

DIDACTICISM IN CHILDREN'S FOLKSONGS: A STUDY OF SELECTED YORUBA FOLKSONGS

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Abstract

This paper seeks to appraise the didacticism in Yoruba folksongs in relevance to the development of a child into an acceptable member of the society. This paper adopts the qualitative research method through interview to gather data about the didactic content of the Yoruba folksongs sung to children. It was discovered that vices such as indiscipline and disobedience are on the rise among children. Childhood, especially between 0-8 years is the formative years of a person when they should be guided to becoming acceptable members of the society. The demand of maintaining a work-life balance is one of the reasons parents and guardians do not get to spend much time with their children, consequently why they do not sing much of these didactic folksongs to their children. The result of these findings therefore shows that other avenues of teaching children didactic folksongs and having didactic folksongs sung to children should be explored.

Keywords: Yoruba, Society, Songs, Folksongs, Didacticism, Children

Introduction

A child is a human being between the stages of birth and puberty. Biologically, childhood ends at 10-11 years, the stage at which puberty begins. Among the Yoruba people of the Southwestern Nigeria, children are seen as a valued heritage, for they are the lifeline to the continuity and survival of the society. Hence, children need to be brought up to the acceptable social standard to live up to the social norms and values. Though traditionally, a child is communally raised, the inculcation of social norms and values are primarily the responsibility of the parents and guardians.

Music has always been an important part of the Yoruba culture. Songs are used in the many different forms of entertainment and religious activities of the Yoruba people. Olagunju (1997) said that:

The Yoruba are a song loving people. No aspect of their life is devoid of song. In joy or in sorrow, time of meeting and departure, time of exhortation or rebuke and so on. There is always song to express the situation. In fact songs are seen as a powerful channel through which the Yoruba people express their mind. Songs encompasses their daily lives and inspire them while at work. Songs among the Yoruba people is a reflection of people's feeling and those feelings centre especially around their world view. That the

Yoruba enjoy expressing part of their world view through music shows the appealing nature of music in their society. (p.24-25)

The Yoruba philosophy is a folk philosophy that valorises the Yoruba people's cardinal virtues- namely love, morality, temperance, honesty, honour, bravery, justice, prudence, and fortitude. These virtues have been made instructive by embedding them in their folk songs. While the majority of folksongs for children teach acceptable social norms, it is noted that disobedience and indiscipline are on the rise among children. This therefore means that didactic folksongs are not sung to children as much as they should. A reason for this is that parents and guardians struggle to find a work-life balance (Pahuja, 2015). The economic reality of the contemporary time requires both parents to work, thereby reducing the amount of time they get to spend with their children. The focus of this paper, therefore is to propagate the use of folksongs in teaching children the acceptable norms for them to be able to coexist with other members of the society.

Didacticism

The adjectival form of the word, "didactic" is more commonly used. Sometimes, disapprovingly, the word "didactic" is used for literary texts that are overloaded with informative or realistic matter, and are marked by the omission of graceful and pleasing details. The word didacticism is a term that refers to a particular philosophy in Art and Literature that emphasizes the idea that different forms of Art and Literature ought to carry information and instructions, along with pleasure and entertainment. Art meant for pleasure and entertainment is said to be aesthetic, therefore, aesthetics generally deal with the notions of beauty, pleasure and taste. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "aesthetics is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste and with the creation and appreciation of beauty". As it stands, the whole essence of art in the aesthetic sense is to please the human senses. On the other hand, utilitarian art is art that has function as its priority, though still pleasing aesthetically. According to Martin (2009), the functions of music include (i) regulation of an individual's emotional, cognitive or physiological state, (ii) mediation between self and others, (iii) symbolic representation, and (iv) coordination of action.

The first function of music according to Martin pertains to the focus of this study i.e. music being a means of regulating an individual's emotional, cognitive or psychological state. According to Aigens (2013), Music therapy is a therapeutic approach that uses the naturally mood-lifting properties of music to help people improve their mental health and overall well-being. Aside therapeutic music which is intended to alleviate physical, emotional or mental concerns, the lyrics of songs can also go a long way in affecting the state of the mind and worldview of a child. Theories have been developed to explain the relationship between music and behavior.

Anderson and Bushman (2002) on the effects of songs with violent lyrics on aggressive thoughts and feelings said that repeated exposure to violent lyrics may contribute to the development of an aggressive personality. So, on the corollary, repeated exposure to didactic songs will contribute to the development of a socially accepted personality.

Didacticism in Folksongs

Folksongs are the traditional songs of a people. These songs taught and learnt orally are indigenous to the people among which they thrive. Though not written down in documentation, these songs have survived generations due to usage stemming from their relevance. According to Ofose (1989):

Folksong refers to any traditional song which is of obscure and indeterminate antiquity, but has passed into general currency and acceptance. By implication therefore the origin, in terms of composers or creators is not known. However, it is always closely bound to a culture within which it fulfills a positive functional purpose. (63)

According to Euba (2013), folksongs stand in different ways as the portal tool that connects the past to the present so as to have a better understanding of the present from the past. Folksongs get a person back to his/her roots by telling stories and giving a snapshot of life forgotten or on the verge of disappearing. Folksongs also tend to highlight the facets of living which all cultures share, shedding light on the similarities between people, as opposed to differences.

According to Ibekwe (2019):

Folksongs are the traditional music of a people which are taught and learnt orally by members of a given society and which are believed to contain the cultural values of that society. By implication, the cultural values of a society can be transmitted, sustained and consolidated through folksongs which are taught to children starting at a very early stage of their development, and as they grow up they live by it. (p.3)

Going by this, Ibekwe gives credence to the reality that the cultural values of a society may be at stake if not taught to children; therefore, it is essential that these cultural values which include morals be taught to children, and a means of doing that is folksongs.

Didacticism in Yoruba Folksongs for Children

As stated and seen above, the cultural values of the Yoruba people are passed on to the next generation orally through folksongs. This agrees with Bolaji's opinion (2013) when he stated that:

The traditional folksongs of the Yoruba people cannot be separated from their cultural value, identity, and historical antecedents. Neither can it be separated from their cultural transmission that passes through the oral tradition of the Yoruba society. Through this singular act, the indigenous belief, norms, cultural heritage and tradition of the Yoruba people are preserved orally from one generation to another.

The Yoruba cultural values are moral principles defined by traditional beliefs. They guide the conduct of those who live in the society in which such cultural values are held in high esteem. As a way of life, folksongs which teach virtues and rebuke vices have been sung to children. This helps to shape their conduct and morality to what is acceptable in the Yoruba society. Values such as handwork, patience and integrity are sung to children by their parents or older relatives. On the usage of didactic music to instill values, Adedeji (2010) is of the opinion that one of the major weapons in our hands to combat social ill in our society is to propagate music that condemn crime, bad governance, oppression and terrorism; music that encourage decent behaviors, love, harmony, justice, respect for human life, truth, hard work, didactic music that show the path towards a glorious tomorrow.

Ibekwe (2019), on the relevance of folksong to a growing child in Igbo culture stated that "folksongs, in addition to providing entertainment contain meaningful texts that instruct, train, reprimand, caution, advice, socialize, encourage and direct the behavior of a growing child." (p.7) Folksong also teaches children about repercussion, that there is a consequence for any misdeed. This helps to keep the children in check from vices even if there is no one around as their conscience would remind them that there is a consequence lurking. As seen, folksongs play a vital role in the development of a child into adulthood. In Okafor & Ng'aandu (2003), Okafor said that children learn the dos and don'ts of their community, character of the people and animals, proverbs, codes and maxims through folksongs. This corroborates the opinion of Aluede and Buraimah (2005) when they said that folksongs can perform different functions such as economic, political, social and moral inclusion.

Theoretical Framework

This research is hinged on the theory of constructivism. The constructivism learning theory by Jean Piaget argues that people produce knowledge and form meaning based upon their experiences. In other words, knowledge of the past is essential in understanding the present and forging on with the future. Therefore, if it is essential that children be taught morals through didactic songs which serve as

moral guide and compass for them, it is therefore important that these folksongs be examined and properly documented.

Scope/Limitations of the Study

This study examined the didacticism in Yoruba folksongs for children as seen in Offa, the Yoruba speaking part of Kwara state. There are didactic folksongs sung by children among themselves but just like order, didactic directives are more adhered to if they come from adults. Therefore, this study is focused on the folksongs sung to children by parents, guardians and elders in communities in Offa, Kwara state. The sample size cuts across five randomly selected adults (men and women) not less than 50 years of age in Offa, Kwara state.

Methodology

The researcher made use of library sources and audio recordings for folksongs sung to children. The researcher thereafter interviewed five adult members of the Yoruba community comprising of parents and grandparents to make enquiries on folksongs sung to children to teach morals. The researcher consulted the five respondents who, through analysis, examined some folksongs to know if they are of didactic nature or not.

The researcher adopted the descriptive survey design which aims to accurately and systematically describe a population. Data were collected in questionnaires containing the researcher's questions with the help of a research assistant.

The research questions consisted of sections A and B. The questions in section A were about the respondents' personal data while Section B consisted of 3 open-ended questions to which the respondents are expected to give varying answers.

SECTION B

Research Question 1

What moral values are noted in these folksongs for children?

One of the respondents, Mr Ishola is of the opinion that the folksongs teaches children to be respectful and grateful, especially to mothers. He said a folksong like *Omo to ma iya re loju* not only admonishes children to be respectful to their mothers but also goes further to spell out the damning consequence of not respecting one's mother.

Another respondent, Mr Ibrahim also said that the folksongs goes a long way in teaching children to be contented in what they have, as portrayed in songs like *Ise ori ran mi*. Also he said the folksongs enshrine honesty which is a very important value among the Yoruba people.

Talking about how children can learn to be grateful by listening to these folksongs, Mrs Idowu said folksongs like *Iya ni wura* and *Iya lo lu to 'ju mi* will make

children know how much sacrifices their mothers and parents in general make for them (the children).

The fourth respondent who identified himself as Baba Popo said upon deep reflection, these folksongs generally preach respect, honesty, contentment and hard work.

In addition to the moral values and norms listed by other respondents, the fifth respondent Iya Egunjobi said the folksong *we ki o mo* teaches cleanliness and eating in moderation. This can help prevent children to be gluttony, an embarrassing social vice if not curbed early.

Research Question 2

What is the perception on the continuous usage of folksongs to teach morals to children?

All respondents responded positively when asked if the usage of folksongs to teach children should be continued. They went further to say that this form of teaching and learning of moral values and norms is enjoyable to both learner and teacher as well. Mr Ishola went further to say that one way of keeping the culture of folksong singing is to incorporate it into the primary and secondary school's curriculum.

The following are some didactic Yoruba folksongs sung to children:

1. *Omo to ma iya re loju*

Omo to ma iya re loju

Ebi ni o na omo na pa/2x

Iya to ji ya nitori re/2x

Omo to ma iya re loju

Ebi ni o na omo na pa

English Translation:

A child that looks at his mother with disdain
will die wretched

Your mother toiled and suffered over you

A child that looks at his mother with disdain
will die wretched

The image shows the musical notation for the song 'Omo to ma iya re loju'. It consists of three staves of music in 6/8 time, with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: o - mo to mo i'ya re lo - ju o e - bi nio na mo na pa. The second staff starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: i - ya to ji - ya ni to ti e i - ya to ji - ya ni to ti e. The third staff starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: o - mo to mo i'ya re lo - ju o e - bi nio na mo na pa. There are measure numbers 5 and 9 written to the left of the second and third staves respectively.

This folksong conveys the philosophical truth of consequence. The song preaches respect for the elders, else there will be consequence.

2. *Iya lolu toju mi*

Iya lolu toju mi lo toju mi ni k eke re

Eyin re lo fi pon mi Iya ku ise mi

Emi ki iya mi ku ise, pelu iteriba mo 'le

Emi ko le ko 'se iya mi ran

Iya, iya, iya

English Translation

My mother is my provider, she provided for
me when I was a baby

She carried me on her back- thanks for all
you did

I will prostrate to greet my mother, also,
with my head bowed

I cannot refuse an errand by my mother, oh
mother

I - ya lo lu to - ju mi lo to - ju mi ni ke - ke - re

5
e - yin re lo fi pon mi i - ya ku i - se mi

9
e - mi ki - ya mi 'ku 'se pe lu 'te 'ri ba mo - 'le

13
e - mi ko le ko 'se i - ya mi ran i - ya i - ya i - ya

This is a folksong about gratitude. Gratitude to mothers for the care given to their children. The folksong went further to admonish children to accord their mothers respect and not to hesitate to run errands for them.

3. *Iya ni wura iyebiye*

Iya ni wura iyebiye

Ti a ko le f'owo ra

Oloyun mi f'osu mesan

O pon mi f'odun meta

Iya ni wura iyebiye

Ti ako le f'owo ra

English Translation

Mothers are inestimable jewels that money cannot buy

She had me in her womb for nine months

She carried me on her back for three months

Mothers are inestimable jewels that money cannot buy

I - ya ni wu ra i - ye - bi ye__ ti a ko le fo-wo ra

5
o - lo-yun mi fo-su me-san o pon mi fo-dun me - ta I -

9
ya ni wu ra i - ye - bi ye__ ti a ko le fo-wo ra

This song states the sufferings women go through to have children. It educates every child to value his/her mother with high esteem, stating that there is no amount of money that can quantify the value of a mother in our society and in the entire world.

4. *Bata re a dun ko ko ka*

Bata re a dun ko ko ka/2x

Bi o ba ka iwe re, bata re a dun ko ko ka/2x

English Translation

You will walk gallantly and be accorded respect

If you read your books you will walk gallantly and be accorded respect

ba-ta re a dun ko ko ka ba-ta re a dun ko ko ka bi o ba ka we re

5
ba-ta re a dun ko ko ka bi o ba ka we re ba-ta re a dun ko ko

ko ko ka is an onomatopoeia of the sound high-heeled shoes worn by women makes. In the past, only educated women and women of substance wore/ could afford the high-heeled shoes. Girls are encouraged to read and become successful so they can afford to buy such shoes and make the “*ko ko ka*” sound wherever they go.

5. *Ise ori ran mi*

English Translation:

Ise ori ran mi ni mo n se

The work I do is what is destined for me/2x

*Ise ori ran mi ni mo n se o
Eni ba jale lo bo mo je*

It is he who steals that brings shame upon himself

i-se o-ri ran mi ni mo n se i-se o-ri ran mi ni mo n

4
se o e-ni ba ja - le lo bo mo je

People who do menial and masonry jobs are often looked down on due to the nature of their work. This folksong talks about taking pride in whatever legitimate job one does. It also warns that stealing brings reproach.

6. *Ki ni o f'ole se*

English translation:

Ki ni o fole se laye ti mo wa/2x

What will I do with stealing?

Ka ka kin jale ma kuku de ru

I would rather be a slave than steal

Ki ni o fole se laye ti mo wa

What will I do with stealing?



ki ni o fo-lo se la-ye ti mo wa o ki ni o fol-le se la-ya ti mo wa

5

ka-ka ki n ja-le ma ku-ku de ru__ ki ni o fo0le se la - ye ti mo wa

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are written below the notes.

The moral taught with this song is that stealing is bad. The song also preaches that there is dignity in labor, for it is better to work for another and be paid peanuts than to steal.

7. *We ki o mo*

English Translation

We ki o mo

Bathe your body well

Fo 'so re

Wash your clothes

Jeun to dara lakiso ma jeun ju

Eat good food when due and do not over feed.



we ki o mo fo 'so__ re jeun to da ra l'a-si-ko ma jeun ju

The image shows a single staff of musical notation in 4/4 time. The melody is written above the lyrics.

This song admonishes children to maintain good hygiene by bathing properly and washing their clothes. Also, it tells them to eat when due and shun gluttony.

8. Eko dara

English Translation

Eko dara e je ka lo e je ka lo si ile iwe

Education is good, so let us go to school

Enikeni ti ko ka 'we alaarun ni yo se lo la

Whoever does not go to school will be a slave tomorrow

Eko dara e je ka lo e je ka lo si ile iwe

Education is good, so let us go to school

The musical score for 'Eko dara' is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The melody is presented on a single staff with lyrics in Yoruba and English translation below it. The lyrics are: E - ko da-ra e - je - ka lo e - je ka lo si - le i - we E - ko da-ra e - je - ka lo e - je ka lo si - le i - we e - ni k'e-ni ti ko ka 'we a - la - ru ni yo - se l'o - la e - ko da-ra e - je - ka lo e - je ka lo si - le i - we. The score includes measure numbers 5, 9, and 13.

This folksong talks about the importance of education and the consequence of not being educated. The folksong warns that anyone who is not educated is in danger of being a slave in the future. The folksong is intended to make children take their education seriously.

9. Ise agbe

English Translation

Ise agbe ni ise ile wa

Farming is our heritage

Eni ko sise a ma ja 'le

Whoever doesn't work will steal

Iwe ki ko lai si oko ati ada

Education without farming skills is incomplete

Ko pe o, kop e o

I - se a - gbe n'i - se i - le wa e - ni ko s'i - se a
4
ma j'a - le i - we ki ko la - i - si o - ko
7
a - ti a - da ko pe o ko pe o

This folksong is about taking pride in one's heritage. The folksong went ahead to say that getting educated is not an excuse to not be involved in farming. These are pointers that it is necessary to be hardworking, that hard work, no matter how little the outcome it pays. As the folksong says, he who does not work will have to steal to survive.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Folksongs generally stand as one of the major tools used in the Yoruba society to imbibe the culture and acceptable social norms governing their society. Looking at the analytical context of the folksongs used in this study, *Omo to mo iya re loju*, *Bata re a dun ko ko ka*, *Ise ori ran mi*, and *Ki ni o fole se*, it is clear that the didacticism of these songs established some cultural values, norms, and traditions of the Yoruba culture into the life of children and adults in the society. Therefore, the continued usage of these folksongs to teach children moral and social values is recommended. It is also recommended that these didactic folksongs be taught to children in schools as part of their curriculum. Also, it is recommended that these folksongs be properly documented rather than being left to the mercy of oral transmission.

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