he could destroy Mosquito because of his wisdom and body size. However, Mosquito proves to him that strength is not measured by size. It is classified under fable. Humans and animals live together in the same community and relate like they are of the same species.

Kabiru Abdullahi's the Golden Girl of Galma

This story re-echoes the proverb, 'pride goes before a fall'. Its theme is humility and discipline. It is the story of a beautiful princess who is so proud of her beauty and her background that she rejects all her suitors. She is, however, abducted and taken away by a poor beggar who was one of the suitors in what seems like a pre-meditated ploy to humble the proud princess. In the course of their living a new peasant lifestyle in the countryside, Halima the Golden Girl is tamed. She later regrets her past excesses and falls in love with her abductor. In the end, Halima the Golden Girl finds out the truth. She is to consider the choice of marrying her abductor, with the backing of her father.

The Golden Girl of Galma can be categorised as a folktale due to its heavy borrowing from popular Nigerian folk literature. Its message is how to humble beautiful, arrogant, choosy girls about getting a spouse. This story is based on the traditional oral culture of the ethnic group in the northern part of Nigeria.

Oladipo Yemitan's Happy Times in Iju

This story teaches rewards for hard work and love for one's culture. This storybook tells of Musa and Lola who live in the city but know nothing about how their food is produced. The day Lola asks their mother if rice grows on trees, their parents become worried. During the long vacation at school, their parents decided to take them to the village to spend the holiday. Musa and Lola learn many things about farming in the village by visiting Uncle Tunde's farms and partaking in the harvest of yam and some

other farm crops. They also learnt about different occupations engaged in by the people in the village. To them, the holiday ended too soon. They have many stories to tell in school.

This is a contemporary Nigerian story that shows the contrast between the exotic and superficial modern life of the city and the simple, serene rural life of the countryside. Readers are left with a choice between the two lifestyles. The essence is to address the rural-urban migration prevalent in Nigeria today by telling the children in the urban areas that there is more and better fun in the rural areas than the exotic and superficial lifestyle of urban centres.

Nnenna Ihebom's the Magic Mirror

This story teaches an effective way to discourage bad habits in children without making them go through the pain. The story centres on Laina, an eight-year-old girl and the youngest of the four children of Mr and Mrs Davis, who forms the habit of admiring herself in front of the mirror. This becomes an obsession as her parents and their house help, Nanny, attempt fruitlessly to stop her from this.

The story changes after Nanny and the parents play a trick on the children through a story of the magic mirror which incidentally leads to the disappearance of all the mirrors in the house. This scary story changes her orientation about her love for mirrors. Laina can now concentrate on her studies. In the end, the children find out that the whole story of the magic wand is a fluke and that the disappearance of all the mirrors in the house is a coordinated action of the elders in the house to take Laina away from the mirrors. But then, Laina has taken to a new obsession – her books.

This is a contemporary story based in an urban setting. It focuses on how to deal with children's habits. The lesson here is that no matter the extent of obsession a child has formed with a bad habit, there is always a way of tackling it.

Oyindamola Ige's The Reign of Akabidi the Wicked Lion

This story re-echoes the metaphor of the triumph of good over evil. It takes cooperation and unity to win the battle over terror and evil. In this story, Akabidi,

the wicked lion, is expelled from the Kingdom of Eranko for plotting a coup to overthrow Agabagidi, the good king. All the animals in the kingdom thought him dead. Then Agabagidi, the good king dies. As the animals decide to crown Jangidi, another good and young lion, to succeed Agabagidi as king, Akabidi appears and forces his reign of tyranny on the people of Eranko Kingdom. The kingdom's animals have no alternative but to conceive a ploy to depose the oppressive Akabidi. This is a fable and a parody similitude of a familiar military regime in Nigeria. It is also a satire.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's My Cousin Sammy

This is the story of love and acceptance. It is the story of an orphan boy, Sammy, who comes from the village to live with his uncle in the city. He encounters a totally different lifestyle and has many obstacles in adjusting to his new home. The uncooperative attitude of his uncle's family worsens Sammy's adjustment in the city. But Ene's love and assistance is a great impetus which propels Sammy to be fully accepted as a part of the family. Ultimately, coming to live with his uncle is a victory for Sammy. He is accepted as a full family member and his sister is to be brought from the village to live with them too. My Cousin Sammy is based on contemporary life in the city with some didactic elements in its theme.

Ayo Opakunbi's the High Flyer

This is a story of reward for hard work. Dade, a boy from a peasant background, is sent to school to become successful in life. He is initially not serious about his studies. This leads to his father's decision that Dade should repeat Basic Six. The decision is the impetus Dade needs to propel him to be a high flyer.

He eventually gains admission into the prestigious Ideal Grammar School in the city and moves in to live with his uncle. The life of his uncle's son, Bisi, is a good influence on Dade's attempt at adjusting to city life. Experience at Ideal Grammar School is pleasant as Dade meets other students who influence Dade positively. Dade receives prizes as one of the high flyers.

This is a contemporary story about a popular interest: education. It deals with the vicissitudes of life as

experienced by Dade and how Dade's life could be a catalyst for the progress of other children aspiring to be high flyers in their educational pursuits.

Chinyere Obi-Abasi's The Loyal Queen

This is the story of love, service, discipline and loyalty. In this story, King Ochefu loves his first wife, Ochugo, so much that he could sacrifice anything for her. Ochugo could not have a child and persuaded King Ochefu to marry more wives who could give him an heir to the throne. Ochugo's role of ensuring unity in the palace, unlike the quarrelsome, self-centred four other wives of the King, endeared her to her husband as a sterling example of what an ideal woman should be. Ochugo becomes ill and is discerned that she will not survive it.

The King cannot fathom how he will live without Ochugo. Ochugo then suggests sending three of the four other wives away so the King can live with only one wife. This is the last task of Queen Ochugo. The follies of three of the wives become evident and they are exposed. The least expected is to be the only woman for the King. Other unsuccessful wives are full of regrets of their misdeeds.

The Loyal Queen is traditional literature. It exposes the cultural aspects of Igboland in the eastern part of Nigeria. The text has no trappings of modernity. To the Igbo child, it reveals aspects of their culture, while to other Nigerian children, it familiarises them with the rich culture of Nigeria.

Femi Fatodimu's Magic to Pass Exams

The story emphasises that hard work is the only panacea for success in education. It emphasises that nobody can triumph in education if effective reading and seriousness with studies are engaged. Junior Ekundayo, who is initially a perpetual failure of examinations, repeats Basic 4 and fails again. His parents win scholarships to study in Scotland for two years. Junior is to live with his grandparents for the period as the scholarship does not cover children.

At the departure of his parents, Junior moves to the village to start a new life. Dele and Uche, his new village friends help him to adjust to village life. His visit with his grandfather to the village magician for a charm to pass examinations led to the discovery of

the fact that regular reading and hard work are the magic to passing examinations. In the end, Junior leads his class in the terminal examination.

Magic to Pass Exam is a contemporary story set in rural areas centred on education success. The story tells readers there is no magic to passing an examination except hard work. Every child needs to understand this to progress in their examinations.

Chinelo Ifezulike's the Costly Mistake

This is a lesson of the proverb; pride goes before a fall. It also has the theme of the consequence of bad influence. Daniel is a source of pride to his teachers and his family due to his excellent performance at school. Unfortunately, he becomes distracted by the bad influence of friends. Daniel can no longer maintain the excellent performance and enviable culture he was known for. He now lives a riotous life.

At the final certificate examination, he is involved in examination malpractice which results in the seizure of his results and those of his cohorts. In the end, Daniel realises that he has made a costly mistake in his life by yielding to the bad influence of his friends. He becomes a bus conductor.

The Costly Mistake is a contemporary story that focuses on education failure and its eventual outcome. Most contemporary children's stories deal with the theme of education, which indicates that education is an important aspect of contemporary Nigerian society. Authors are, therefore, using books as a corrective measure to redirect education positively.

Audu Godfrey Eche's Every Choice has a Prize

This is a story of crimes and punishment. Enayi recounts her mischievous ordeals, wickedness, bad habits and disappointments. Her unbecoming adversely affects her siblings who are constantly punished for what they did not do wrong. Enayi narrates all the wrong choices she has made in her quest through childhood and how she receives punishments for her misadventures. The arrival of her uncle, Jerry, in their house, where he is to stay during his mandatory one-year Youth Service Corps after his university education, reveals another side of bad habits and mischief, which instils fear in Enayi and

leads her to drop all her bad habits and turn a new leaf.

This story is set in Ibadan, a contemporary urban city in Nigeria. Its themes include crime and punishment, repentance, bad habits, and peer influence. It is an instance of how storytelling could be used as a therapy to solve the problem of bad habits.

Research Question Two: What is the subject-matter and the categorisations of each of the 15 selected children's literature?

Themes of didactics peculiar to the traditional storytelling culture are the major themes of all the selected children's literature. The analysis of the major themes in the selected texts is contained in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Major themes of the Selected Children's literature

Major Theme	Number of Texts	Percentage
punishment	11	61.1
education	7	38.9
Reward	6	33.3
hard work	5	27.8
bad habits	4	22.2
disobedience	4	22.2
migration	3	16.7
triumph of good	3	16.7
bad influence	2	11.1
discipline	2	11.1
Love	2	11.1
stubbornness	2	11.1
acceptance	1	5.6
patience	1	5.6
Loyalty	1	5.6

The theme with the highest frequency among the major themes in the texts is punishment for vices, with 11 of the 18 texts dwelling on it as their major theme, which constitutes 61.1%. This is followed by education. Seven of the 18 texts in this study have education as their major theme, which constitutes 38.9% of the entire works. This is followed by themes of reward for virtues, which runs through six texts (33.3%). The themes of reward (33.3%), hard work (27.8), bad habit, and disobedience are each

found in four of the texts, which constitute 22.2% of all the works. The themes of migration (rural-urban and urban-rural) and triumph of good (13.3%) are explored in three texts each (16.7%). Other themes that are found in the selected texts are: bad influence, discipline, love and stubbornness (11.1% each). However, loyalty, patience and acceptance (5.6%) are each found as themes in only one of the texts.

Research Question Three: How appropriate are the themes of the children's storybooks to the cultural and social adjustment to society's expected norms and values?

In a nutshell, all the themes are didactic and pedagogical. This is in consonance with the focus of the traditional oral culture of storytelling whereby literature is meant to teach, correct, encourage and caution (Igudia & Ogunsina, 2015). Of the data presented, it is evident that punishment, which is the main weapon for correction in the African traditional culture, dominates the texts, with 61.1% of the texts basing their themes on it.

Education is another theme that prominently in children's literature due to its value to society and the need to encourage children to acquire education. Reward for virtue is another prominent feature of the traditional culture of didactics in storytelling which has great influence in the works of Nigerian authors of children's literature. In the traditional culture, the inexplicable struggle between good and bad virtues has always led to the reward for good and punishment for bad virtues. This is the reason themes of reward and punishment are often found in modern children's literature.

V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

All the storybooks selected for this study have varying themes. However, their themes are didactic and pedagogical. They are effective in inculcating the right attitude and values in children. The storylines will surely arouse children's reading interest. They are also relevant to the children's context of situation and culture. This is in tandem with the focus of the traditional oral culture of storytelling, whereby literature is meant to teach, correct, encourage and caution (Igudia, 2018b). This is not surprising as

most Nigerian authors of children's literature borrow from oral tradition.

The major themes of children's literature in Nigeria are crime and punishment, the value of education, reward for hard work and good virtue, bad habits and their consequences, and disobedience and its aftermath (Igudia, 2018c). The conflict between good and evil is the focus of all the stories in them all, good triumphed over evil. This conflict between good and evil is the force that keeps the society going. Every human community strives to place the good well above the evil to keep the community in a state of cohesion. Being new in society, children are susceptible to evil forces as they are easily accessible to the human psyche. Hence, storybooks help to build the character of children.

The study assumed that the themes of selected texts are relevant to the contemporary Nigerian social context. Findings have shown that all the storybooks under investigation in this study have taken into cognisance the cultural milieu of the readers, and the themes are appropriate for the target audiences.

It has been hinted that Nigeria is the cultural milieu within which the various texts were written. The themes are didactic, which makes them suitable for the target audiences. This is in line with the claims of Oberstein (1996), Huck (2001), Chapleau (2004), Nodelman (2008), Jarrar (2010), and Igudia and Ogunsina (2015) that most works of children's literature are inherently conservative and didactic in approach to instil proper behaviour in children.

The study assumed that the selected texts were appropriate for the education of the target audience. The appropriateness of the themes of the stories stems from their relevance to the education of Nigerian children in terms of values relevant to their cultural and social adjustment to the expected norms and values of society.

VI. CONCLUSION

Contemporary Nigerian children's literature are appropriate for the target audience in themes and settings. However, there is heavy reliance on morality and oral tradition in the Nigerian children's literature.

Oral tradition and morality have always been the focus of children's literature right from inception of written literature. This is over-flogged. There is need to diversify into contemporary issues by focussing on suitability and enjoyment. Contemporary issues should also be focussed on. This will make the stories relevant to present day realities.

RECOMMENDATION

From the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. More literary texts should be written by Nigerian authors along contemporary issues in the society so as to make their work relevant to the present realities of Nigeria.
2. Authors of children's books should de-emphasise heavy reliance on oral tradition and emphasise other aspects such as suitability, enjoyment and contemporary themes so as to foster engagement and promote good reading culture among children.
3. The appropriateness of themes should take into cognisance the contemporary cultural of the society and social adjustment to society's expected norms and values.

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