

Folklore as a Mirror of Human Dilemmas in Selected Children's Stories From Badaiki's *Fireside Stories*

By

Anakoro, Canice Ihentuge

Department of English Education
College Of Languages and Communication Arts Education
Lagos State University of Education

Abstract

This study analyses folklores showing their place as emotional and socio-cultural reflections for man's predicaments. For illustrative purposes it exploits a close reading of children's stories selected from Felicia O. Badaiki's Fireside Stories. It relies on two principal theoretical models, namely, Piaget's ethical developmental theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The paradigms probe how young readers' oral tales act as symbolic expositions of uncertainty of life, human survival and moral potency. Hence, it relies on subterranean textual examination to verify mythological figures and embodied animal characters as symbols of dualistic conflicts between deception and decency, brutality and sacrifice, along with greediness and shared harmony. The findings show that Badaiki's tales are not only created for amusement, but also promote mutual respect, compassion and mental resilience among children. Their inherent moral predicaments will endow children with diverse mechanisms to deal with rising intricacies of a modern world.

Keywords: Folklores, children's stories, symbolic exposition, man's predicaments, mental resilience.

Introduction

Fireside Stories by Badaiki (2004) is a collection of young readers' oral tales. It represents traditional folklores that serve as a link between native Nigerian verbal storytelling and contemporary literary expression. The work, hence, provides a pedagogical means for ethical instruction beyond its entertainment effort. Badaiki's visions in the tales include the generation of communal respect, love, compassion and mental resilience among children growing in a complex world. The collection presents the incessant but deep-seated struggles between good and evil, signifying the conflicts as being symbolic of man's world and predicaments. The artist, thus, harnesses varied personified animal characters, objects and mythological figures, casting their allegorical and symbolic shades in the dualistic conflicts between courage and fear, sacrificial ethics and violence, etiquette and corruption, as well as shared harmony and materialistic tendencies.

The study examines these folkloric narratives, showing their role in aiding the young reader in resolving the complicated moral predicaments in today's society. The general aim of executing this investigation is to scrutinise children's folktales as allegorical frames for perceiving basic human concerns. Its specific objectives are to: i) identify the crucial existential and ethical problems rooted in selected tales; ii) analyse the tales as mirrors of shared norms, while providing a moral compass to guide behavior; iii) assess the sound problem-solving and ego-defense mechanisms of characters in the stories as models for young readers confronted by developmental problems; and iv) establish the place of local folk narratives in mentally preparing children for moral choices in contemporary situations.

Literature Review

This study seeks a connection between orature, children's literary art and the ethical field of psychology. The study applies Badaiki's collection of young readers' oral tales as they exude a creative melting pot that mirrors inherent moral and socio-cultural predicaments. In Africa, the genre of children's folkloric art is a fundamental framework for socialisation, and not a pure device for some redundant leisure. Finnegan (1970/2012, pp. 24–25) confirms that folklore serves as an urbane and formidable art form that mirrors and examines the moral principles, socio-cultural realities as well as human hitches in a society. By conceiving these oral narratives as forceful expressions of actual moral predicaments as against plain amusement, her seminal work, *Oral Literature in Africa*, attests that oral arts are closely attached to the daily norms, social contexts, and collective apprehensions of the people that produced them. This groundwork on orature generates some theoretical grounds on which children's narratives, as the forms within Badaiki's collection, could be comprehended. In principle, she views orature both as instructive mechanisms and cultural embodiments. However, the major limitations of her framework include the relegation of the moralistic and social functionalities of the stories in favour of aesthetic values. The performance value of folktales as expressions of human predicaments is equally limited as the framework underrates narrative fixity and audience interface, which are vital qualities for exploring both ethical and sociological lessons in Badaiki's *stories*. Any effort at ameliorating these constraints can involve study codes that re-invigorate the sociological efficacy of oral narratives as instructive moral device and mirrors of human predicaments. These include notions such as psychoanalytic mirror model, the structural-functionalist technique and Post-colonial reconstructive model.

Ong (1982/2012, p. 69) also concurs that orature, in forms of folktales, myths and proverbs, serves as a means of preserving a society's collective memories, reproducing and reinforcing its central norms, values, beliefs, shared apprehensions and worldviews. His *Orality and literacy* is, thus, a foundational theoretical support for examining the oral community's drive towards the preservation and dissemination of its values. Focusing on real concrete actions and situations targeting human predicaments, he contends that a narrator expresses his problem loudly. For him, such an act generates a sympathetic, collective bond between the speaker and the listener, signifying a lesson that is closely rooted in the culture's collective memory. Despite its significance, the application of Ong's thesis could be over-generalised. One finds it very deficient, challenging and fraught with certain Eurocentric fallacies in relation to African tradition. Reducing native African folklore to primitive status, such thesis leads to cultural prejudice and theoretical reductionism, among other things.

Many other scholars also agree that orature, in form of folktales, myths and proverbs, serves as a means of preserving a society's collective memories, reproducing and reinforcing its central norms, values, beliefs, shared apprehensions and worldviews. Okpewho (1992, p. 3), a celebrated scholar from the African literary arena, presents a comprehensive exploration of how the epic and folktale forms of orature mirror the socio-cultural realities or rational norms and beliefs of the societies that create them. His work, *African Oral Literature*, is a foundational text that authenticates folklore from Africa as a valid, artistic scholarly venture. This viewpoint clarifies oral tales as crucial and vibrant cultural creations employed by society in understanding and resolving intense human predicaments. However, one of the limitations of Okpewho's thesis is its relegation of ethical and social functionalities of folklore in favour of its aesthetic and structural features. This is comparable to Finnegan's (1970/2012, pp. 24–25) structuralist and aesthetic view of folklore.

Consequently, it lacks the instructive, realistic character-building processes that enhance local children's narratives. Moreover, through the emphasis on preservation by means of texts, the critic equally relegates the vital and vibrant aspect of the audience-participant performative role of the tales. These shortfalls in Okpewho, Ong and other theoretic codes can be resolved through alternative critical models like Postcolonial, participatory pedagogy, among others.

From the foregoing, it is clear that oral narratives such as those from Badaiki's sizable anthology are readable from various angles. No particular reading perspective or school of thought is entirely perfect. At best, they complement one another. Further illustrations would suffice. From the ethical and psychological outlook, characters consider deep moral problems as greed versus generosity. On this ground, Bettelheim (1976) argues, in work on fairy tales and the importance of its fascinations for children, that classic fairy tales generate the essential magical framework to handle intricate emotional predicaments. He states that the place of children's stories in aiding children to deal with diverse subconscious desires cannot be overstressed. On the other hand, Bâ (1981, pp. 193–194) extensively explores the role of storytelling and initiation rites in boosting profound reflection on the endless union of man's existence, his society and nature. Thus, his influential work on oral tradition and African education, specifically "The Living Tradition", suggests that this bond is what children learn from living oral traditions in Africa. Discussing African orature from its problem-solving mechanisms, Adeyemi (2021, pp. 85-102) states that storytelling in traditional African world is a mutual, and "participatory experience" (p. 89). Concurring with socio-cultural interconnectedness of the people, Sone (2025, 14–24) opines that African oral literature constitutes a "living intellectual ecosystem". He postulates that its wealth of knowledge amounts to actionable codes that could launch younger generations' imaginative thoughts, invigorating sense of equity, collective resilience, and moral co-existence. On the whole, most of these scholars, like Bâ (1981, pp. 193–194), Adeyemi (2021, pp. 85-102) and several others, concur that African orature (folktales, proverbs, riddles, and myths) help in developing children's deep opinion about collective life, playing the role of a pedagogical device. Their critical talents are nurtured keeping them abreast of their duties and compliant to communal regulations. They constitute historical awareness from generation to generation, while being the authentic media for the transmission of the people's cultural life. As "dilemma tales" created for arousing both moral and intellectual expression, the tales orchestrate the clash of mutual harmony with personal aspirations. This is seen in the dualistic tensions between good and evil, courage and terror, etc.

The preceding literature review has exposed vast areas where new researches beckon. The researcher, in the long run, would analyse the selected children's folktales as allegorical frames for perceiving basic human concerns, by specifically identifying vital existential and moral problems from the selected tales; examining the tales as mirrors of shared norms and a moral behavioural guide; evaluating the sound problem-solving and ego-defense mechanisms of characters in the stories as models for young readers confronted by developmental problems; ascertaining the role of local folk narratives in mentally preparing children for moral choices in contemporary situations.

Methodology

Specifically, this study relies on two principal theoretical paradigms. The first is Piaget's moral or ethical maturity theory, which is the subject of his *The moral judgment of the child* (1932/1997, p. 26). It clarifies how children emotionally process right and wrong. In the context of the selected folktales and children's stories, the framework gives the psychological parameters for identify *why* and *how* young minds assimilate the moral lessons, effects and

human predicaments obtainable in traditional stories. Notably, several other theorists of moral and ethical maturity exist, including Kohlberg (1958/1981, p. 12) who, in the 1950s, expanded Piaget's notions. Their ideas are relevant to the tales as they promote reasoning among the young readers and actionable consequences.

The second specific theoretical model is linked to notions of socio-cultural theory projected by Vygotsky, (1978, p. 57). The theorist believes that mental functions begin as communal relationships and are culturally initiated by language and other social mores. This is explained in his *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (1978, p. 57). Other theorists who propagated the socio-cultural theory include Rogoff (2003, p. 238), who linked the theory with developmental psychology. Among other things, mental development and learning are seen as social processes shaped by cultural conditions, collaborative interactions and semiotic devices.

Explicitly, the methodology adopted in the study is the qualitative research design involving, among other things, text-based content and thematic analysis. This entails a systematic five-step technique. First, the specific stories are identified. The study involves a close reading of four stories selected from Badaiki's *Fireside Stories* (2004). These stories are: 'The King and His Seven Wives', 'The Greedy King', 'Why the Hippopotamus Lives in the Water' and 'The Man and the Three Wives'. For the sake of convenience, these stories are tagged: 'Story A', 'Story B', 'Story C', and 'Story D', respectively. While they constitute the primary sources of data, the secondary data are taken from different scholarly journals and articles, textbooks on literary criticisms especially folklore studies.

Another vital step is explaining the parameters for selecting the texts. The study uses the purposive sampling technique to ensure that the selected stories explicitly align with the research objectives. Therefore, the chosen stories primarily focus on man's moral concerns or ethical conflicts, while highlighting how characters employ ego as protective mechanisms and other problem-solving techniques in the face of societal demands. The tales indicate reward for good behaviour, penalty for *hubris* or error in human character, with good overcoming evil. As potential models for young readers confronted by developmental problems, they demonstrate how local folk narratives mentally prepare children for moral choices in contemporary situations. Finally, these four particular stories were selected from Badaiki's *Fireside Stories* because together they generate an inclusive and wholesome instructive plan representing the core foundational values of native Nigerian culture.

The last three steps involve the analytical procedure, synthesis and interpretation. The study will rely on folkloric images and symbols for its analysis. These allegorical features, in form of animal characters (the trickster tortoise, the proud and vulnerable hippopotamus) will implicitly expose man's tendencies towards integrity or deception, generosity or greed, et cetera. In other words, such are allegories for real-life human predicaments, as a means of teaching cultural identity, exposing critical moral choice and promoting emotional resilience among younger readers. This procedure would assess how the cultural problems in the selected stories serve as socially recognised mode of instructing young readers how to handle apprehension, dread and communal norms; that is, turning the stories into devices for real-life problem solving.

Discussion of Findings

The essence of the investigation is to bridge the gap created by using alien folk tales to analyse African contexts by employing an African home-made, text-based reading, showcasing Badaiki's use of traditional folklores as allegories of present-day communal moral and personal problems. It would concentrate on classifying some of the ethical and lethal dilemmas rooted in selected tales; explore the tales as representations real-life communal norms; appraise some problem-solving and defense mechanisms of characters, while considering the role of native folklore in preparing children for future ethical choices in modern situations. To effect this task, the discussion would take the form of a probe into the predicaments presented in the four tales, highlighting their psychological implications and socio-cultural significance, among other things.

Human Predicaments, Implications and Socio-Cultural Significance

The four stories present various forms of human problems. In Story 'A' which is the second story of the collection, one reads about a king, Ojiso, who lived in Ishan in Edo State of Nigeria. Despite the good living, abundant wealth, respect, honour and the numerous excitements which palace life accords to men and women, the king and his seven queens had their share of earthly predicaments. They had no child. This shows that no one is above earthly adversity. It illustrates the uncertainty of life. However, it does not draw the king into wickedness. Despite his predicament, the narrator reveals that Ojiso was a nice king, who loved his wives and his subjects, and was "full of knowledge and wisdom" (p. 9). Hence, he represents the wise elder/king, a folkloric symbol recurrent in Badaiki's collection of tales. This is evident in the fact that he lived peacefully with his seven wives despite their condition of barrenness. One reads:

He was a very popular king, known in all the towns in Ishan and outside. He was a very kind king, full of knowledge and wisdom and he loved children very much. He was known to hold a feast twice in a year for children with gifts and children always looked forward to this feast (p. 9).

The king's behaviour is a metaphor for wise human behaviour (human wisdom) in the face of dreadful human dilemmas. This story of Ojiso the nice king and his subjects' love and honour for him demonstrates the shared predicaments, underscoring how the community felt the problems of the king and his wives. It aligns with Vygotsky's (1978, p. 57) notion of socio-cultural standard, highlighting how communal mores are the roots children's intellectual development and functionality.

The façade of happiness and peace in the palace is often punctuated with sorrow as the situation "sometimes made the king very sad and moody" (p. 9). This shows the human side of the king. He is neither a spirit nor a perfect human. The king later consulted the oracle and got an instruction as to what to do. After a long time, he got a child with the help of a spirit with many heads in the bush. This tale is enhanced by devices like suspense, magic and other forms of fascination that are suitable for children, showing how typical fairy tales create the essential thrilling structure for handling intricate emotional predicaments. With the good king regaining his lost happiness, in the long run, young readers are able to learn wisdom, love, patience, hard-work, faith, and many other sound traits from this story. They could face real adversity with courage and resilience.

Regarding its form, the story is a comedy in which the artist makes readers understand that there is great reward for humility and good manners. This tale also leaves an impression that the wicked would not go scot-free. The king's six wives were sent away because they planned and threw the small boy born by the seventh wife into the water. However, through mysterious circumstances, the boy was saved and brought back to his father's palace. Here, the theme of crime and punishment is observed as Ojiso, the king, punished his six wives for their wickedness. The narrative also deals with the motif of patience and its rewards as the seventh good and faithful wife was restored with her husband asking "for her forgiveness":

The palace was full of festivities. The king invited all his subjects to come and rejoice with him. The seventh wife was presented with beautiful clothes, jewels and other precious stones. He sent away the other (six wicked) wives, forbidding them to ever come to the palace again" (p. 18).

The next tale, (Story 'B), is the sixth story in Badaiki's sizable anthology. It is also about a king. The story is very exciting and revolves around a greedy king who lives in the land of Agbana. Initially, his people loved and appreciated him so much and brought him all kind of gifts as a sign of their love and affection. The people did not know that he was very greedy.

Unknown to the people, the king had extreme love for women and children. He saw them as his personal possession. Where women and children were concerned, the king was very greedy. During these feasts, which are organized by the king: he always took for himself, the most beautiful girl in the land who happened to come the king's feast. The girl automatically became his wife (p. 34).

This tale revolves around the deceit, greediness and selfishness of the king of Agbana. He was not satisfied with what he has. His people began to sense that he is hypocritical and evil ruler. This narrative also thrives on folkloric images and symbols. The king is presented as a wicked fraudster who, with the development of the story, exposes his tendencies towards deception, greed, malevolence, cruelty, narrow-mindedness and inhumanity. This was obvious when he gave an order that any child born on Eke market day should be given to him:

One day, the king called a meeting of the elders of the land. He said to the elders, "I have called you here today to discuss an important matter. I am giving everyone in the clan an order, which must be obeyed.

... From henceforth, anybody who gives birth to a child on the Eke market day forfeits that child to the king." (pp. 34, 36)

This is the height of his inhumanity, highlighting the growth of wickedness in the heart of an evil mind. This greediness led him to take away the three children of a man called Nwoye and his wife, Ifeoma. The woman fell sick and died from the weight of this trauma, showing that the king never had feelings for the sick or dying mothers whose children he confiscated. He is, thus, the narrative emblem of real-life human predicaments in the community of Agbana. This story also justifies the notional frame for "human dilemmas", revealing the duality and prevalence of greed at variance with generosity, or evil versus good, and so forth. This is epitomised by characters in the story, standing as allegories for real-life situations.

Thus, it confirms notions like Finnegan's (1970/2012, pp. 24–25) belief that folklore serves as an urbane and formidable art form that mirrors and examines the moral principles, socio-cultural realities as well as human hitches in a society. Ifeoma's trauma is no longer a personal encounter but a communal predicament.

Having discovered the wickedness of their king, the people of Agbana village went to his palace, carrying the corpse of Ifeoma:

So, they took the body of Ifeoma, wrapped it in white cloth and took it to the king. They told the king that since he has taken all the children of the dead woman, he should also take the body of the children's mother since she also died on Eke market day (p. 37).

Upon his refusal, "the whole villagers banished the king and took one of the numerous wives of the king and gave her to Nwoye as wife and returned all Nwoye's children to him" (p. 37). From a moral outlook, the king's actions are seen with notional labels such as 'taboo', 'cultural violation', 'consequential dilemma', et cetera. Culturally speaking and textually evident, these traits or 'actions' are strictly outlawed and punishable by banishment or death. Hence, his banishment, attesting to the fact that the story deals with crime, reward and punishment, highlighting the motif of the triumph of good over evil. Nwoye's patience also earned him the reward of receiving back his children; while Ifeoma became the 'sacrifice' for the restoration of communal or universal order. This narrative teaches critical morality and promotes emotional resilience among younger readers, aligning with Piaget's moral development theory particularly on how children process right and wrong (1932/1997, p. 26). It is also supported by notions of actionable consequences projected by philosophers like Kohlberg (1958/1981, p. 12).

Story 'C' is the third tale in the anthology and is set in the animal kingdom, with Hippopotamus as their king. The story presents the king as a kind character who often organised "a big feast for all his subjects". The narrator also tells the audience that Hippopotamus is a mighty power-broker, the second in command in the kingdom. Unfortunately, the story is about how he lost his throne on the land and why he came to live in the water. Ultimately, it is about pride, greed, craftiness, as well as faithfulness. The king paid extremely for his pride as he abdicated his throne and possessions. In short, he lost everything owing to his pride. Nonetheless, he stood by what he promised, underscoring faithfulness or trustworthiness as a very vital pre-occupation in the narrative. This allegorical tale is supported by Kohlberg's notions of actionable consequences, highlighting that what a man sows is what he reaps.

Comparatively, the story of Hippopotamus the nice king resembles that of Ojiso the nice king of Ishan. Both loved and protected their wives and subjects. Both were also loved and honoured. However, the community could not pity Hippopotamus because of his foolishness and pride. The notion of shared predicaments is lacking here unlike in Ojiso's case. A careless and very arrogant sovereign, King Hippopotamus is symbolic of ignorance, overconfidence and worldly show or vanity. Although, he is not wicked and greedy like the greedy king who confiscated children, he brought calamity upon himself and his wives through his pride and ignorance. His story is not about crime and punishment but ignorance and pride and their consequences. Among other things, children would learn to embrace his love and generosity, but due to his downfall, try to avoid ignorance, overconfidence, vanity and their likes. This story is also boosted with components of suspense and magic, that are good for children, turning classic fairy tales into an essential magical framework for handling intricate mental

predicaments. Suspense, irony and many vital folkloric devices especially riddle are effectively applied in this tale. The story-teller, for instance, makes use of a *riddle* posed for name discovery.

On one such occasion, the hippopotamus called his subjects together and said “Every time, you assemble here you eat my food and drink my drinks and dance to my bands without even knowing my real name. Today, no one would eat my food and drink my drink without first of all telling me my name”.

... As they could not guess his name, they all went home disappointed but the tortoise remained behind. He asked the hippopotamus what he would do for him if he guessed his name correctly...(pp. 19-21).

The story-teller deploys skillfully, exploring “some of the most important traditional beliefs about the Tortoise – his wisdom, craftiness, patience, optimism, manipulative tendencies, hard-work, and above all, his dogged drive towards success. He was able deceive the king, craftily finding out his secret name, thereby, inheriting his entire properties” (Anakoro 2010, 57-58).

Story ‘D’ is the fifth tale in the anthology. It is another interesting story. It is a tale of about a certain man in Eastern Nigeria, Mr. Eze, who had three wives. Two of them are presented as malicious characters. The story-teller narrates how they planned against the third wife, owing to jealousy. She had male children while they had only female children. The man “loved his third wife very much because she had male children for him ... Because of this, the other wives became jealous of the third wife” (p. 29). This story underscores the significance of the male child in the African society. Mr. Eze’s two aggrieved wives succeeded in instigating him to send his third wife parking with her children. She was banished from the community and passed through untold sufferings. Notably, the problems of anger, bitterness, hatred, diabolism, self-indulgence, craftiness, impatience, distrust and several other manipulative tendencies in Mr. Eze’s household are culture-bred. The traditional norms regarding the special position of sons in Igbo traditional world instigated the ‘life and death’ war that almost consumed his family.

While third wife was sent away, Nduka her son was left behind in his father’s house. He faced a lot of horrible treatments at the hands of his step-mothers. The narrator demonstrates how the malicious women planned to kill him by sending him to the evil forest. There in the dangerous forest, Nduka met the chief spirit of the evil forest. At last, he returned with the help of the king and some kind people in Umuahia village. The women were summoned, prosecuted and banished to the evil forest:

They confessed that they stole Eze’s money and lied that the money was stolen by one of the boys. They also confessed that they forced Nduka to go to the evil forest because they wanted him dead. the king became angry with them and banished them into the evil forest where they died.

Finally, Nduka’s mother was called back and all her children and both Eze and his beloved wife live happily together (p. 33).

The banishment and doom of Nduka’s stepmothers amplify the recurring motif of crime and punishment, running through the selected stories. Nduka’s endurance, wisdom, love, patience,

hard-work, faith, courage and resilience in the face adversity in the narrative will help children to learn how to make moral choices. With the discovery of the truth, his mother was restored to her place in her husband's house, while her enemies faced the consequences of their evil acts, demonstrating reward for patience and goodness and that the evil that men do would not go unpunished.

Brief Comments on Character and Style

The four selected stories employ major and minor characters in addition male and female ones. In the first selected tale, King Ojiso is a major character, while minor characters include the king's messenger and the spirit with many heads in the bush. They all played different but crucial roles in the narrative. For instance, the spirit adds to the tension, *magical* or make-belief effects and thrilling frame of the story as a folkloric piece. The greedy king, Ifeoma and her husband, Nwoye, play major roles as characters, while the villagers and their palace chiefs are minor characters. The communal predicaments revolve around the key characters. Like other villagers, Nwoye and his wife lived peacefully prior to the coming of the hostile king, his traumatic Eke market day promulgation and his brutal authority. This led to her death and widespread communal protest and banishment of the king, highlighting the socio-cultural base of narrative dilemmas.

The third selected story is a fable with animal characters both major and minor ones. The characters are emblematic of real-life situations and the fable is allegorical of the human world. Major characters include Osaritan the hippopotamus, the elephant and the six wives of King Osaritan. The Hippopotamus once lived on the land. The second in command in the kingdom of the animals, he is said to be a great ruler, who intensely loved his subjects and frequently organised feasts for them:

From time to time the hippopotamus used to organize a big feast for all his subjects in the locality where he lived. Many of his subjects always looked forward to this feast, because there was always much to eat and drink, with a lot of dancing and other forms of merriments (p. 19).

Despite his loving and sound natural traits, he was full of proud. This was the attribute that ruined him, leading to loss of his wealth and powerful position and wealth. The tale sees his pride as the reason why the hippopotamus lives in the water.

Another key character in this story, Tortoise is acclaimed for his great wisdom and tricks. As a result, he was the one who could find out the secret name of their king, that is, Osaritan. Having worked very fast and relentlessly to get the real name of the king, he inherited king's throne and all his properties"

When the feast was over, the hippopotamus and his wives went down to live in the river as he had promised leaving his land, his house and his property to the tortoise. This was how the hippopotamus come to live water (p. 22).

Other important characters in the story are the king's wives and Elephant, the greatest sovereign in the animal kingdom. This story of the downfall of King Osaritan the hippopotamus teaches young readers a lot of lessons. One should always think properly before making promises. Moreover, if at all one has made promises, he should try and keep them.

This fourth story also employs a combination of characters, male and female, young and old, exist, et cetera. Minor characters, including the king of Umuahia and some villagers, are used to clarify the concerns of the story which revolve around the principal characters like Mr. Eze, his two wicked wives, and Nduka, his son. The story underscores the people's belief in the value of male children over females. The use of characters aligns with this African cultural belief. However, this belief does not over-rule making a thorough investigation before taking decisions. Eze sent his third wife and her children away, without proper investigations and thus regretted it. The four stories deal with predicaments of communal magnitude. And characters have been employed as a device to represent a communal perspective; the individual is only significant mainly as a part of his community, its norms, et cetera. This aligns with such notions of African orature as propagated by different scholars like Adeyemi (2021, pp. 85-102), showcasing folklore as a mutual, and "participatory experience".

The author employs simple English throughout the stories. This makes each tale easily understood by any reader. The author organises the story in a way that a lover of children's stories would not think of dropping it till the end. This is because of its simplicity. The author also uses themes and motifs of interest such as crime and punishment. This is seen in almost all the stories. The stories make use of diverse tragi-comic encounters, highlighting real-life situations. Hence, there exist existential and moral dilemmas deeply rooted in the shared norms of the society. These are made lucid through simple language embedded with emblematic actions and characters. The use of irony is seen in the downfall of the hippopotamus. His ignorance, overconfidence and vanity cost him his kingdom and possessions. The entire fable is built through personification. Animals acquire the qualities of human beings and encounter human predicaments. The use of charms and oracular attributes are clearly seen in Ojiso's trauma of sterility and the drive to acquire children. Like the other three stories, one finds suspense, magic, fantasy and many vital folkloric devices. The child's imaginative capabilities are stretched along with his moral choices provided by the encounters in the stories.

Findings

Numerous proofs from the four stories selected from Badaiki's *Fireside Stories* reveal the author maintains the use of simple Standard English that ensures fluidity and interest in the readers especially children. Each of the stories is easily understood by any reader. The stories also have a blend of the comic and tragic realities of life. Findings from the four stories show the amalgam of joy and sorrow, right and wrong, good and evil, life and death, human and spirit, et cetera. These dualities help children distinguish between ethical and immoral deeds. Some tales present mythical and fantasy figures or adverse conditions to signify real-life threats. Many of these have been identified and analysed. The artist presents these predicaments, indicating how they are resolved by courageous characters. Such stories could aid children manage anxieties and safely tackle their own mental horrors. Many characters presented by the stories equally reflect different socio-economic, political and moral problems and classes in real life. Their lives signify that actions have consequences that act as deterrent traits against revenge, antagonism, defiance and other behaviours. The tales are, thus, loaded with psycho-sociological implications. By marking the value of shared responsibility, some stories buttress a child's awareness of his place in the family, the cultural milieu and society. The tales also highlight ego-defense machinery. Such narratives help children in handling aggressive propensities and deal with damaging passions like peer contentions and jealousy. Also, they serve as conscience *police dogs*, touching on critical virtues like integrity, obedience and admiration. Character molding is very vital in these tales. The narrative resolutions often build powerful moral compass and promote perception.

Conclusion

In Africa, folklores operate as an essential psychological and cultural tool. This study confirms that oral narratives are helpful to children in safely processing their intricate human predicaments related to morality, emotional and social responsibility. Oral traditions can be seen as timeless instruments for shaping ethical and emotional development. The selected stories from *Fireside Stories* showcase characters faced with moral choices. Consequently, they act as instructive devices for young readers on how to deduce right from wrong. A means of conserving indigenous intelligence and cultivating a sense of belonging, younger generations are able to embrace their traditional legacy through orature. On the whole, this study confirms that stories from Africa are not sheer mechanisms for distraction and leisure. As crucial and serious mirrors of the society, they are viewed as integral systems of the society used as crucial instructive frameworks, helping readers to gain compassion and apply resilience in the face of real-life apprehensions. Among the salient contributions of this study, therefore, is its disapproval of many dangerous ego-defense mechanisms of animal and human characters in the selected stories, underscoring the subtle deterrent of young readers taking such sub-human stance in real life. Parents, educators, policy makers and curriculum planners are encouraged to deliberately integrate folktales into child development and literacy programs. More stories especially from African folkloric arena should serve as data for new investigations to expand and popularise the notions of emotional and socio-cultural role of folklore in the African milieu.

References

- Adeyemi, T. (2021). Oral traditions and the development of the African child's critical mind. *Journal of Oral Literature in Africa*, 12(2), 85-102.
- Anakoro, C. I. (2010). *Enquiries into literatures of the World*. Lagos: Eagle Creative.
- Bâ, A. H. (1981). The living tradition. In J. Ki-Zerbo (Ed.), *General history of Africa, I: Methodology and African prehistory* (pp. 166–205). UNESCO
- Badaiki, F. O. (2004). *Fireside Stories*. Lagos: Eagle Creative Press. (Original work published 1992)
- Bettelheim, B. (1976). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Finnegan, R. (2012). *Oral literature in Africa* (Reprint ed.). Open Book Publishers. (Original work published 1970)
- Kohlberg, L. (1981). *Essays on moral development, volume 1: The philosophy of moral development*. Harper & Row. (Original work published 1958)
- Okpewho, I. (1992). *African oral literature: Backgrounds, character, and continuity*. Indiana University Press.
- Ong, W. J. (2012). *Orality and literacy* (3rd ed.). Routledge. (Original work published 1982)
- Piaget, J. (1997). *The moral judgment of the child* (M. Gabain, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1932)
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford University Press.
- Sone, E. M. (2025). Echoes of the ancestors: Reimagining African oral literature and folklore. *African Journal of Literature and Humanities (AFJOLIH)*, 3, 14–24.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.