



IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities

Vol. 11. No. 5, (2025)

ISSN: 2488- 9210 (Print) 2504-9038 (Online)

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Umunya**

Indexed: Academic Journals Online, Google Scholar, Igwebuike Research Institute

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IMPLICATIONS OF FOLK SONGS FOR EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The study of African songs has moved beyond dispassionate inquiry and the antiquated perspective that considered it a subject fit only for speculation by idle minds. With the present development in the area of African renaissance, acknowledging and claiming the African cultural heritage, the occasion has arisen to once again study African traditional songs to see their contributions towards the development of education in Africa. There are several works investigating African traditional songs from a variety of perspectives; however, the beauty of the present work is the connection it makes between education and African traditional songs. The burden of this work is to study African traditional songs, their dimensions or types, and their contribution, particularly, to the area of education. To achieve this, the phenomenological and hermeneutic methods of inquiry were employed. This research discovered that African traditional songs, handed down from one generation to another orally, permeate every facet of African life and thus occupy a fundamental place in the African traditional educational heritage. It further recommended the employment of African indigenous folk songs in educational institutions in Africa, more importantly, at the primary and secondary levels. In this way, the African will be taught within categories that he or she understands and appreciates.

Keywords: African, songs, education, traditional, societies, hermeneutics, value, educative.

Introduction

Education, as an activity that goes on in every society, has its aims and methods determined by the nature of society in which it operates. In traditional African societies, where knowledge was orally transmitted from one generation to another, the methods employed would certainly be different. It is, therefore, not surprising that proverbs, stories, songs, myths, symbols, etc., were employed for the accumulation, preservation, organization, and transmission of knowledge and experience from one generation to another. Through the use of these vessels and methods of knowledge, the natured and nurtured elements of individuals were developed to make them fit into society. In this way, people were socialized and made full-fledged members of the traditional society (Kanu 2015). They were employed, under the guidance and control of selected social agencies- parents, sacred specialists, kings, elders, etc., to intentionally foster among its members its norms, values, purposes, and organizations. This is meant to guide the members of society in the proper direction so as to enable them to achieve their goals, needs, and aspirations.



In the colonial era, indigenous African music and culture were considered evil and unacceptable for use in schools and places of worship. Thus, they were excluded from school curricula, and a central place was given to European music and instruments; this was promoted in schools and churches around Africa. It is, therefore, not surprising that from the time of nineteenth-century colonialism, European music dominated the educational system in colonial schools. This led learners to come to the belief that there is only one music system in the world, that is, European music (Nompula, 2011). In the post-colonial era, this development began to be challenged. The South Africa Music Education Society (SAMES) formed in 1985 is known to have encouraged educators to begin discussing and debating the principles and processes of forming a new music curriculum in South Africa in such a manner that music education develop a conceptual approach that leads to the adoption of a broader view of music (Oehrle, 1986 and 1994). Agreeing with the above perspective, Blacking (1967 and 1979) contends that each culture has its pitch and sounds that are accepted as music. Scholars have also argued that African traditional music is of great value in education owing to its ability to develop children's creative ability (Campbell, 1991; Floyd, 1995; Sloboda, 1985).

This research focuses on African folk songs and their relationship to the education of the child. African folk songs are a characteristic musical expression that plays a fundamental role in the life of the African people. Children begin to sing as soon as they can make an understandable word. This singing does continue through life, in the school, in the farm, in the local kitchen, during a conversation, during storytelling, courtship, marriage ceremonies, initiation rites, at meals, war, funerals, on the road, in squares, etc. (Senoga-Zake, 1990). And by African folk songs, the definition of the International Folk Music Council (Scholes, 1970) is adopted, as:

... the music that has been submitted to the process of oral transmission. It is the product of evolution, and it is dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation, and selection... It can also be applied to music that originates with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten, living tradition of a community. (p. 366).

Concerning culture and history, the Igbo folk songs are closely related to the Igbo culture and history. It serves as a storehouse for culture and history, and also as a medium for transmitting that culture and history. With this understanding, questions concerning the educational value of Igbo songs begin to emerge. Thus, this piece investigates the educative value of African traditional folk songs.

Methodology

For this research, the qualitative method of research would be employed given its appropriateness for the study of the nature of the relationship between African folk songs and education. The document study or document analysis approach will be used by the researcher for the purpose of reviewing written materials on this subject and using their critical findings for the development of the present piece. Thus, primary and secondary materials will be consulted during this research. The phenomenological research design will be used for the understanding and description of the essence of the folk song phenomenon among the African people (Berger, 2013). This will be based on lived experience, which will expand the knowledge about the folk song phenomenon. Folk songs will, therefore, be studied as it is among the African people, focusing more on the Igbo-African culture area (Aspers and Corte,



2019). Following a better understanding of African folk songs will be a presentation of the critical findings of the researcher on African folk songs, especially as it relate to education.

Theoretical Framework

The Inculturation theory is used to underpin this study. As a concept, it was first introduced into the academic community by Cardinal Sin of Manila at the Synod on Catechesis held in Rome in 1977, with a focus on the need for an inculturation of Catholicism in a variety of forms. Generally, emerged as a theory in a bid to make the Christian religion, coached in Western culture at home in Africa through dialogue. Shorter (1988), Metuh (1993, 1996a, and 1996b), and Walligo (1991 and 1996) had maintained that communication between human cultures can only take place effectively through dialogue and participation, through listening, and through readiness to learn. Kurgat (2009) avers that it is only through interdependence in corporation and congruence that conversions can successfully take place. There is an emerging consensus that culture is a developing process in which there is and there must be a continuous dialogue between faith and culture. This is still very important as Schreiter (1991) observes that much of the continent of Africa still staggers under the burden of neo-colonialism and continued economic subordination to the powerful cultures of Europe, Asia, and North America. This theory is relevant in this study because we are dealing with developing an African educational methodology that would be in tandem with the African spirit. Its emphasis on dialogue, participation, through listening, and through readiness to learn are very important principles for the development of an African system of education that allows for the interaction between education and culture.

Types of African Songs

The major characteristic of African folk songs is that they have functions. Thus, Nnamani (2014) associates African songs with activities such as work, games, dances, wars, religious ceremonies, etc. No one in Africa sings without a purpose. It is therefore not surprising that the different types of African songs differ with the differing activities or events that they accompany. These include:

1. Entertainment songs

These songs are sung to entertain people who have come together for a celebration. They are usually praise songs to give accolades to the brave, like warriors, hunters, chiefs, kings, etc. They occupy a very important place in the gatherings of Africans in traditional societies, and even in contemporary times.

2. War songs

These are sung before going into war to boost the morale of the warriors. These songs are so powerful that they can turn a weakling into a warrior; they can drive the mind into doing things that until hitherto it could not conceive of doing. This can also be sung before a wrestler goes onto the open floor for a contest with his opponent. He is called all kinds of great names to boost his morale.

3. Funeral songs

These songs are sung to pour out grief, pain, and sorrow over the death of a loved one. It also tells the great work that the dead has done and how the person in question would be missed by society. It also gives hope to the living that the dead still lives and has not completely departed.



4. Manual labour songs

This relates to the songs of war. Just as war songs boost the morale of warriors, manual labour songs have a way of boosting the morale of workers, especially farmers or weavers, etc., to work harder. It energizes the worker and makes the tedious interesting. Women sing these songs while sweeping, pounding, grinding, cooking, farming, and during other domestic duties. Men sing them during hunting, fishing, farming, palm wine tapping, etc. During the slave trade, African slaves used songs to boost the overall happiness of the people they worked with. During times of difficult labour, they would break out into songs to pass the time and to lift their spirits of distraught workers.

5. Religious songs

These are sacred songs with extraordinary powers sung during religious festivals or worship at shrines in supplication and for spiritual upliftment. It is in this regard that Nzewi (1989) opines that worship finds its most respectful and satisfying mode of address in songs. Agu (1990) observes that they are sung in praise of the deity before whose shrine worshippers have come to welcome his or her presence to grant their requests. These songs are sung to glorify the deity and prepare the grounds for the manifestation of its power. During the singing, drums are used, dancing and clapping are allowed. Most times, in shrines where you have mediums, such songs throw them into ecstasy- they become possessed and fall to the ground, revealing things that are hidden. Thus, Quarcoopome (1987) avers that:

Singing generates the avenue for expressing certain sentiments or truths, and in the context of rituals, they demonstrate the faith of the worshipper from the heart- faith in God, belief in and about divinities, assurance and hope about the present, and with reference to the hereafter. (p. 37).

6. Victory songs

These are songs sung for warriors when they have returned from war. It is a welcome song, usually sung when they have won a victory over the enemies of the village. No one sings these songs when warriors have failed in a battle. This can also be sung after a wrestler has won his opponent in a wrestling contest.

7. Consolation Songs

These are songs sung to console a person who has misfortune befallen. Usually, it is geared towards giving the person hope, making him or her understand that all is not lost and that if there is life, new opportunities would avail themselves.



From the foregoing, it is observable that African songs permeate every facet of African life, such that it is difficult to witness a social gathering that is devoid of songs and dances. At a local level, they occupied the place of the press, radio, and publication in traditional African societies. Okafor and Emeka (1995) write that: "Music is unquestionably, the most widely practiced of the traditional arts in Nigeria. At any time of the night or day, somewhere in the land, some music is being made" (p. 105).

Igbo-African Traditional Musical Instruments




African songs are usually accompanied by instruments. The instruments employed, especially among the Igbo-African people during singing include giant slit wooden drums, flute, metal gong, xylophone, etc.





Table 1: Igbo-African Traditional Musical Instruments

S/N	Instrument	Use/Value	Picture
1	Flute	The <i>OJA</i> (Flute) is a piece of wood designed with a cavity inside. The top has a wide opening to fit the shape of the human lower lip, a small hole on the bottom, and two smaller holes closer to the top on the exact opposite side. The artist blows the musical sounds through the wide opening while placing the thumb and the ring fingers simultaneously on the two smallest holes to control the rhythm. The bottom hole, which is left alone at all times, controls the musical rhythm outflow. It accompanies dances and songs, or is played as a solo.	
2	Pottery drum	The <i>UDU</i> (Pottery-drum) is a sphere object made of clay, with a hollow inside and a small round open mouth. The primary function of the <i>Udu</i> is to produce a musical bass. The artist accomplishes this by taping the open mouth with a round and flat object.	



3	Rattle	The <i>Ichaka</i> is made of gourd or calabash loosely covered with beads. When tapped or shaken, it produces a rattling sound to complement other instruments.	
4	Talking drum/Cylinder drum	The <i>IGBA</i> (Cylinder-drum) is a piece of hollow wood covered at one end with animal hide held down tight with fasteners. The artist carries it over his shoulder with the help of a shoulder strap. The artist produces the sound by beating on the animal hide with his fingers or a combination of one set of fingers and a special stick	
5	Slit drum	The <i>EKWE</i> (Slit-drum) is a tree trunk, hollowed throughout its length from two rectangular cavities at its ends and a horizontal slit that connects the cavities. The size of the slit-drum depends on its use and significance. Its significance includes use as a musical instrument at coronation, cultural events, and rituals. The different sounds of the drum summon the citizens to the monarch's palaces or town squares.	



6	Gong	The <i>OGENE</i> (Gong) is the most important metal instrument among the Igbo people. They were made originally in bronze but, in modern times, are mainly made of common metal with a bulging surface in an elliptical-shaped rim, and tapering like a frustum to its handle. It is hit about its rim by a stick to produce different tunes.	
7	Thumb piano	The <i>ubo-aka</i> is a "thumb piano" of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. This instrument features a wood-burnt hardwood soundboard (with cut-out handholds) mounted on an incised, wood-burnt gourd resonator. Instead of the traditional metal cuffs around each key, a metal chain is stretched across the key.	

Author created

Critical Findings

The study of African traditional music in relation to education has led to the following critical findings that are fundamental to the consideration of the educational value of African traditional folk songs.

1. A cursory glance reveals that African music is increasingly being enthusiastically appreciated around the globe, even in the most conservative circles. This development is the outcome of a better understanding of the structural and sociocultural significance of African folk songs. This is also changing and correcting stereotyped ideas about African traditional music, as merely a noise, and as evil. This growing acceptability of African traditional songs is creating a strong basis for their employment in educational institutions in Africa and beyond. According to Nketia (1974), this is important as African songs are not just songs, but also a language which is used for communication.

2. African traditional songs are very instrumental in the teaching of children manners and correct social behaviour. These correct social behaviors emerge as the lessons learnt at the end of a good number of African songs. Thus, Weinberg (1984) avers that through indigenous music, children, especially, not only learn the language of the community but also how to behave. It is also in this regard that Nketia (1974) and Steward (1998) strongly hold that African



traditional songs promote a co-operative spirit among people, and at different levels in the society, and bring about the maintenance of order in society. These songs warn, praise, and entertain the listeners. During public functions, sometimes, the songs are sung by masquerades, with the intention of backing that which is taught- cultural values, customs, and moral codes with the authority of the ancestors.

3. African traditional songs are also a great source of education about the history of a people or a society. This is important as some of the African songs are about the society's past and values, or about an event that has happened in the past. These songs are transmitted orally from parents and elders of communities to the next generation. Historical songs involve detailed narrations of events with brief allusions to significant incidents and accounts of descent from ancestors. As these songs are sung, the child is educated about who he or she is, where he or she is coming from. This self-understanding helps the child to know where he or she is going, having known where he or she has come from. This also helps the child to prepare for the future, having learnt from the past.

4. African traditional songs have the capacity for developing the confidence level and self-esteem of children who engage in their singing. It also helps to improve the creative skills of children, and their composition and co-operative skills. As they sing and learn new songs, their power of imagination, aural acuity, memory, and cognitive skills are also improved (Campbell, 1991). In songs also, many children who have no voice as a result of their constricting environment are afforded an opportunity to express their originality.

5. As in the case of African folktales, African traditional songs can be used in varied fields or areas of study. This dynamic character that African songs possess makes them more positioned for use in the education of the child. Ofei (1974) argues that:

There are songs about historical events and people. There are songs that deal with various aspects of tradition, as well as songs that make references to the environment. Therefore, the music education program can form a part of a properly integrated school curriculum, remembering that music in the past was not only a means of entertainment but also a means of education.

6. African songs carry within them elements of culture, aesthetics, linguistics, and practicality; it is holistic. Given this, it has the capacity for preparing African children for all life phases of the future. Through the tonal inflection of words, children learn how to differentiate the pronunciation of words that may have the same spellings but different meanings. Noble ideas are also communicated to the listeners as a way of boosting their commitment towards the good. During such songs, social vices are discouraged and virtues are promoted.

Conclusion

The strong connection between African songs and education in traditional African societies is based on the fact observed by Onwuekwe (2005 & 2006) that African songs involve the language, customs, and values of traditional African societies. Okafor (1998 & 2005) and Nwamara (2015) further observe that African songs are integrated with every facet of traditional life, from birth to death, and convey African history and culture. If that is the case, African songs are very significant instruments for education and learning, the transmission of history and knowledge. Because of their educational value, they are usually short and repetitive to enhance remembrance, and also as a reorganizing principle. The brevity and repetitive nature



of such songs is necessary so that the message may not be lost. Thus, although African songs entertain, they are also a medium for the transmission of cultural values and knowledge. It was such an important means of communication that during the slave trade, slaves used songs to communicate hidden advice and coded maps with full details on how to escape to Canada, which was then a non-slave state.

The foregoing has studied the fundamental place that African songs occupy in traditional African societies. It has further studied the dimensions of African songs, which reveals that it is an almost indispensable variable in virtually every dimension of African traditional life. In our time of cultural renaissance, an attempt to reaffirm the African cultural heritage, this piece argues that African traditional songs were a huge dimension of the African traditional educational system. It is a method of education that speaks to the African spirit. It recommends that such traditional songs should be reintroduced into our educational systems to boost academic performance among the young. This is very crucial as African traditional songs beautifully synthesize the elements of entertainment and learning.

However, with the advent of Western education, little or no time has been given to African songs as a means of transmitting knowledge. Thus, Mbiti (1969) rightly observes that “As with proverbs, the collection and study of religious songs is very scanty, and yet this is another rich area where one expects to find repositories of traditional beliefs, ideas, wisdom and feelings” (p. 87). There is, therefore, a need to revive African traditional songs through documentation and recording. There might also be a need to introduce some modern elements where necessary to make it fit into contemporary times. There is also a need to establish folk music centers and associations; it should be encouraged and incorporated into the school curriculum; there should be official governmental recognition and sponsorship of African folk music. This would help in the preservation of African culture and the transmission of the rich historical heritage embodied in them.

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