

EMPHASIZING THE RIGHT OF THE CHILD THROUGH AFRICAN CULTURAL VALUES AND MUSIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The right of children has been challenged and threatened in Africa from time immemorial hence making them vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and discrimination. African children are abused most of the time because they do not know they are entitled to some rights. Children across Africa face many interconnected cases of abuse and barriers every day to their right to education. But the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child emphasizes the right of a child to have education directed to preserve and strengthen positive African cultural and traditional values and experiences. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study with a population of forty respondents in Nigeria. A structured questionnaire which consisted of fourteen items in three sections was used to collect information from the respondents. The study used library sources, unstructured interviews and observation to gather data from respondents. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings of the study indicate that many adults and children are not aware of children's rights and this makes children vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Furthermore, results demonstrated that there is a need for society to inform and equip African parents and children with knowledge of children's rights and privileges. Since the African tradition is transmitted through folklore and folksongs, it should be included and emphasized in the education of children and adults living in Nigeria.

Keywords: African Cultural values, Right of the Child, Music education, Song

I. INTRODUCTION

There are reports across nations of the world on the abuse of children in recent times. This abuse ranges from emotional torture, exploitation, maltreatment, neglect, sexual abuse, and exposure to dangerous situations (Ike & Twumasi-Ankrah, 1999; Sossou et al., 2009). These forms of child abuse cut across all cultural, racial, and religious lines and most often leave deep and lasting scars on the abused. In many African societies, children between the ages of five and twelve are found hawking wares for their parents or guardians while their counterparts are busy with schooling. These often happen to children from polygamous homes and single-parent families. These children are denied access to good nutrition and health, a safe environment, protection, and good education (African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), 2022). The female child most often is sexually abused, deprived of education, and sent into early motherhood (Moor, 2022). Their male counterparts are sent into early labour that is too tedious for their age, hence some of them engage in juvenile crime and drug addiction. Because of this experience, these children do not inculcate acceptable social and culturally appropriate norms, values, and beliefs. To

curb these anomalies, there are international instruments and declarations such as the Convention on the rights of the child, the World summit for children, the Education for all, and the Millennium development goals to which many African countries are signatory. These instruments are geared towards enlightening and empowering children against the different levels of abuse. Barker's theory of rights discusses the moral aspect of rights. Barker opines, "that law of the state helps me to secure rights. But rights are claims and the origin is the individual himself. An individual is a moral person and he determines that he will develop his moral personality through his rights. His purpose is not to inflict any harm upon society. The implication of moral being is, he releases his best efforts for the general welfare of society" (Nitisha, 2017, p. 1).

The African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child outlines the rights of children. However, most of these children do not know they are entitled to any right let alone know what to do when those rights are denied. OAU Articles 11, 12, and 31 (1990) of this charter, stipulate as follows: Article 11: "Every child has the right to an education, to develop his or her personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. This education also includes the preservation and strengthening of positive African morals, traditional values, and cultures." Article 12: "Children have a right to play and to participate fully in cultural and artistic life." Article 31: "Children have responsibilities towards their families and societies, to respect their parents, superiors, and elders, to preserve and strengthen African cultural values in their relationships with other members of their communities." From the above quotes, it is evident that children have rights and responsibilities toward the perpetuation and preservation of African cultural values. These rights are to protect them from abuse and exploitation. The knowledge of African cultural value as it affects the right of the child will empower them to know, claim and insist on their rights. The implication of this on the child is that values that are thought from the cradle tend to stick and last longer in the brain. But according to Falola (2016, p. 157), "Technology has changed the way we run our lives; technology has become power." Falola argues that, "since the 1980s, the world has come to another crossroads with the new era of virtual internet and the real global village. Breakdown of family lives and the close-knit village neighbourhood relations and social norms and rules began to change to anonymous town and city lives, with associated sophisticated new forms of entertainment, crimes, and associations" (p. 158). To correct these eroded values, there is a need to educate and inform the younger generation of their rights and the right values by using music education, and this is to be done through the teaching of African educational songs.

In Africa, values form the bedrock of our educational system. African traditional education transmits social and cultural values. These values are products of societal value. They include social justice, fairness, truthfulness, honesty, the dignity of labour, chastity, and good morals. However, with the emergence of western education, social values have changed in Nigeria. Technological advancements

have eroded cultural values, hence, there is moral decadence that has taken its toll on the children. All this newness has an adverse effect on the children. Children no longer have adequate knowledge of the positive cultural norms and values of the society in which they live, which is to expose them to their entitled rights. This study thus focused on the strategies of infusing African cultural values in the child through the knowledge of African songs towards enabling the right of the child.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

a) *Empirical review*

African cultural values are standards that are put in place to promote African cultural heritage. They are treasures that are highly cherished and commendable in African societies. Some of these cultural values that are cherished by Africans are diligence, endurance, kindness, loyalty, a sense of shame, and good morals, hence, laws are made to safeguard and punish any act of immorality and laziness. There are values that are geared toward resisting exploitation and oppression. Values in this category are boldness, courage, doggedness, and being resolute. Other values are to promote social responsibility and provide cultural stimulants to guide the child toward self-discovery. Values in this category are self-discipline, thoughtfulness, reasoning, painstaking, and endurance. But unfortunately, these cultural values are fast being eroded, and this has grave consequences for the African child. In the words of Nzewi (1997), “modern Africa has recklessly abandoned its human essence and cultural values while gobbling up with the modern-publicity-hoisted, glamorous allures of Western thoughts and lifestyles. The African charter article 15, 16, 21 and 27 outline the rights of the child against exploitation as follows:

“Children should be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. Children should be protected from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse” (Article 16). “Governments should do what they can to stop harmful social and cultural practices, such as child marriage, that affect the welfare and dignity of children” (Article 21). “Children should be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse” (Article 27).

Section 17 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria adopted in 1999, and amended in 2010, Article 3 equally states that “The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that children, young persons and underage are protected against any exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect.” These rights involve adult responsibility concerning the protection and defense of the children. This informs us that the society, immediate family, and the government should jointly work together to put a stop to societal negative practices that infringe on the rights of children. Children too should be equipped with the knowledge of the resistance to any injustice. In Nitisha (2017), Laski’s

theory of rights states that “Individual shall co-operate with the state in all matters, but where he finds that the function of the state is not in conformity with public interests he has right to resist.”

A song is a piece of music with words you can sing to communicate thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards life. Song in a broader sense teaches moral lessons, entertains, enhances creativity, informs, calms nerves, and establishes bonds between people or a thing (Bessey, 2016). Many events concerning the lifestyle, cultural heritage, and traditions of people are taught through songs. In some African societies, deliberate attempts are made to use songs for educating the young or for transmitting the information. For example, among the Yoruba tribe of southwest Nigeria, songs are used to teach children morals, cultural values, and beliefs. According to Agu (2011, p. 3), “in Igbo setting, the child learns about everything around him, the culture, the history of the land, general knowledge and moral instruction through songs.....this exercise compels the Igbo child to have an adequate idea and knowledge of his music and culture, both of which are the important possession of a people.” Agu (2011) commented further that “even the greatness of outside influence and rapid change cannot erode the basic elements, educational and moral values of folk music already imbibed by an Igbo child at early developmental stages of life.” Nissen (2017) noted that in South Africa, song and dance have a place of primacy in Venda society, and are taught in school with equal intensity to language, literacy, and numeracy. As a result, all members of Venda society have a remarkable aptitude for singing, rhythm, and movement. Some information that cannot be passed verbally is sometimes stated in songs. Hence, some songs are used as oral documents in African history and philosophy. Below are examples of moral songs:

Yoruba, South West, Nigeria

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(1) <i>Iya l’olutoju mi</i>
 <i>Ti ntoju mi ni kekere</i>
 <i>Ehin re lo fi npon mi</i>
 <i>Iya ku ise mi</i>
 <i>Emi ki iya mi ku ise</i>
 <i>Pelu iteriba mole</i>
 <i>Emi ko ni ko ’se fun ’ya mi mo</i>
 <i>Ndao, ndao, ndao</i></p> | <p><i>Mother is the one that cares for me</i>
 <i>Cares for me as a child</i>
 <i>She carries me on her back</i>
 <i>Well done, mother</i>
 <i>I salute my mother for her labor</i>
 <i>with my head bowed down</i>
 <i>I will never deny errands for my mother</i>
 <i>No, No, No</i></p> |
| <p>(2) <i>Ole alapa ma sise</i>
 <i>Ole f’aso iya bora sun</i>
 <i>Iya ole ko romo bi</i>
 <i>E wa w’aye ole o, ole o</i></p> | <p><i>A lazy person</i>
 <i>Covers himself with a wretched cloth</i>
 <i>A lazy man’s mother is childless</i>
 <i>Look at a lazy man’s life</i></p> |

Igbo, South East, Nigeria

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Anam aga n’uzo</i>
 <i>Nw’okolo nelu m anya kwe n’isi</i>
 <i>O sim he-nwata nwanyi biakene</i>
 <i>O nyem ofe egu,</i>
 <i>Yo mu kam solu ya</i></p> | <p><i>As I was passing by</i>
 <i>A young man admired my beauty</i>
 <i>He beckoned me to come close,</i>
 <i>He offered me one shilling</i>
 <i>And requested me to follow him</i></p> |
|---|---|

*M'nye ya ego n'abo si ya
Ka obia ka okwelu M'wee yoo ndi mmuo
Ka fa sekasia afe ya*

*I offered him two shillings
And requested the spirits to tear
His clothes to shreds*

These are examples of songs that are sung among the different tribes in Nigeria against various forms of immorality. These songs teach hard work, diligence, respect for parents (elders), and chastity. The knowledge of these values is implicit in African child cultural rights.

Health Educational Songs (Yoruba)

(1) *Eyin omode mo fe ko yin l'eko kan
Te ba de'le ke f'oso yin
K'e we k'e tun r'orin
T'e ba de'le k'e ka'we
K'e ran obi yin lowo*

*Children, I want to teach you a virtue
When you get home, wash your clothes
Bathe and brush your teeth
When you get home, read
And help your parents
Bathe very well, cut your nails
Wash your clothes, Eat well
Don't overeat*

(2) *We ki o mo, Ge ekanna re
Fo aso re, Jeun to dara lasiko
Ma jeun ju*

(3) *Imototo lo le segun arun gbogbo
Imototo lo le segun arun gbogbo
Imototo ile, imototo ounje, imototo ara
Imototo lo le segun arun gbogbo*

*Cleanliness can cure all illness
Cleanliness can cure all illness
House, food, body cleanliness
Cleanliness can cure all illness*

These categories of songs are educative, informative, and teach morals, health values, and virtue. There are other categories of songs like ceremonial songs and historical songs. Their knowledge of them will improve the children's lifestyle and add value to their livelihood.

b) Theoretical framework

This paper is premised on the functional theory of right by Laski. Laski in Nitisha (2017) calls for rights as conditions of social life. According to him, rights are a social concept and deeply connected with social life. "The essentiality of rights is established by the fact that individuals claim them for the development of their best self" (p.1). The most attractive part of Laski's theory is the functional aspect of rights. The functional theory of rights stresses that an individual is entitled to claim rights only when he performs duty otherwise the claim or demand for right cannot be entertained. This means that an individual can claim right on the ground that he contributes to society. But the function is not enough. Any type of function cannot make one demand rights unless their work or performance are socially useful. That is, what he does must enhance the welfare of society. A man has no right to do whatever he likes. The work must relate to the general welfare of the state. Here Laski views the duty of individual and rights from the perspective of the whole society' (Laski in Nitisha, 2017, p.1).

This theory also admits an individual's right to resist. People can resist on the ground that their action aims at the general welfare of society. "An individual shall co-operate with the state in all matters, but

where he finds that the function of the state is not in conformity with public interests he has right to resist.” (p.3). The relevance of this theory to this work is that it supports children’s entitlement to some rights and privileges because of the part they contribute to society. This right is dependent on responsibilities that they carry out at home and in society.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive research method which involves the collection of information from a population sample. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from forty adult respondents. The data collected from the investigation were analyzed using percentages. It equally used unstructured interviews and observation schedules to explore opinions concerning African child rights. Children within the age range of five to twelve were randomly selected. The open-ended question interview was used for the children while the questionnaire was administered for the adults to explore opinions concerning African child rights. The focus of the study was Nigeria and the concepts gathered were generalized to Africa because literature review reveals similarities between child exploitation and oppression in many countries of Africa. Books, journals, and other literary documents were consulted for a robust literature review.

IV. RESULTS

Three instruments (questionnaire, unstructured interview, and personal observation) were used for the study. These were personally administered by the researcher with the help of a research assistant. The items in the questionnaire were sorted out according to the variables they were designed to measure. The questionnaire was collected back from the respondents, collated, and analyzed using percentages. The result is as follows:

Table 1:

Privileges and Rights of Children in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Yes	Undecided	No	Total
1	Children are entitled to rights and privileges in Nigeria	87.5%	12.5 %	0%	100 %
2	Children are entitled to free housing in Nigeria	50%	10%	40%	100%
3	Children are entitled to free food in Nigeria	57.5%	10%	32.5%	100%
4	Children are entitled to free health care in Nigeria	80%	10%	10%	100%
5	Children are entitled to justice in the court of law in Nigeria	62.5%	12.5%	25%	100%

Table 2:

Children’s Entitlement to Rights and Privileges in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Yes	Undecided	No	Total
1.	African values accord children specific rights	35 %	10%	55%	100 %
2.	Children’s rights are protected by Nigerian Constitution	77.5%	10%	12.5%	100 %
3.	Children can fight for their right	100%	0%	0%	100%

Table 3:

Children's Acquisition of Knowledge Concerning their Rights

S/N	Items	Yes	Undecided	No	Total
1.	Children in Nigeria learn about their rights from their parents at home	75%	10%	15%	100%
2.	Children in Nigeria learn about their rights from the schools.	77.5%	10%	12.5%	100%
3.	The knowledge of African songs equips children with the knowledge of their rights	72.5%	10%	17.5%	100%
4.	Teaching children's songs about child abuse equips them with information that will prevent adults from molesting them.	72.5%	0%	17.5%	100%

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine and emphasize child rights and privileges in Africa through the learning of African educational songs. The paper found out that children are entitled to some rights and privileges. They are expected to enjoy the same human rights as adults because children's rights are human rights. This is consistent with CRIN (2018) which says children have specific rights to help protect them from the threats, exclusions, and discrimination they are vulnerable to (Franklin, 2001 & Young-Bruehl, 2012). Bandman (1999) posits that interpretations of children's rights range from allowing children the capacity for autonomous action to the enforcement of children being physically, mentally, and emotionally free from abuse.

Results also showed that parents and guardians in Nigeria deny children their rights under the guise that children must imbibe the African virtue of discipline and good morals. This finding is in consonance with Anaba (2018, p. 16) who says,

the discourse of child rights reveals an interesting intersection of history, culture, and norms. In all cultures, all climes, children are seen as 'treasures'...this meeting of culture is the foundation of social and legal norms with regard to child rights. Curiously, however, actions and inactions of adults contradict these culturally embedded notions and norms, leaving many unanswered questions for a critical ethnographer.

It is puzzling to discover that the same culture that held children in high esteem is the one denying them their social and moral rights.

This study equally revealed that many parents and adults are not aware of the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child. Madubuike-Ekwe and Mbadugha (2018) and Nwoke (2019) opined that all adults are expected to have information about acts, laws, and edicts in Nigeria because the Freedom

of Information Act of 2011 gives to citizens a right of access to information held by the government or public institutions. The study also came out with the findings that the knowledge of African songs equips children with the knowledge of their rights. Teaching children songs about child abuse equips them with information that will prevent the adults from molesting them. This aligns with Ibekwe (2009, p.60) who asserts that “among activities that help to shape, mould and reform character, (African) traditional music plays the greatest part. It is functional and richly imbued with societal ethics, norms, and values. It is this functional aspect that makes it most relevant in society.” African music encourages high freedom of expression to point at the right values and acceptable norms of the society (Okechukwu, 2018).

VI. CONCLUSION

There is a need for society to inform and equip children in Africa early enough about their rights and privileges. This can be learned informally within the society and formally from school in subjects like social studies, civics education, cultural and creative arts, and religious knowledge. These subjects will inform and educate the children against exploitation and oppression. It will equally empower them with national ethics and societal values. Music in the form of songs has a lot to add to this because children easily commit songs to memory. Today, despite extraneous influences, African music still serves its former role in the continued moral, mental, and social health of the society. African educational songs contain some information that has to do with rights, values, ethics, and societal norms. This is why there is a need for its preservation and sustenance in the education of the African child. Moral lessons cannot be excluded from the training of children. Keke and Obiekwe, (2012) posit that through song-texts, a people learned the moral codes of his land. They also learned about their language, the things their people lived by, and how the society worked. Children are expected to be well versed in the knowledge of African cultural values. The knowledge must also translate to the performance of the ethics. These will guarantee access to their rights.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for public enlightenment programs for children at school and at societal levels on social and educational rights. There should be a forum in the school programs of activities where parents and teachers meet to discuss entitled rights and privileges that are for the African children. These rights should be made possible practically and not only on paper.

Children should be allowed to participate in cultural programs that are geared towards their enshrined rights. Programs like cultural displays, dance performances, drama, and other theatrical shows should be encouraged. There should be enforcement of the law on the protection of children's rights.

Parents should create time for singing and teaching their children African values at home. Music recordings of popular musicians that border on African values, child privileges, and rights should be

aired and deliberated upon during parents' and teachers' meetings. Talks from child psychologists should be allowed during the meetings.

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