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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.

Keywords: yorùbá orature, yorùbá numerals, traditional education, western-education, society, theory, culture, children.

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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. The methodology involved fieldwork where we interviewed older adults through tape recording. Moreover, the researcher consulted journals, books and magazines related to the subject matter. This paper concludes that Yorùbá orature deeply comprises the fundamental basis for teaching Yorùbá numerals and that, Yorùbá traditional society has a lot to offer the educational system, while the learners will attain a higher degree of education.

Keywords: yorùbá orature, yorùbá numerals, traditional education, western-education, society, theory, culture, children.

I. Introduction

This paper examines how Yorùbá traditional education is deeply-rooted in Yorùbá orature. According to a Yorùbá proverb which says, "Àkùrọ̀ ti lómi tẹ́lẹ̀ kí òjò tó rọ̀ 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, Ajàyí 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)

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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 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.

Orin (Songs)

Lílé:	Ení bí ení	Solo:	One like one
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Èjì bí èjì	Solo:	Two like two
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Ẹ̀ta ń tagbá	Solo:	Three is sure
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Ẹ̀rin wọ̀rọ̀kọ̀	Solo:	Four is doubtful
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Àrún ìgbódó	Solo:	Five is prompt
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Ẹ̀fà tièlè	Solo:	Six is slippery
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Aro n báro	Solo:	Aro is aro
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Mód'Ẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ̀sán	Solo:	I arrive Ẹ̀rẹ̀kẹ̀sán
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
Lílé:	Gbangba lẹ̀wá	Solo:	Ten is certain
Ègbè:	Họ ẹ	Chorus:	Yes
	Gbàngbà eré wa dayọ̀ láyé		Undoubtedly, our game has become successful.
	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 culture. Like songs, ìwúre also permeates Yorùbá life. In essence, the Yorùbá pray on every occasion either in joy or sorrow. Therefore, it will not be a surprise if the Yorùbá uses ìwúre as one of the means of teaching their children numerals, as it is analysed below:

Ení:	Ànímọ́ owó, ànímọ́ ọmọ	One:	You will have more money; you will have more children.
	Ànímọ́ àìkú tíí ṣe baálẹ̀ ọrọ̀, Àṣẹ!		You will have long life which supersedes everything. Amen

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Èjì:	Òjíjí kìí wọdò kómi ó gbóná	Two	When òjíjí (fish) enters the river, the river does not become hot.
	Oó máa jí rówó. Oó máa jí rọ́mọ. O ó máa jí rí ire gbogbo. Àṣẹ!		You shall always have money; you shall always have children. You shall always have fortunes. Amen
Ẹ̀ta:	Agbọ́n ayé kò ní ta ọ́	Three:	Agbọ́n (widely) will not sting you
	Oyin ayé kò ní ta ọ́,		Oyin (honey bee) will not sting you.
	Àkéekèe ayé kò ní ta ọ́		Akéekèe (scorpion) will bot sting you. Amen.
Ẹ̀rín:	Ẹ̀rín lọmọdé ń rín kawó,	Four:	It is with happiness that kids count money
	Ẹ̀rín làgbàlagbà ń rín pobì		It is with joy that adults pieces cola nut
	Ẹ̀rín làgbàrá ń rín pàdé odò lọ́nà		It is with happiness that erosion meets with the river,
	Tẹ̀rín, tẹ̀yẹ ni ọ̀rọ̀ rẹ yóò máa jásí. Àṣẹ!		Your ways will result in fortune and happiness. Amen
Àrún:	Àrùn ò ní sọ ẹ́ lójò kalẹ. Àṣẹ!	Five:	A prolonged disease will not attack you. Amen.
Ẹ̀fà:	Ẹ̀fale fako ni tèrúkọ́	Six:	Hoes bring forth booties everywhere;
	Gbogbo ohun tí ó bá fọwọ́ fà		whatever you struggle for,
	Yóò máa jásí rere		will come into being
	Ìfà yóò máa wọlé tọ̀ ẹ́ wá. Àṣẹ!		Booties will come on your way. Amen
Èje:	Bí Olúgbọ́n ṣorò yóò kìje	Seven:	Olúgbọ́n's festival lasts seven days.
	Bí Arẹ̀sà ṣorò yóò kìje		Arẹ̀sà's festival lasts seven days,
	Àṣeyọrí yóò máa jé tire. Àṣẹ!		Success will be yours. Amen.
Ẹ̀jọ:	Jọ̀jọ̀ agbò níí mágbò níyì	Eight:	Àgbò's (ox) overgrown hair gives it respect
	Ilé rẹ a jọ		Your home will be orderly.
	Ọ̀nà rẹ a jọ. Àṣẹ!		Your ways will be good. Amen.
Ẹ̀sán:	Ilé ayé 'a san ẹ sówó	Nine:	Life will favour you with money
	Á san ẹ́ sọ́mọ		Life will favor you with children.
	Á san ẹ́ sí ire gbogbo		Life will favor you with good things.
	Alẹ́ yóò san ẹ́ ju òwúrọ̀ lọ. Àṣẹ!		Your future will be better than the present. Amen.
Ẹ̀wá:	Wíwá ni a ń wá mọ́ tọwọ́ ẹni	Ten:	One searches more for whatever he has.
	Owó yóò máa wá ẹ wálé		Money will search for you.
	Ọmọ yóò máa wá ẹ wálé		Children will search for you
	Ire ayé yóò máa wá ẹ wálé. Àṣẹ!		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 Òsùpá (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. 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:

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

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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 dẹ̀ta	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 dẹ̀rin	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 dẹ̀fà	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 dẹ̀jọ	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 dẹ̀sán	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 dẹ̀wá	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.

Ẹsẹ Ifá (Ifá Corpus)

Ifá corpus is not only used by the diviners to predict the future but also serves as a way of teaching young ones how to count numbers. This basic knowledge enriches children's prowls. The excerpt below is taken from Ọ̀yẹ̀kú Méjì, thus:

Ọ̀kan ṣoṣo póró lóbìnrin dùn mọ́ lọ́wọ́ ọkọ	One woman is the best for a husband
Bí wọ́n bá di méjì	If they are two
Wọn a dòjòwú	They become rivals
Bí wọ́n bá di mẹ́ta	If they are three
Wọn a dẹ̀ta ǹ túlé	They become three to scatter the house
Bí wọ́n bá di mẹ́rin	If they are four
Wọn dìwọ lóríín mi ni mo ríín ọ	They become you laugh at me; I laugh at you
Bí wọ́n bá di márùn-ún	If they are five
Wọn a di lágbájá lo ti run okọ wa tán	They become someone that ruins our husband's fortunes.
Lóhun ṣuṣuuṣu	If they are six
Bí wọ́n bá di mẹ́fà	They become wicked
Wọn a dìkà	If they are seven
Bí wọ́n bá di méje	They become witches
Wọn a dàjẹ́	If they are eight
Bí wọ́n bá di mẹ́jọ	They become big-headed women

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Wọn a dìyá alátàrí bàmbà	That brings nonsense to our husband
Ló ti kó irú èyí ṣẹ ọkọ wa lọ́wọ́	If they are nine
Bí wọ́n bá di mẹ́sàn-án	They become a jobless or the jobless mother
Wọn a dìyá wa kò níṣẹ́ kan,	That has no specific work
Kò lábọ̀ kan	If they are ten
Bó bá ti jí	They become our husband sits at home
Aṣọ ọkọ wa níí má sán ń kiri	That they come to look for him
Bí wọ́n bá di mẹ́wàá	One woman is the best for a husband
Wọn a d'ilé lọkọ wa jókòó	If they are two
Ni wọ́n ń wá ọkọ wa wá	They become rivals

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 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:

Ení bí ení lọmọdé ń kawó	One by one, children count money
Èjì bí èjì làgbà ń tayò	Two by two, adults play ayò game
Ẹ̀ta bí ẹ̀ta ẹ jẹ́ kí a tara wa lọ́rẹ	Three by three, let us exchange gifts
Ẹ̀rin bí ẹ̀rin, ẹni rín ni làá rín	Four by four, you laugh at me I laugh at you
Àrún bí àrún, baba má ṣe wá l'árungún	Five by five, father, don't make us a jobless people
Ẹ̀fà bí ẹ̀fà, ẹ jé ká fara wa mọ́ra	Six by six, let us be cordial
Èje bí èje, olúgbọ́n ṣorò ó kìje	Seven by seven , olúgbọ́n's festival lasts seven days
Ẹ̀jọ bí ẹ̀jọ, ẹni bíni làá jọ	Eight by eight, one resembles his parents
Ẹ̀sán bí ẹ̀sán, ilé mi á san ọ̀nà mi á san	Nine by nine, my home will be well, my way will be okay
Ẹ̀wá bí ẹ̀wá, wíwá ni a ń wá mọ́ tọwọ́ ẹni	Ten by ten, let us look more for what we have

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.

Àlọ́ Àpagbè (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 Ọ̀ run" (Lákíti and Men of the heaven). In 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,

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

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

Lílé:	Lákíti kò lè jà (bbl)	Solo:	Lákíti cannot fight (etc)
Ègbè:	Nj̀é ó lè jà? (abbl)	Chorus:	Can he fight? (etc)

Within a twinkle of eyes, Lákíti 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 Lákíti. This time it was a tug of war. The drummers commenced their usual song thus:

Lílé:	Lákíti kò lè jà (abbl)	Solo:	Lákíti cannot fight (etc.)
Ègbè:	Nj̀é ó lè jà? (bbl)	Chorus:	Can he fight? (etc.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lílé:	Lákíti kò lè jà (bbl)	Solo:	Lákíti cannot fight (etc.)
Ègbè:	Nj̀é ó lè jà? (bbl)	Chorus:	Can he fight? (etc.)

The ten-headed man took the advantage that Lákíti was already tired of his previous fights. He unleased dead blows on Lákíti, 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, Lákíti'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 Lákíti 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, Lákíti'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 Lákíti 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 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, ìwúre, 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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