

# Assessment of the Role of Children's Literature in Building an Incorruptible Global Nigerian Community

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**Abstract:-** Nigeria is seen and addressed as a corrupt nation and thus rated among the highly corrupt nations of the world. It is a concern to many responsible stakeholders of the country. Hence, the solution to solve the problem is necessary. Therefore, since literature is an instrument of social change and children are the hope of any nation's future, children's literature is identified as a means to address the problem. This study was to identify how some texts of children's literature have vividly addressed the subject of corruption and social values and virtues in the social, political, economic, religious, and communal lives of characters that align with the situation in Nigeria. The evaluative method was used to gather the data. It was discovered that all the texts were able to address issues of corruption in various manners like condemnation bribes, laziness, the dignity of labour, patriotism, obedience to elderly counsel, impartial judgment, sexual purity, and others. It was therefore recommended that children's literature should be taken as a deliberate national instrument of building responsible children for the future from home to school and society in general.

**Keywords:-** Children's Literature, Corruption, Nigeria, Values, Virtues.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the Committee of Nations, Nigeria is a very prominent member. In United Nations, Ecowas, OAU, and others, her membership remains staunch and solid. The nationals of this country are residents in many nations of the world. They are located and found prospering in many professions and manifesting specialties in diverse human endeavours. Many have risen to prominence acquiring laurels in international competitions and receiving awards of no mean status.

In spite of the foretasted, Nigeria is rated high in the circle of corrupt nations of the world. According to Musa (2023), the ranking of Nigeria as a corrupt nation has not changed considering the Corrupt Perception Index (CPI) results released by Transparency International for 2022. He stated that though Nigeria's rank in 2022 was 154 as against 150 it was in 2021, out of 180 nations, yet, repeated the 24 out of 100 points rating in 2022. Stressing and emphasizing

that Nigeria has nothing to change her status as a very corrupt nation within the year of assessment.

Corruption is a betrayal of trust reposed in persons occupying public positions. The use of the influence of position for personal gains is corruption Myint (2000). Collection of bribes, embezzlement, unexecuted contracts awarded, falsification of documents and accounts records, misappropriation of public funds, and many others are considered acts of corruption in any society Nmah (2017). Nigeria has grossly been enmeshed in corrupt practices from individuals, groups of people, corporate organisations, public and private; religious and traditional; local and foreign. It is an endemic and cancerous ailment in the body of Nigeria systems, Philips & Akpokighe (2014).

The effects of corruption are highly devastating and unimaginably destructive to any human community. This has been evidently witnessed in the retrogressive and underdeveloped situation of the Nigerian state. The outcome of the study conducted on corruption in Nigeria by Oladipupo (2016), revealed that corruption in the public, private and family systems led to the present deplorable situation of the country's infrastructures and governance which affect both rich and poor.

It is worthy of note to record that efforts have been made to tackle this precarious problem that frightens the existence of the nation. Successive governments in the country have come up with programmes, legislations, and or public establishments to tackle various elements of inhuman and bestial practices that constitute the corrupt body of the nation. Starting from the military government of Buhari between 1983 and 1985, the vogue was War Against Indiscipline (WAI) launched but could not endure after the regime because of the attendant seemingly corruption in the style of implementation riddled with incidences of highhandedness violating human rights.

Thereafter, Babangida's government modified WAI to (WAIC) War Against Indiscipline and Corruption. It is quite funny to equally ascertain that the government that subsisted from 1985 to 1993 was identified with unparallel corrupt practices. A high-class notable crime of drug peddling of Gloria Okon was traced to the person of President Babangida and which at the time generated a lot of public criticism and

outcry of the press that eventually led to the famous letter bomb that killed Dele Giwa, the then Editor of Tell Magazine.

The Civilian government that heralded the third republic headed by Olusegun Obasanjo also tried to confront this subject of corruption through the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences (ICPC). These two government institutions aimed at nipping in the bud the endemic corrupt practices continue to be instruments of government to date. The civilian government of Goodluck Jonathan and the immediate one of Muhammed Buhari made use of these two institutions. Individuals, corporate bodies, chief executive officers or organization, and government officials including governors, ministers, commissioners, directors, chairmen of boards, and parastatals were among the suspects and criminals squeezed by these anti-graft agencies. Some were found guilty and sanctioned through court judgements while some were exonerated or favoured in some ways to escape punishment.

Nevertheless, Corruption in Nigeria has not blinked her eyes as evidence of reaction to the heat from the fire of attacks through the instruments of government. The reasons include selective mode of operation as perceived enemies or oppositions of government in power are pursued, partial handling of cases affecting cronies and errand machinery or pipers of the government, unpatriotic and corrupt officers of the anti-graft agencies, and many more. In recent times the head of EFCC was sacked and arrested because of alleged involvement in the saga of the Central Bank's insecure and callous programme of Naira reprint.

It is disheartening to note that there are some nations in the world that rarely respect Nigerians as a result of this damaging culture, corruption. Sadly noted also is the fact that the lawmakers: who thought it wise to promulgate laws against evil are evil themselves with dirty and soil hands infested with a high level of corruption; the judiciary that is looked up to for dispensation of justice is spotted with the deceptive garment of a miscarriage of justice, and unfair judgement; the law enforcement agencies are masterminds of lawlessness and criminality in the society without a sense of shame displaying their ignominy everywhere. With brazen disregard for morals and societal values, the civilians in government as the executive, and their supporters with reckless abandonment, disdain for citizens' collective ownership of the nation's resources, and continue to ascribe to themselves the ownership.

What then is the way forward or is the hope lost? Not exactly. Though, for more than six decades after independence, the nation has not experienced a growing healthy state of morality and good virtues across its system of existence, yet, hope abounds. There is hope for repositioning, hope for restructuring, hope for transformation, hope for revival, and hope for change. The foundation should be revisited. The root of the Nigerian nation was not corrupt. It was a virtuous and morally upright society even in the diverse ethnocultural and religious settings

Therefore, this paper is premised upon the notion of children's literature as a veritable means of restructuring and reforming Nigeria from corruption since children are identified and believed to be leaders of tomorrow and hope for the future of any society.

## II. CHILDREN LITERATURE AND NIGERIAN SOCIETY

Children's literature consists of every literary material in various media that addresses issues that relates to the life of children as they interact with the world around them to influence their life aspirations, and conducts in order to be useful to themselves and society in general. Ngwuchukwu (2010) in the context of regional literature describes African children's literature as all written works about the interest of children, and for children. Whereas, Ngwuchukwu, Ezengwu & Ewa. (2020), describe Nigerian children's literature as a body of literature with artistic value, presented for the intellectual needs of children in the period, with a particular language and style.

Children's literature in Nigeria is not a product of colonization or civilization cum modernization. It is part of the original life of Nigerians in the various indigenous cultures and tribes that make up the nation. From north to south, and east to west, the indigenous life of Nigerians as of all African races is decorated with literature. In various ways and manners, children's literature has been used to mould the characters of Nigerians positively, which really helped in building an incorruptible society of old.

Through oral literature, Nigerian children were educated, enlightened, and entertained to position themselves as a dignified and untainted personality who are responsible to themselves, family, and the community. Folktales, folklores, stories, poetry in ballads, dirge, lyrics, epics, fairy tales, songs, customs, games, and others are the genres and forms of literature used to nurture the personality of an indigenous Nigerian child to a responsible adult who becomes loyal and patriotic to the nation as a community of people.

The indigenous Nigerian society disdained and detested corruptible practices. Anti-social and immoral behaviours are derided and condemned in their entirety to the extent of banishment, ostracization, sanctions like restitution, restoration, fines, and others, employed as punitive measures against recalcitrant members of society. During festivals and social engagements, such people were satirized with songs and acrobats that brought shame and ridicule to them. Hence, every individual was seriously mindful of what they did and even the associations they kept for friendship and occupation partnership. Community sometimes were labeled because of the ignoble act of a member who was considered to have committed a serious offence like murder, rape, burglary, stealing, and others. Other neighbouring communities or villages warned their children from associating with children from such communities and decline marriage proposals from such clans and it ran down to families.

Fables, folklores, and others involving animals like tortoises, dogs, lions, hyenas, foxes, and other creatures were characters in stories that revealed greediness, selfishness, wisdom, hard work, laziness, and other themes were used to teach children in order to guide them to the noble path of social, cultural, religious, occupational and political uprightness.

The advent of colonization and modernization dislodged the sanctity of indigenous practices that literature offers for good citizenry from the tunnel of wisdom. Indigenous social values and virtues of honesty, loyalty, obedience, love, appreciation of one another, fear of God, unity, kindness, and more become neutralised as foreign cultures of ignominy, selfishness, disregard for communal accountability, social order, traditional authorities, and others become the order of the day. Nmah (2017), submits that the pursuant of modernization by post-colonial African leaders and the people at all costs bring multiple problems that accompany social change in society. The situation becomes complicated and confusing to handle as individuals have lost a sense of dignity and social-cultural virtues and values that originally sustained the society.

In order to redeem and transform the already corrupt nation, it must be appreciated that children are hopes for the future of a people. Hence, building them deliberately through the instrument of literature would salvage the already considered hopeless situation. This is to re-enliven the abandoned and neglected indigenous instrument of education and enlightenment that produces and nurtures incorruptible citizens and leaders aiming and pursuing a socially, economically, politically, and spiritually stable and developing nation

In view of the present daunting corrupt situation of the country and lack of solutions through all approaches employed so far, this paper analyses the possible way children literature can be used to eradicate corruption by inculcating virtues and moral values for personal dignity, development and responsibility to self, other and society.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study is evaluative with the survey of the contents of children's literary texts to gather data. It is qualitative data analysis. Some texts for children's literature would be selected and analysed bringing out salient points from their themes as being relevant to the subject of the focus of the study.

### IV. SUMMARY OF THE TEXTS

To justify the purpose of this study, three different Children readers shall be analysed and discussed. They are:

- The Drummer Boy by Cyprian Ekwensi
- The Incorruptible Judge by Olu Olagoke
- The Punishment" by Kayode Adeyemo
- Eni Ori Yo by Olawoye, S. A.
- Iwa Ibaje (Evil Deeds)
- Ore Mi (*My Friend*)

#### ➤ *The Drummer Boy*

The storybook written by Cyprian Ekwensi succinctly reflects the reality of a typical setting of society through the life and fate of the protagonist, Akin who is a blind boy. The author used him to disabuse the mind of people and society that being handicapped is not a curse or sentence to dependence and beggarly life. Akin was a drummer who does not beg for a living. In spite of his blindness, he became a source of joy to his community. The story also teaches love through the character of Madam Bisi who introduce Akin to "The Boys' Forest Home" where Akin could become self-sufficient rather than charity through drumming. Though he did not understand the importance at first. Criminality was also condemned as a gang of boys who deceived Akin to be friends and joined him in the music and work as a team. Later, they robbed him of his earnings but later got arrested and hanged after they attempted to steal tires from an army vehicle.

#### ➤ *The Incorruptible Judge*

The Incorruptible Judge by Olu Olagoke centres around a young school-leaver, Ajala, who seeks for a job with a pathetic physical appearance with his worn-out shoe due to a long distance-trek to get a job. He must get a job because of the debt of the loan that sponsored his education. When eventually hope of getting a clerical position at the Government Development Department, he was faced with the demand of a bribe of #5 by Mr. James Ade Agbalowomeri. With the encouragement of Femi his schoolmate who already is a staff of the establishment through the influence of his father, Ajala decided not to succumb to giving bribes. Instead, he involved the police and Mr. Agbalowomeri become ensnared in his bribery game. He was given a marked currency by the police to offer as a bribe to get his letter of appointment. Mr. Agbalowomeri was arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment. Justice Faderin whose father-in-law was detailed to prevail on him to take a bribe and upturn justice has no sympathy for any element of criminality, and uncompromisingly dispenses judgement to serve as a deterrent to people of shady minds and character.

#### ➤ *The Punishment*

The Punishment by Kayode Adeyemo features Bode, the main character as a spoiled mummy's pet who becomes a defiant truant, thief, and grossly bad boy at school. The consequence of these behaviours is five years in confinement through a court judgement on the case of Dayo's death through abortion. Dayo was Bode's girlfriend whom he forced to abort a pregnancy by the influence of Richard, his bad friend. Before the imprisonment of Bode, there had been an act of disobedience defying the instruction of the principal to watch football at the stadium and in the process was bitten by a snake. Social carelessness or negligence and encouragement of unnecessary things among young ones are addressed. Equally, Dr. Ladi, a greedy professional who aided and abetted the abortion of pregnancy bagged seven years of imprisonment as a consequence of the heinous crime.

#### ➤ *Eni Ori Yo (Delivered by Fate)*

This is a storybook written in Yoruba language by Olawoye is about two boys, Sola and Boye who attended the same primary school. While Sola is a serious brilliant, and morally upright pupil, Boye is a truant, disobedient, and academically poor. The parents of both boys are very responsible and encourage their children to be academically vibrant and morally upright. Sola continues to be diligent in his studies and behaves well. Boye continues to follow his bad friends and grows hardened in truancy, lies, and bullying. There comes a time he mobilises his friends to deal with Sola simply because his parents got to discover his truancy and lies through Sola, when he visited their home. He has been absent in school and Sola decided to visit him at home. In order to avoid punishment at home, he runs away to his friend and refuses to come back home. Late in the night, his friends send him out to go back to his parent. Instead of going back home to his parents, because of fear of punishment, he turned to the motor park and found himself in the midst of miscreants. His way of life and relationship sold him to kidnapers to be used for rituals. Bode was fortunate to escape death through interception of the kidnapers by the police at road checkpoints. He eventually reconciled with his parents, the entire schoolmates and teachers with the help of the police. He promises to be well-behaved and be obedient and never went back to bad behaviours but face his studies. Bode keeps to his promise and begins to do well academically. The book also focuses on Akanmu the class teacher of the two boys. Akanmu takes his teaching job with interest in his pupils, teaching them and counseling them to be diligent and well-behaved. He is patient, loving, and caring to the pupils, he always received gifts from the parents. He is an exemplary professional.

➤ *Iwa Ibaje (Evil Deeds)*

This is a satirical poem condemning bad and corrupt acts in society. It focuses lens on famous and influential people in society who acquire their status through shady means. Armed robbery, smuggling, stealing, drug dealing and addiction among others as hidden sources and roots of their status. Hence, they are condemned with the consequences outlined; public execution, insanity. The narrator makes personal declaration and supplication to God that he will not be part of such acts in his life because he will do good and God will reward him and judge the evil ones.

➤ *Iwa Ibaje (Evil Deeds)*

This poem examines who a friend is; a good and a bad friend. The narrator asks ‘what type of friend are you?’ Whether the friend is an evil or good, fortune bearer or architect of woes; He reflects how the parents warn him to beware of friends. He daily gathers friends around himself. They are good and bad friends. Some have caused troubles and bad luck to him. Now, he makes fresh and firm decision not to allow bad friends because there is gain in them.

## V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

All the text narrated as the instrument for this study are very good to build virtuous character and useful dignified lives in children.

In *The Drummer Boy*, though Akin was blind, yet, he made a living by using the skill inherent in him to make a living. This will disabuse children’s minds from the social degradation of begging. He did not constitute himself as a social miscreant to stealing and pilfering around as some abandoned children do all around the country. The eventual execution of the bad boys who deceived and joined him as a music team after they were discovered as thieves teach a lesson that criminality leads to destruction. It teaches that though there is a limitation in being physically handicapped, yet, there is an opportunity for transformation and improvement through training as it is in *The Boys Forest Home* Which Madam Bisi introduces Akin.

So, *The Drummer Boy* is capable of building virtues and morals in the minds of the children as a good foundation for their later life. They learn Self-reliance, love of others and people with disability, consequences for criminality, enhancement of a handicapped person through training, and cautiousness in identifying with people for friendship and partnership.

*The Incorruptible Judge* emphasises that the challenges of life is a strong instrument of determination to aspire for dignity. Ajala struggled to be educated through loans due to his parent’s poverty. His refusal to give bribes for the desperately needed job is a great lesson for children that poverty and lack of material needs are not justifiable reasons or excuses to commit crimes or succumb to social vices. It also stresses the benefit of practicing the knowledge and teachings given in schools. Femi is able to remind Ajala about the teaching of their Principal at school that they should not be involved in bribery. It builds confidence in children to face and resist evil in society everywhere they are. Ajala is bold through Femi’s encouragement and involves the police whom Sergeant Okoro represents. The arrest and eventual imprisonment of Mr. Agbalowomeri is a great lesson that no matter anybody’s position or influence in society, the law is above them when found in evil. Also, the refusal of Justice Faderin to collect bribes through his father-in-law further strengthens the courage of children to do the right thing and condemn what is criminal and evil in society.

This play displayed young Ajala and Femi’s loyalty to the nation, obedience, and law-abiding. They offer themselves as dividends of true education by reminding each other of the virtues instilled in them why in school. The cooperation of Ajala, Femi, and Sergeant Okoro to arrest the corrupt Mr Agbalowomeri, a government employee is an encouragement to children to learn contentment and hatred for any act of immorality and corruption. Impartiality and truthfulness as displayed in Justice Faderin is another lesson for children to imbibe.

*The Punishment* reveals and teaches that indulgence in the pampering of parents does not end in joy when the



consequences emerge. The case of Bode is a great lesson to children. His pampered life encouraged him to defy the instruction of the principal, grievous disobedience that led to a snake bite. Dayo became pregnant and they aborted resulting to death. Children learn to keep away from fornication which in religious parlance is sin and in social life, perversion and immorality. In pre-literate traditional society, it attracted disgrace and communal condemnation. Dayo witnessed unwanted pregnancy through escapist behavior and met an untimely death. It could happen to any disobedient child who indulges in it. So, children will learn to run away from the immoral act. Dr. Ladi's imprisonment also is another lesson that greediness can lead to disgrace and punishment by the law. Nobody is above the law.

So, in *The Punishment*, children learn obedience and good conduct, abstinence from sexual immorality, avoidance of unnecessary indulgence of pampering by the parents, and greediness.

*Eni Ori Yo* (Delivered by Fate) teaches the rewards of diligent and good moral conduct with the consequences of bad behaviours and seriousness. Through the character of Sola, many students are encouraged to well behave and also be diligent in their studies. In the novel, the character of Sola earns him the friendship and love of many of his mates while the teacher and the parents including Boye's give him much regard. In the character of Bode, other children learn to avoid getting into serious trouble the kind Boye found himself before turning a new leaf. Mr. Akanmu becomes a role model, a mentor to the pupils whom he encourages always to be up and doing in order to become a teacher like him or other dignified professionals. It will inspire children to desire becoming a famous and good person like Akanmu. Diligence is equally portrayed in him as a worker and citizen of the nation.

➤ *Iwa Ibaje (Evil Deeds)*

In *Iwa Ibaje*, children are taught how to hate unwholesome means of getting rich, famous and influential. The consequences of the shady means are not good for anyone so, children will quickly learn not to take such people as their mentors in society. Public execution is a shameful thing, equally is insanity through hard drugs. They will not want to be victim.

➤ *Ore Mi (My Friend)*

This poem simply teaches children of the negative consequences of bad friends and obedience to parents. The narrator did not heed to the warning of his parents at first. After he had experienced the consequences of bad friends, he quickly change his way and screens who should be his friend.

It is evident from the analysis and discussions of the texts that children's literature is capable of building a Nigerian nation to global acceptance. It is possible to avoid bribery and condemn it. It is possible to sanitise the government's establishment of corrupt practices and dispense correct and punitive judgement in the judiciary. It is possible to refuse to be influenced by criminals and corrupt people. It is possible to expose corrupt and bad people in society. Every antisocial and immoral behaviours are punishable. It is possible to a loyal and law abiding citizen.

It is the sayings of the Yorubas that charity begins at home. Nigeria is home to all citizens that disperse into the countries of the world. If good virtues and moral conduct are imbibed in every citizen from the cradle, at home, school, and the entire society, they will not be corruptible when they go to other countries, it will remain in them because it has become the principle and philosophy of their life.

Therefore, it is recommended that the issue of children's literature be taken as a serious business of building the minds and character of the children.

- It should become a subject of legislation that every level of contact with children is involved in deliberate efforts of teaching them.
- Children's literature materials should be made available in homes, schools, and, other relevant public places like libraries, religious organisations, and clubs for easy access at all times.
- The content should be made available in print, electronic, and information and technology variants.
- For the benefit of all citizens to allow inclusion at all levels, materials in different ethnic languages should be produced for maximum realization of this goal.
- In schools, proper monitoring of the effects of the opportunity on the children should be encouraged while the general society must be conscious of this responsibility as the children belong to them.
- Themes of children's literature to be produced should deliberately address social problems leading to corruption in Nigeria.
- Relevant faculties and departments in our tertiary institutions should encourage their students and graduates to produce literary materials for this purpose.
- More writers should come up among graduates of language literature

Gradually, the nation will begin to see the progressive effects of this decision if wisely adopted and implemented.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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