

## Perception Of Primary School Teachers On The Use Of Oral Literature

**E. P. Obiweluo**

### Abstract

The study examined the perception of primary school teachers on the use of oral literature. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Two research questions guided the study. Seventy-seven [77] primary school teachers in Nsukka Education Authority were used for the study. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The findings of the study revealed that teachers appreciated the educational value of oral literature. However, they indicated that some of them have negative undertones. Based on the findings of the study some recommendations were made.

### Introduction

Literature is as old as man is. It is a creative writing, which capture the fictionalized life, culture, and practices of a people. Goetz (2006) defines literature as a body of writing, by a people or peoples using the same language. Literature could be written or oral. Initially, adults had literature materials written exclusively for their consumption. However, along the line, it was found that some of the literary materials were good for children's reading and enjoyment.

Children's literature is a body of writing specially designed for children's pleasure and enjoyment in order to capture their interest in reading. According to Encarta (2008), children's literature is writings designed to appeal to children either to be read to them or by themselves. These include fiction, poetry, biography, and history. Children's literature also includes riddles, precepts, fables, legends, myth, folk poem and folktales based on spoken tradition.

Oral literature evolved from oral tradition, and was composed by illiterate raconteurs and transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to another. It is a collection of oral materials of high quality and was composed verbally through creative use of imagination by an artist in non-literate societies. Mbunda (2006) defines oral literature as a verbal art of essentially non-literate societies composed extemporaneously before a traditional audience and transmitted from one generation to another by word of mouth. Oral

literature has three branches technically referred to as genres. These include prose, drama, and poetry.

Prose is a literary form of language expressed in ordinary narrative. For instance, folktales are narratives thought out by unknown individuals and handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Folktales usually deal with the imaginary world set in the remote past. The tricksters, quest heroes, helpers or donors are the common characters in the narrative, which embellish the story. Folktales educate children by acting as a vehicle for cultural propagation and provide an enjoyable escape from reality (Mbunda, 2006). This kind of oral literature presents materials in a direct and simple style that appeal to children. Children enjoy actions exhibited by individuals, colourful characters and humour. Folktales deal with legends, customs, superstitions and beliefs of ordinary people.

Myths are fruitful accounts of what happened in the past. They were embodiment of dogma and were accepted on faith (Babalola, 2002). Myths were intended to find answers on basic questions about the world. For myths, the stories were filled with fantastic adventures, and they provide children insight into other cultures. Tongue twisters and riddles are good aspects through which children learn language and culture of their people. They enhance the stimulation of children's cognition. Proverbs are words of wisdom and the love of every race. They are traditional virtues and regarded as the 'oil', which lubricates native language.

Poetry is another form of oral literature. These are traditional poems handed down from generation to generation. It is an art, which uses both speech and song to reveal the realities that the senses record (Babette in Mbunda, 2006). Nursery rhymes provide many children with the first contact with singing and recitation of poems. The rhymes are short, simple poems that are one of the oldest forms of children's literature. Adults entertain children and children entertain themselves by reciting the rhymes. Older children delight in many poems written especially for them. Children see and feel the world around them through descriptions in poetry.

Dramatic performance is another aspect of oral literature. They are usually traditional demonstrations that are often highly dramatic and picturesque in form. These traditional performances take place during festivals and ritual celebrations. They are highly colourful and entertaining. Such spectacular shows are for people to see.

Oral literature is the most indigenous way of educating children. Evidence reveals that oral literature is essential because of its significant influence in the life of children. For instance, Babalola (2002), states that folklore provides a unique and invaluable insight into the beliefs, customs, values and aspirations of the traditional society. Folklores serve as a means of expressing social approval and disapproval. Akinyemi (2003) opined that oral literature serves as the traditional form of educating children in the native society. It thus employs oral literary techniques such as tongue twisters, lullabies, riddles puzzles, songs, games, poetry and folktale. These have potentials to educate and influence the thinking of children. From the foregoing, oral literature appears to be of significant value in the life of children.

The main thrust of this study is to examine the perception of primary school teachers on the use of oral literature. Primary education is a springboard from which other levels of education take off. Primary education as referred to in the National Policy of Education (2004) is the education given in an institution for children aged six to eleven years. It determines the success or failure of the whole system. Primary school teachers are professionally trained individuals who teach children in the above stated institution. Hence, the perception of primary school teachers regarding oral literature determines, largely, the frequency of its use in the primary school. Teachers are solely responsible for imparting the subject matter on the learner. The perception of teachers in this regard is of paramount importance. In the words of Umeano (2010), perception is the process in which people's sensory experiences are organized and made meaningful.

Some people appear not to have fully perceived the profound educational value of the use of oral literature for children. In addition, even with the overwhelm importance of oral literature; it appears there is no provision made for it as a subject in the school system. This appears to result to a relative lack of interest in the use of oral literature. In same vein, Akinyemi (2003) observed that little or no attention is paid to the educational values of oral literature usually referred to as 'minor genres'. Some people appear to see it as possessing only crude and uninteresting forms not worthy for children's literary learning. Finnegan (1970) stated that people regard oral literature as having very uneven quality and their usefulness depends on knowledge of the theoretical preconceptions of the collector. People believe it consists mainly of rather childish stories. The author further stated that scholars

regarded oral literature as primitive, naïve, mindless and verbatim repetition that were handed down from one generation to another. Other people show lack of interest because illiterate raconteurs in non-literate societies composed them. In addition, the idea of magic and totemism variously dominated oral literature. This appears to dilute or challenge children's belief in the Almighty God. It is against this background that this study seeks to find out the perception of primary school teachers on the use of oral literature in teaching and learning process.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the teachers' perceptions in the use of oral literature in primary school?
2. To what extent do primary school teachers use oral literature in the teaching and learning process?

### **Methods**

The design the study is a descriptive survey. It examined the perception of the use of oral literature by primary school teachers in Nsukka Local Education Authority of Enugu state. The population consisted of all the primary schools teachers in Nsukka Education Authority. The sample for the study consisted of seventy-seven teachers from the schools selected sampled in Nsukka. Stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the teachers from their schools.

The instrument for data collection was a 28-item questionnaire structured on two different four-point rating scales organized in two sections in accordance with the research questions. Section A – sought information on the perception of primary school teachers on the use of oral literature while section B – sought information on the primary school teachers' use of oral literature in teaching and learning process. Each item was assigned a four-point response scale of Strongly Agree – (SA), Agree – (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D) and Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE) with a corresponding value of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Three experts validated the instrument: one each in Childhood Education, Special Education and Library and Information Technology, respectively. In modifying the instrument, the

validators' comments and suggestions were used. The modified questionnaire was trial tested and computed using Cronbach alpha. The reliability coefficients obtained were 0.89 and 0.86, respectively. The researcher administered the instrument to the respondents with the help of research assistants. On-the-spot collection was made to ensure a high return.

Data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean (X) and standard deviation (SD). A mean of 2.50 and above indicates the benchmark for acceptance while rejection is any mean score below 2.50.

## Results

**Table 1: Mean rating on the perception of teachers in the use of oral literature**

| S/N | Item Statement  | Mean | SD   | Decision |
|-----|---|------|------|----------|
| 1   | Tongue twisters and riddles enhance stimulation of children cognition.  | 3.06 | 0.75 | *        |
| 2   | Children learn language through listening to story telling  | 3.36 | 0.79 | *        |
| 3   | Oral literature enhances children's learning of language and expands their vocabulary.                            | 3.36 | 0.76 | *        |
| 4   | Songs, proverbs and riddles enhance children's learning of their own cultural heritage and that of others.        | 3.48 | 0.73 | *        |
| 5   | Oral literature broaden children's horizon by getting them to know other people and what happens in other places. | 3.19 | 0.69 | *        |
| 6   | Oral literature is for the non-literate societies   | 1.92 | 0.91 | D        |
| 7   | Oral literature is savage reliance on the magical power of the word.  | 2.30 | 0.93 | D        |
| 8   | Oral literature creates a leeway for children to believe in the existence of fairy spirits.                       | 3.58 | 0.99 | *        |
| 9   | Oral literature is embedded in the belief in the use of charm and magic powers.                                   | 2.30 | 0.93 | D        |
| 10  | Oral literature may lead children to believe that ancestors reincarnate.  | 2.53 | 1.09 | *        |
| 11  | oral literature dilutes or challenges children's belief in the Almighty God                                       | 3.41 | 1.01 | *        |

|    |   |      |      |   |
|----|---|------|------|---|
| 12 | Oral literature possesses only crude and uninteresting forms not worthy to be used for children's literary learning.  | 2.02 | 0.88 | D |
| 13 | Oral literature possesses vastly more aesthetic, social and personal significance than other literary materials.  | 2.39 | 0.01 | D |
| 14 | Oral literature, in the form of myths and folktale is the most indigenous way of transmitting societal values.  | 3.21 | 0.75 | * |
| 15 | Oral literature is an individual inspired artist.   | 2.70 | 0.93 | * |
| 16 | Oral literature was handed down word for word from the dim bedtime or far back ages.  | 2.73 | 0.89 | * |
| 17 | Oral literature was variously dominated by the idea of magic and by totems.   | 2.36 | 1.07 | D |
| 18 | Games poetry provide avenue for socialization and adaptation; development of desirable qualities such as honesty, emotional control, fair play, leadership and unselfishness. | 3.41 | 0.52 | * |
| 19 | Recitation of poems indirectly trains the children in the art of effective pronunciation of language sound.   | 3.64 | 0.61 | * |

Key: A = Agree

D = Disagree

The result on table 1 showed that the teachers agree on 12 items out of the nineteen (19) items. Items 1, 2, 3,4,5,8,10,14,15,16,18 and 19 were agreed on as being in favour of oral literature while items 6,7,9,11,12,13 and 17 were rejected as being against it. The items were accepted since they have the mean rating of 2.50 and above. The only options that they did not agree with are; that oral literature possesses only crude and uninteresting forms not worthy to be used for children's literary learning and oral literature possesses vastly more aesthetic, social and personal significance than other literary materials. They were rejected since they had mean scores below 2.50 the benchmark for acceptance.

Some of the items that teachers ranked most include; songs, proverbs, among others. Riddles enhance children's learning of their cultural heritage, and that of others; games, poetry provide avenue for socialization and adaptation, development of desirable qualities such as honesty, emotional control, fair, play, leadership and unselfishness, and recitation of poems, and indirectly trains the children in the art of effective pronunciation of language sounds.

**Table 2: Mean responses of primary school teachers on the use of Oral literature in teaching and learning.**

| S/N | Item  | Mean | SD   | D  |
|-----|---|------|------|----|
| 20  | Teachers incorporate tongue twisters and riddles in the teaching and learning of native languages.                            | 3.04 | 0.59 | HE |
| 21  | Teachers create opportunity for competition in the use of songs, proverbs and riddles.  | 3.06 | 0.78 | HE |
| 22  | I employ story telling in delivering lessons to catch children's attention and improve their learning of language.            | 3.19 | 0.84 | HE |
| 23  | I incorporate Myths and folktales in teaching subjects such as social studies.  | 2.83 | 0.92 | HE |
| 24  | Teachers give special preference to Game poetry and recitation of poems by children.  | 2.72 | 0.82 | HE |
| 25  | Teachers modify Oral literature that portrays belief in existence of fairy spirits to disabuse the children's mind from such. | 2.84 | 1.16 | HE |
| 26  | I modify Oral literature that involves the use of charm and magic power to depict God's power and victory over evil.          | 2.84 | 1.16 | HE |
| 27  | Teachers discard Crude and uninteresting forms of oral literature and replace with inspiring ones.                            | 3.12 | 0.96 | HE |
| 28  | Teachers prefer oral literature that build children's faith in God and challenge the devil to others.                         | 3.43 | 0.83 | HE |

Key: HE = 2.50-3.49: High Extent

VHE=3.50-4.00: Very High Extent

Table 2 presents the responses of primary school teachers on the extent of use of oral literature in teaching and learning process. The table shows that primary school teachers use oral literature to a high extent in all the items. This indicated in the mean scores that range from 2.72-3.43.

### **Discussion**

The data on table 1 which showed that perceptions of teachers' in the use of oral literature indicates that the teachers perceive them as good for children due to their educational value. This is in line with the findings of Dike (1991) which stated that through story telling children attune their ears to the flow of language, the imagery of words, the rhythm of speech and patterns of reading long before they are capable of meeting these through reading print of poetry, folklores and others, which have positive educational influence on children. For the author, poems indirectly train children in the art of effective pronunciation of language sounds.

The data on the extent of use of oral literature by primary school teachers, the findings show that teachers use it to a high extent in teaching and learning in primary schools. The findings corroborates the view of Dike(1991) and Babalola (2002), which advocated the use of story telling for children's ears to the flow of language and use of games. Poems provide children the avenue for socialization and development of desirable qualities such as honesty, emotional control, among others. Buttressing the points on the use of oral literature the Book of Proverbs 22:6 in King James Bible states: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it". This is true. For instance, if oral literature that involves the use of charm and magic powers is modified to depict God's power and victory over evil, a good spiritual foundation is laid for the children. By implication, teachers' use of oral literature with appropriate modifications of the questionable ones would help meet the basic intellectual, moral, spiritual and emotional needs of children.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:



- ❖ Teachers should incorporate tongue twisters and riddles in the teaching and learning of indigenous language.
- ❖ Teachers should learn to employ story telling in delivering lessons to catch children's attention and improve their learning of language.
- ❖ Modification of Oral literature that involve the use of charm, and magic powers to depict God's power and victory over evil.
- ❖ Oral literature that build children's faith in God and challenges the devil should be preferred to others.

### **Conclusion**

Oral literature is an indigenous way of educating children. It creates opportunity for children's emotional release; provide unique and invaluable insight into the beliefs, custom, values and aspirations of the traditional society. However, teachers, parents and other adults should be careful and well acquainted on how best to use oral literature so that the children are not led astray from the true worship of God Almighty.

### **Educational Implication**

Oral literature is an indigenous way of educating children in the proverbs, riddles, custom, values, indigenous languages and aspiration of traditional society.

### **Limitation of the Study**

A limited sample of teachers was involved in the research due to time and finance. Therefore, generalization of the result is not possible.

---

## References

- Akinyemi, A (2003) Yoruba oral literature: A Source of Indigenous Education for Children. *Journal of Africa Cultural Studies*. 16 (2) 161-179. file://E:oral%20literature%20/htm.
- Babalola, V.O. (2002). The Contributions of Traditional folklores and folktales to early childhood development and education. In *Development and Education of African Children*. Proceedings of OMEP Africa regional Seminar. (eds) Maduwesi E.J. and Agusiobo C.B. Nigeria: Nelag and Co. Ltd.
- Dike, V. (1991) **Library Resources in Education Enugu**: Abic Publishers.
- Finnegan, R.O. (1970) **Oral Literature in Africa**. Great Britain Oxford University Press.
- Mbunda, F.M. (2006) Oral Literature in Contemporary Society in Onuigbo S. (ed) **Essays and Literary Concepts in English**. Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publishing CO. Ltd.
- Goetz, P.W. (2005) *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Canada: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 23.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) *National policy on Education*. Lagos: Federal Government Press.
- King James: **The Holy Bible**; Proverbs 22:6. USA: Published International Bible Association.
- Umeano, E.C. (2010) *Child Psychology: Brief Foundation of Educational Psychology*. Nsukka: Univerity Trust Publishers.