

## Impact of *Tales by Moonlight* - A Television Drama series, on Children

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### Abstract

Children are assets to every community and therefore there are efforts to get them the best education so as to make children realise their full potentials in the society as they gradually become of age. If their interest in education is sustained, surely the rate at which deviant behaviours infest the society will no doubt reduce to the barest minimum. This research examined the impact that educational drama programmes on television can have on children. It investigated into level of information reception by children through drama as compared to other conservative methods. Data were obtained through historical method and in-depth interview. *Tales by Moonlight*, a children television programme on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was the focus of the study and 5 viewers who watched the programme as children (though now grown-ups) were purposively selected for interview. Feedbacks from audience were also thematically analysed from online forums. Findings showed that when children are thought through well produced educational drama programmes, level of reception and retention is high and the memory of it lasts longer than when it is through the traditional method. This study, therefore, recommends more educational drama programmes across all fields of learning for children in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Television Drama, Learning Impact, Tales by Moonlight, Educational Broadcasting.

### Introduction

Children sometimes lose interest in class works when they are bored with only conventional or traditional method of teaching. Analysts posit that the usual way of teaching is too monotonous because it lacks variety, colour and adventure (Aderibigbe, Nwanne & Aliede, 2013, p. 48). It is also imperative that for children to be groomed as future leaders and nation builders, their interest in education must be sustained.

In developing nations, rates of schools' drop outs are high. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2015, p. 1) says four out of every ten

children drop out of school in the Sub-Saharan African region in 2010, and by 2013, study shows that number of children and adolescents who are out of school globally grew to 124 million out of which 30 million live in the Sub-Sahara Africa and 10 million in South and West Asia. This number rose by 2.4 million between 2010 and 2013. The worst is that once children drop out, most of them never go back to class.

One major reason for such high rate in drop out is attributed to lack of interest in class works. A lot of children that could have made significant impacts in the field of science, technology, arts, social sciences as grownups are ending up at mediocre level while some even find themselves constituting threats to the society due to degenerating into some sort of deviants - a scenario that could be reversed, had all efforts been made to make education very appealing to them at the very onset.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In developing countries like Nigeria, children's interest in education has been on the decline due to monotonous rigorous class works. Can more educational drama programmes specifically designed for children restore interest of affected children in education? This is the essence of this study as it tries to find out the effectiveness of an educative television drama series, *Tales by Moonlight* in improving children's interest in what they are taught.

Drama has always been having a captivating effect on viewers especially children (Andah & Laninhun, 2012, p. 2). It can make an uninteresting issue very interesting if handled in the most fascinating way. Drama often creates suspense which makes the audience wants to know the next occurrence and by this, the viewer's interest is maintained. Drama has been used to make mathematics colourful and interesting; so also are other subjects like physics, chemistry, biology, geography, history, languages, and the likes, which ordinarily children often find uninteresting when taught in a monotonous manner.

Children educational broadcasting in terms of drama and other methods has been a veritable tool being used in the developed countries to groom children for their future career (Aderibigbe, Nwanne & Aliede, 2013). To corroborate this, Osei-Hwere (2008) in Andah & Laninhun (2012, p. 4) says in developed countries for example, the United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia and Japan, media contents are created to teach school based curriculum on the Internet and television. Osei-Hwere goes further to say that the contents are made very appealing with the use of elements like humour, mysteries, games, illustrations, animations, demonstrations among others. He also asserts that the fact that entertainment is a natural necessity of life makes children's drama imperative as "all work and no play makes Jack or Jill (Jide or Joke) a dull boy or girl."

Therefore, as the case may be, drama can be very appealing because it is entertaining in nature and at the same time can be used to run the school curriculum. Previous researches also revealed that children spend more time watching television than their parents who

engage in other socioeconomic activities (Usadolo & Gwauya, 2012, p. 33). This means creating more children educative television drama programmes might buy over their interest considerably into their education.

Moreover, part of the Children's Television Charter drafted at the World Summit on Children and Television in Melbourne, Australia in March, 1995 and adopted at the Prix Jeunesse Roundtable in May, 1995 cited in Andah & Laninhun (2012, p. 2) is that Children should have Programmes of high quality which are made specifically for them and which do not exploit them. These programmes in addition to entertaining, should allow children to develop physically, mentally and socially to their fullest potentials.

In Nigeria, children educational broadcasting is given a little space in the allotment of programmes on radio and television not to talk of children educational drama series. Oha & Andah (2002, p. 2) say that most of the programmes on Nigerian televisions are adult-oriented and not even suitable for children's consumption and that this trend amounts to social and psychological alienation of children as a social group.

The primary reason identified for such shortage of children television educational programmes in Nigeria is that children programmes may not be a good way of generating revenue for broadcast stations. Since the order of the day is to give priority to commercials or programmes that go along with commercials that will fetch good money for the stations. But if it can be established that these children programmes can effectively make children do well in their education, then the aforementioned factor is not enough reason to jettison what will benefit the children of which the overall payback will do good to the entire nation on the long run. This shows that the media are sacrificing immense overall long term benefits for short term benefits of a particular class.

This research work therefore stressed the effect of a popular children educational television drama series, *Tales by Moonlight*, on its teeming audience who were particularly children across the country. The scope of the study spans from 1984 to 2002: the period that Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was running *Tales by Moonlight* programme. The programme still sometimes surfaces but as repeat episodes.

## **Brief History of Tales by Moonlight Children**

### **Educational Programmeme**

The programme, *Tales by Moonlight* was created in 1984 by Victoria Ezeokoli, a former Director of programmes at NTA headquarters. It was an attempt by NTA to introduce a local children's programme that could be at par with the highly popular foreign programme, *Sesame Street*. It was initially presented and narrated by a lady known as Aunty Nkem (Nkem Orakwe), but later by a male narrator, Jimi Solanke. The programme had evening setting to make it reflect the traditional African culture of entertainment time before the advent of

modern technology. The moon would shine; children would sit on the floor around their Aunty and listened intently to her folktales. The tales were taken from the different ethnic groups in Nigeria. The narrations would then automatically translate to the story land where actors would re-enact the stories to enable viewers see it acted instead of hearing it alone. The tales had so many animal roles and they taught moral lessons and value.

Popular among the stories relayed and acted were “Why the Tortoise has a cracked shell” and “Why the sky is so high” It was aired every Sunday from 6:00 to 6:30PM. The programme eventually won the 1991 prize of International Video/Film Competition organized by the National Black Programme Consortium in Columbus, Ohio, USA. It was adjudged the best youth educational programme for that year (Aderibigbe, 2013, p. 50).

## Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered

1. To what extent was *Tales by Moonlight* programme appealing to children?
2. What was the extent of children’s concentration when they watch *Tales by Moonlight* programme?
3. How long did the memories of watching *Tales by Moonlight* programme remain with the children?

## Concept of Educational Broadcasting

One of the primary duties of the media is to educate its audience (Daramola, 2012, p. 112). And to make education more accessible and easier for the populace. Radio, television, films and lately Internet are used to carry out educational activities. Therefore, Onabajo in Aderibigbe, Nwanne & Aliede, (2013, p. 14) defines educational broadcasting as the transmission of education or educational programmes through radio waves from a television or radio station or any other broadcast device, to the audience in far and near places. And according to Duyile (2015, p. 307), educational broadcasting is the technique of using radio and television to educate the mass audience. What can be deduced from these definitions is the use of electronic means to carry out educational function on mass audience. Whether it is for the purpose of obtaining or aiding in obtaining academic qualifications, helping one to learn any vocational skills or acquiring ‘how to’ of any art, such as cooking, gardening, baking, etcetera or for the purpose of educating the masses about government policies or current trends in the society.

Onabajo, (2000) in Aderibigbe, Nwanne & Aliede, (2013, p. 15) posits that educational broadcasting is as old as the emergence of broadcast industry. It dated as far back as the early 1900s and it has been successfully used for the furtherance of education in the advanced countries: Australia since 1929, United States since 1930s, India since 1929, and Japan since 1933. In Nigeria it was introduced with the advent of radio and television broadcasting in the

1930s and 1959 respectively. It was one of the major reasons for establishing the first television station in Africa, Western Broadcasting Station (WNBS) in Ibadan - to engage in educational broadcasting (Aderibigbe, Nwanne & Aliede, 2013, p. 18). Since then it has been used to carry out both formal and informal aspects of education.

The advantages of educational broadcasting cannot be overemphasized. Babalola (2005) highlights the importance of educational broadcasting thus:

- It encourages a greater understanding of the subject matter because its presentation is done in clear, straight forward and simple language.
- It promotes individualised learning because the listener or viewer can learn on his or her own by listening to and or viewing the lesson personally without having to come in contact with the real teacher.

### **Drama as a Concept in Children Educational Broadcasting**

Drama, theatre, plays have been used synonymously. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary 2014, drama is a piece of writing that tells a story and is performed on a stage. Aderibigbe, Nwanne & Aliede, (2013, p. 62) say it is a performance which tells a story through action and dialogue. It takes us into the lives and thoughts of people and exposes their characters and how these change as a result of conflicts which face them and how these are resolved. When the conflicts are inconsequential, the drama is a comedy and when they are deeply disturbing or profound, it is a tragedy. Some scholars posit that theatre is an art that comprise drama, music, poetry or dance. (Akpan, 1987) However, it is important to note that drama could combine the other three components of theatre art namely music, poetry and dance.

Basom (2005, p. 1) describes drama as an art that explores human conflict and tension. It generally takes the form of a story presented to an audience through dialogue and action. The story is conveyed using the elements of the theatre: acting, costumes, props, scenery, lighting, music and sound. Drama has an emotional and intellectual impact on both the participants and audience members. It holds up a mirror for us to examine ourselves, deepening our understanding of human motivation and behaviour. It broadens our perspective through stories that portray life from different points of view, cultures, and time periods.

Furthermore, Basom (2005, p. 1) says it is a multisensory mode of learning to (a) increase awareness of self (mind, body, and voice) and others (collaboration and empathy) (b) improve clarity and creativity in communication of verbal and nonverbal ideas, (c) and deepens understanding of human behaviour, motivation, diversity, culture and history.

Cruse (2012, p. 5) Says there are three primary modalities through which people take in information: visual, auditory and tactile and Silverman (2006) cited in the same relates these three modalities to how students process information, deriving three basic learning styles:



visual-spatial, auditory-sequential, and tactile-kinaesthetic. Visual-spatial learners take in new information through visualization of the whole concept and think in holistic, often in three-dimensional images. Auditory-sequential learners, by contrast, think in words, processed audit-orally, and generally learn in sequential, step-by-step process. Finally, tactile-kinaesthetic learners take information through physical touch and sensation, and they benefit from demonstration or application more than from verbal explanations.

Television drama therefore means stage performance of a story meant for television production. This will now create a linkage with the concept of movie since it is a television production. Movie means motion picture or film whereas drama may not necessarily have visuals. An example of this is radio drama which only involves audio performance.

This now takes this study to children television drama; it can be defined as a stage performance of a story in a television production meant for children consumption. Drama has been employed in many facets of children educational broadcasting all over the world. Scholars believed it stimulates and increases interest on the part of the pupils in education. Even in mathematics, where many pupils have some difficulties, drama have contributed to the increase of interest in education. There is the popular joke in Nigeria with reference to an Igbo boy who did not know the sum of four (4) plus four (4). His father was so angry with him and said: “Emeka! You don’t know four (4) plus four (4)! Now, if I give you Four naira (N4) and your mum gives you another four naira (N) how much would you be having in your hand then?” The boy quickly said, “Of course eight naira (N8).” Now the boy who could not answer  $4 + 4$  was able to answer correctly when it was dramatized; especially when money was involved! Thus the main aim of drama is its importance in the development of the child, such development includes oral, physical, emotional, social and philosophical development of the child.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The social learning theory as propounded by Albert Bandura and his associates, states that every social behaviour is learned primarily by observing and imitating actions of others. It also says that observational learning can very much occur through watching behaviour that is demonstrated. In this case, drama fits into the picture here, and that in many cases learning observationally and sometime when one is directly involved in the learning process is highly beneficiary to the learner. (Pecchion, Robinson & Thompson, 2000 cited in Usadolo & Gwayua, 2012, p. 34). In other words, drama is a demonstrated behaviour that normally fascinates interest of its audience more than just normal teaching that may be less exciting and monotonous in nature.

Although, Anaeto, Onabajo & Osifeso, (2008, p. 102) remark, that this theory has been particularly valuable in analysing the possible effects of television violence, but are quick to add that it is also a general theory of learning that can be applied to other areas of mass media

effects, and that the theory recognises that people can bypass the inefficient approach to learning to acquire some behaviours simply by observation and storing the observations as a guide to future behaviour. It also recognises that much human learning takes place through watching other people model various behaviours. These aspects make this theory suitable for the study.

## Method of Research

Qualitative approach was used to gather data for this study. It is a tool for studying “attitude, behaviours and meaning people attach to an experience and circumstance” (Ritchie, 2010 cited in Usadolo & Gwauya, 2012, p. 34). Since this study explores experiences of children who watched *Tales by Moonlight* programme although the children then are grownups now, this is the most suitable approach. Historical method was employed in data collection; According to Ogbulogo, Kolawole, Daniel & Iyere (2012, p. 42)

By this method, past experiences were dug into while people associated with the programme were consulted. The target population is viewers of *Tales by Moonlight* programme. Since the programme has been rested they were selected purposively. In-depth interview was used as method of data collection so also was thematic analysis used to analyse data collected from Internet forum discussion.

## Findings

Based on the qualitative investigation, findings are thematically presented, thus:

**Table 1. Appeal for *Tale by Moonlight***

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Etic Interpretation</b>	<b>Emic Interpretation</b>
Love for the stories	Love for programme	Captivating content
Part of family life	Group exposure	Multiple exposures per view
Interesting programme theme song	Creative theme song visuals	Theme song is influential
Willing to pay for programme	Audience ignore programme cost	Programme is lucrative
Programme is missed	Nostalgia for programme	Audiences wish re-Launched
Loved by children	Appealing to target audience	Enormous mass appeal

Source: Interviews, 2018

Data in table 1 provides details towards answering research question one: To what extent was *Tales by Moonlight* programme appealing to children? Accordingly, reactions proved that *Tales by Moonlight* programme was very appealing to its audience to the extent that many years after the show had been rested, viewers were still able to say precisely the captivating effects it had on them as kids.

**Table 2.Children’s concentration during exposure to *Tales by Moonlight***

Responses	Etic Interpretation	Emic Interpretation
Meals secondary to content	Immensely interesting	Programme can be addictive
Children often sit close and still	Close attention by children	-Proximity and attention was high

Source: Interviews, 2018

Contents in table 2 provides details towards answering research question two: What was the extent of children’s concentration when they watch *Tales by Moonlight* programme?

The response gathered indicated that the concentration level of children while watching *Tales by Moonlight* programme was very high to the extent that some of them would not heed the call of parents to come and have their dinner till the programme ended.

Moreover, the following response attests to the fact that there was always very high concentration: “Hmmm, good old days, used to sit very close to the T.V set; shows like that should be revived.” The phrase “Sitting very close to the T.V set” proves an act of immense concentration and the reactions of rest of the people interviewed towed the same direction.

**Table 3.Children’s recall of *Tales by moonlight* programme**

Responses	Etic Interpretation	Emic Interpretation
Contents resonate	Recall is high	Programme imagery is high
Serious TV Characterisation	Cast was interesting	Powerful creative TV plots
Recall flows with story	Memory is content is high	Programme message sustains

Source: Interviews, 2018

Table 3 enables answering research question three: How long did the memories of watching *Tales by moonlight* programme remain with the children?

Consequently, *Tale by the Moonlight* was potent and had influential recall potency among audiences. Those who grew up with the programme still recall several episodes of the programme, and can still narrate the importance and message of the educational stories.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The researcher therefore concludes that teaching with the aid of educative drama on television have greatly impacted the lives of children by increasing their concentration level far above using only conventional methods. As a result of the findings of this research, the researcher thereby recommends the following:

- a. The government should make it mandatory that at least 15 percent media contents on individual television stations should be educative drama programmes for children.
- b. Funds should be made available for the sponsor of such programmes.



- c. Advertisement of such programmes should be run from time to time so as to create awareness on the part of the children as regards time of the programmes and the benefits of watching them.

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