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## **Fictional Reality Environments in Child's Learning: Evaluating Screen Institution in *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone and My Kids and I***

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### **Abstract**

The Nigerian youth's restiveness and licentious acts have come under the purview of the public interest in recent times. Consequently, the rise of ritual killings and other social vices amongst the younger generation in the country questions the teaching model and learning environments designed to impart knowledge to Nigerian children. The objective of this study is to evaluate the aptitudes of fantastical and realistic film environments in child's learning and nurturing. The study, through the adoption of the content analysis approach of qualitative research method, evaluated the impact of the fantasy genre and fictional reality film environments on children and thus analysed. *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone (A British Fantasy Film)* and *My Kids and I (A Nigerian Fictional Reality Film)*. The study utilised Skolnick Weisberg's theory of Mise-en-place: Setting the Stage and Nkemakonam Aniukwu's Screen Institution Postulation, in examining the influence of fantastical and fictional reality film environments in child's learning. The study discovered that some films produced in the Nollywood film industry have the capacity of thwarting the child's mind and this could lead to misconceptions of certain principles and standards of the society and subsequently change his behaviour towards other members of the public. Parents should also play a vital role in monitoring and curtailing what the children are watching on their screen interface.

## **Introduction**

The argument about the impacts of fantasy and fictional-reality films on child educational development is a topic that has generated interest in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson, Joanna Russ, could be said to be some of the exponents of fantastic and fantasy genres in Literature. Each of the scholars has a unique opinion about the genre. Tzvetan Todorov believes that the theoretical genre of the fantastic showcases a world in which the hesitation between a natural and a supernatural explanation of some unusual phenomena is never resolved. In a world that is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphids, or vampires, there occurs an event that cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world that remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (Todorov. 1975. p 32)

The point Todorova raised above is that if the text is not understood as denoting some imaginary reality, the hesitation between natural or supernatural reality dissolves. Although there are elements of truth in the above position when it comes to literature, recent studies especially in film have proven that such issues can be resolved because, with the use of technology, science fiction, and magical techniques in moviemaking, a child can navigate the gap between the supernatural and unnatural events. Rosemary Jackson's theory of fantasy “The Literature of Subversion” is based on Marxist and psychoanalytic theory. Her study discusses low fantasy and attributes fantasy as a genre

connoting fantastic literature containing a plot set in our recognisable world. Jackson's position on fantasy supports the fantasy-reality idea "which this study intends to explore". As such, fantasy as a film genre can be used in affecting how things work in the real world. This position is against Johanna Russ and Svein Angelskår's views about the genre. In quoting Johanna's position, Angelskår avers that "Fantasy embodies a 'negative subjunctivity' "that is, fantasy is fantasy because it contravenes the real and violates it" (Angelskår, 2005. p 45). The above assertion sees fantasy as a negative apparatus that could influence the audience or readers negatively. Svein believes "fantasy, throughout, insists on the denial of the real" (45). If fantasy is seen in the above light, then its utilization in creating movie content meant for children will be questionable. Svein and Johanna may have drawn their inspiration from Jean Piaget's work on children's imaginative abilities which states that "The striking feature of these symbolic combinations is the extent to which the child reproduces or continues the real world . . . the child has no imagination, and what we ascribe to him as such is no more than a lack of coherence" (Piaget. 1972. p. 131). Conversely, recent scholarships on children's understanding of fantasy from reality have questioned Paget's position. Schafer opines that Rowling (The author of the Harry Potter series) is confident that children can easily discern where reality ends and fantasy begins (Schafer, 2000, p. 104). Her assertion is inconsonant with Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalyst approach (1976), which avers that any child familiar with fantasy understands that these stories "speak to him in the language of symbols and not that of everyday reality" (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 62). Fantasy is seen as a genre that could permeate the learner's cognitive development, encouraging him to think beyond what is

ordinary and from it create what is needed to advance human development. Skolnick's work on 'Distinguishing Imagination from Reality' believes that fantasy as a literary genre poses no threat to a child's understanding of the world around him. Children rarely make mistakes in their explicit reporting on the status of the entities they are imagining, claiming that items that are present in the room are real, whereas the items in the box are not...our best current evidence suggests that children do not experience imagination–reality confusions when it comes to fictional stories or characters. (Skolnick. 2013. p. 76). Most times, some people especially children enjoy seeing films because it offers them the opportunity of seeing pictures or images of people that are not common in their immediate environment, this explains why most children like the beautiful and grotesque characters of cartoon films. For example, previous research by the researcher entitled “Between Phantasmagoria and Reality: Interrogating the Place of Children in Nollywood Films” shows that most children identify and relate more with Disney fantasies, especially Cinderella and Shriek. (Aniukwu, 2017. p. 7)

### **Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

Based on my previous research, (**The Screen Institution and Child’s Models in Nollywood Fictional Reality Films: An Example of *Two Rabbits***) The age range for the participants in the study group is 7 – 13 years of age. This selection falls within the age range of what Jean Piaget called “Concrete Operational Thought” here, children begin to develop clearer methods of thinking and start to overcome the egocentrism of the pre-operational stage. They demonstrate logical, concrete reasoning and realise that their thoughts and feelings are unique and may not

be shared by others. Fantasy and reality arts may be in the form of literature or film. Thus, these genres appeal differently to children of different ages. Hence, interrogating the influence of Nollywood on Nigerian children may highlight what children are and how film affects them socially, emotionally, physically and otherwise since they form an integral part of society. Consequently, theories that focus on aspects such as physical, emotional and moral development have been developed. This aspect of the effect of film content on a developing child is supported by Albert Bandura's Observation, Learning and Imitation Behaviour Theory. The process is similar to that when children imitate the behaviours of adults around them. While Bandura's studies in the 1960s provided evidence that modelled behaviour (aggression) is spontaneously imitated by children or adolescents. According to Bandura "the best and more effective way to teach children new ways of acting is to show them the behaviour you want them to display." (10) Cultivation theory which also contributed immensely to birthing Screen Institution Postulation is an approach developed by George Gerbner. The cultivation theory talks about the impact television makes on people on the way they view society. The theory states that:

The world of television drama is a mixture of truth and falsehood, accuracy and distortion. It is not the true world but an extension of the standardized images which we have been taught since childhood. Cultivation analysis...inquiries into the assumptions television cultivates about the facts, norms, and values of society. (179 - 182)

The cultivation theory discusses the impact of continuous exposure to television and how it stereotypes the behaviour of the child, Gerbner initiated this theory as a result of his observation of

the changes in the attitude of people when they are constantly exposed to a particular type of attitude for a good number of times. Cultivation theorists such as George Gerbner and Larry Gross believe that television can create and maintain a very basic set of beliefs about the world and that these influences are cumulative and long-lived. This indicates that the worldview of the person who watches violence on television does not change immediately, it is cumulative. Children who spend more hours seeing film content with a negative portrayal of their society soon learn not to trust anyone in their environment and they also learn to react aggressively to certain situations. Mcquial Davis in his research about children and television avers that:

The central hypothesis of the research was that viewing television gradually leads to the adoption of beliefs about the nature of the social world which conform to the stereotypical distorted and very selective view of reality as portrayed systematically as television fiction and news (495)

Some of the critics of cultivation theory think that it has limitations which are its concentration on television only social constructive effects. Others talked about mainstreaming, that is the more time a person spends watching TV, the more he or she will adopt the predominant outlook of the world that is expressed on the medium. Therefore, constant attention should be given to the contents that children are exposed to bearing in mind that their understanding ability differs according to their various stages of development based on Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Folarin asserts that "Both theories (Bandura's and Gerbner's) assume that people especially children, tend to learn from the mass media and to model their behaviour on those

dramatic personae” (82). Okunna opines that “Every receiver of a television message does four things to the content, receive it or not, respond to it or not, accept it and behave according to its demand or not” (204). Okunna, of course, may be talking about adult audiences who can use a variety of defensive mechanisms or strategies to shield themselves from media messages, which are contradictory to their attitudes, principles and values. One could deduce that the above theories are centred on television viewership. The question that one may likely ask is ‘What about the children, the young audience who in today’s world have access to a plethora of screen interfaces, such as phones, computers, tablet phones, smartphones, television, and films, who are equally defenceless to the content of the aforementioned gadgets?’

As observed above, over the years, researchers and scholars have created and developed different methods and approaches detailing child development and the impacts of different learning techniques on the child’s improvement. Some of the approaches are Creative Dramatics, Theatre-in-Education, (TIE), Role-playing techniques, Folklore, and the Impact of the Learning Environment, among others. Nevertheless, one may argue that the above methods have not been properly integrated into the school curriculum designed for teaching in most primary schools in Nigeria. Each of the above-mentioned methods of teaching or enhancing the cognitive development of a child has its pros and cons, and each requires a teacher, a facilitator, and a guardian to see to its logical conclusion. However, in Nigeria today, the aforementioned methods are more or less not used effectively and the proliferation of contents of a new medium of acquiring knowledge which does not in most cases ‘require’ a facilitator, a

teacher, or a guardian has emerged and some Nigerian children needing no permission from teachers or parents have grasped the opportunity and thus gradually, they have become their teachers, guardians and facilitators in front of a television set, smartphones, laptops, tablets phones, social media platforms and so on.

There are three major institutions designed to train a child in Nigeria. These institutions are Family, School and Religion. Conversely, these institutions are making concerted efforts to ensure the proper upbringing of children in society. However, the family institution one may argue in recent times is no longer living up to its expectations, as most parents find it difficult to devote adequate time to take care of their children and train them properly, some schools in Nigeria are ill-equipped to train children in the 21st century, the lack of adequate facilities and technical know-how are belittling the efforts of most teachers in some of the schools. On the other hand, most religious organizations in Nigeria preach wealth, successes, riches and financial breakthroughs to the detriment of moral rectitude and decency. In place of a child's education and upbringing, the aforementioned institutions are struggling to maintain their relevance in today's world when it comes to child nurturing. Consequently, the researcher discovers another institution where the activities of the above institutions are assimilated and dispensed. The Screen Institution postulation is the conglomeration of the screen interface's contents that children can access and use. The Screen institution postulation includes, but is not restricted to films, games (Screen games), cameras, smart phones, laptops, social media, information gotten from YouTube channels, Netflix, and online streaming platforms, among others. Also included is all information that can be acquired through the



screen interface. (Positive or negative information or learning as the case may be) Today's children learn from all these platforms and in most cases, no one is saddled with the responsibilities of guarding, directing and explaining to the child learner the subtext lessons inherent in the contents of the aforementioned platforms. What a young adult/child sees often on the screen is what he imbibes and assimilates, gradually, this turns out to shape his understanding and the ideological constructs of his immediate environment. In Nigeria today, one may argue that most children have embraced the screen "teacher" who is closer to their immediate needs and aspirations. These needs and aspirations may be positive or negative, thus, it became imperative that the contents of this fourth institution of learning be galvanized, sieved, dissected and censored to promote and project a positive learning environment for children. This study, therefore, focuses on the screen institution of Nollywood films and as such, adopts Aniukwu's Screen Institution Postulation and Skolnick Weisberg Mise-en-Place: Setting the stage theory to evaluate the fictional-reality and fantasy films environments in child's education and learning. Skolnick Weisberg's theory states that "fantastical scenarios signal that kids need to pay attention because things in that environment do not necessarily follow the typical script. As a result, children feel drawn to engage more deeply, mentally preparing them to learn in a more focused way" (46). On the other hand, Screen Institution postulation summarises that what a child sees often on the screen interface through fictional-reality content is what he or she imbibes and assimilates, gradually, this turns out to shape his understanding and the ideological constructs of his immediate environment which could be positive or negative. This postulation was tested through a pre-test and post-test evaluations where a fictional-reality film (*My Kids and I*) and a Fantasy film

(*Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone*) were screened before a focus group of thirty participants. The results of the post-test suggest that an opinion could be formed or an existing one changed after viewing particular content on the screen. Consequently, the researcher espouses the content analysis approach of the qualitative research method in evaluating the films under review. The two films mentioned above are the primary source of data collection while the secondary data involves relevant scholarships on the subject matter of the topic under study sourced from textbooks, journal articles, and libraries.

### **The Studies on Nigeria Children's Films and Significance of the Research**

The presumed proposition that inapt behaviours, nonchalant attitudes, moral decadence, and violence among African children are the outcome of films produced in Africa (Nollywood Film Industry) calls for serious examinations. J. O. Nnabuko and Tina Anatsui in their study entitled “*Nollywood Movies and Nigerian Youths-An Evaluation*” (2012) express concern on the contrary focus on the negative themes and their negative impact on youth behaviour and the image of Nigeria. The impact they believe leads the youths to different social vices such as organized crimes, Stealing, Unlawful possession, Forgery and altering. In 2013, Ogochukwu Ekwenchi, Allen. Adum, and Chikezie. Uzuegbunam looked at the influence of Chinedu Ikedieze and Osita Itheme characters' portrayals in Nollywood children's films. Thus, the search for good educational film content is ignited in the Nollywood industry. As Bolu Folayan puts it. “Involvement of children as writers, actors, consultants in films targeted at children. Producers of children's films should not think for the

children, but think through the children.” (Folayan, 2016. p 9) In 2017, Osakue Stevenson Omoera, John Okhatie Edemode, and Peter Aihevba carried out a study on the impact of Nollywood films on Nigerian Children. The researchers examined the audience perception and the impact of Nollywood films on children's behaviour in Ekpoma. In 2019, Nkemakonam Aniukwu in his Dissertation entitled *Between Fantasy and Reality: Analyzing the Impact of Selected Films on Children in Awka* explored the utilisation of Fictional reality films and fantasy films in educating Nigerian children. The impact of the audio-visual medium of communication (Film, Television, Internet, etc) in the information dissemination of today's world cannot be overemphasised. Film as an audio-visual means of information dissemination has not left any stone unturned in advancing the information, education and entertainment needs of children. Those who have the interest of children at heart agree that extensive exposure to film medium has a profound effect on children, both positive and negative. Excessive media use, particularly where the content is violent, gender-stereotyped, sexually explicit, drug or alcohol-influenced, or filled with human tragedy, skews the child's worldview, increases high-risk behaviours, and alters his/her capacity for successful, sustained human relationships (Villani. 2001. p. 395) It is claimed that during children's formative years, engagement with television violence can create distorted views of society and acceptability of certain behaviours (Cater and Weaver, 2003. p. 72) Some children Film Scholars have extolled the film medium as an effective educational tool for the young audience. Movies can help strengthen children's communication, language, problem-solving and coping skills...furthermore, these movies are used as societal tools, in which parents and children can come together over a

common interest or activity (Langham. 2013. p. 1). There have been a lot of hues and cries about how video films have purportedly harmed the Nigerian audience, especially children who tend to imitate the most violent acts that they see on the screen (Omoera 2014. p 79). The above observations indicate that the content of what is projected to the child is paramount. Hence, adopting movies in teaching is an effective way to reach people's effective domain, promote reflective attitudes and link learning to experiences. Teaching with movie triggers that disclose emotions, allows questions, expectations and dilemmas to arise for both learner and teacher (Blasco, 2015. p 3). Scholars have established that the film medium has a great impact on the educational development of a child. However, questions have arisen on what should constitute the contents of children's movies. What genre is suitable for a child audience?

**Synopsis of *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone and My Kids and I***

**Title**

*Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone (2001)*

**Genre**

Fantasy, Fiction

**Setting**

Hogwarts (England)

**Language**

English Language

**Running Time**

120 minutes

**Top-billed actors**

Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint, Richard Harris, Tom Felton.

**Riters**

J.K Rowling and Steve Kloves

**Producer**

David Heyman

**Director**

Chris Columbus

**Year of Production**

2001

*Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone* opens with Rubeus Hagrid arriving on a flying motorcycle and subsequently handing over an infant to Professor. Albus Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Professor Dumbledore takes the young infant to live outside the school until he is ready to enrol on Hogwarts school. The infant would become Harry Potter, an eleven-year boy gifted with all sorts of magical powers inherited from his dead parents (Lily and James Potter) who were killed by the Dark Lord Voldemort (He-Who-must-not-be-named). Harry Potter living with his aunt's family becomes a maid to the family as he virtually does every house chore. Aunt Petunia, her husband Uncle Vernon and their son Dudley maltreated Harry Potter, but not for long as Hagrid comes at the nick of time to take him back to Hogwarts on his eleventh birthday. At Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Harry Potter makes some friends in the persons of Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley. Luckily for the three of them, the magic

sorting cap places them in Gryffindor's house. The school's dormitory houses are Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin. The four houses compete against each other in different activities including the Quidditch game competition. Harry Potter, exhibiting courage and bravery in virtually all the activities, becomes the Seeker of Gryffindor House in the Quidditch game. The Quidditch game between Slytherin and Gryffindor ends with Gryffindor emerging victorious and this evokes Draco Malfoy, Goyle and Crabbe's anger who now try all kinds of tricks to stop Harry Potter, but Granger, and Ron are always at hand to stop them from succeeding in their evil plots. Professor Severus Snape, the Headteacher of Slytherin House is not happy that Gryffindor and Harry Potter are winning almost all the competitions and thus fashions out ways to end their victories. He releases the Troll to confuse him so he can go and steal the "Sorcerer's Stone". The Troll almost killed Hermione Granger but Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley saved her from the Troll. At the end of the term, Gryffindor House Comes fourth (The last of the four houses) amongst the four houses, but Professor Albus Dumbledore after awarding individual marks to outstanding students which Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger are among. The individual marks amassed by those three see Gryffindor become victorious in all the competitions with the highest points.

**Title**

*My kids and I (2017) Seasons 1, 2.*

**Genre**

Melodrama (Fictional Reality)

**Setting**

Nigerian Urban City (Lagos)

**Language**

English Language

**Running Time**

120 minutes

**Top-billed actors**

Mary Chukwu, Chisom Oguike, Chidimma Oguike, Chinenye Oguike, Bolanle Ninalowo,

**Writer**

Chidiebere Solomon

**Producer**

Chidiebere Solomon

**Directors**

Abraham Okonkwo, Adams Umar,

**Year of Production**

(2017)

*My Kids and I* is a Nigerian children's film that tells the story of three kids Claire (Chisom Oguike), Michelle (Chidimma Oguike) and Annabel (Chinenye Oguike) who just returned to Nigeria with their father, 'Oscar' (Bolanle Ninalowo) from the United States of America. The kids came to Nigeria for the first time despite virtually everything about their new environment, to the bewilderment of their father who was full of expectations that the kids would love their new luxurious home in the city of Lagos. The children find it difficult to cope with anybody else except their father. While still trying to adapt to their Nigerian home and system of living the kids disrespect Chikwesili (Their Nanny) and their gateman at first. The kids born and bred in America exhibit some American kids' lifestyle of being blunt in their statements

without minding the consequences of such action, except Annabel (The youngest, about four years old) who is always calm and respectful. The kids often go on hunger strikes to register their grievances whenever their father upset them. In the subsequent scenes in the film, the children begin to get acquainted with their new environment and even start getting along with Chikwesili. Their father, who claims he lost his wife because of childbirth decides to marry another wife. He brings a lady home to integrate her into his family. The children did not get along with their would-be stepmother, and in a bid of finding a way of getting the kids to like her, she consults a friend who tells her that the solution to the problem is sacking the kids' nanny whom the kids are now fond of, and by so doing the children would have no other option but love her. This plan she almost executed by instigating her fiancée in sacking the kids' nanny, with the excuse that she can take care of the kids and there won't be a need of wasting money on the nanny's salary. The kids intervene by pleading with their father not to sack Chikwesili. Annabel likes Chikwesili the most. One day she meets Chikwesili praying in her room, and she pleads that she teaches her how to pray. The children, having learned how to pray from Chikwesili, can pray for their father when he is sick and their daddy gets healed. *My kids and I* adopt typically adopt a more sophisticated approach towards making a positive impact on a child's psychological and sociological development. It explores the adventure of three kids, Claire, Michelle and Annabel, with their daddy Oscar. Oscar is used in the film to explore other better ways parents can inculcate the right behaviours into their children.



### **Fantastic Film Environment and Child's Learning in *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone***

*Mise-en-place: Setting the Stage Theory* of Denna Weisberg is of prime importance in analyzing the Child's learning environment created in *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone*. The theory states that "fantastical scenarios signal that kids need to pay attention because things in that environment do not necessarily follow the typical script. As a result, children feel drawn to engage more deeply, mentally preparing them to learn in a more focused way" (46). Such a fantastical environment is created in the opening glee of the film as Hagrid rides in on a flying motorcycle, this opening helps the participants' attention as they wait to see the outcome of what Hagrid brings to Professor Dumbledore. Also, Ron Weasley visits Harry Potter with a flying car as could be seen in the plate below

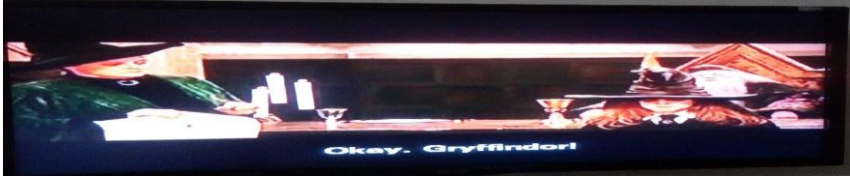
#### **PLATE 1**



Ronald Weasley Driving his Father's Flying Car

The motorcycles and cars that the participants see in their everyday activities or their real world do not fly. So the participants' interests at that moment became glued to the television. Elements of fantasy such as Magic are well utilized in the film. For example, the sorting cap which talks and works as a magic cap is used to place each student in a house. The Plate below shows the sorting cap on Harry Potter's head.

## **PLATE2**



The Sorting Cap Places Harry Potter in Gryffindor's House

The action and the environment above are not common to the participants, thus it is fantastical and intriguing enough to raise the participants' consciousness and curiosity. The above action teaches the viewers that due process must be followed in obtaining one's aim and objective. Even though Harry Potter inherited his supernatural powers from his parents, and James Potter (His Father) was one of the famous teachers at Hogwarts he still submits himself to the sorting cap to be sorted into the school dormitory. On the other hand, Draco Malfoy whose grandfather was one of the founding fathers of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry equally submits himself to the sorting cap to be sorted into Slytherin House. The viewers learn that there are processes to be followed in every situation and that no matter how highly placed an individual is in society, he must follow due processes. Another fantastic film environment created in the film is the shifting staircases at Hogwarts.

### PLATE 3



#### The Changing Staircases at Hogwarts

The shifting staircases teach the children and the youths to always obey and observe rules and regulations. One of the rules given to new students at Hogwarts is to always remember that the staircase moves, and changes from time to time. The above plate teaches viewers the importance of expedient action and the importance of keeping to time. Again not forget to be careful at all times as the case may be. In one of the instances, Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger missed their direction as the staircases change and take them to a restricted area where Fluffy, Hagrid's three-headed dog is guiding the Sorcerer's Stone.

### PLATE4



#### Fluffy, the Three-Headed Dog

The danger they face is terrifying since they are still new to the school at the time. Although Hermione's intelligence saves the three from imminent danger as she uses her magic wand to open the door that leads to their escape.

Hermione's quick reaction, remembering what she has read in a magic book, helps them escape the danger of being devoured by the three-headed dogs. It is Hermione Granger who defines the Philosopher's Stone which is the major symbol of knowledge as utilized in the film. From what she has read, she says "The philosopher's stone is a legendary substance with astonishing powers... It transforms any metal into pure gold and produces the elixir of life which will make the drinker immortal" (HTSS) The lesson here is that a child learns the importance of reading and using the acquired knowledge to solve his or her problem when the need arises. The next set of plates teaches bravery, courage and friendship. The battleground is prepared between Troll and the children (Harry Potter, Granger Hermione and Ron Weasley. The viewers watch to see how the children can face the giant Troll and save Hermione Granger.

### **PLATE 5**



Troll Holding Harry Potter Who Goes To Save Hermione

Harry Potter seeing that Granger Hermione is in great danger goes to help her and ends up in the hands of a Troll, Hermione who is helpless informs Ron who is also at the scene to use a magic trick they were taught in the 'class of levitation' to subdue the Troll. Ron "Wingardium Leviosa." Once Ron casts the spell on the Troll, Troll's big stick hangs in the air. The three friends' defeat of Troll elicited applause from the participants (Viewers). The

plates above present heroes and a heroine. The above scene teaches friendship as seen in Weasley and Potter's courage and bravery to save Hermione. It also teaches responsibility on the part of Granger Hermione, towards the end of the above scene, Professor Severus Snape and Professor McGonagall come to fight the Troll but on getting to the scene, Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley and Granger Hermione have defeated the Troll, and the two professors are terrified.

**Professor McGonagall:** (To Harry Potter and Ron Weasley) Oh! My goodness, explain yourself both of you

**Hermione:** It's my fault, Professor McGonagall. I went looking for the Troll. I thought I could handle it. If Harry and Ron hadn't come and found me, I'd probably be dead.

**Professor McGonagall:** (To Hermione) Be that as it may, it was an extremely foolish thing to do. I expected more rational behaviour and am disappointed in you. Five points will be taken from Gryffindor. (To Ronald and Harry) I just hope you realize how fortunate you are. Not many first-year students could take on a Troll and live to tell the tale. Five points will be awarded to each of you.

From the above conversation, one could deduce the punishment for breaking the rules and the reward for good work. Five points are taken from Gryffindor for breaking the school rules and regulations as admitted by Hermione in her lines, for Ron and Harry to escape punishment, she opts to take responsibility and save her friends. And by doing so, instead of punishing Harry and Ron, five points are awarded to them for their courage and bravery. The next plate shows the characters' quest to conquer their fear. The playing of a Quidditch game in the air is not common to the participants of this study, it is an environment that

challenges the viewers' fear of staying in the air and playing a game at the same time. Harry Potter conquers the above fear in his first year at Hogwarts by becoming the first-year student ever to become the Seeker of Gryffindor, a position reserved for older students with experience.

### **PLATE6**



LONGBOTTOM STILL LEARNING HOW TO FLY WHILE HARRY POTTER HAS PERFECTED HIS FLYING ON THE BROOMSTICK

Apart from the fantastic environment, characters and magic created in *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone*, the central theme and subthemes of the film were not lost. The theme of friendship and subthemes of, courage, bravery, assiduousness, etc are highlighted and projected more in the film's narratives. As such, the film stands as a good learning material for young children. Hermione's encouragement to Harry Potter summarizes the central message of the film in the following lines, "Me? Books and cleverness. There are more important things. Friendship and bravery" (HTSS) Hermione's lines show that although they have come to school to acquire knowledge, become intelligent, and clever, friendship and bravery would go a long way in helping one succeed in life.

### **Morality Question and Fictional Reality Film Environment in *My Kids and I***

Screen Institution postulation summarizes that what a child sees often on the screen is what he or she imbibes and assimilates, gradually, this turns out to shape his understanding and the ideological constructs of his immediate environment. In fictional reality films, the viewer identifies with the film environment, the characters, the settings, costumes, props, and the atmosphere among other filmic activities. Filmic events follow sequential arrangements just like the audience's real-world activity goes. The didactic value of children's educational material is paramount to this study, as well as the examination of possible lessons that could be learnt from *My Kids and I* which may shape the child's upbringing positively or negatively. Since the child's brain is supple, the teachers, parents, guardians, and other caregivers must be mindful of what is channelled towards the child's understanding of his immediate environment and the world around him. Children are often curious to understand their environment and they seek answers from adults around them as exemplified in *My Kids and I*. Oscar and her three daughters (Michelle, Claire and Annabel) move from LA, in America to Lagos in Nigeria and everything seems awkward to the kids. Their first meeting with Chikwesili (Their Nanny) says it all. Chikwesili enters the kids' room to clean it up and Michelle and Claire's reaction is harsh and appalling.

**Chikwesili:** Hello, Children, you all look beautiful.

**Michelle/Claire:** Get the hell out of here.

**Claire:** Apologize for calling us children

**Michelle:** I need you to go brush your teeth.

Chikwesili leaves the room in humiliation and the kids go straight to their Father to interrogate him.

**Michelle:** Daddy, what is that girl doing in our house?

**Oscar:** Oh! She is your nanny (As Chikwesili approaches)

**Michelle:** You mean, you brought a Nanny for us, jerk!

**Annabel:** (To Chikwesili) Why is your colour, Black?

**Michelle:** Daddy, we don't need a nanny, we are big girls, and we can do anything we want by ourselves

The kids think and behave according to their ages (Michelle 10-12, Claire 8-10 and Annabel 4-5 years old) They are sincere in exhibiting the vituperative lifestyle of most American children. They do not mind how Chikwesili (A 25-year-old lady) feels about what they say to her neither do they care about how they talk to their gateman Aloy (A 40-year-old man with a wife and children). One may say that the children characters' portrayal is unique, unlike most Nollywood children's films where the children characters talk and behave like adults. Then again, some of the adult characters in the film also understand that children will always be children, as Chikwesili is seen crying over the insults Michelle, and Claire meted out on her but Aloy reminds her, that they are just kids who are not familiar with their new environment. On the other hand, Oscar as a single parent understands his children and makes sure that their needs are met. Oscar sings a lullaby for his kids while Claire sits in the sitting room, Oscar approaches:

**Oscar:** (Tenderly) Claire, why are you here?

**Claire:** I don't want to sleep dad, there is an engine that doesn't want to stop. (She is talking about the electricity generator)

Oscar explains to her gently why it is so, "if the generator goes off then there will be no light in the house." He takes her to the bedroom and bids them good night he says:



**Oscar:** Goodnight Pumpkins

**Annabel:** Daddy, why are you always calling us Pumpkins?

**Oscar:** Because Pumpkins are beautiful and you girls are beautiful

The above conversation shows a parent who understands his children's needs at every point in time, parent to child bonding manifested throughout his dealing with his kids in the movie. His love for his children did not stop him from directing their footsteps as could be seen in the dialogue below. Chikwesili serves the kids their breakfast and Michelle is not comfortable with what is served.

**Michelle:** I want fucking noodles

**Oscar:** (Harshly) who uses the 'F' word in my house? Be nice to your nanny Michelle.

In subsequent scenes, each time Michelle, and Claire try using the 'F' word, Annabel always cautions them reminding the two girls that she (Annabel) is going to tell their daddy or step mummy they later had in the film. So one could say that all kids do not need to behave and understand things the same way, there must be one or two who serve as watchdogs over others. Annabel's character is created to be friendly, loving and caring to everyone she comes in contact with. Within a few days of their return, Michelle, and Claire become tired of staying in Nigeria and prepare to go back to LA.

## PLATE 7



Michelle and Claire order the Gateman to Open the Gate

**Michelle:** Eh! Mr. open the gate,

**Aloy:** Open the gate, where una dey go? (Where are you girls going?)

**Michelle:** We are tired of Africa, we are going back to LA

**Aloy:** Which one is LA, go back inside the house, here is not America. It is not as safe as America.

**Michelle:** Open the damn gate, your job is to serve us our pleasure and not to ask us questions.

So far, the reading of the film has taught the viewers one or two things about the kids and their reactions to their immediate environment. These kids because of where they are coming from need to be understood by the adults around them, they need to feel loved by other people around them except their father who seldom stays at home but loves them so much. For them to settle in this new environment, the African mentality of ‘seniority’ must be put aside by the adults around them. Chikwesili is given the task of making sure the kids drop their idea of going back to LA, in her quest to convince the kids to stay, she reaches an agreement with the kids. The agreement is that she is going to take them out to see the city of Lagos even though Oscar forbids his children from

stepping out of the gate, let alone moving around 'the dangerous' city of Lagos. Chikwesili honours her agreement with the kids and Oscar finds out through one of his friends and subsequently sacks Chikwesili. The kids, knowing that their father has sacked their nanny, enter their father's bedroom.

**Oscar:** Out of my room, out (As they are about to leave) come back (The kids return)

**Michelle:** Daddy, please don't sack her, we requested it. It is our fault

**Oscar:** What, I thought you never liked her.

The kids take responsibility for their actions, pleading with their father not to sack Chikwesili whom they have started getting along with. The kids are smart, inquisitive, and observant of their immediate environment. Oscar is down with malaria, a common disease in Nigeria and Annabel asks "Daddy, do people fall sick this way in Nigeria?" Oscar replies "People fall sick everywhere" Annabel who has observed Chikwesili pray in her bedroom, asks her to pray for her sick Daddy, and Chikwesili and the three kids prayed for Oscar, Chikwesili also bought malaria drug for Oscar the morning Oscar is healthy again. Claire asks her father, "Daddy, does the prayer work?" and Oscar answers "Yes, it did". These intelligent children, seeing that Chikwesili, their nanny has made herself one with them, and is ready to satisfy their needs to the detriment of her job become sober of their previous actions and as such, ask for her forgiveness.

**Michelle/Claire:**(Kneel down) Aunty Kwesi, we have insulted you and disrespected you, please find a place in your heart to forgive us (Chikwesili is surprised)

**Annabel:** Aunty Kwesi, please forgive them

**Chikwesili:** As long as I live in this house, I will always love you, Michelle, Claire and Annabel.

The above action is a positive one from the kids, as stated earlier that the minds of the children are malleable, they respond to stimuli around them, if you treat them harshly, you are more or less their enemy, but Chikwesili has shown them love and care, she becomes a mother that they lost, she brings herself to their level in order to gain their trust and in no time the idea of going back to LA is put on hold. Having praised Chikwesili for understanding these children, Oscar brings in Rhoda, a lady he wants to marry, he introduces Rhoda to his kids and vice versa at the dining hall.

**Oscar:** Rhoda, these are my kids, Michelle, Claire and Annabel.

**Annabel:** (To Rhoda) Who are you to our daddy? (Rhoda is surprised)

**Oscar:** Okay, let me answer that question, kids, her name is Rhoda and she is going to be your stepmother, okay?

The kids did not waste time registering their disapproval of Rhoda as they discussed it with Oscar.

**Michelle:** Dad, the lady you brought here, we don't like her, and we don't need a mum, send her away

**Oscar:** How can you hate someone you just met? I love her and I want to marry her.

**Annabel:** She seems unfriendly

**Claire:** She has a mouth odour.

Oscar is confused but yet goes ahead with his plan of marrying Rhoda. Rhoda on her part tries to familiarize herself with the girls as she enters their room. And Annabel is quick to respond "You should knock before entering someone's room, they leave her in the room and go to Chikwesili's and complain to her of their father's plan. Chikwesili encourages the kids to be nice to their would-be stepmother. "Your father has made a decision; you have

to respect it. You have a new mum in the house, your duty is to love and respect her, okay.” Rhoda maltreats the kids, and forces them to eat her food and Michelle is quick to react by going to Aloy, the gateman and ordering him to call 911.

**Michelle:** There is a lady in there, terrorizing me and my sisters. I want her arrested immediately.

Rhoda comes outside and sees Michelle complaining to the gateman, drags her inside the house and beats her as well. She calls the kids ‘names’ “Silly girls, stupid girls, spoilt little brats. This is Nigeria, we respect our elders, nonsense, ‘Oya’ kneel down all of you” before now, Rhoda has already sacked Chikwesili believing she was the reason the kids find it difficult connecting with her. Oscar comes in and sees his children kneeling and crying, he becomes furious with Rhoda “What, what are you doing to my kids? Being hostile won’t win their love, you need to treat them with love and care. Leave my house now, I don’t ever want to see you again” and that becomes the end of Rhoda in the house. Although the children bring up their idea of going back to LA again, pack their bags and are on their way before Oscar stops them and promises, he is going to take them to LA in the summer. Michelle reminds his father that they have rights of movement and opinion, she also promises Oscar that they are going to sue him if he renegeed in fulfilling his promise to them.

**PLATE 8**



The Kids Stamp their Demands By Blocking Maxwell's View

Chikwesili whose love for the kids earns her Oscar's love is now the stepmother of the kids, she introduces her brother, Maxwell to the kids. In another scene, Maxwell is seated in the sitting room and watching a football match when the kids enter and block his view to seeking his attention.

**Maxwell:** What is it?

**Claire:** Uncle Max, we were watching cartoons before we went to take our bath.

**Michelle:** Please, could you turn it back?

**Maxwell:** I will, smart girls, I love that.

**Annabel:** But they aren't smarter than me.

**Maxwell:** (To Annabel) Yes, of course, sweetie, (To Michelle and Claire) you see the first time we met we didn't get to introduce ourselves properly. So, what are your names?

**Michelle:** My name is Michelle, but you can call me Mich, I can be very stubborn in all imaginable ways

**Maxwell:** (To Claire) What about you?

**Claire:** Claire, I don't like introducing myself twice.

**Annabel:** Common Claire, don't be unfriendly

**Maxwell:** Claire, I am sorry, the first time we met, I did not get your name. Please pardon my manners okay

**Annabel:** But Uncle, you have not asked me my name

**Maxwell:** Sweetie, I already know your name, Annabel

**Annabel:** Uncle Max, you don't know I like ice cream, chocolate to be precise.

**Maxwell:** And I like ice cream too. Now that I know you like ice cream, very soon,

Uncle Max will be taking you girls for an outing and I will get you ice cream (To Michelle and Claire) what do I get you?

**Michelle:** Pizza

**Claire:** Chips

**Maxwell:** Now we have ice cream, pizza and chips, there you go. (Pleading) Just

allow me to watch this football in peace. Very soon, I will change it to a cartoon network. I know you don't like football but I will teach you how to enjoy it. Come here. Come and sit with me.

## PLATE9



Maxwell Convinces the Kids as he sits and watches Television with them

The above narrative has shown that kids are like yam tendrils, always following the direction given to them by their parents, caregivers, teachers, television programmes, films and guardians. Chikwesili's love and care gave them a sense of belonging to their

new environment. An adult who wants to change a child's perception must first and foremost bring himself/herself down to the child's level of understanding. He or she must make out time and understand the child's needs at all times and that is exactly what Maxwell did in the above scene.

### PLATE 10



Chikwesili welcomes the Kids Back from School and admonishes them.

In the subsequent scene, Chikwesili welcomes her stepchildren back from school and the following conversation ensues:

**Chikwesili:** Hey! Cherries, come and give mummy a hug (The kids hug her) Why are your faces like this?

**Michelle:** Mum, I was in fourth grade, and I got demoted at my new school.

**Claire:** Same here Mum, I got demoted...

**Annabel:** Mum, I have a friend in school, her name is Ana.

**Chikwesili:** (To Annabel) Oh! Sweetie, that's beautiful, I knew you will get along better, (To Michelle and Claire) listen, I know how disappointing this is for the both of you, okay but, it is just temporary very soon you will be done with this term.

**Michelle:** They should have retained my class position

**Claire:** I wanna change school, already. That's so unfair and the teacher is so unfriendly



**Michelle:** Mine is grossly unfriendly...He can't even hear himself (The teacher speaks fast)

**Chikwesili:** Hehe! Come on, take it easy with your teachers, okay, you will get used to it very soon.

In the end, there are some negative angles to the film, when it comes to African culture, where it is expected that no matter what an adult does, the child should respect the adult as was the case between Rhoda and the kids but the truth is that in most cases children needs are neglected by some adults, and adults make decisions for a child and in some cases, denies the child some certain privileges and rights. The positive angle of the film carries the fact that children appreciate those who love them and can easily do whatever such people want them to do. *My Kids and I* show an average Nigerian child that his parent (s) has a duty of taking care of his responsibilities, and on his part, he is responsible for his actions as exemplified by the first time Chikwesili was given a dismissal letter by Oscar. More so, the three kids acted within the confined space of their natural environment, this simply means that they acted like kids that they are supposed to be in the movie. It also shows that kids in their natural environment are not hateful, they are not thieves, they are not witches, they are not liars, and they are not melancholic as represented in most Nollywood children's films, they become hostile only when pushed otherwise by the environmental forces beyond their control.

Oscar, while extending his loving arms to embrace and give his kids everything they need, still finds time to caution them whenever they erred. The film teaches children the importance of obedience, respect, loyalty and the overall need to embrace mutual understanding amongst themselves. The act of prayer is

another positive impact the film will make on the child's psychology. It was Chikwesili the nanny who introduced the children to the act of praying to God. And the kids respond whenever they have problems beyond their scope. A child who grows up with such an orientation is likely to fit well into the larger society and he will go on to become a responsible adult and even make a good leader.

An average Nigerian child seeing this film will be encouraged to abhor mischievousness, disobedience, impertinence and constituting nuisance in the society, but if no one is saddled with the responsibility of explaining the film message to them as often the case in most Nigerian homes, most of them would learn to disrespect their elders wherever and whenever their decisions are challenged by an adult following the characters of Michelle and Claire who are seen exhibiting the true state of the environment where they are coming from. (Los Angeles, United States of America).

## **Conclusion**

The two films evaluated in this study have buttressed the fact that children's films should be made to inculcate moral rectitude in the lives of children, as well as instigate creative ingenuities in the young as seen in *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone*. The fantastic film environment explored in *Harry Potter: The Sorcerer's Stone* moves the attention of the children away from everyday events and presents an imaginary environment whose events are not common in the child's environment, thus looking at *Mise-en-place: Setting the stage theory* by Skolnick, the child audience focuses his attention on the subject matter of the film narratives. Screen Institution postulation as utilized in *My Kids and I* pinpoint the learners' attitudes towards projected realities on the screen. If positive or negative attitudes or behaviours are projected on the screen, children assimilate and imbibe such behaviours in their day-to-day activities.

## **Recommendations**

Apart from Family, Religious and School institutions where manners, attitudes, morals, comportments, intellects, charisma, behaviours, knowledge and so forth are developed and learned, the fourth institution which this study has identified as the Screen Institution is powerful in influencing opinions, shaping ideological leaning of children as well as carrying out the above-mentioned functions, as such, much attention should be given to the screen institution. The censorship board should ensure proper evaluations, and regulations of the screen content meant for child's consumption. Parents should also play a vital role in monitoring and curtailing what the children are watching on their screen interface (Television/smartphones etc.) There are educational tablet phones for children, as such, parents,

caregivers, teachers and guardians could buy such tablet phones for the children. Cable television stations should activate security codes on all adult channels to deny children frequent access to adult content without the knowledge of their parents.

The filmmakers should consider the content of the films meant for children in the Nollywood film industry as content designed to build and not to destroy. Most of the film content in Nollywood is riddled with themes and subthemes of hate, ritual killings, money rituals, and get-it-at-all-cost syndrome, among other vices, the aforementioned themes are not good examples to Nigerian children and youths, as such, the filmmakers should desist from glamourizing the above themes and subsequently promote themes that are in the interest of positive growth and nation building.

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