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THE JOURNAL

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Informal Method of Education: The Role of African Oral Tradition

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Abstract
The traditional African societies are characterized by shared common socio-cultural ways of life and experiences of the pre-colonial and post-colonial factors. In the pre-colonial Africa, the methods and means of cultural transmission and educating members of the society was identical. The traditional method of education, which was made possible through the use of oral tradition; folklore, myth, legend, proverbs and stories were functional in all spheres of life. The history of the African people, their communities and that of their heroes and heroic deeds, as well as the teaching of moral values and socialisation processes were all made possible in the authentic traditional African context through the orally-based tradition of folklore, myth, legend, proverbs, superstitious statements, stories and other forms of the oral tradition, as the societies were not literate. In such traditionally-based contexts, parents, elders, traditional institutions and other members of the community served as teachers, since from them socialization and acquisition of knowledge was made possible. This study is an attempt to critically explore the various inherently associated methods used in the context of pre-colonial African period in the education and socialization processes of the individual members of the community (ies). The nature and forms of education in the context of the period is examined. Also the stages involved in the socialisation processes of the Africans, as means of socio-cultural integration is reviewed from the linguistic and sociological perspectives. The need to revitalize the traditionally induced system and integrate it as part of the present day system of education is equally included as part of the given suggestion for the preservation and continuous transmission of the African cultural heritage in the modern African setting that is dominated by current trend of the indiscriminate influx of foreign cultures.

Keywords: Tradition, Africa, education, culture, myth

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Introduction

The pre-colonial traditional African socio-cultural setting was characterized by many factors that determined the existence of a full-pledge socio-cultural linguistic community: the presence of socio-cultural norms and institutions, accepted norms and values, tradition, common beliefs and means of socialisation, though most of the African socio-cultural groups were not literate, yet there existed a system of cultural transmission, socialisation processes, as well as means of educating members of the society. There is a rich tradition throughout Africa of oral storytelling. Although written history existed for centuries in West Africa, most of the writing was in Arabic, and the majority of the people did not read or write in Arabic. So the transmission of knowledge, history and experience in West Africa was mainly through the oral tradition and performance rather than on written texts. Oral traditions guide social and human morals, giving people a sense of place and purpose. There is often a lesson or a value to instill, and the transmission of wisdom to children is a community responsibility. Parents, grandparents, and relatives take part in the process of passing down the knowledge of culture and history. Storytelling provides entertainment, develops the imagination, and teaches important lessons about everyday life. On the obvious fact about the African Oral Tradition is that it was used as a viable means of cultural transmission, as well as educating members of society.

One of the unanimously identified social roles of the African Oral Tradition was knowledge acquisition or the means of instilling and teaching of the individual members of the socio-cultural linguistic communities, as the formal process of modern education was not available then. Education was transmitted via the

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oral tradition of folklore, oral history, myth, legend, superstition, stories, songs, panegyrics, proverbs and the other forms of the Oral Tradition. Through the use of oral tradition history is transmitted and preserved; the origin and historical development of the community is revealed, the heroic deeds and the communities outstanding heroes and founders are made known to the younger generation (Hassan,2000). In addition, the teaching of moral education and instilling of acceptable norms and values are made possible through the oral tradition. The expected roles to be performed by individual member of the society based on gender, social status and age were also taught in the pre-colonial traditional African context through the oral tradition.

According to Mooris (2000) the origin of history and means of educating members of communities was originally the informal method of oral tradition. He argues that the essential primary source of history is the oral tradition; the same source is also the means of educating members of a social groups. This view indicates that socio-cultural linguistic groups used the oral tradition in their original traditional context for cultural transmission, educating of members, as well as for socialization processes of the individual as full-pledged culturally bound members of the group. This presentation attempts a critical analysis of the roles of some selected African Oral Tradition in process of educating and the socialization of the members of the African socio-cultural groups.

Objectives of the Study/Presentation

The objectives set to guide the study are:

To examine the roles of the different forms of the Oral African Tradition in the education processes of the members of the African socio-cultural groups;

To ascertain the roles of the Oral African tradition in the socialization processes of the members of the African socio-cultural groups:

To explore the various Oral Traditions from the different parts of the African continent and their roles in the education and the socialisation processes; and

- To examine the present status of the African Oral Tradition in the education and socialization of Africans in the context of modern Africa and the emerging challenges of the indiscriminate influx of foreign cultures.

Methodology

The method used as the design of the study is Ethnographic Design. It is a design which involves observation of real natural context for the collection of data. The design relies on the techniques of observation, video, photographs, contextual interviews and analysis of artifacts. Observation technique was used in the study. Stories and other forms of oral tradition were collected through contextual interviews and watching of video clips containing oral traditions.

Conceptual Framework/Clarification

Oral Tradition

Parry (2001) defines Oral Tradition as, "a way for a society to transmit history, literature, social norms and values and other knowledge across generations without a writing system". In another short and precise definition, David (2005) defines it as, "a transmission of cultural materials through vocal utterance". In the same vein, Oral Tradition is defined by Oscar (2005) as, "messages that are transmitted orally from one generation to another. The messages may be passed down through speech or song and may take the form of folktales and fables, epic histories and narrations, proverbs or wise sayings and songs". Also, Henkell (2000) argues that the expression oral tradition, "applies both to a process and to its products. The products are oral messages based on previous oral messages, at least a generation old. The process is the transmission of such messages by word of mouth overtime". Bagchi (2010) defines oral tradition as, " a means of keeping people's culture alive through generations by orally narrating the memorized stories of their history, beliefs, values and practices". Based on the various definitions it is obviously indicated that oral tradition has certain peculiar features and serves many social functions. The obviously manifested features include the verbal transmission of the tradition, as everything is rendered orally; the transmission of knowledge, history and experiences was mainly

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through the oral tradition and performance rather than on written texts.

Also, the story teller is very relevant in the context of oral tradition. A storyteller's tools are not just words, but gestures, singing, facial expressions, body movements and acting to make stories memorable and interesting. Sometimes masks and costumes are used to enhance a performance. A storyteller performs epics that can be hours or even days long that relate history and genealogy, battles and political uprisings of a community. They use riddles, proverbs and myths to educate and entertain. Storytelling is an important shared event with people sitting together, listening and even participating in accounts of past deeds, beliefs, taboos, and myths. Gifted or well-known storytellers often repeat the story with the same words and same expressions in each performance as they travel. They also add new material to an old story to make it more interesting or meaningful to different audiences.

Oral storytelling emphasizes repetition of the language and rhythm, which are two of its most important characteristics. Storytellers often repeat words, phrases, refrains, sounds, whole lines and even stanzas. The use of repetition helps the audience remember the chorus and allows them to join in with the storyteller. A storyteller pays close attention to the beat and how the words sound. Using short phrases makes the stories easier to understand and recall from memory. When audiences who are familiar with the stories actively participate in their telling, they feel a sense of belonging to the community (Bagchi, 2010). Parts of the social functions of the oral tradition include the guiding of social and human morals, giving people a sense of place and purpose. There is often a lesson or a value to instill, and the transmission of wisdom to children is a community responsibility. Parents, grandparents, and relatives take part in the process of passing down the knowledge of culture and history.

Aspects/Types of African Oral Tradition

Oral History

This is a form of West African oral tradition. It is the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information, based on the storyteller's personal experiences and opinions. It often takes the form of eye-witness account about past events, but can include folklore, myths, songs and stories passed down over the years by word of mouth. Oral stories could be about the history of the tribe. Some were about great wars and battles. Others were about everyday life. In some West African communities, there was usually only one storyteller per village. If one village attempted to steal a storyteller from another village, it was cause for war. For instance, amongst the Malians tribes, the Griots were known experts and skillful storytellers, though other people could tell a story. But the Griots were the "official" Storytellers. The village Griot did not have to work to the fields; their job was to tell stories well. In addition, the similitude of the Griot among the West African Hausa communities was the Marokan Baka and the 'Yan Kama Entertainers. A thousand years later, new stories about new triumphs and new adventures are still being told by the village Griots. They continue to play important roles in modern West African societies, but the Griot's position in African society has changed. These performers are still in great demand to conduct ceremonies and parties, but today they are popular singers who reinterpret traditional songs and perform on television and radio. Griots are often the narrators in African film and explain or comment on the action or set the stage for the tale being told. Despite the changes in their duties, they continue to be respected members of the West African culture and provide a strong link to the past. They continue to be the historians, genealogists, advisers to nobility, entertainers, messengers, and praise singers in communities (Bagchi, 2010).

Oral Histories involves *Myth*, a traditional story which embodies a belief regarding some fact or phenomenon of experience, and in which often the forces of nature and the soul are personified; a sacred narrative regarding supernatural being, a hero, the origin of the world or of a people. Furthermore, there is a *Legend*, a story of unknown origin describing plausible, but extraordinary past events.

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Fables and Folktales

These are stories full of wisdom and generally convey a moral or teach a lesson. Often these lessons are ones of resourcefulness, independence, and illustrate the rewards of courage. There are different types of folktales, with fables and talking beasts' stories among the most common. Both fables and folktales contain fictitious narratives intended to enforce some useful truth or percept, usually with animals, birds, plants as characters. The stories are created and told to excite wonder, common talk, teach lesson and guide social behaviors. According to Badura (2000) the traditional African folk tales and fables have moral, a moral point or are used to educate, entertain, correct behavior and explain certain human and animal behavior.

Proverbs

These are wise sayings that are used to convey wisdom, truth, a discovery of ideas, as well as life lessons. They are often a reflection of deep social and psychological experiences. Proverbs are also an illustration of a vivid and fundamental truth about life. Proverbs are also defined by Ogundipe (2007) as, "a short saying that uses things from the everyday life experiences to teach a lesson or give advice". They are used as a means of warning, advice and the indication of the resultant impact of one's actions. The following are popular African proverbs.

- It takes a village to raise a child.
- When a king has good counselors, his reign is peaceful.
- No matter how long the night, the day is sure to come.
- One falsehood spoils a thousand truths.
- Do not call the forest that shelters you a jungle.
- When you follow in the path of your father, you learn to walk like him.
- It is best to bind up the finger before it is cut.
- The fool speaks, the wise man listens.
- Do not say the first thing that comes to your mind.
- A little rain each day will fill the rivers to overflowing.
- Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you.
- Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worse.
- When the head is too big, it cannot dodge blows.
- The wrong-headed fool, who refuses counsel, will come to grief.
- What an old man will see while seated, a small child cannot see even standing on top of a tree/mountain.
- Wisdom does not come overnight.
- A child can play with its mother's breasts, but not its father's testicles.
- When the brothers fight to the death, a stranger inherits their father's estate.
- The witness of rat is another rat.
- By the time the fool has learned the game, the players have dispersed.
- When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.

Epic Narrations

These are the exploits of a hero who really existed and played a major role in people's history. The adventures of the heroes are often exaggerated in order to have created a greater impact on the listeners.

Songs

They occupy an important place in African oral literature. Songs are present in all moments of life, especially on occasion of ritual ceremonies. The traditional African oral songs are of many kinds: of praise, history and rituals.

Superstitions

This is a form of belief in something that is irrational, non-physical and does not follow the rule of proving or justification. In superstition, people have a held belief about something or the belief that happenings or presence of something, conditions or certain phenomena may eventually cause or lead to the happening of something else (Ogundipe, 2007). For instance, there is superstitious belief among the Hausa people that itching of one's hand is an indication that one will get lots of money. Similarly, itching of one's eyes signifies that the person is about to be visited.

The Thematic Content of African Oral Tradition

The thematic pre-occupations of the African Oral Tradition are centered on the following common aspects:

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History

One basic central theme of the African Oral Tradition is that of history. Badura (2000) argues that via the oral tradition the history of people, their communities, heroes, and the experiences of the people were preserved and transmitted orally. Such historical facts are embedded in the myths, legends and epic histories. According to Ittah (2005) the primary source of history is the oral tradition, as such in the pre-literate Africa the history of a people is preserved in the oral tradition for centuries.

Morality and Virtues

The teaching of moral lessons and good virtues is another central thematic pre-occupation of the oral tradition. Through stories young ones were taught how to be honest, morally upright and also avoid behaviors and deeds that are not socially acceptable. This is achieved by depicting the negative consequences and tragedies that befall villains in the story and also how the protagonist emerged victorious despite obstacles and challenges. Obedience to parents, elders and those in authority was taught through the oral traditions. In addition, proverbs are central in the teaching of good deeds; as the consequences of evil deeds are wisely portrayed.

Teaching of Communities Cultural Norms and Values

The teaching of the accepted norms and culturally approved modes of behaviour is another important thematic pre-occupation of the African oral tradition, as through this means individual members of the society were taught and guided on the traditional norms and values. The expected roles of the members in the community based on their age, gender and social status are taught. It is based on this consideration that sociologists identified the role of the cultural transmission and socialisation processes as part of the inherent associated feature of oral tradition.

Findings of the Study

Oral Tradition as an Informal Method of Education

The role of the African oral tradition in the processes of educating members of the society can be seen from the following educative and knowledge acquisition roles:

Transmission of the Knowledge of History

One of the identified roles of informal education is the transmission of historical facts about the society, its people, its past, about the heroes and about the important social happenings. In the pre-literate African societies, such historical facts were preserved and consequently transmitted to younger generations by the word of mouth or what Ogundipe (2007) describes as the oral messages. Though unwritten and often distorted by story tellers; by adding or removing certain historical accounts, but the preservation of such oral messages are entrusted in the memories of successive generations of people. The sources of oral historical account are multiple: eyewitness account, hearsay, visions, dreams, hallucination, interpretation of experiences, reminiscence, commentaries (Badura, 2000). Knowledge of history transmitted through oral tradition was in forms of oral songs, myth, legends and stories. The following historical accounts presented in different forms are collections of oral tradition from the different parts of Africa:

1- Popular Legend on the Origin of Hausa Land

The popular legend was centered on the activities of *Bayajidda* or *Abu-Yazid.* He was believed to be a prince from the kingdom of Baghdad in the Middle East. According to the legend, he was a white skinned adventurer probably from Arab extraction. He was said to have developed misunderstanding with his father the king of Baghdad and left the kingdom with his loyalists. His movement took him to western Africa where he first took residence in the *Kanem* Empire.

The *Mai* (king) of *Kanem* sheltered him and gave him his daughter *Magira* to marry. The king separated him from his followers. Having lost his followers, he became afraid that his life was in danger, so he fled westwards leaving his wife and son. He came to a town called *Daura.* The time, that town was ruled by a woman called *Daurama*. He arrived at night and requested for water to drink, but the old woman who accommodated him, told him that there was no water as the only well where the whole town got water

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had a dangerous snake which allows people to have access to the well once a week. *Bayajidda* attacked and killed the snake. This act of bravery made the queen to marry him and made him to settle down in *Daura.* They gave birth to a son called *Bawo*. The son was said to have gotten six sons who are believed to be the founders of six Hausa states: Kano, Rano, Katsina, Zaria, Gobir and Daura. These states, *Daura* inclusive are popularly known as Hausa *Bakwai* (the Legitimate States).

The queen was said to have made a concubine available for *Bayajidda*. The claim was that, the union of *Bayajidda* and the concubine produced sons namely: Kebbi, Zamfara, Gwari, Jukun, Ilorin, Nupe and Yawuri. These seven sons were according to the claim the founders of another seven Kingdoms, popularly referred to as the Hausa *Banza Bakwai* (The Illegitimate States).

2. Myth on the Origin of Life/ World (The Yoruba Myth)

The entire world was filled with water, when God decided to create the world. He sent his messenger, Obatala, to perform the task of creating the world. Obatala brought along his helpers, a man named Oduduwa, as well as a calabash full of earth and a chicken. Then they began their descent to earth from a rope. On their way down to earth, they stopped over at a feast where Obatala got over drunk. Oduduwa seeing his master over drunk picked up the calabash and the chicken and continued on the journey. When Oduduwa reached the earth, he sprinkled earth from the calabash over the water and he dropped the chicken. The chicken further spread the earth to different direction until the present world was created on the water.The first place were the earth started or created is called Ile-Ife. On the other hand, when Obatala, got out of his drunken laze, he discovered that Oduduwa had already performed his task. He was quite upset, but God gave him another task of creating the people that would populate the earth.

3-Why the Leopard Can Only Catch Prey on its Left Side

Once upon a time, Leopards did not know how to catch animals for food. Knowing that, the Cat was very skilful in this way, Leopard one day went to Cat and asked very politely if she would teach him the art. Cat readily consented. The first thing Leopard had to learn was to hide himself among the bushes by the roadside, so that he would not be seen by any animal passing by. Next, he had to learn how to move silently through the woods. He must never allow the animal he was hunting to know that he was following it. The third great principle Cat taught Leopard was how to use his left paws and left side in springing upon his prey. Having taught him these three things, Cat asked Leopard to go and practice them well. When he had learnt them thoroughly he could return to her and she would give him more lessons in hunting.

4- Why Turtles Live in Water

Turtles used to live on the land, they say, until the time a clever turtle was caught by some hunters. They brought him to their village and placed him before the Chief, who said, "How shall we cook him?" "You'll have to kill me first," said the turtle, "and take me out of this shell." "We'll break your shell with sticks," they said. "That'll never work," said the turtle, "Why don't you throw me in the water and drown me?!" "Excellent idea," said the Chief. They took the turtle to the river and threw him into the water to drown him. They were congratulating themselves on their success in drowning the turtle, when two little green eyes poked up in the water and the laughing turtle said, "Don't get those cooking pots out too fast, foolish people!" As he swam away he said, "I think I'll spend most of my time from now on, safely in the water." It has been that way ever since.

Apart from the above various oral accounts meant to explain the historical origin, as well as provide explanation and explicit account on the existence of certain natural phenomena, there are also others that exist in form of songs and praises,

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through poems history is also revealed:

"Nyim Gyakiri, the wealthy noble who led his nation to its doom at Feyiate
Nyim Gyakiri's grandchild hails from Feyiate, the field of battle"

Also,

"May you live long, the conqueror of unbelievers
May you live long the good follower of the most exalted prophet
You are the true Dabo, the reincarnation of the first Dabo.
Your father, Abdullahi Mai Kano inherited the throne from Abdullahi
Maje Karofi……. "

(full account of family lineage and those who ruled the kingdom was given)

Through praise songs and other related ones the full historical account of the family is given, the brevity of warriors recounted in the place, time and conditions that warranted the happenings of social events are all given. The popular oral tradition is still in practice today, especially during important public social events. For instance, in the West African communities of Hausa lands and Mali Empire, the praise singers, popularly known as Mawaka (Hausa), or Griots (Mali) served various social functions, as historians, praise-singers and musical entertainers. They are the guardians of the knowledge of their people's ancestry and genealogy. As history may never be written down, the Grios / Mawaka are crucial in keeping records of the past. They are the custodians of history entrusted with the memorization, recitation, and passing on of cultural traditions from one generation to the next. They are also called upon at important events, during which they recount a family's genealogy.

During these ceremonies, the youngest Griot acquires new knowledge. In the time of Emperor Sundiata of Mali Empire, Griots tutored princes and gave council to king. They were educated and wise, and they used their detailed knowledge of history to shed light on present-day dilemmas. Long after the fall of the Malian Empire in 1468, a West African family of means would have their own Griot to advise them and help them negotiate matters with other families. Griots arranged the terms of marriages and mediated disputes, always relying on their understanding of each family's history.

Teaching of Morality and Virtues

Another important means of informal education of the members of the society through the oral tradition is the teaching of moral values, good deeds, and socially approved behaviours. Through stories, good deeds are encouraged and vice-versa. This is made possible by the depiction of negative consequences that befall a bad character. In addition, the oral tradition of superstitions, proverbs and songs advice and restrain against immoral acts are adequately provided or given. The following examples serve to depict the relevance of the oral tradition in moral training and discipline.

Story

The Three Brothers and the Pot of Porridg

This is a story, a story, a story.
Let it go, let it come

Three brothers were travelling through the dense rain forest jungle. They had been travelling on foot for almost a full day and night was falling. They needed a suitable place to rest for the night, a place where they would be safe from prowling animals of the night. They were lucky, because before it fell, they spotted a little isolated hut in the distance. When they arrived at the hut, they met a kind old woman who invited them in and offered them a place to spend the night. The old woman offered them some porridge which she was cooking in an iron pot over some firewood. The brothers declined for they were very exhausted and also did not want to impose on this old woman who was living alone, and had cooked enough porridge only for one person.

The old woman gave them some mats and went into a room where they could lie down and have a good night rest. Soon, the entire hut was dark and everyone in it was asleep. Sometime in the night, the youngest of the three brothers woke up and he was very hungry. His older brothers had declined the offer of some supper and he had just gone along, but he was really hungry. So he went

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out into the kitchen to see if any of the porridge remained and indeed, there was enough porridge in there for one person. It appeared that the old woman had not eaten any of it, she must have been keeping it for the next day. It wouldn't harm anybody if he ate just a little bit of it, and it would certainly do him a lot of good, so he ate a little bit. Then a little bit more, and even more until it was all gone. Realizing his folly, he decided to cover it up in the pot. He hoped the old woman would not notice.

The following day, the three brothers were up early to continue their journey. They bade farewell to the old woman and thanked her for her kindness. The old woman discovered the stones in her pot soon after the brothers left and immediately set out after them. Even though she was very old, she could move as fast as or maybe even faster than any young man since she was able to catch up with the three young men.

She accused them of stealing her porridge and filling her pot with stones, at which the eldest brother spoke for them sincerely and denied the accusation. The old woman though was certain that one of them performed the deed, so she challenged them to take a test. They went to nearby river which had a log laying across it. Each one of them would walk across the river on the log while singing a song which the woman taught them. They would each sing this song in Hausa:

Idan ni na ci abincin Inna
If I ate the old woman's food
Ruwa tafi da ni
Let the sea take me
Kada ka dawo da ni
Let's never return to my people

The first two brothers walked confidently across the river singing the song. But the youngest brother was so scared as he walked and sang. His step faltered several times and he eventually fell into the river and was drowned. This is what befalls he who refuses to tell the truth.

That is all!

Off with rat's head!

The above story which is from the Hausa oral tradition, has a moral lesson, as the theme of the story is meant to teach listeners to be sincerely grateful to whoever assists them and also be honest by telling the truth. The story shows the consequences and calamity that befall whoever refuses to be honest and grateful.

Apart of these stories there are also proverbs and superstitions that are meant to guide people uprightness and teach members of the community to avoid those practices regarded as taboos.

One falsehood spoils a thousand truths.
The wrong-headed fool, who refuses counsel, will come to grief.
When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.

The afore-stated proverbs are also meant to teach morality and good virtues. For instance, the first proverb contains lesson and useful advice on the beauty of telling the truth and the affect of lie to one's reputation and social acceptability. Second, the other proverbs shows is an admonishment for those recalcitrant who refuses to listen to elders' advice. The last proverb is on the relevance of unity and cooperation in social cohesion and development.

Teaching of Cultural Beliefs and Social Norms and Values

Superstitions

Most of the thematic pre-occupations of the African superstition revolve around warning against any act perceived as culturally prohibited (Badura, 2000 and Ogundipe, 2007). This is based on the fact that certain socially manifested acts are considered inappropriate due to either religious restriction or socially believed norms and values. According to Nganger (1997) African superstitious beliefs are related to religion-traditional religion. This is why the superstitions in Africa involve spirits, witches and dangerous animals, as such doing anything contrary to the wishes of these can cause serious consequences and implications to the individual and society. Similarly, some superstitions are meant to explain or interprete certain actions, events or situations, while others are meant to discourage doing something regarded as socially unacceptable or

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can have negative implications on the actor. Courtlander (1996) posits that African superstitions are powerful means of teaching cultural norms and values, as they are meant to teach individual member of the community what to do and what to avoid, as well as teaching/informing individuals about certain mysterious happenings, through all these teaching is actually taking place. The following are examples of African-based superstitions and their teaching implications in the African context:

Mmadụ idinechi ụzọ (Igbo Superstition)

(A superstition banning one to sit, to lie or to sleep across the door step)

This superstition is based on the Igbos' belief that spirit moves everywhere and that their movement will not in any way be blocked by humans. In addition, it is believed that the door step is a route regularly used by the spirit in order to guide and protect the members of a given household, so it is regarded as a sign of respect given to the spirit, not to block their passage and hinder their free movement.

Mpupee anya mmadu ilo oko

(The scratching of the eyelid)

The above is an Igbo superstition which indicates that if the lower eyelid of one starts aches, it means that such a person may have reasons to weep, however, if it is the upper eyelid, it means that something good is on its way.

Other common superstitions from different parts of Africa are:

- If one's dream is fish, someone will give birth to a baby.
- Do not allow children to sweep the floor, because doing so invites unwanted guests.
- Never put your bag on the floor or you will be a poor man.
- Do not put your hat on the bed, or you will be sick.
- When you are walking with someone, never let a pillar or tree between you and the other person, otherwise you may have trouble on the road.
- Walking wearing one shoe, instead of two leads to a life of abject poverty.
- Meeting a leper in the early hours of the day signifies bad luck.

These superstitions are meant to teach different aspects of cultural norms and values. Some are warning, while others are explanations on certain mystical social phenomena.

Socialisation Processes of Individual Members of Community

Education is identified as a fundamental agent of socialisation processes of individual member of a given socio-cultural group. Through education, one is initiated and fitted into the society, as oral tradition is an informal means of educating members of the society, the societal members acquired the accepted values, norms and tradition, as well the language spoken in the community, the belief and the socially accepted behavior.

Developing Societies and the Challenges to Oral Tradition

With the emerging unprecedented development in science and technology, new economic orders, formal system of education, as well as the globalisation trends, the survival of oral tradition is seriously at stake. Nganger (1997) and Mazzuco(2003) identify the followings as the potential threat to the continuous survival of the African Oral Tradition.

Development in Science and Technology

Industrial Revolution which is the basis for the subsequent development in science and technology, originating in England around mid-18th century was, without doubt, a major turning point in human history. As it spread from England into Europe, manufacturing units, powered by steam power, came up at a number of places. Though Industrial Revolution was economic in nature, its social consequences were far-reaching. The manufacturers needed manpower and started drawing upon its rural hinterland to meet this requirement. Towns and cities proliferated but at the cost of rural society. As men, women and children, lured by better economic prospects, started moving to these manufacturing centres, the extended rural families started fragmenting and depleting. The new phenomenon of nuclear or small families emerged in towns. One of its impacts was felt on oral tradition of telling stories. With grandparents

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left behind in villages, parents too busy with their long hours of daily grind and even children put to work to supplement income, the practice of storytelling started declining in the societies dominated by the new economic order.

Developing Societies and Oral Tradition

A larger part of the world, comprising mostly what is today known as developing societies, was left untouched for long by the Industrial Revolution. In these societies, the oral tradition still held its own and played an important role in spreading knowledge of its traditions through folklores, folk music, folk theatres, etc. However, with the advancing technological revolution, the oral tradition even in these societies is becoming less secure today and is being increasingly overtaken by modern means of information transfer.

Language Extinction

A further disturbing trend that affects oral tradition is that its basic tool, the languages, is facing a "global extinction crisis". More than half of 7,000 existing languages worldwide some are expected to die out by the end of this century. More than 2,000 are gravely endangered. In Nigeria, the indigenous spoken languages are also facing extinction, especially the so-called Minority Languages. Findings of many studies have also indicated that many languages in Nigeria died or disappeared (Hassan, 2015).When a language dies, it takes with it irreplaceable knowledge of the past traditions and the present day natural world. With languages disappearing, the human knowledge base is getting eroded and the rich reservoir of oral tradition is getting depleted the result would be a disaster for societal up bringing which was/is being made through folklore platform.

Formal Education, Writing System and the Mass Media

Millennia before the Industrial Revolution, the evolution of alphabets and development of scripts had its own impact on oral tradition as it was no longer necessary to memorize history and culture of a people for transmission to succeeding generations. The growth of written literature, though much of it is based on orally told stories and parables passed down from generation to generation, further hastened the decline of the oral tradition, because people prefer to read printed stories to listening to them.

The development of new technology of printing, including movable type, and now computerised desk-top printing system, has helped to widely and rapidly spread the written word in the form of books. The advent of electronic mass media, including radio and television, is another factor. Their widespread networks are progressively reaching into remote places. These developments are also adversely impacting the oral tradition.

Conclusion and Recommendations

African societies were originally pre-literate, but like all other socio-cultural groups, the African traditional societies had their own culturally-based means of educating people. Through oral tradition, societal members were educated and fully integrated into the society. However, with the advancement of science and technology, globalization and language extinction, the oral tradition is seriously at the verge of extinction. In view of this, there is need for the revival of our cultural heritage.

A worldwide effort is needed to prevent oral tradition from becoming extinct. Storytelling needs to be revived, especially among children with low literacy level and those who are physically, socially and economically challenged. A concerted attempt is necessary to reach children worldwide and touch them with the magic of stories and bring smiles on their faces. The wealth of stories found in great epics of every culture should be documented and transformed into animation films, dramatised versions, as well as, presented to children, especially those who still remain deprived of their inherent cultural right to education. The oral tradition retains its strength to revive traditional values and that strength should be preserved and used for greater common good of children worldwide.

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