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The paper should be empirical or theoretical, well researched, and relevant to the broad domain. Short communications, reviews, commentaries, data set and methods could also be considered. Contributors should include Author's name(s), institutional affiliation, the title of the paper, abstract, introduction, statement of the problem, review of related literature, methodology, findings, discussion, of findings, conclusion and recommendations. Authors should include their phone numbers and e-mails. Manuscripts must conform with the latest American Psychological Association (APA) documentation style. Manuscripts should be submitted in Microsoft Office Word with Times New Roman, 12 fonts size. This should be sent to hujmss@hallmarkuniversity.edu.ng, copying hujmss@gmail.com.

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NIGERIA FEMALE WRITERS AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: HISTORY, ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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Abstract

In times past, children's literature was hardly accommodated in literary writings, as it existed and survived mainly on the fringes of adult literature. However, in recent times, there is a paradigm shift, resulting in a noticeable tilt to children's literature. As a fast-developing field of study, children's literature has provided a platform for an array of writers worldwide to express and explore available genres in fiction and non-fiction works to enhance children's development in their style and approach to children's literature. The works of children literature writers, especially females, have in some cases served as a yardstick for measuring core societal values and norms and their effect and influence on children, who at this stage are in the process of societal, cultural and religious integration. This could be explained in line with the roles and natural attributes of women and the influence, power and authority they wield on their children. However, the ever constant and dynamic nature of man, especially in the digital and technological era, has made it imperative for female writers of children's literature to move with the tide of time. This paper gives an overview of Nigerian women children's literature writers who have made indelible landmarks. It then examines female writers' works for the modern age, especially in the 21st century, when it comes to children's literature. To this end, suggestions are then made to bridge the divide and make suggestions for the development of emerging Nigerian children's literature female writers.

Keywords: Children's literature, female writers, feminist, gender, women

Introduction

Literature is of vital importance in our day-to-day life since it connects individuals with reality and ideas in society and creates a chronicle for recoded thoughts and experience. These stringed thoughts are made available and accessible to others through fictionalized and non-fictionalized accounts of experience. Literature, be it fiction or nonfiction, is foundational to every society. Dominant events in society are brought to life in the authors' words. Literature emanated from oral literature in both African and Western societies. In England for example, it evolved from works in old English, orally composed at first before written. Early writers are, Caedmon, Aelfric and King Alfred, but a host of other writings are anonymous. Chaucer works from 1066 were mostly narrated poetry where he introduced rhyming couplet and other rhymes used in Italian

poetry. Other writers like, Henry, Homard, Early of Surrey, Wyatt introduced the sonnet and a range of short lyrics to literature writing which later became popular with Sir Philip Christopher Sidney (1554-1586), Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) Marlowe (1564-1593) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Literature emerged from writings in the prose and poetry intended to provide instruction enlightenment or entertainment to the reader or audience. Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) is generally referred to as the father of modern English literature. He was a widely acclaimed poet of the middle ages. Old English literature was mostly poetic, lyric, descriptive but chiefly, narrative or epic. Early Genres of literature included drama, fables, sutras and epic poetry dating as far back as 1500-1000 BCE among which the Indian Sanskrit Epics of Iron Age India stands out.

African literature is an offshoot of both poetry and prose which are often reflected in mythological, historical, stories and sometimes in African folktales and oral poetic forms. This oral tradition is an offshoot of major trends in the development of African Literature. Writings on black Africa is dated back to the middle ages with the introduction of the Arabic language before the Latin alphabet in the nineteenth century. Oral African traditions are orally transmitted messages from one generation to another in the form of speech songs, fables, epic histories, narrations, proverbs, or sayings. Themes and thematic relevance are diverse in African Literature as the continent itself. Themes arise from history, culture, customs, norms and traditions of a group of people while narrating their stories. African themes were derived from living and lifestyles of generations of people. African Literature can then be further categorized into, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial literature. Pre-colonial African Literature revolved around oral narratives accompanied by dramatization and music, centred on a trickster figure (Ijapa, tortoise in Yoruba land, Nigeria and Ananse, the spider in Ghana). Colonial Literature X-rays the horrors of the slave trade and slavery, as well as the revolt against colonialism and British imperialism. Post-Colonial Literature highlights the clash between colonial and indigenous cultures while raising hope for Africa's future within this praxis. The fact that there is a subset of African women writers among the horde of writers from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial periods and within a patriarchal society work to give hope and strength to follow when women are caught in the web of despair, dismissal, marginalized, used or abandoned by fathers and husbands. Their narratives depict the struggles of women in their bid to holding their homes together to uphold and preserve their cultures, even in the face of stiff opposition.

History and Development of Children's Literature

There is no generally accepted definition of children's literature, but it can be broadly defined as anything that children read or listened to. It could also mean, more specifically, work fiction, non-fiction, poetry, prose or drama intended for and used by children and young people. In modern parlance, it comprises all

books written for children, excluding works such as comic books, joke books, cartoon books, and non-fiction works that are not intended to be read from front to back, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference materials (Hunt, 1995). The origin of Children's literature can be traced to the stories and songs, which are part of a wider oral tradition in human societies, which adults shared with children before the emergence of publishing. Right from the 15th century, pieces of evidence of a large quantity of literature existed, often with a moral or religious message aimed specifically at children. The development of early children's literature, before printing was invented, is difficult to trace. Even after printing became widespread, many classic "children's" tales were created for adults and later adapted for a younger audience.

Children's literature became popular in the second half of the 18th century. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became known as the "Golden Age of Children Literature" as this period included the publication of many books acknowledged today as classics. It became a flourishing and popular business in the publishing industry in Britain mostly in London. The books were meant to please, appeal and entertain the target audience through the pleasant tone of writings, illustrations, page layout and designs. Early themes were often moralizing and pious which by today's standards are dry and uninteresting. Early children's literature before the mid 18th century was instructional, often moralising (spelling books or school books) and deeply pious. Writers in this category are John Bunyan and James Jane and examples of some of their works include *Way's Puritans* and *A Token for children* respectively. These writings preach holy living, uprightness and had religious agenda. The twist came by the mid 18th century with the production of new books designed to instruct, delight and entertain children. Thomas Boreman and Mary Cooper are good examples of this movement in their books *Gigantic Histories* (1740-1743) and *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* (1744). However, John Newbery is widely acclaimed to be the father of children's literature with his book, *A Little Pocket Book* intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss folly (1744). He is also

credited for producing the first children's periodical called the Lilliputian magazine (1751-1752) while the History of Little Goody Two-Shoes (1765) of his claimed to be the first present novel.

The reasons for this sudden rise of children's literature has never been fully explained. The entrepreneurial genius of figures like Newbery undoubtedly played a part, but equally significant was structural factors including the growth of a sizeable middle class, technical developments in book production, the influence of new educational theories and changing attitudes to childhoods (Grenby, 2014, p.54)

The modern concept of childhood only emerged in recent times. Originally, children were in the past not considered as greatly different from adults and were not given significantly different treatment in the literature. Early children's literature consisted of spoken stories, songs, and poems that were used to educate, instruct, and entertain children and religious stories written by priests/ clerics for instructional and didactic purpose. The concept of childhood emerged for the first time in the 17th century when adults began to see children as a separate entity. They became conscious of their innocence and frailty and the need to protect them. They saw the need to train adults to meet their special demands and peculiar needs. It was only in the 18th century, with the development of the concept of childhood that a separate genre of children's literature began to emerge, with its divisions, expectations and peculiarities. John Locke, an English philosopher, in his study of human understanding, prescribed "easy pleasant books" for children to form their sensory experiences. Sometimes, there may be no clear cut distinction reached about whether a given work is best categorized as literature for adults or children as some works defy easy categorization. For instance, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series was written and marketed for young adults, but it is also popular among adults. There was a shift to a modern genre of children's literature in the mid-19th century. The production of more humorous, well designed, child-oriented books was birthed

to suit children's imagination. Subsequently, the availability of children's literature greatly increased as paper and printing became widely available and affordable. Readers' population grew and literacy rates improved with this technological advancement.

Categories of Children's Literature

Literature is a child's third parent. Like the father and the mother, literature helps to bring up a child by moulding his mind and developing his character (Segun, 2008). A major outstanding feature of children's literature is age and gender. These are strong determinants of technique, tone, content, or length. Anderson (2006) identifies two classifications of children's literature, by genre and by age. The categories are as follows

Genre Category

- Picture books, including concept books that teach the alphabet or counting, for example, pattern books, and wordless books.
- Traditional literature, including folktales, which convey the legends, customs, superstitions, and beliefs of people in previous civilizations. This genre can be further broken into subgenres: myths, fables, legends, and fairy tales
- Fiction, including fantasy, realistic fiction, and historical fiction
- Non-fiction
- Biography and autobiography
- Poetry and verse.

Age Category

The criteria for these divisions are vague but can be seen in simplicity or complexity of language, large prints or normal prints and many or fewer illustrations. These form the borderline for distinguishing literature for younger and older children. The categories with an age range are listed below

- Picture books, appropriate for pre-readers or children ages 0-5
- Early reader books, appropriate for children ages 5-7. These books are often designed to help a child build his or her reading skills.
- Chapter books, appropriate for children ages 7-12.

- Short chapter books, appropriate for children ages 7-8
- Longer chapter books, appropriate for children ages 9-12
- Young adult fiction, appropriate for children ages 12-18 (Anderson, 2006).

Picture books are most often associated with younger children. Illustrations are rarely seen in adult books but are outstanding features of modern children's books. Generally, artwork plays a great role in books intended for younger readers (especially pre-literate children). Children's picture books often serve as an accessible source of high-quality art for young children. Even older children appreciate occasional drawings or illustrations in chapter books. The first illustrated children's book is *Orbis Pictus* published in 1658 by the Moravian author Comenius. It had a picture on every page, followed by the name of the object in Latin and German and translated into English in 1659. It was very popular in homes and schools around Europe and Great Britain for years. This later became a flood gate for the emergence of female writers for children's literature in years to come.

Early Female writers for children's literature

- By the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, the world was already giving recognition to the works of women. There was a large realization that they possess apart from domestic dexterity, conquest in the labour market, valuable social and intellectual contributions, the right to be free, seen and heard. This heralded a breakthrough that was also witnessed in children's literature with some phenomenal women who contributed so much to the literary culture worldwide. Their writings covered a range of themes where they have found expression for their talents, writing about life and times with image moulded-in poetry and finesse. Some of these works of female literature writers widely read include
- Jane Austen (an English novelist) *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Sense and Sensibility* and others
 - Virginia Woolf (a foremost twentieth-century modernist): *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*

- Eliza Follen (an independent, magical storyteller of the twentieth century) *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* Series
- Rhonda Power Redding *Run Away*

Early female writers concentrated on moralistic writing to impart manners, values and norms of the society in preparation for their children's journey into adulthood. Pre-dominant features in some of this earliest writings contain feminist themes where women of this period were represented mainly in children's books as domestic hands. They charted leadership roles for boys and exempted girls from science and adventure. They perpetuated stereotypes about appropriate behaviour and occupations for women and girls. Early children's books frequently lack female characters entirely or include them only as minor or unimportant characters.

More and more studies began emerging from children's literature. All the findings agreed that women were drastically underrepresented and given few options. Boys were overwhelmingly shown to be much more active and have adventures more frequently, while girls were passive and remained in the home with the adult women. The results of countless studies conducted over the years all had the same or similar results. (Yabroff, 2016, p.11).

Two works, *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women* and *Frank L. Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* deviated from this trend by raising awareness of housework as oppressive. This is one of the earliest forms of the feminist movement. Apart from the exploits of the listed writers in their works for children, today children's literature has become more expensive and diverse. Technological advancement and modernity have brought in new genres of children's literature which apart from fictitious historic and moralistic writings now included science fiction. Female writers now explore more subjects environmental, projection, spiritual, future and sexual orientation themes are core. Gender division stayed in children's books prominently until the 1990s but

...it is the goal of a feminist to promote children's literature that gives children autonomy and the authority to speak

and be heard. Books for children need to show how important it is to be able to listen and hear the accounts of others' stories. (Hartfield 2006, p.14).

Nigerian Female Children Literature writers.

Africa has produced a lot of renowned female authors who have made great contributions to the world of literature. This development only becomes manifested during the late 1970s with the arrival of Senegalese woman, Aminata Sow Fall and Manama Baa, (first African feminist writer) and others like Mabel Segun, Flora Nwapa and other first-generation women writers. Since then, there had been many more female writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ama Ata Aidoo, Tess Onwumere, Zulu Sofola, Zukiswa Wanner, and some others. These are popular early writers of short stories, novels and plays whose writings mostly in protest to the marginalization experienced by their genders survived. The arrival of African female writers for children literature was a later development, much later than their male counterparts. The reason for this lateness can be attributed to a dearth of educated female writers, which was not a common sight. Women were relegated to the background where they keep mum, not seen or heard. Their role in the traditional African society was to rear children, perform household chores and attend to their husband's needs and see to the general running of the home. With the attainment of independence by most African states, few privileged women, who were from elite families had opportunities to become educated. Their writings are predated by the prevailing quest for acceptance by their male counterparts. Themes of their writings for children depict rustic African traditional societies and cultural norms, the confusion that comes with modernity and clash of cultures, the consciousness of womanhood and a search for a loss of identity in their works. Outstanding among them are three early female writers whose works will be discussed in the following paragraphs. These are writers whose works belong to the Nigerian post-colonial era.

Mabel Dorothy Segun (b.1930) is a prolific writer, foremost pioneer and advocate of children's literature. She is a versatile woman whose outstanding achievements in

the fields of literature singled her out for Nigerian National Merit Award in 2010 under the administration of the then President Goodluck Jonathan. She pioneered the establishment of children's Literature Association of Nigeria which she founded in 1978. Mabel Segun's stories and poems have been published in over 30 anthologies in Nigeria and abroad. They have been translated into German, Danish, Norwegian, Greek and Serb Croat while two of her children's books have been translated into Swahili and Arabic. Her career as a teacher, broadcaster, poet, editor, playwright, short story writer and her exploits in sports formed a vast base for the expressive combination of her talents prolifically displayed in her works. As a champion for children's literature, her interest and exploits were brought to fore in 1965 with her early popular classic autobiography, *My Father's Daughter*. It is a story capturing the essence of the life of a young girl in a small, rural society at the transitional stage between an animist past and a technological future full of uncertainty. The story emphasizes the efforts of a society striving to strike a balance between man and nature, inter and intra-relationships, irrespective of religious or cultural beliefs. This was later followed by its sequel *My Mother's Daughter* Series in 1986 and these two have formed the basis for literary studies and appraisal in theses and articles in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Other works by Segun for children are, *Olu and the Broken Statue* (1985), *The First Corn* (1989), *The Twins and the Tree Spirits* (1991/2004). Apart from short stories, Segun has also published poetry for children, including co-authored ones, like one she edited with Neville Grant, *Under the Mango Tree* (1980), a collection featuring poems from all over Africa and the Diaspora. Her other children's literature collection includes eight books entitled, *Fun with Shells*, *Decorating eggs*, *Painting stones*, *Painting China*, *Let's Use String*, *Printing*, *Making Pictures* and *Patterns*, and *Modelling*, *Building* and *Carving*. She is regarded as the Matriarch of African Literature.

Following closely is her counterpart, Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa (b.1931), popularly known as Flora Nwakpa; another notable feminist female novelist, short story writer, poet

and children's writer. She is accorded first African woman novelist to be published in Britain. She has been tagged the Mother of modern African literature and doyenne of modern African female writers. Her works are best known for recreating life and traditions from an Igbo woman's viewpoint. Her contributions in reconstruction during the rehabilitation of orphans and refugees after the devastating Biafran war said many volumes about her generous nature. Her first novel, *Efuru* (1966) was a masterpiece intervention in African literary culture where women were often portrayed from a male-centred perspective. She saw her novels as an attempt to liberate the African woman from the stereotyped role of domestic life and victimization as always represented by male writers in their novels. African women were more than simply poor traders, prostitutes, and unhappy wives. Although she refused to be labelled a feminist, her novels allowed her to refashion African femininity through complex and multi-faceted characters. Her adventure into children literature was targeted at older children and this led to the publication of nine children's books.

Another Nigerian female writer is Buchi Emecheta, (b.1944). A feminist and Black British female writer recognised as Nigeria's first woman novelist published in Britain. Emecheta is a novelist, children's writer and playwright, whose works are domiciled in her multi-layered yet intersecting identities of a diasporic single woman. Her narrations of African myths and traditions and the cultural collusion, which are typical of postcolonial writers, punctuate her writings as she re-creates her continent's enslaved traumatic historical past. She wrote for older children in Pacesetters, a popular short story series in the '80s and her illustrated book for children, *Nowhere to Play*.

New female children literature writers, new trends

Women have gradually found a voice and safe nest in a patriarchal society where they can be seen and heard. Male gender has now started recognising and acknowledging the role and importance of women beyond the initial relegation to household chores. A new generation of children literature female writers have emerged in recent times, so also have

there been various styles of writing. Gone are the days of writing for female emancipation from the clutches of tradition, culture and male chauvinism. The change in the social status of women has contributed immensely to the new trends of writing for children's literature. There is a consciousness to create self-awareness and identity for children. They are encouraged to speak out against any form of oppression and suppression in society and exercise their rights. Unlike the early writers when female education was a rare privilege, new writers see it as a right they are entitled to. Therefore, themes and thematic treatments have shifted grounds from pleading to assertion and writers are now confronted with the treatment of themes that are offshoots of education, civilisation, politics and power, indoctrination, technology and other social vices that are dominant in today's societies.

This is the category that *Ayodele Olatunwa*, writer of *Eno's story*. Her debut is a story revolving around Eno, a young girl in the Eastern part of Nigeria where people were dying of AIDS. Eno was accused of witchcraft as is commonly the practice now, after the mysterious disappearance of her father. There are established cases of child witch scandal in Nigeria and they undergo torturous punishments in the form of deliverance by their parents or close relatives, leaving them maimed or dead at the end. Eno was able to face adversity through the support of her loving mother, instead of being downtrodden and overwhelmed by a victim mentality. It is a sad, moving story spiced with bouts of humour which further characterized Eno as being brave and courageous. Her story is well illustrated, colourful and close to life, in the class of Enid Blyton series. Eno's story was shortlisted for Nigerian Prize for Literature Award in 2011.

Another female writer is Nnedi Okorafor. A Nigerian-American born of Nigerian immigrant parents in the United States. She is an international award-winning novelist of African-based science fiction, fantasy and magical realism for both children and adults. Nnedi can weave African culture into creative evocative settings and memorable characters. Her interest in writing science fictions for adults, young adults and children are credited in her works,

The Akata series, *Zahrah the Windseeker*, *The Shadow Speaker*, *Long Juju Man*, *Indessa and the Secret of the Never Mine* and others. Her motivation for writing books in this genre set in Africa and America is a true reflection of her identity and roots. The relevance of her work to the modern child is apt and timely. The African child is no longer satiated with folk tales, legends and myths. Exposure to science and technology has left a thirst and search for inquiry and adventure, which is a mix in Okorafor's writings. This is uniquely significant creativity in a new dimension, a total and radical departure from the established norm of writing for children. Her works have won many awards, listed below, from 2005 till date.

- 2005 – The Strange Horizons Reader's Choice Award for Stephen King's *Super-Duper Magical Negroes*
- 2007 – 2008 – Macmillan Writers' Prize for Africa for *Long Juju Man*
- 2008 – Carl Brandon Parallax Award for *The Shadow Speaker*
- 2008 – The Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature for *Zahrah the Windseeker*
- 2012 – The 2012 Black Excellence Award for Outstanding Achievement in Literature (Fiction) for *Zahrah the Windseeker*
- 2012 – Kindred Award for *Who Fears Death*
- 2011 – The *World Fantasy Award* (Best Novel) for *Who Fears Death*
- 2016 – The *Nebula Award* (Best Novella) for *Binti*
- 2016 – Children's Africana Book Award for Best Book for Young Readers for *Chicken in the Kitchen*
- 2016 – The *Hugo Award for Best Novella* for *Binti*

Mary Okon Ononokponor is of Oron origin in the South-South region of Nigeria but living in the UK. The Nigerian-British is a freelance fashion/entertainment writer and artist, obsessed with making tangible intangible things. Her work, a children fiction, *Tualah and the Time Traveller*, won the Golden Baobab Prize for Children's Literature in 2014. It is based on the travelling adventure of Tualah, assisted by her clever cat, Karma. The story, entwined in technology, app creation, time management and other heavy themes feature in this creation. Her motivation stems from her African immigrant origin

propelled by a quest to recreate individual experiences narrated in popular culture. This is aside from books written by black authors and set in the African Diaspora with a tendency to focus on the Caribbean or American experience, which is difficult to identify with as an African immigrant.

Suggestions

Literature as a child's third parent and a twenty-first-century child is a child of many parts. Female writers need to produce good pieces of literature that can create in young people an awareness of the expectations of a decent society and acceptable behaviour patterns in society. Children need to have a personal identity, a point of reference from which they can operate. A foremost way of creating this awareness is by providing them with well-written stories, poems and plays whose themes reflect concerns that are germane to their existence. They need books about family, growing up, emotional needs of people, suffering, loss/grief, love accepting others, relationships and religious tolerance. Books that can fill this gap are books that portray the cultures of the different ethnic groups and their diversities. Universal social problems need to be treated in books. Such as problems of alcoholism, cultism, hooliganism, prostitution, drug abuse, sex, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Female writers need to be aware that today's literature for a Nigerian child needs a refocus on global issues, such as the environment, gender discrimination, human rights, child abuse terrorism, conflict resolution, war and peace, as these are prevalent issues calling for attention. These works need honesty, amusement, imagination, fun and recognition of the fact that this writing is for them not adults and must be treated as such. Children would prefer to read works of writers that view life from their perspective and can relate with their interests and expectations and by so doing bridge the divide. These are crucial factors that endear children to pieces of literature.

Conclusion

Discourse in children's literature has evolved a more radical approach in treatment and thematic relevance, germane and fundamental to the "modern-day" child. There is a call for a new generation of African female children writers, illustrators and publishers to step forward and

embrace their artistry with innovations and new dimensions that would be relevant in meeting the modern-day demands. It is imperative to strike a balance with technological advancement and the challenges they present as a reality of today's world. Female writers must necessarily write for today's children not tilting towards the writing styles they grew up with. Modern children

need works of literature that are engaging, involving and innovative. Of great importance, emphasis should be laid on the available media open to children such as electrical gadgets (tablets, phones, laptops, etc.) and in particular social media. They must strive to meet them at their point of need in the most suitable manner that will appeal to their senses.

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