

# TEACHING CHILDREN PHILOSOPHY THROUGH AFRICAN FOLKTALES

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper critically discusses the need for teaching philosophy to children by using African Folktales. Though philosophy is a college or tertiary-based subject which is taught to adult students alone in almost all the country in the world. The problem this has created is that at the tertiary level the students have missed out on the critical skill sets that are necessary for a robust engagement with abstract philosophical texts. Thus, many students find philosophy to be difficult and dry. Nevertheless, the issue is not philosophy per se but the way it is being taught at the tertiary level without a foundational exposure at the primary and secondary levels. Therefore, this paper adopts the use of folktale as a mechanism through which philosophy can be implanted on the younger generation at the primary and secondary levels of the educational system, which will equip the children with higher-order thinking, questioning, and enquiring skills. Children will be more tolerant, able to respect other people's opinions and values, and be broad-minded, not intolerant or narrow-minded as it is commonly found in most urbanized African societies. The paper employs the method of critical analysis.*

**Keywords:** Philosophy, critical thinking, Children, African folktales

## INTRODUCTION

Philosophy for children (P4C) or philosophy with children (PWC) is an important movement that started in United States of America by Mathew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp. In 1974 Lipman and sharp established institute for the advancement of philosophy for children (IAPC) at Montclair University, United State. Since then P4C is practiced, debated, researched and recreated in more than sixty countries around the world (Rollins, Haynes and Marris, 2017). It has taken up in Nurseries, kindergartens, secular and religious schools, universities and other educational institutes.

Philosophy as an academic discipline and a way of life is fundamentally aim at inculcating into people the skills and the ability to think rational, creatively and to contemplate on complex issues that are germane to human existence. Though philosophy have many branches that are

interested in specific burning questions, nonetheless, every branches of philosophy is guided by the tools of logic. Logic guides human reasoning which makes ideas intelligible for learned men and women. As a branch of philosophy, logic shapes argument and ensure that it is in line with sound reasoning. Hence, Children as natural born philosophers are born with the instinct and propensity to question and never stop questioning until they get answers. This paper seeks to answer these questions: can children learn philosophy? What possible ways can philosophy which seems abstract be taught to children in their early education?

The above questions are very important because students only engage with philosophy at the tertiary level without any previous knowledge of the subject-matter and the basic skill sets that the learner need to navigate his/her way in the discipline. Moreover, philosophy is a foundational subject that finds applicability in virtually all other areas of human knowledge. More so, at the General Studies level of Nigerian Educational system, philosophy was included to facilitate the values of logical and precise reasoning in students but students find it difficult to grasp the fundamentals of the subject even after passing the course *Philosophy and Logic*. Perhaps the problem stems from lack of foundational preliminary knowledge of philosophy at students' early education. This is what this paper seeks to beam searchlight on.

From antiquity till date, great philosophers and sages are in continuous search for the best way to teach philosophy within their traditions. Socrates who is regarded as the father of western philosophy introduced the dialectical methods, which involve questions and answers between two interlocutors in a dialogical manner. Plato formalize this method in his academy and Aristotle adopted the peripatetic method in his Lyceum. The assumption behind this method is that philosophy is a serious discipline made only for the so-called “mature minds”, thus it is for adult alone. Nevertheless, this paper will argue the claim that Folktale as a heritage of almost every human society (Bukar, 2018; 44) is a vital means through which societal philosophies are inculcated on the young ones. Therefore, to achieve the above task, the paper will be divided into four sections. Section one will look at the relevance of philosophy as a distinctive subject. In section two reasons for teaching philosophy to children will be discussed. Section three will discuss folktales in African Tradition, while section four will discuss the teaching of philosophy through folktales.

### **RELEVANCE OF PHILOSOPHY AS AN ACADEMIC SUBJECT**

Essentially, philosophy like every other core curriculum or subject is tailored in the direction of the impartation of expertise, enhancement of cognitive abilities, and also the formation of the mindset and behavior of people who are learning about it. Though its contribution to the health and wellness and also advancement of society is not directly evident like other technical subjects, its crucial contribution to society is indisputable. According to Adesola (1981), philosophers are like gadflies that urge society to evaluate and to take an important consideration on itself, to re-examine itself in terms of its worth and objectives, which aids society to transcend its dogmatism, uncritical practices, and collective ignorance. This leads society on the pathway of self-criticism and self-discipline. Similarly, Nwala (1981) believes that philosophers are geared up with the intellectual resources for the vital examination of things, issues as well as problems. Therefore, the Characteristic of training in philosophy is to

make the student a theorist, practitioner, and a deep thinker, which will certainly make him/her a noble influencer of societal values. Philosophy makes its contribution to the educational enterprise with its demands on intellectual clarity. Education and learning in philosophy involves familiarization with significant figures and growths in the history of philosophy, discovering current techniques and approved response to thoughtful questions, and also discovering crucial, expository, and also evaluative skills that, in the general scheme of things, might be taken into consideration to be of greatest worth.

Much of what is learned in philosophy can be used in basically any kind of venture. This is both since philosophy touches on a lot of topics and, especially, since most of its approaches can be utilized in any type of field of study. The research or study of philosophy helps us to enhance our capability to fix issues, our interaction skills, our persuasive powers, and our writing abilities. Below is a summary of just how philosophy helps us establish these different important abilities.

**General Problem-solving Abilities:** The research or study of philosophy boosts a person's problem-solving abilities. It helps us to analyze principles, meanings, disagreements, and troubles. It adds to our capability to organize ideas as well as concerns, manage concerns of value, and also remove what is necessary from big amounts of information. It aids us, on the one hand, to differentiate, fine and refined distinctions between views as well as, on the other hand, to find common ground in between opposing positions. It additionally aids us to synthesize a selection of sights or viewpoints right into one unified whole.

**Communication Abilities:** Philosophy adds distinctively to the development of expressive and communicative powers. It gives several of the basic tools of self-expression - for instance, abilities in providing concepts with well-constructed, organized disagreements - that other areas either do not use or utilize less thoroughly. Philosophy assists us to share what is distinct in our insights, it boosts our capacity to clarify difficult problems, and it helps us to remove uncertainties and ambiguity from our writing and speech.

**Persuasive Powers:** Philosophy supplies training in the building and construction of clear formulations, excellent debates, and also suitable instances. It, thus, helps us to establish our ability to be convincing. We find out to construct as well as protect our own views, to value completing contexts, as well as to show powerfully why we consider our own insights preferable to choices. These capabilities can be created not just with reading and writing in philosophy, but likewise, with the thoughtful dialogue, both within and outside the classroom, that is necessary for complete thoughtful education and learning.

**Writing Abilities:** writing is taught intensively in numerous philosophy courses, and numerous routinely appointed thoughtful texts are also exceptional as literary essays. Philosophy instructs interpretive writing through its examination of difficult texts, creative writing via emphasis on fairness to different positions, argumentative composing with creating students' capability to develop their very own views, and also descriptive composing through a detailed portrayal of concrete instances. Concrete instances serve as the supports to which generalizations must be linked. Framework and also method, then, are highlighted in thoughtful writing. Creativity is also urged, and students are normally prompted to utilize their

creative imagination to establish their own ideas.

The basic uses of philosophy just described are clearly of great scholastic value. It should be clear that the study of philosophy has innate incentives as a limitless pursuit for understanding essential, challenging problems. However, philosophy has further made use of in growing education, both in college and also in the many tasks, specialist as well as personal, which follow college graduation. Two of these additional uses are defined below.

**Understanding Other Disciplines:** philosophy is crucial for our capability to understand various other techniques. Several crucial questions concerning a discipline, such as the nature of its ideas as well as its relationship to other techniques, are thoughtful in nature. Philosophy of science, as an example, is required to supplement the understanding of the all-natural as well as social scientific researches that derives from scientific work itself. Philosophy of literary works as well as the philosophy of history are of similar worth in recognizing the liberal arts, and philosophy of art (aesthetic appeals) is necessary for recognizing both the aesthetic as well as the executing arts. Philosophy is, in addition, crucial in evaluating the numerous criteria of evidence utilized by other disciplines. Because all areas of understanding utilize thinking as well as should establish requirements of evidence, logic, as well as epistemology, have a basic bearing on all these areas.

**Development of Techniques of Research as well as Analysis:** Still another worth of philosophy in education and learning is its contribution to our ability to frame hypotheses, to do research, as well as to put issues in a manageable form. Thoughtful reasoning strongly emphasizes the clear formulation of suggestions and also problems, an option of appropriate information, and also unbiased approaches for analyzing suggestions and also proposals. It also emphasizes the growth of a sense of the new directions recommended by brand-new hypotheses as well as inquiries one encounters while studying. Philosophers regularly build on both the successes as well as failings of their precursors. A person with philosophical training can conveniently learn to do the very same in any field.

Among things that individuals educated in philosophy can do a lot of things. They can do a study on a selection of subjects. They can get information and arrange it. They can write and speak clearly and also successfully. They can connect well, generally both orally and also in writing. They can produce concepts on many different kinds of problems. They can formulate as well as resolve issues. They can evoke hidden assumptions as well as verbalize forgotten alternatives. They can persuade people to take strange insights or novel options seriously. They can summarize difficult problems without undue simplification. They can integrate varied data and also construct beneficial examples. They can differentiate refined distinctions without ignoring resemblances. They can additionally adapt to change, a capability of growing value in the light of fast advancements in many fields. As well as well-educated philosophers can normally educate what they understand to others. This capacity is especially valuable at a time when training and also re-training are so often required by fast technical adjustments.

These capacities are quite general, yet they bear directly on the series of careers for which philosophers are prepared. Philosophers have the abilities required for a substantial series of both academic and non-academic tasks. The kind of basic education and learning which

philosophical training supplies is incomparably helpful in some major aspects of basically any type of occupation.

### WHY TEACH CHILDREN PHILOSOPHY?

No wonder so many by just hearing the word “philosophy” might object to the idea of teaching children such subject/skill, others might hesitate by saying that children are incapable to think philosophically, however in both arguments there is a clear cut misunderstanding and under estimation of philosophy and children. First, it is expedient to know that by saying P4C nobody is going to be mentioning names like Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Bertrand Russell, Kierkegaard or Ludwig Wittgenstein or even idealism, materialism, determinism, free will, metaphysics or epistemology, the main focus of the idea is to engage children in philosophical discussion. Children will be guided by a facilitator on discussing and debating ideas uprooted from a folktale. However, it is good to remember that children raise philosophical questions since their childhood, like: “Where did the dead go when they die?” “Why is the time only twelve hours?” “When dad tell me to be good, what does he mean?” “Are spirits real?” “Why are some people rich and others poor?” “What will happen after death?” “Who is God?” “Who create God?”

All these are philosophical questions that children often ask their parents or other elders who they think have answers to these questions. Therefore, to say that philosophy is beyond children ability is a serious under estimation of the child's intellect. Moreover, children are often discouraged from raising these questions and at times strictly warned. Thus, fear will be inculcated in them and desire to know, enquire, wonder, research, ask investigate, examine, question, and probe will be quenched from their hearts and children will become dormant, inactive, indolent and quiescent. Engaging children in rigorous philosophical inquiry will obviously help them strengthen their own capacity to respond to beckoning alternatives, attend to complex issues with ease, correct their habits of thought and action through sustained ethical enquiry.

P4C or PwC if introduced to young growing children will help them in respecting one another's opinions and values, divergent and opposing issues will be addressed through dialogue with utmost respect to one's opinions and values. This will foster empathy and harmony in a diverse society. P4C will help to encourage reasoning and argumentative skills. Through P4C children can be taught the rules and fallacies of logic like *ad hominem* and *ignorantium*, hasty generalization, bandwagon, fallacy, etc. Which will guide them in presenting logical arguments. The essence of inculcating these skills on the child's mind at an early age is that if he/she begins to make use of them in his day to day arguments, he/she will stick to them even when he/she grows up, and they will undoubtedly be of great help to him/her even in other studies or subject areas. As we have stated philosophical skills can be applied to science subjects, art subjects and even trade subjects because it provides the basic tools of argument in every academic subject/discipline. Essentially, academic is all about advancing, criticizing and strengthening arguments (ideas) which are the building-blocks of our knowledge architecture about the physical world, human society and ultimate destiny (Sowell, 2011).

One positive value about P4C is that, it is an approach to teaching and learning philosophy that

will yields results in other fields. P4C for example can be applied in history, students will learn to question historical documents and investigate further to confirm or contradict it. Students of language will learn to question ideas, theories and opinions to produce theirs, students of sciences will be able to uncover that scientific facts are subject to criticism, they will be able to know that they also have the capability to initiate and produce their own ideas, theories or opinions and that world re-known scientists are fallible.

### **FOLKTALES IN AFRICAN TRADITION**

Folktales is a conflation of two words, folk (people/community) and tale (story or narrative). It is the most popular form of oral literature in Africa (Mirabeau, 2018). Folktale in African tradition is oral prose transferred from generation to generation, however, one of the standing characteristic of folktale is its focus on code of conduct, ethics and morality. In many societies in Africa during the night elders narrate such stories to younger ones. Most stories contain explanation of bravery, sincerity, wisdom, generosity etc. in other words they are aimed at training the young on a societal ethical guiding principle and norms and values that are accepted in the society. Bukar Usman (2018) submits that folktales play four fundamental roles in a society. They promote a sense of community, impart positive common value, teaches ethical and practical lessons and entertain the audience. This position of Usman implies that folktales are not mere legendary stories but they are medium of teaching the next generation the values, philosophies and norms of the society, in order to foster a healthy society for all.

An additional name for folktales is folk literature. Folk literature started in the oral traditions as well as it lends itself quickly to informing and retelling of epic stories, as well as it has for centuries being the delight of youngsters and adults, the same still takes place today. Oral tradition, otherwise referred to as oral literature, is given by word of mouth from one generation to another. It is therefore reproduced verbatim from memory throughout the centuries. They are common folk stories thus no one can claim individual authorship or originality. Oladeji (1997) submits that "Oral literature refers to that large body of poetry, plays, stories which are not jotted down however form the basis of technique as well as legend throughout the globe" (p. 34). It could not be much from the reality, as a result, to state that oral literature emanated from the inborn routine of our predecessors to tell tales as well as express in words some unique facets of human experience and their cumulative knowledge. Because the principles of this branch of literature, the composition as well as efficiency happen at the same time. Adejumo (2009) opines that the oral literature of the Yorùbá of south-western Nigeria is fundamentally oral from inception. It was the introduction of Western culture/Western education that brought about the written tradition. With the threat of endangerment of the Yorùbá language in addition to the destruction of the Yoruba aboriginal society, as a result of cultural integration, literary works is often overlooked and also disregarded in the collection, research, as well as evaluation as a part of human venture. Oral literature necessarily depends on a performer who develops it, in words, on a details event, contrasted to written kind as a piece of work can be said to have an independent as well as substantial presence. A great author is doing oral literature has various aesthetic resources at his beck as well as call. Being in person with his public, he has a great deal of advantages to improve the impact of his story. He utilizes motions, expressions, and occasionally mimicry. Dramatic body movements expressed in type of dancing, which the audience frequently joins,

frequently come with the visual aspect. According to Cheung (2001), making use of popular culture (which s/he defined to consist of 'TV, special-effect flicks, very promoting songs, gossip magazines, comics, style, computer games as well as the Internet' p. 56), to encourage a team of secondary school trainees in Hong Kong to learn English. The very same can be applied to the teaching of philosophy in both pre-primary, and secondary schools. Cheung (2001) uncovers that the pupils did much better with using pop culture. This implies that acknowledging private students' histories causes much better instructional outcomes. Based upon the finding, Cheung (2001) recommended that language teaching must be made to benefit from pop culture. The storyteller typically involves his audience straight as a type of stimulation and energetic participation to participate the carollers of songs, which he introduces into his narrative. The audience is carried along to perform. These top qualities mark the difference between oral and written literature. Because the origin of our communal folklore has actually been traced and related to oral literature, it concerns take a look at the composition of oral literature. Oral literature is seen by Africans as the work of communal consciousness as well as team authorship as opposed to the inspiration of individual artists. In this century, oral literature is viewed as a powerful weapon not only to forge national unity, however, for the purpose of national development.

Educationally, oral literature has worked as a solid device for national growth. One of its educative functions is seen in paying attention to folktales or puzzles is where one is anticipated to learn, in order, to transform one's lack of confidence and good character in society. A normal character in many Yoruba as well as Igbo Mythology is the tortoise (Ijapa in Yoruba and also 'nibe in Igbo). He is normally provided as a smart, greedy, and also unfaithful personality who experiences sufferings at the end of his mischief. Several tales are informed of this smart pet. At once he took his in-law's pottage and wound up shedding the hair on his head. He also craftily took the Elephant slave by making believe to be leading the Elephant to his (the Elephant's) instalment as king. The Elephant later fell under a hole hidden under the king's throne. Ijapa also deceived the Itare into running a race versus him, which he won through his craftiness. Several young people have actually been educated on the value of such virtues as persistence and also sincerity. Oral literature must after that be seen as a vital instrument.

Broadly talking, Folktales are myth-logical (myth with logic) stories that are coded with philosophical knowledge that can be made explicit via hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the art of analysis of classical literary works (in the African situation oral literature). In African tradition, folktales are property of the community that is protected and transmitted from one generation to the following. It is an ancient technique of imparting understanding, developing character in youngsters, and also magnifying the creative imagination of kids to think seriously on their own. Folktales in African tradition offer an academic function in the sense that, it is primarily geared in the direction of sharing the rich stock of expertise within an African community. Folktales are at the heart of African communal life because it is traditional to find conventional African community celebrations around the village square throughout the full moon to hear stories of terrific lessons that are required to create communal life as well as well-being. This might not be possible in urbanized African communities yet those folktales can be the centrepiece of a durable education that philosophy can give. Hence,

folktales are a meeting point of African philosophy and also African Oral Literature.

Therefore, the curriculum of teaching youngsters philosophy can be enhanced by the use of the storyteller's art. The repertoire of the author must not be neglected. Tales of adventure can expand from a great system of study in philosophy for kids. Amazing stories from the very early Africans can assist deepen the understanding of just how they lived and also worked which will provide the kid an idea of his/her people. The location of the good storyteller in the educational program lacks par informs his stories making use of renowned figures in experiences, which books do not use. Individual experiences or experiences of one's family are a good resource of materials for stories. In African custom, this has been the method from time immemorial directly linked to our forefathers.

### TEACHING PHILOSOPHY THROUGH FOLKTALE

Philosophy as mentioned earlier encourage children to think for themselves, at the same to think with others. It is a matter of reflecting on issues or ideas and discussing these ideas with others. This paper is an attempt to motivate the teaching of philosophy to the young generation through custom, in order to achieve two aims: firstly, children will be able to grow as critical thinkers and problem solvers, secondly, folktale which is becoming “dying custom” in most societies will be revived, appreciated and preserved in a formal and reasonable way.

P4C as Wartenberg (2009) claim should be learner-centered teaching. Children should be given the chance to pursue their natural inclination for philosophy under the moon, even though children are natural born philosophers, they do not have the temerity to discuss issues with their peers, as such it is the duty of the teacher/facilitator to train them on that. The facilitator should co-ordinate the children by making sure that nobody is left out of the discussion, he raises the philosophical question and ask the students to engage in a philosophical debate, whenever the rule of debate is violated he inform them that a fault or fallacy has been committed and that the faultier should correct the fallacy and argue in line with logical rules. As Wartenberg (2009) argue that the fundamental assumption of learner-centered teaching is that the student, no less than the human mind itself, is not simply a *tabula rasa* upon which anything a teacher want can be inscribed.

Moreover, one of the most important point to elaborate before proceeding is, what is a philosophical question? Philosophical question as Wartenberg (2009) and Russell (1980) claim “they are those questions that cannot be answered empirically and no specific discipline has been developed that is capable of providing an answer to it”. For example, questions like, why does rain fall? Why is the sky blue? What cause earthquake? What are the symptoms of malaria? Are all not philosophical questions, because different disciplines and scientific research had provided the answer to them, on the other hand questions like, what is good? What is beauty? What happen after we die? Is it possible to do nothing? Is there life after death? Why is there something rather than nothing? Do life have any ultimate meaning? What is the meaning of life? Is attaining knowledge possible? e.t.c. Are all philosophical questions. Therefore, it is the duty of the facilitator to make sure that only philosophical questions are raised, he/she should also ensure that rules of doing philosophy are followed, children should be encouraged and trained to be categorical when expressing their views; as highlighted by

Wartenberg (1986, p.33):

- a. A child state his position on an issue by answering a question that has been asked in a clear manner after taking time to think.
- b. Figure out if you agree or disagree with what has been said.
- c. Present a real example of the abstract issue being discussed.
- d. Present a counter example to a claim that has been proposed.
- e. Put forward a revised version of a claim in light of criticism.
- f. Support your position with reason.

Now we are going to give few examples of folktales across different Nigerian cultures and raise the possible philosophical question from the folktales.

### **THE TALE OF THE KING, THE SPIDER AND THE TORTOISE**

Once upon a time, there was a very rich king. He had two servants, a spider and a tortoise. The spider was very committed to the service of the king, unlike the tortoise who always stole from the king's treasury, the spider was honest and never took anything the king didn't give to it. The king was aware that the tortoise was always stealing from his treasury, but pretended he didn't know. All he did was to ensure that he kept very important things away from the sight of the tortoise. Overtime, the king became old and was about to die. He handed all his property to the spider but gave nothing to the tortoise. Tortoise couldn't question the king's action as it realised that the king knew that it was always stealing from his treasury (Cited in Usman, 2018, p.103).

After reading or narrating the tale to children, the facilitator will ask the children what moral lesson is the tale teaching us, after they answered, now proceed to raising the philosophical question;

- (1) What is morality?
- (2) What is honesty?
- (3) If the children think the spider is honest, try to make them bring up one or two criteria for an action being honest.
- (4) Do you think not stealing somebody's property make you honest? Why or why not?
- (5) Can you be honest and still be a bad person and can you be dishonest and still a good person?

### **THE TALE OF THE HUNTER AND ANTELOPE**

A hunter loved setting traps for wild animal but had never caught an antelope. So, he took time out to observe the movement of antelopes. He found out that they grazed only on wet grassland. So, when he thought he had learned enough about antelopes, he set an antelope trap. The next day, he saw that the bait had been taken away but the trap caught nothing. He then decided to set another trap, next to the first one. At last, an antelope was caught, one leg stuck in the first and another leg stuck in the second trap. The hunter was overjoyed and went home to get a cutlass with which he was going to cut off the poor antelope's delicate head.

When he returned, just before he could strike the agile antelope with his weapon, it has loosened the rope tying up his two legs in both traps and ran away.

Philosophical Questions:

- (1) Do you think it is right to set trap for animals.

- (2) Do animals have rights?
- (3) Is it right to retaliate evil with evil.

## CONCLUSION

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is trend in the teaching and learning of philosophy that needs to be encourage within and beyond Africa. Though it has it root in the west but it has positive values that can be beneficial to Africa. The debate on how and why should philosophy be taught to children have been answer within the context of this paper. The paper identifies African folktales as the mediums to impact the knowledge, skills and attitude that philosophy is known. This means that folktales are myth-logical narratives that can serves a didactic purpose and it will be more intone with the level of the cognitive development of the child.

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