

## Re-telling the Igbo folktales: A Journey to greater wisdom in the Covid-19 Era.

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### ABSTRACT

In the olden days, parents, elders, relations spent quality time with the children, inculcating intellectual, moral and socio-cultural values to the children through folktales. Today, western interference has influenced the contemporary society to falsely believe that these folktales are moribund and mundane so we neglect them. Folktales are filled with wisdom which would help man solve problems that life may pose. This necessitated the study. The descriptive research method was used. The thrust of this paper therefore is to examine the wisdom and lessons illustrated in the two selected folktale - *The frog tale and the eaglet and the chickens* especially as it relates to the challenges in the COVID 19 era. The valuable lessons highlighted are solutions that would help humanity respond positively to the challenges of life. Using the reader-response theory of literary criticism, the folktale- *the frog tale* was X-rayed and the content revealed that one should be careful not to listen to the negative remarks or information the world discharges at us but to courageously deal with adversity when times get tough in life. The second folktale, *The eaglet and the chickens* advocates that a strong foundation should be built on developing creative skills which would enable one to positively adapt to changes or deal with the negative situations in life. The paper concludes and recommends that folktale should not be allowed to fade away but should be re-told, preserved and upheld because of the great wisdom it offers.

Keywords: Folktale, Wisdom, Journey and Covid-19

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### INTRODUCTION

Some people think that folk stories are pastime for old people and infants to while away time, forgetting that the stories convey didactic as well as the contemporary issues in the society [1,2,3]. Folktale as a body of narratives is an important aspect of the oral performance through which society impact morals and transmit worthwhile values to members of the family or to the community [4,5,6]. Every folktale has a moral which is necessary for the upbringing of the youths. Prior to the introduction of western type of education, folktale provided a most effective avenue for the transmission of key values and norms in the African communities [7,8].

[4] writes that,

*folktale is an aspect of folklore usually composed of fictional stories about animals or human beings involved in actions, activities and social instructions which culminate in giving a moral bent to the tale.*

Through folktales, the young ones are taught to adhere to the tenets of society within which they are born. Folktales are a reflection of the totality of the African socio-cultural existence [5]. It is also central in the promotion and attainment of a harmonious

relationship with the people and the community. Folktales keeps the tradition of a people aglow by preserving the customary norms, morals and ethical values of the community. Unfortunately, today, society seems to have deliberately neglected these folktales which acted as great teacher of wisdom in the olden days and is essential in bringing up the African and Nigerian child responsibly [6]. Through folktales, greater wisdom and knowledge are transmitted from one generation to another.

Folktales when analyzed has the capacity to throw a new and positive light in people's line of thought and re-shape people's way of thinking. Folktales are a representative of life and play important roles in mirroring life and teaching life's fundamental truths and values. In this study, the story of *The frog tale and the Eagles egg and the chickens* were analyzed and aligned with the lessons of wisdom learned during the COVID 19 traumatic era. A period which is considered remarkable in history because of the profound and distressing pain experienced in that particular period [8].

### Folktale

The new generation knows little of their folktale. Traditionally, children were trained with folktale to help imbibe the societal norms and values of the society where they live. [9] writes is a short witty story, passed on orally from one generation to another and harbors valuable morals, wisdom or lessons [4].

Folktales helps to advance and stabilize the society because of the moral, intellectual and socio-cultural and political ideas it impacts in the young ones which helps to shape their behavioural traits positively. The bible records *“Train up a child in the he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it”* (Prov. 13 vs 22). Vital and right virtues when learned are not easily discarded. The moral upliftment of the people is the strength and pride of a country, it is not only the

technological, economical or scientific attributes that counts. These fundamental attitudes learned from the folktales moulds the character of the youths in a given society, for righteousness exalts a nation while sin is a reproach [7].

Literature whether oral or written is very useful in social re-organization because it can forestall actions or help to reawaken the consciousness of the people. The power of literature lies in its capacity to change the mindset of readers about events, situations and circumstances. In the two folktale examined *the frog tale and the Eaglet and the chicken*, valuable themes of wisdom were drawn to ensure that individuals are equipped to face and live up to the challenges that life continues to thrust at them. From the characters portrayed in these tales, certain traits were highlighted which would be helpful in managing predicaments when faced with such similar situations in life [8].

### Wisdom

Agwuna (2014) indicates that, Mairi (1998) expresses

*wisdom as the quality of being wise,  
the ability to make sensible judgment  
especially on the basis of one's knowledge and  
experience, prudence, common sense and learning.*

The weight of informed opinion is not left out. One can associate wisdom with having insights, understanding, moral, intellectual

virtues and possessing technical skills. Hornby (2000) notes that

*wisdom is the ability to make sensible  
decision and give good advice because  
of the experience and knowledge one has  
gained over a long period of time.*

Davies (2006) notes that literature whether oral or written is a source of insight and wisdom to human predicament. This means that lessons of wisdom are learned from those characters in the tales that have experienced predicaments and came out triumphantly.

pandemic, starvation, riots, strikes, shootings and killings continues to assume prominence globally. Critical thinking and wisdom are the valuable tools relevant to balance the contemporary challenges of this new era especially at this Corona virus pandemic era.

Exposure to these folktales is needed to help one train and defend themselves in crucial times in order to survive in the journey of life. Life is full of uncertainties. Societies continues to change as issues like COVID 19

Life is a survival of the fittest and wisdom is knowing what to do when you do not know what to do. The lack of wisdom generates failures, backwardness and regrets but wisdom is supreme and the bible advises us

## COVID 19

The Corona virus (COVID 19) is an infectious illness caused by a virus that is communicable. The symptoms include: cough, fever, loss of taste or smell, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, muscle aches, severe respiratory illness, sore throat. The virus spreads easily among people in close contact. It can spread by a person being exposed to small droplets that stays in the air for several minutes or hours (online).

It was identified in Wuhan, China. The Corona virus is a pandemic, meaning that it occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population. People infected with this illness are being isolated, quarantined and stigmatized. For this, preventive measures are put in place in order to stop the spread. For example, washing hands regularly, using hand sanitizer, wearing facial masks, never hugging or shaking hands, instead wave, nod or bow to greetings, cleaning and disinfecting everywhere, avoiding crowded places, coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow or tissue, maintaining social distancing, quarantining and avoiding contacts with suspected patients in order to prevent further transmission.

The COVID 19 era, recorded a lot of traumatic experiences that threw so many people into panic and fear of the unknown. Schools, churches, stadium were closed, flights were canceled, global sports events canceled, panic buying to stockpile food items and stay at home. The pandemic wreaked havoc across the world and most people thought it was the coming of the end of the world.

In discouraging and disheartening situations like these certain lessons or wisdom has to be applied to surmount the battles and storms that life continues to deliver.

In this study, pearls of wisdom were extracted and analyzed from two folktales- *The frog tale and the Eaglet and the chickens*. To weave folktales into the COVID 19 era is to establish the synergy between folktale lessons and its relevance in Education in Nigeria. Literature whether oral or written is seen as being laden with a force capable of changing negative tendencies into constructive ideals. It will impact on the individual the wisdom and functional knowledge which will make them balanced and capable of facing the challenges of life. (Ahumaraeze and Igbokwe, 2018)

### A.THE EAGLET AND THE CHICKENS

Once upon a time, a hunter hunting for animals picked three eggs on the ground. He thought they were the eggs of a cartridge and took them home but the eggs were of an eagle that fell off from a palm tree. On reaching home, the hunter took the eagle's eggs and kept them with his hens which was about to hatch its own eggs. The hen also hatched the eagle's eggs with her own eggs, so the little chicks and eaglets grew up together.

The little eaglets never knew where they are and whom they were. They usually go out with the chickens in search of food. The eaglets learned how to dodge from the attacks of the hawks and how to scratch the ground in search for daily food. Not long, one of the eaglets noticed that it was not

easy for it to scratch the ground as the chickens usually do. This made it, always hungry and wanting for more food. It noticed how adorably lovely it was, more than the chicken. The eaglet now realized how significantly different it was from the ordinary chicken and entirely stopped scratching the ground for food but aimed at flying high to gather food from the tree tops. The eaglet was always learning how to use its wings for flight in order to gather more food from the tree tops for survival.

The eaglet embarked on training and learning how to fly effectively. When the eaglet mastered flying high with its wings, it left the others and flew away to the tree top where it gathers enough food that sustains it. The other two eaglets continued to follow

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the chicken, scratching the ground for food, not realizing they were eaglets and could fly on tree tops for more food that can sustain them. Not long, one of the eaglets got learner, fell sick because it was not getting enough food. It made no extra effort to strive for more food or fly. It had little strength,

### **Interpretative analysis**

Folktale through critical re-awakening and analytical ability is a veritable tool for impacting wisdom and knowledge. The lessons provide ideas essentially needed for survival especially in the COVID 19 era, when hunger, loss of jobs, starvation and unemployment was a major challenge. Many begged for food while many went back to the village to farm.

This folktale throws light on the need for one to unlock and develop their innate potentials. In the story, the first eaglet was not getting enough food from just scratching the ground, it needed more food to survive so it stood up, took the necessary actions and trained itself to fly with its wings to get to the tree top for more food for survival.

In reality, things do not just happen unless people take actions. The lock-down challenges and difficulties during the COVID 19, brought too many hardships. Too many businesses were shut down, churches, individuals donated food to the hungry masses, the wise ones who experienced hardships during the COVID 19, just like the first eaglet did not accept defeat. They made efforts and re-positioned themselves. Some ventured into agriculture, poultry, baking, trading on food stuffs. They developed their skills and potentials, bounced back to fruitfulness and never starved.

The other eaglets who never made efforts to tap their gifts, resources and potentials never realized whom they were and the hidden treasures and potentials within them. They represent the people during the COVID 19 that remained in starvation, poverty, throughout the lock-down. They depended on the donations from the general public and churches. They represent those who kept borrowing, seeking for loan, looking out for the false promises that the government were sharing money to the citizens. They represent the great brains on the planet earth who are blind to their gift, never making efforts to use the gifts they were

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walking about in search for food. The third eaglet became strong, mustered courage and mastered the way of life of the chicken, lived like a chicken and never realized it was an eagle.

endowed with. When people do not develop their skills, they depreciate in value and never attain any valuable feat but when talents are developed, with determination great things are achieved.

Extraordinary resources and greatness lies within man waiting to be tapped and actualized. Millions today die with unused and undiscovered talents within them which is a huge loss to humanity. It is interesting to note that the people who made efforts to succeed during the COVID -19 difficulties and ventured into agriculture or learned a new skill lived fruitfully. Today, they are profitably reaping the reward because they have added another skill to the ones they had before and are now progressing.

Igbo philosophers encourages and rewards hard work. The quest to achieve great feats in life comes as a result of the innate desire and personnel resolve to rewrite ones' history and change the situation through sheer hard work, determination, industry and courage. (Adam 2017). In life, man must work in order to be maintained and developed. Man from the beginning is called to work and man advances, earns his daily bread, contributes continually in science and technology through work. Human life is built up every day from work and from work it derives its specific dignity. The Igbo man works hard to uphold personal and communal honour and integrity. There is dignity in labour. In the story, the first eaglet that single handedly developed and distinguished himself exemplifies the self-help and self-entrepreneurial skill of the Igbo people in Nigeria.

Igbo People are endowed with inherent attitude for hard work and entrepreneur which helped them to survive during hard times especially during the Corona virus trauma. They are industrious and self-reliant. The Eagle (Ugo) in Igbo land is a symbol of strength and beauty. It symbolizes supremacy as the king of the birds. To the

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Igbos, it is a sacred bird. The eaglet from the story just like the Igbos are industrious and self-reliant. The eaglet in the tale, denied itself every comfort, got up to work and trained itself. Innovation centers around an Igbo man that is why they set up things to

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stand for themselves even in desert areas. Their motivational spirit enables them to achieve and sustain themselves. They are not complacent or idle.

## B. THE FROG TALE

Once upon a time, two frogs fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit to see how they would help them come out from the pit. When they saw how deep the pit was, they became dismayed and hopeless and told the two frogs in the pit that there is no way they can ever come out from the pit that they should prepare themselves for their fate. Unwilling to accept this terrible fate, the two frogs made frantic efforts to jump out from the pit. Some of the frogs shouted into the pit that it was hopeless trying to jump out because they would never ever come out. Other frogs continued shouting sorrowfully that they should just give up since they were already as good as dead. The two frogs continued with desperate effort trying their very best to jump out. Finally, one of the frogs quietly

resolved himself to his fate, lay down at the bottom of the pit and died as the others looked on in helpless grief.

The other frog continued to jump with every energy he had although exhausted and worn out. His companions began yelling again for him to accept his fate, give up and die. Finally, the frog leaped so high that it jumped out from the pit. Surprised, the other frogs gathered, celebrated his miraculous freedom and asked him how he made it. because it was just impossible that he could get out from the deep pit. Reading their lips, the astonished frog explained to them that he was deaf and that when he saw their gestures and shouting when he was in the pit, he thought they were encouraging him to try his best and jump out from the pit.

### Interpretative analysis

The analysis will be anchored on the Reader-Response theory of criticism. Meyer (1993) notes that,

in the reader-response theory, the reader's interpretation of the work is influenced by his or her personal background. It describes what goes on in the reader's mind during the process of reading. The reader's intellectual and emotional reaction to the work is as ripe for analysis as the text itself.

Though the above theory is based on written literature, it can equally be applied to oral literature. Oral literature especially folktales are stories created based on the way of life of the people, their beliefs, their cultural aspirations, hopes and identity. The content of the folktale mirrors what goes on in the society where they live. Based on the Reader Response critical analysis, we can infer that the Igbo people use their folktale to show situations and offer helpful suggestions for one to manage such predicaments when faced with similar situations in real life.

The folktale throws light on the need for one to shun negativism and not accept negative

discouraging remarks, news when struggling to survive during difficult times of life. What goes on in one's mind can either make one defeated or courageous.

The first frog heard all the negative remarks from other frogs saying, "it is helpless and impossible to jump out from the pit, they should just give up and die". As the first frog kept hearing and listening to the negative remarks, he became defeated, gave up the struggle and died.

The other frog was deaf so it kept labouring without rest, trying with strong determination because it thought the gestures and shouting were actually shouts of encouragement, to try his very best to jump out from the pit. The deaf frog

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survived courageously because it did not hear the negative remarks rather, what he saw from the shouting were encouragements. In life, what we listen to has the power to influence our life, negatively or positively.

When we take a look at the study, the pit where the two frogs fell into represents the compulsory unprepared, COVID 19 lock-down. Many have never seen a thing like that. During that period, people increasingly relied on social media due to corona virus outbreak. There was a stay at home order, wearing of facial masks, social distancing rules, hand washing, not touching your face, fearful news of vaccinations intended to reduce world population, lack of physical contact with other family members, friends, quarantine, isolation camps, widespread closure of schools and churches. The media kept announcing every day and every hour, the number of recorded cases and death. It was blown out of proportion. So many recovered from the disease but the social media kept saying that the corona virus has no cure so there was panic everywhere. Many thought it was the end of the world. Fear, stress of contacting the virus, worry, increased as negative news kept circulating globally through the social media like the Twitter, WhatsApp, Goggle, micro blogging, Instagram, YouTube and Reddit.

Misinformation, inaccurate information, half-truths and false news spread in a fast dimension resulting to an overwhelming rising cases of fear and risk of infection. Generally, the mental health of many began to deteriorate. So, it is normal and understandable that people were experiencing fear and panic throughout the COVID 19 general lock-down. Many starved,

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the COVID 19 lock-down many wise people who lost their jobs, used their God-given talents and wisdom to learn skills to provide for themselves and family. One should shun idleness, work hard and not sit idly by expecting manna from heaven. People should be careful of their spoken words and remarks. It is better to think on the right and positive, not on the negatives. We should be selective on what we allow the ears to hear, the eyes to see and the heart to

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many attempted suicide, many had no money for food and medical attention Some for the fear of being diagnosed of the corona virus stayed at home to treat themselves of their illness and could not make it.

These sets of people represent the first frog from the folktale who could not survive in the lock-down pit because of the negative, discouraging, dreadful news and remarks he kept absorbing and believing.

The deaf frog represents the sets of people who closed their ears and refused to listen to the distressing fearful news about the corona virus. How it has come to put the world to an end, how the Corona virus has no cure so people should stay in that lock-down pit of despair, Was the deaf frog locked down in the pit to do nothing? No, it continued trying with all manner of strategy and survived the harsh circumstances.

So it was during the COVID 19 pandemic, most who represent the deaf frog are people who lost their jobs, those whose businesses were shut down for fear of the spread of the virus but instead of accepting defeat, struggled and found another means of livelihood. Listening to the negative news report of the consistent announcement of the increasing number paralysis the mind.

These fearful news from the social media makes people conclude that we are never going to survive the COVID 19 pandemic. The way out from the confusion is faith and courage and never succumbing to negative fears and information from the global news. The COVID 19 is not the end of the world. Life must go on and life is a survival of the fittest.

be opened up to because a single thought can lead to a disaster. One needs courage in the face of fear. Be positive and never give up. It is to everyone's advantage to fill the mind with positive thoughts and not the negatives.

We need to encourage ourselves and encourage one another in difficult times. The deaf frog was encouraged because it thought the shouts and gestures were for encouragement to jump out from the lock

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down pit. The Bible says, “*therefore encourage one another and build one another up*”. (1 Thess.5: 11)

Pearl (1992) notes that we become what we think. If we think thoughts of courage, courage will flow. The more courageous the thinking, the greater the result will be. One should therefore act courageously, because we usually get according to the way we act. We should pray for courage as we pray for our daily bread.

The Igbo proverb says, “*Onye kpoo oba ya mkpokoro agbataobi ya e were ya kporo ntu*” (if the owner of a calabash kicks it around, the neighbours will use it as dustbin. When one fails to place value in what he/she has, he cannot appreciate the value in other people. Africans, Nigerians, the Igbo people should nurture and uphold their folktales and never allow it to fade away.

## CONCLUSION

The problem with most African countries especially Nigerians and the Igbos in particular is that they are no longer interested in those tales which are gradually becoming extinct. This explains why the present generation lack the practical wisdom needed to prefer solution to cope and live in this ever changing world. The world today is much in need of balanced and insightful citizens who would help offer solutions and

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Parents, grandparents, elder should go back to the era of sitting down to teach children their folktale. Life has so many lessons to teach us particularly from these neglected folktales. Curriculum planners should include the study of folktale in the curriculum, making it compulsory from the kindergarten to the tertiary levels of education. Creative writers should through their works, endeavour to introduce oral folktales into their literary work. This would help.

As the youths nowadays seems to derive more of their socialization from the internet, television and radio program, the collected materials of these folktales can be creatively and specially packaged in these social media to showcase these folk stories to them.

respond positively to challenges that life continues to throw at humanity. Literature whether oral or written mirrors life and teaches life's fundamental truths and values. These values and wisdom if assimilated, are capable of guiding one in life. It is therefore pertinent that we appreciate, uplift and revive our Igbo folktales because if we lose our traditions, we diminish and fail as a people.

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