

STUDENTS' USE OF AFRICAN ORAL LITERATURE: ITS IMPLICATION AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This article examines the relevance of African Oral Literature especially, the Oral Literature in developing students' reading and writing ability. It posits that the values of folktales to both students and teachers are of paramount importance in the light of the current dearth of reading habit among Nigerian students. Teachers and students can become successful when they are conversant with the story telling techniques of oral rendition that is audience friendly, audience centered articles further discusses the importance of Oral Literature in a child's development, later life in learning a second language. As he listens to, and reacts to stories told by elders, his receptive and expressive skills are developed which helps the child immensely later in life. This articles specifically emphasizes the moral, educational and entertainment values of folktales. It submits that these values can help the individual to leverages, soften, or cope with all kinds of tough language situation the student may find him/herself. Several recommendations are made, amongst them are: our leaders should imbibe the rich moral lessons in our folktales in order to reinforce better governance, government should make teacher education more functional through the provision of equipment and other resources, to enable a shift from its present dependence on paper qualification, to a technical know-how by fully supporting education at all levels.

Keywords: *Oral Literature, folktale, Implication, and Prospects.*

Introduction

Africa is no exception to the crowded sequence of historical events. Ignorantly a lot of people earlier believed that Africa had no history. Even though, it is only recently that professional historians have turned their attention to this field. Ambros (2022) The early impact, rise and fall of empires and kingdoms throughout the centuries, diplomatic or economic contacts and contracts within and outside Africa, movement and communication between different peoples, economic and social changes, wars, rebellions, conquests, these are all the stuff of history (Mckay, 2017). More often than not, a university's core mission is rooted in the humanities in the study of culture, history, language, literature, anthropology, philosophy, religion, the arts and folklore. The above mentioned disciplines constitute a people's common heritage. The humanistic disciplines, and particularly folklore, have a clear practical value: they teach critical and analytical thinking while at the same time stimulating the imagination and promoting ethical values. Ambros (2022) Leaders need these skills to lead, to identify problems, and to conceive creative solutions. Citizens need them to participate actively in public life. Yet the key contribution of the humanities and folklore in particular goes beyond cultural education and training in analytical skills. Humanistic studies help ground national dialogue on many urgent issues encompassing humane values. Technical and technological solutions today raise ethical issues and questions that require public understanding and public debate.

No doubt too, there have been in the past, as in the present, rising and falling literary fashions, some short-lived, others long-lasting; some drawing their inspiration from foreign sources, others developing from existing local forms. Examples in this volume may give a rather static impression, as if certain 'traditional' forms have always been the same throughout the ages; but such an impression is misleading and arises more from lack of evidence than from any necessary immobility in African Oral Literature. Africa possesses both written and unwritten traditions. Bayo (2021) posits that, the former is relatively well known at any rate the recent writings in European languages (much work remains to be publicized on earlier Arabic and local written literatures in Africa). The unwritten forms, however, are far less widely known and appreciated. Such forms do not fit neatly into the familiar categories of literate cultures, they are harder to record and present, and, for a superficial observer at least, they are easier to overlook than the corresponding written material. Oral literature is rich enough in socio-cultural and educational lessons that can be used to prevent, or soften the impact of an economic recession. However, our focus is not on the entire subject of oral literature but limited to folktales, an area that teaches moral laws and values (Mande, 2019). This paper examines the

origin, evolution and emergence of oral literature as an academic discipline in Africa and its place in the humanities. It draws attention to the richness of indigenous knowledge contained in oral literature and demonstrates how the ethical and moral gap in the existing educational system can be filled by the moral precepts embedded in oral literature.

Concept of Literature

Jessy (2021) In Africa, as elsewhere, literature is practiced in a society. It is obvious that any analysis of African literature must take account of the social and historical context and never more so than in the case of oral literature. Clearly a full examination of any one African literature would have to include a detailed discussion of the particularities of that single literature and historical period, and the same in turn for each other instance a task which cannot be attempted here. A common nineteenth-century notion that still has currency today is the idea of Africa as the same in culture in all parts of the continent (or at least that part south of the Sahara); as non-literate, primitive, and pagan; and as unchanging in time throughout the centuries (Ambros, 2022). Thus 'traditional' Africa is seen as both uniform and static, and this view still colours much of the writing about Africa. Such a notion is, however, no longer tenable. in the 21ST centuries as things seems to take different indeed a modern life structure. No doubt, education has assisted in modernizing African Literature (Mckay, 2017).

Oral Literature

McRobbie (2020) asserts the concept of Oral literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which, like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition. In the popular view it seems to convey on the one hand the idea of mystery, on the other that of crude and artistically undeveloped formulations. In fact, neither of these assumptions is generally valid. Oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product. Ambros (2022) There the connection between transmission and very existence is a much more intimate one, and questions about the means of actual communication are of the first importance without its oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker (Teacher), an unwritten literary piece cannot easily be said to have any continued or independent existence at all.

In this respect the parallel is less to written literature than to music and dance; for these too are art forms which in the last analysis are actualized in and through their performance and, furthermore, in a sense depend on repeated performances for their continued existence (Mckay, 2017). Oral literature is part of the vast field of knowledge known as 'oral tradition' or 'orality', that is, a system of communication in which information and messages are transmitted verbally from one generation to another. The term 'oral literature' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'folklore' or elements such as language and belief systems that are shared by a group; that which gives a community its cultural and national identity. Jessy (2021) opines, in contemporary usage 'folklore' means popular and group-oriented expressions of culture. This is the sense in which it is understood in conventions of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

African Oral Literature

Many scholars such as Bayo (2021) and Obafemi (2016) Akporobaro (2018) have given their views on what constitutes African Oral Literature. What is central in their view is that African Oral Literature is an inherited and verbal creation; it is in the form of stories, folk beliefs, and songs of pre-literate African societies. It is passed through spoken word from one generation to another. Okoh (2018) From the foregoing, we can discern that African Oral Literature is the rendition of a people's culture, tradition and experiences, in the form of oral prose, oral poetry or oral drama that is transmitted orally from generation to generation before printing was invented. As we earlier mentioned our focus is the folktales of African Oral Literature. In this wise, it is pertinent to state here that other forms of African folk literature such as myths, legends, riddles and epic narratives etc. could serve the same purpose as folktales in coping or softening or coping with all kinds of tough language situation the student may find him/herself.

Bayo (2021) African oral literature, therefore, like its written counterpart, has both form and structure which rely on certain principles. As is to be expected, these principles differ from one society to another. In other words, the people who create and use an oral piece are best placed to determine what is literature and what is not in their particular

culture because they have been able to develop clear-cut procedure over the years for the performance of oral pieces, which enables these pieces to be classed as oral literature or not (Bayo, 2021). This is to be expected because literature, whether written or oral, is a product and expression of culture. Put differently, oral literature exists both in its composition and appreciation within a specific cultural context. Since oral literature arises from human responses to recurring human situations, it should play a crucial role in the broad disciplines of the humanities and their curricula. There is, therefore, the need to define the humanities (Jessy, 2021).

Oral Literature and Its Values

Akporobaro (2018) defines folktale as an imaginative narrative (story) in prose form. He further posits that such a story may have a basis in real life but its essence is to entertain through the recreation of a memorable experience. However, such stories may be believed to be true especially by children but the older ones and adults consider them untrue and not objectives serious beliefs. Folktales in pre-literate Africa were very useful because community identity as a group was preserved through them. It was the role of elders in such communities to transmit to the young ones that customs, beliefs and expectations through folktales. Emme (2020) asserts that most Nigerian folktales are still transmitted in the indigenous languages while a few have been written down in English Language. Emme, further argued that Folktales reflect the temperaments way of life, expectations and beliefs etc. of a people. Therefore, folktale in the time of social integration, this could equip students with all kinds of tough language morality, it is expected to reflect stories surrounding the attitudes and reactions of the people in regards to social integration. The general experiences of the people and other consequences of such a time is expected to be transmitted orally in rural settings and documented by writers in cities for the future generation (Mande, 2019).

McRobbie (2020), in modern setting, students and teachers stand to gain a lot from folktales. A student's foreign language acquisition in later life can be greatly boosted by the amount of the oral tradition he has acquired from his oral folktales. Language learning involves two components, receptive and expressive skills, While the receptive skill is the ability to listen and understand what others are saying, the expressive skill is the knowledge and use of a spoken language necessary to communicate. Emme (2020) the development of these skills are mostly cultivated when children listen to stories, songs and other forms of folktales even before they start formal schooling. They tend to acquire the expressive skill when they talk to their family and friends, and when they respond to the stories, they develop their expressive ability. Okoh (2018) These oral language foundations help the children to be able to appreciate Modern African Writers later in life since much of what these writers write is based on the African past. Folktales therefore serve as a link between the children's past and the ever-changing modern urbanized society. Negash (2021) a sound acquisitions of the story telling technique can boost his teaching career as his stories are based on sound principles of teaching. He begins his story by arousing the interest and attention of his listeners. He may ask his listeners to perform an activity or he throws in a riddle etc.

The teacher in like manner begins his teaching with an introduction, which serves as a warmer, where he also arouses and captures the attention and interest of his pupils. Both the teacher and story teller move from an introduction to the presentation of their subject matter full of activities. They structure the plot and language in such a manner that their objective will be achieved (Bayo, 2021). They both consider the age of the children in deciding the topic to be delivered and the language used. Finally, they both evaluate what has been delivered to ascertain if the objective(s) has been achieved. Therefore, the modern day teacher has a lot to gain from the story teller's manner of rendition of his art (Mande, 2019).

Oral Literature Teacher

Oral literature teaches, among other things, the tenets of self-restraint, humility, modesty, tolerance, patience, understanding, altruism, and transparency in our dealings with others. Brown (2021) argued that, it exhorts us to put our intellectual and technical competence at the service of our society, it may also, interest the reader to know that thanks to the folklore and literature studies as a whole, I learnt to rely on my own insight and foresight rather than on that of others. I have learnt to come to my own conclusions rather than slavishly accept the conclusions of others. Above all, I have learnt to take my own decisions in life for better or for worse and to live with the consequences of my own actions. Idemu (2019) defines teacher education as that: form of education which is properly planned and systematically tailored and applied for the cultivation of those who teach and will teach particularly but not

exclusively in the primary and post primary levels of schooling. In its extended dimension, it encompasses also the professional preparation of administrators, supervisors and guidance counselors. Moses (2022) opines that teachers are persons whose primary profession or occupational function is to help others learn and develop in new ways of life. Teachers are trained and lined by societies to help fulfill the purpose of providing a certain type of educational experience. Therefore, Teacher Education addresses environmental, social and economic concerns, to create locally relevant and culturally appropriate teachers.

Oral Literature and Educational Systems in Africa

Generally speaking, education is the process of establishing habits of critical thinking, intellectual development and independent appraisal of human values and qualities. Education could be defined as “the physical, the aesthetic, the intellectual and the moral upbringing of man”. Seen from this perspective, education is meant to develop the individual intellectually and morally and prepare him/her to function effectively in society (Brown, 2021). Brown further states that if education is to perform its fundamental function of nurturing the individual it must, of necessity, have a system. Idemu (2019) argues that the nature of this system of education will depend, in the main on what sort of individual that particular society wants to produce, on what is their idea of the perfect man. And their idea of the perfect man will depend, to a large extent, on the problems that beset the society; for their ideal man will be the man best equipped, best able to meet these problems. An educational system is established by a particular society to meet its specific needs Moses (2022), reinforces that, no educational system stands apart from the society which establishes it. It has purpose that must be achieved if that society is to continue in the right direction. Education is meant to be embedded in that society, drawing inspiration and nourishment from it, and in turn contributing to societal opportunities for growth and renewal.

Implication and Prospect of Africa Oral Literature

However, Keinde (2020) asserts that, African oral literature is beginning to occupy an important place in the educational programs of many African universities today because after the attainment of political independence by most African countries, their governments gradually became aware that African cultures, for the most part, still exist in the oral tradition and that Africans continue to transmit their cultures through oral expression (Amosu, 2021). It was also realized that very little has been done in the way of systematic collection and presentation of African cultural heritage. Furthermore, the acceptance of governments of most independent African countries of the responsibility to ensure that the cultural heritage of their people is properly recorded coincided with the renewed interests of scholars in Africa and African diaspora. Keinde (2020) confirms the above observation by saying that since oral literature was not part of the academic tradition of the West, it had little chance in the first place of being on the educational curriculum of colonial institutions. But when the educational policy-making process passed into the hands of the natives, things took a different shape and they have continued to improve ever since. The place of oral literature in the curriculum today has changed. Oral literature is now taught in many African universities and as Amosu, (2021), points out, “it is fast becoming one of the most popular disciplines in the humanities”.

Despite the fact that oral literature has been taught as an academic discipline in the various African universities since the late 1960s, and early 1980s in secondary schools, the teaching of oral literature in secondary schools is beset with many problems. The general feeling is that the teaching is rather haphazard. The integration of English language and literature has further compounded the problem, making some teachers de-emphasize oral literature. Another problem besetting the study of oral literature on the African continent is that the educational syllabuses on literature in most African countries do not emphasize oral literature. Hence, after more than five decades of political independence, hardly any African country can boast of a well-articulated syllabus on the oral literature of its people. Furthermore, the recent increase in interest in oral literature in Africa has not encouraged the production of appropriate texts designed to provide the reader with the essential tools for appreciating the oral literature. The university system in many African countries has a share of the blame for the state of the art in oral literature. For while students in many African universities graduate with a degree in English, German and French, very few or none may graduate with an interest in the oral literature of their own people. Keinde (2020) sees this as “a disservice from our universities”. One reason for this situation is the misconception (and sheer arrogance) of many a scholar who should know better. Such situations deny oral literature its interdisciplinary synergy with other fields of research.

The effects of globalization on African oral literature have been discussed at length by Amosu (2021), in a paper titled 'Swazi oral literature studies yesterday and today: The way forward'. However, it is useful to mention it here briefly. 'Globalization' is a term that is applied mostly in economic and political studies, but, for the purpose of this paper, it can be seen as the process of trying to replace African culture and values with the values of technologically advanced countries. Keinde (2020) posits that, it can also mean the movement of Africans of the multiplicity of their ethnic languages and cultures into a global culture which, in effect, implies a common global language and a common global literature. In other words, globalization is a concept that implies one world which is economically (and culturally) controlled by a group of nations (notably Western). Communication as a key human factor plays a very important role in globalization.

Conclusion

Conclusively the articles have attempted to examine the relevance of African Oral Literature specifically in terms of developing humanities, and students' intellectuals. The contribution of the humanities to human civilization and cultures is therefore so obvious that no informed person can deny it. A world without the humanities would be inconceivable. Is it possible, for example, to imagine a world without religion, without the fear of God; a world without history, a people without history; a world without the study and use of language and literature; a world without any means of communication or information? Even if it were possible to imagine such a world, it would certainly not be a human world. A world without the humanities would not be a human world, for it is the humanities that humanize the world and make it a human world. Yes, it is the humanities that humanize society and make it a humane society where human values are respected and upheld. The humanities make us humane and promote humane interpersonal relations and peaceful co-existence. Evidently is important in the sense that just as the humanities lie at the heart and center of university education worldwide, oral literature is the heartbeat of the humanities and should therefore not be neglected.

Suggestions

1. Government should imbibe the spirit of rich moral lessons of our folktales in order to develop the younger generation intellectually and academically.
2. Teachers should be encouraging to write more folktales in Nigerian languages for the sake of posterity and for children in urban centres to have access to them. The reading culture of children and adults can be developed if this is done.
3. Nigerian folktales should be translated into foreign languages in order to showcase our rich oral traditions and exposes students to different modern societies.
4. Government should make Teacher Education functional through the provision of equipment and other resources that will enable a shift from its dependence on paper qualification to technical know-how.

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