

# Child Formative Power of Literature

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**Abstract:** *This article investigates the power of literature on the formation of a child's psychology, policies and behavioural tendencies. The categorisation of literature for the scope of this work is not limited to books but extends to internet, media/social platforms, orature, television and other avenues through which moral lessons may be transmitted. The use of questionnaires, oral interview, observation of certain children who have been exposed to literature and those who were not, form the backbone of the conclusion arrived at in this paper.*

**Keywords:** *communication, Interference, language, bilingual, multilingual*

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## INTRODUCTION

Literature can be defined in various ways, some of them are quite interesting. It is an imagination of a complete world. It is a creative world. It is a world of art. It is a fictional world. It is an imaginative reflection and/or refraction of the real world in its verisimilitude. It is a fiction mirroring of our concrete world.

Literature as it relates to this paper is not limited to books but extends to all areas of literary impacts like media: videos, audios, teaching aids, etc. where the world is mirrored in a true-to-life form. Literature has the power to form the psyche of human beings. However, this paper is particularly interested in the power literature has to form the psychology of a child. Every person on earth, is a summation of everything/idea he/she has come to believe. Literature has the power to sell ideas, morals, principles etc. to children, these help to form their beliefs and in turn their psychology either positively or negatively.

**OBJECTIVE:** This work is geared towards proving the great influence literature has in child character formation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to <https://www.reference.com>, literature affects people by teaching them, entertaining them and inspiring them to take action in life. That is to say that literature is an educator, it teaches people.

Gulf News.... says that literature has shaped civilizations, changed political systems and exposed injustice. It goes on to say that literature helps people understand other walks of life. Narratives in particular, inspire empathy and give people a new perspective on their lives and the lives of others.

Some Literature inspire emotion eg love poems. They are a timeless way for people to express romantic, platonic, maternal and other forms of love. This means that literature can power our emotions either for love, anger, action etc. Literature therefore can be impactful whether in a positive or negative way. Its effect on a child also may be positive, it can also be devastating. Michael Foucault (1980) in his article (Foucault at school): Discipline, Education and Agency in Harry Potter (Children's Literature in Education, December, 2014, Volume 45, Issue 4, Pp 285-297), declares that the formative power of children's literature is both great and suspicious. As a resource of socialization, the construction and experience of children's literature can be seen as modes of disciplinary coercion. Literature has the power to form a child's psyche to do either good or bad. This means that literature has a powerful impact on a child.

### **METHODOLOGY**

A survey was conducted among children between the ages of 4-10. Questionnaires were read out and answers ticked by interviewers. 100 children were targeted, only fifty questionnaires were properly attended to and returned.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Children's response to the basic questions in the questionnaire

Item	Positive	%	Negative	%	Not sure
You like story telling?	Yes	30	No	5	15
Do you watch television?	Yes	40	No	3	2
Do you think you learn things from them?	Yes	35	No	8	7
How well do you learn from them?	Very well	35	Little	10	5
Do you think anything may be wrong with what you watch, read or are told as stories?	Yes	5	No	38	7
Are there some of these television stories that teach you bad things?	Yes	12	No	25	3

These questions were to psyche the disposition of children over stories, films etc. They love literature in all forms and believe that they are meant to educate them. This disposition puts them at the risk of learning all: good, bad and ugly.

### **THE FORMATIVE NATURE OF A CHILD'S PSYCHOLOGY**

**John Locke** posits in his theory that man is born 'tabula rasa' which is to say that man is born a clean slate, whatever knowledge he eventually gets is acquired, not innate. This may not be exactly true but to a large extent un-debatable.

There are certain things that are innate in man, yet many are acquired through

outright teaching, experience and experimentation.

Majority of man's exhibition (in character) and disposition (mentality) depend on learning/exposure.

A child is therefore born with little or no knowledge. Whatever exposure a child is given empowers his/her mind to certain ideologies and by extension character/behaviour. A child raised in a forest, by animal friends will more likely talk and behave like an animal. There is an anonymous story of baby eagle raised among chickens, it grew up thinking and behaving like a chick!!

This is a confirmation that a child learns from what is heard, seen and experienced, then aligns consciously/unconsciously.

A child's psychology is so flexible and undefined. It is what is found around them that forms their cognitive (mental) and comparative psychology (character). Of course, one's mental disposition determines his/her character.

Children are more inclined to learn from the imitation of certain things they have seen others do either at home, in school, church, books and/or films. According to Professor Dan Hade: "we think in stories, they are incredibly powerful in the lives of humans (stories), especially children."

### **CHILD CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LITERATURE**

Way back into the past, literature was one of the greatest tools of child psychology formation. Oral literature which is the noticeably recognized literature was used to form children's ideologies, principles, decision etc.

Moonlight stories, folk tales, fables etc were creatively constructed in a way they end didactic. The moral lessons are so glaring that the listener subconsciously decides to either behave like the character(s) in the literature or never to appear in that light.

Not all postulations from literature are welcomed by an adult because he/she already has preconceived ideas or motions about films, books or stories. An adult world usually take the message with a pinch of salt.

However, children who have little or no preconclusive motion of every thing are quickly framed by the kind of literature they have access to if the literature promotes wrongs: stealing, cultism/terrorism etc, that child will grow up believing that such is heroic and by extension will engage in such, in a bid to stir applause. Same goes for the positive.

African traditional society understands that literature is a strong force/weapon against vices in the society. Literature is therefore used to catch them young; it is used as a form of indoctrinization. Literature is viewed as a strong channel through which children are taught, instructed, initiated and grounded in the beliefs and tenets of the society. It can be said to be a form of 'brain wash' :whatever a child may have been gearing up to believe is creatively erased and replaced with what the society/story teller wants.

Certain religious sects too have engaged literature early enough in children's lives in order to have them form the way they desire. Example is the Almajiris of the muslim sect: they are caught young and 'brain washed' using the quoran and other forms of literature which by extension moulds them into the choice model of their tutors.

Whatever you want a child to become, get him or her constantly into the relevant literature and watch that child become amazingly what you exposed him to.

#### **FIGHTING NEGATIVE CHARACTER FORMATION THROUGH LITERATURE**

One major way of fighting negative impact of literature on children is to keep at bay, out of their reach, whatever may not impact them positively. Eg. Pornographic materials, films, books where crime is not clearly shown as bad and destructive. Children's exposure to literature particularly media should be censored by guardians and parents. If one has some channels on television/air that will impact a child negatively, employ locks or pin codes (that they do not have access to), this will deter access even in your absence.

Secondly, schools should be careful with literature introduced into the school curriculum. Adopting a book with unacceptable content due to nepotism is mental/psychological genocide. Such kids may be beaming healthwise, yet they were morally killed some time ago.

Thirdly, keep children away from unchaperoned social media (facebook, whatsapp, instagram etc). until they are psychologically ready to handle that. Since a child lacks the power to control what is sent to him or her on social media. It is not a good idea to allow a child own an account. That is not to say that a child should not use phones when necessary but the point is: do not let that which is owned by the child have access to uncensored zones. A child may only own a simple phone that can only place calls and send messages.

Fourthly, pay attention to literature materials brought in by his/her friends (not all parents understand this). If a child is constantly in possession of undesirable literature materials, you may need to disengage your child from his or her company while you make a report to the guardian or parent of such wards.

Fifthly, parents/guardians' should be sensitized about the formative power in literature: how a child's character may be formed or destroyed by the literature he has access to.

In conclusion, whatever you do not desire a child to become, do not present in attractive parcels to him.

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