



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: G  
LINGUISTICS & EDUCATION  
Volume 21 Issue 15 Version 1.0 Year 2021  
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal  
Publisher: Global Journals  
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

## Yorùbá Orature: The Fundamental Basis for Teaching Yorùbá Numeral

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**Abstract-** Without mincing words, there is a gradual loss of long-aged tradition, a method of equipping young ones for life. In Yorùbá traditional setting, the teaching of Yorùbá numerals remains an authentic means of transmitting culture from one generation to another. This paper attempts to examine that Yorùbá traditional education is deeply rooted in Yorùbá orature. Equally, it shows that the education system had been part and parcel of the society and it is not the training given in modern education but education which the indigenous black people of Africa offered. Additionally, the paper establishes that Yorùbá orature serves both recreational as well as educational purposes to prove that the use of Yorùbá orature is a fundamental basis for teaching the young ones the Yorùbá numerals as embedded in the culture and tradition of the people. Apart from this immediate and apparent function of teaching the young ones, the teaching of Yorùbá numerals initiates child(ren) into the various phases of life. This research work adopted both primary and secondary research methods.

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**GJHSS-G Classification:** FOR Code: 930299



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# Yorùbá Orature: The Fundamental Basis for Teaching Yorùbá Numeral

Àránsí Ayònlá Ọládùnníké

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how Yorùbá traditional education is deeply-rooted in Yorùbá orature. According to a Yorùbá proverb which says, “Àkùrò tí lómi télè kí òjò tó rò si” (A marshy land already contains water before the rain falls). Before the advent of Western education in the mid-nineteenth century, Yorùbá had a fundamental means of educating their children. Therefore, when the Europeans came and introduced their system of formal education in the society, it was not new because it was regarded as an additional and perhaps a modern way of seemingly developing the intelligence of the people. The traditional educational system had been part and parcel of the society before experiencing the school pudding. This Yorùbá traditional education system is in line with Awoniyi (1975: 357) when he says:

No education system stands apart from the society which establishes it, and education has purposes which it must

achieve if that society is to continue in the right direction. Education, therefore, draws inspiration and nourishment from society and contributes in turn to social opportunities for growth and renewal.

In essence, Yorùbá educated elites should appreciate that education has to do with people's culture and tradition. Lester (1957: 9) rightly observes this when he defines education as:

The culture which each generation purposely gives is to those who are to be its successors, to qualify them for at least keeping up, and if possible for raising the level of improvement which it has attained.

The obvious implication is that it seems impossible to educate the child properly or effectively outside his cultural environment. Long More (1959: 7) justifies this when he says:

If a man does away with his traditional way of living and throws away his good customs, he had better be certain he has something worth more invaluable to replace them.

It is pertinent that scholars have not intensified much research effort on how a Yorùbá child can be taught Yorùbá numerals effectively through Yorùbá orature. Also, one should realise that the Yorùbá traditional society has something to proffer educational theory and practice, which is brought out lucidly in its educational pattern through a combination of precepts and orature. By orature we mean, rich corporal of texts as are derivable from folklore, proverbs, chants, recitations, songs, riddles, folktales, and incantations, presented in oral form for the aim of animating and influencing the behavior of each other in a speech society.

Yorùbá orature is used amongst the Yorùbá to express a thought in vivid metaphor, to describe a person or thing in more obscure metaphor, to provide a form of amusement and it has an instructive value. In essence, Yorùbá orature combines recreational and educational features. Some scholars have researched the study of Yorùbá traditional method of education; for example, Ajayí 1990, examines riddles and the Yorùbá child; while Callaway (1975) explains indigenous education in Yorùbá society. Fáfúnwá (1975) concerns himself on education in the mother tongue among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria. Fájánà (1966) attempts to appreciate some aspects of Yorùbá traditional education and education policy in Nigeria traditional society in (1972) respectively. Also, Obidi (1997) writes on Yorùbá indigenous education in while Ọlájubù (1978)



dealt with the use of Yorùbá folktales as a means of moral education.

This paper has attempted a micro-study of Yorùbá orature as a means of teaching Yorùbá numerals. That is, the preceding writers have not examined the reading of numerals in the Yorùbá thought system.

## II. ANALYSIS

In Yorùbá society, song serves as a means of communication. The Yorùbá people sing on all *Orin* (Songs)

Lílé:	Ení bí ení	Solo:	One like one
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Èjí bí èjí	Solo:	Two like two
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Èta í tagbá	Solo:	Three is sure
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Èrin wòròkò	Solo:	Four is doubtful
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Àrún ìgbódó	Solo:	Five is prompt
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Èfà tièlè	Solo:	Six is slippery
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Aro n báro	Solo:	Aro is aro
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Mód'Èrèkèsán	Solo:	I arrive Èrèkèsán
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Gbangba lèwá	Solo:	Ten is certain
Ègbè:	He e	Chorus:	Undoubtedly, our game has become successful.
	Gbàngbà eré wa dayò láyé		
	Èèrò wá wò wá o o		People should come and watch us.

From the preceding example, it is observed that numbers one to ten are sung in a sonorous voice to teach the young ones the Yorùbá numerals. As the Yorùbá children are lovers of songs, it is very stress-free to teach them how to count one to ten. By rendering this song repeatedly, the act of counting becomes part and parcel of their knowledge.

### Ìwúre

Ìwúre is the prayerful aspect of the oral medium of communication between man and gods in Yorùbá

Ení:	Ànímò owó, ànímò ómọ	One:	You will have more money; you will have more children.
	Ànímò àìkú tíí se baálè ọrò, Àṣe!		You will have long life which supersedes everything. Amen

occasions. Such occasions include a time of joy and sorrow. In essence, one could conclude that songs permeate Yorùbá life. Consequently, songs serve as one of the means through which the Yorùbá teach numerals, as discussed below.

Èjì:	Òjíjí kí wòdò kómi ó gbóná Oó mágá jí rówó. Oó mágá jí rómo. O ó mágá jí rí ire gbogbo. Àṣé!	Two	When òjíjí (fish) enters the river, the river does not become hot. You shall always have money; you shall always have children. You shall always have fortunes. Amen
Èta:	Agbón ayé kò ní ta ó Oyin ayé kò ní ta ó, Àkéekèe ayé kò ní ta ó	Three:	Agbón (widely) will not sting you Oyin (honey bee) will not sting you. Akéekèe (scorpion) will not sting you. Amen.
Èrín:	Èrín lómódé ní rín kawó,  Èrín làgbàlagbà ní rín pobí Èrín làgbàrá ní rín pàdé odò lónà	Four:	It is with happiness that kids count money
	Tèrín, tèye ni òrò rẹ yóò mágá jásí. Àṣé!		It is with joy that adults pieces cola nut
Àrún:	Àrún ò ní sọ é lójò kale. Àṣé!	Five:	It is with happiness that erosion meets with the river, Your ways will result in fortune and happiness. Amen
Èfà:	Èfale fako ni tèrúkó Gbogbo ohun tí ó bá fowó fà Yóò mágá jásí rere Ífà yóò mágá wólé tò é wá. Àṣé!	Six:	A prolonged disease will not attack you. Amen.
Èje:	Bí Olúgbón ṣorò yóò kíje Bí Arèsà ṣorò yóò kíje Àṣeyorí yóò mágá jé tire. Àṣé!	Seven:	Hoes bring forth booties everywhere; whatever you struggle for, will come into being
Èjo:	Jòjò agbò níí mágbò níyì Ilé rẹ a jo Ònà rẹ a jo. Àṣé!	Eight:	Booties will come on your way. Amen
Èsán:	Ilé ayé 'a san e sówó  Á san é sómpo Á san é sí ire gbogbo Alé yóò san é ju òwúrò ló. Àṣé!	Nine:	Olúgbón's festival lasts seven days. Arèsà's festival lasts seven days, Success will be yours. Amen.
Èwá:	Wíwá ni a ní wá mó tówó ení  Owó yóò mágá wá e wálé Omó yóò mágá wá e wálé Ire ayé yóò mágá wá e wálé. Àṣé!	Ten:	Arèsà's festival lasts seven days, Success will be yours. Amen.
			Money will search for you. Children will search for you Good fortunes will search for you. Amen

From the above excerpt, one realizes that the Yorùbá can teach their children numerals accurately through supplicatory devices (ìwúre).

#### Ewì Eré Òṣùpá (Moonlight Poetry)

It is important to note that in Yorùbá culture, children often go out during the moonlight time to socialize together. During this occasion, they chant various children's poems to display their intellectual wit.

Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú

Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot

Ó dení

That is one

Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú

Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot

Also, such chanting serves as the means of training their tongue or enhancing speech ability. In essence, moonlight poetry serves as means of education and even as a serious test of mental capacity. Here is an example:

Ó dèjì	That is two
Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú	Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot
Ó dèta	That is three
Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú	Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot
Ó dèrin	That is four
Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú	Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot
Ó dàrún	That is five
Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú	Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot
Ó dèfà	That is six
Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú	Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot
Ó dèje	That is seven
Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú	Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot
Ó dèjo	That is eight
Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú	Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot
Ó dèsan	That is nine
Kámú gba lámù ká fi kámú	Let's pick calabash from the pot and put it on top of the pot
Ó dèwá	That is ten

The above example is not only used to enhance children's smooth speech ability but mainly to teach them to count numerals from one to ten. When this is done repeatedly during the moonlight game, obviously, children become experts in counting. In totality, such moonlight poetry is an indirect way of teaching numerals in Yorùbá culture.

Ọkan ṣoso póró lóbìnrin dùn mọ lówó ọkọ	One woman is the best for a husband
Bí wón bá di méjì	If they are two
Wọn a dòjòwú	They become rivals
Bí wón bá di méta	If they are three
Wọn a dèta à túnlé	They become three to scatter the house
Bí wón bá di mérin	If they are four
Wọn dìwo ló rín mi ni mo rín o	They become you laugh at me; I laugh at you
Bí wón bá di márùn-ún	If they are five
Wọn a di lágbájá lo ti run okó wa tán	They become someone that ruins our husband's fortunes.
Lóhun ṣusuusu	If they are six
Bí wón bá di méfà	They become wicked
Wọn a dìkà	If they are seven
Bí wón bá di méje	They become witches
Wọn a dàjé	If they are eight
Bí wón bá di méjo	They become big-headed women

Wọn a dìyá alátàrí bàmbà  
 Ló ti kó irú èyí şe ọkọ wa lówó  
 Bí wón bá di mésàn-án  
 Wọn a dìyá wa kò níṣé kan,  
 Kò lábò kan  
 Bó bá ti jí  
 Aṣo ọkọ wa ní má sán ń kiri  
 Bí wón bá di mewàá  
 Wọn a d'ilé ọkọ wa jòkò  
 Ni wón ń wá ọkọ wa wá

From the preceding, the researcher observed that the Ifá corpus teaches children the act of counting numerals. This system roots seriously in Yorùbá's traditional society.

#### *Ewì Ọmọdé (Children's Poetry)*

In Yorùbá culture, some poems connect to children's games. Such poems are known as "Ewì

Ení bí ení lomodé ń kawó  
 Èjì bí èjì làgbà ń tayò  
 Èta bí èta e jé kí a tara wa lóré  
 Èrin bí èrin, ení rín ni làá rín  
 Àrún bí àrún, baba má se wá l'árungún  
 Èfà bí èfà, e jé ká fara wa móra  
 Èje bí èje, olúgbón sorò ó kìje  
 Èjo bí èjo, ení bíni làá jo  
 Èsán bí èsán, ilé mi á san ònà mi á san  
 Èwá bí èwá, wíwá ni a ń wá mó tòwó ení

It is realized from the above excerpt that "Ewì Ọmọdé" is a device not only to teach children numerals but also to refresh their memory.

#### *Àló Àpabè (Folktales)*

Folktales serve as a device not only to teach children good morals but also to teach them numerals in Yorùbá culture. A good example is a folktale titled, "Lákíti àti Ará Ọ run" (Lákíti and Men of the heaven). In

That brings nonsense to our husband  
 If they are nine  
 They become a jobless or the jobless mother  
 That has no specific work  
 If they are ten  
 They become our husband sits at home  
 That they come to look for him  
 One woman is the best for a husband  
 If they are two  
 They become rivals

Ọmọdé" (children poetry). Children render these types of poems during the moonlight game to open or commence the day's activities. The children usually render them one after the other to determine whether a child makes a mistake or a free performance. In essence, such poems serve to develop children's mental skills. For example:

One by one, children count money  
 Two by two, adults play ayò game  
 Three by three, let us exchange gifts  
 Four by four, you laugh at me I laugh at you  
 Five by five, father, don't make us a jobless people  
 Six by six, let us be cordial  
 Seven by seven, olúgbón's festival lasts seven days  
 Eight by eight, one resembles his parents  
 Nine by nine, my home will be well, my way will be okay  
 Ten by ten, let us look more for what we have

the distant past, there was a quarrel between Lákíti and the men of the underworld, which invariably led to physical combat. The men of the underworld numbered ten confronted Lákíti in turns in a fight to finish the combat. The combat began with the one-headed man who came forward to slug it out with Lákíti in the presence of a large audience. Shortly after the combat started, the drummers commenced saying thus,

Lilé:	Lákíti kò lè jà (2ce)	Solo:	Lákíti cannot fight (2ce)
Ègbè:	Njé ó lè jà? (2ce)	Chorus:	Can he fight? (2ce)
Lilé:	Kó gbé e párá kó fi dá	Solo:	He lifts promptly to win
Ègbè:	Njé ó lè jà?	Chorus:	Can he fight?
Lilé:	Kó yàn bòn-ùn bí ìbọn	Solo:	He sounds like a gun
Ègbè:	Njé ó lè jà? Abbl.	Chorus:	Can he fight? (etc.)

Instantly, Lákíti and the one-headed man started the fight, but it took Lákíti a few minutes to win by killing the challenger. The audience in attendance hailed Lákíti for defeating the one-headed man.



The two-headed man came out fully determined to challenge Lákítí in a fight. As soon as the contest begins, drummers continue to sing thus:

Lílé: Lákítí kò lè jà (bbl)  
Ègbè: Njé ó lè jà? (abbl)

Within a twinkle of eyes, Lákítí defeated the two-headed man by killing him. All the people hailed him for his victory.

The three-headed man came out desperately to fight Lákítí. This time it was a tug of war. The drummers commenced their usual song thus:

Lílé: Lákítí kò lè jà (abbl)  
Ègbè: Njé ó lè jà? (bbl)

It took Lákítí no time to win the dwell by killing his challenger. The shout of joy over Lákítí's victory spread all over the places.

The four-headed man came out, and Lákítí defeated him in the same grand style. The five-headed man took his turn, and it was the same story of victory for Lákítí.

The six-headed man challenged Lákítí to the fight to finish the war. But luck was in Lákítí's favor.

The seven-headed man came out, aiming to defeat Lákítí. But, the whole thing was just like a dream because Lákítí recorded a victory over his victim.

Lílé: Lákítí kò lè jà (bbl)  
Ègbè: Njé ó lè jà? (bbl)

The ten-headed man took the advantage that Lákítí was already tired of his previous fights. He unleashed dead blows on Lákítí, and he dropped down dead. This event saddened the audience, and they went home disappointed and unceremoniously. The ten-headed man performed a miracle by resuscitating his fellow men, numbering nine, and all of them, including the ten-headed man, went home alive in happiness and elaborate jubilations. Surprisingly, Lákítí's son, who was the only one left behind, came out from his hide-out after all the ten men of the underworld had left to rescue his father. Both Lákítí and his son went home in joy too.

It is worth noting that one of the numerous devices adopted by the Yorùbá to teach the young ones numerals in society often uses the above folktale. Also, in the above folktale, Lákítí's challengers were numbered ten. He defeated the first nine, that is, one-headed man, two-headed man, three-headed man, four-headed man, five-headed man, six-headed man, seven-headed man, eight-headed man, and nine-headed man. But unfortunately, the ten-headed man defeated Lákítí as a result of his tiredness.

### III. CONCLUSION

It is apparent to stress in this paper that the use of Yorùbá orature as a fundamental basis for teaching young ones the Yorùbá numerals ensues the culture

Solo: Lákítí cannot fight (etc.)  
Chorus: Can he fight? (etc.)

Solo: Lákítí cannot fight (etc.)  
Chorus: Can he fight? (etc.)

The eight-headed man promised to give Lákítí a tough fight but all in vain. Lákítí claimed victory over his challenger.

The nine-headed man came out with full force to silence Lákítí just with a few blows. But Lákítí escaped defeat. This victory earned Lákítí instant popularity before the audience.

The ten-headed man came out so determined to avenge all the death blow that Lákítí had rained on his fellow men. As soon as the fight began, both the drummers and the signers went into action, thus:

Solo: Lákítí cannot fight (etc.)  
Chorus: Can he fight? (etc.)

and tradition of the people. Also, teaching numerals effectively through Yorùbá orature has started in the distant past before the advent of westernization of Yorùbá education.

The various ways of imparting Yorùbá numerals into the knowledge of Yorùbá children are through song, iwúre, moonlight poetry, folktales, children poetry, and Ifá literary corpus. These various ways permeate the Yorùbá life because the system is deep-rooted in Yorùbá culture and tradition. The method should be encouraged to ensure that the children's upbringing is a continuing partnership between the school and Yorùbá society.

Finally, it is shown in this paper that the Yorùbá traditional society has something to offer for education theory and practice. Indeed, this fact, which sustains the teaching of Yorùbá numerals, is a reason why orature still continues as fundamental means by which we teach Yorùbá numerals to children despite the challenge of western education.

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