

# CHAPTER 15

## THE PRESERVATION OF FOLK TRADITION FOR EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

In the pursuit of education in contemporary Nigeria, the drive of stakeholders is moving drastically towards the development of science and technology with very little for arts education. Government policies as well as societal beliefs continue to encourage technological and scientific promotion more than artistic empowerment. This development to a very large extent is belittling this area of endeavour in several ways despite different opportunities locked within it and feasible feats it has achieved for the nation. One of the fast-fading cultures of the people within the nation is the folk tradition, this is due to the growing and intimidating modernity. Folklore, folk tale, folk music, folk dance and different folk traditions establish a people in distinct and dynamic ways from other people on earth. Unfortunately, many of these folk traditions, to a large extent are fast fading away and becoming non-existent as the tradition of science and technology is taking over. This paper, through a general survey, found out that Nigeria has huge resources of folk traditions in her multi-ethnicity and the folk traditions are useful for education and many other benefits, so, it should be geared towards the preservation of the folk traditions for the benefit of education and development of the Nigerian people in the modern world. The study, therefore, recommends that steps should be taken to actively preserve the folk traditions through our education to promote artistic empowerment in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Nigerian education, Contemporary Nigeria, Folk tradition and its preservation and artistic empowerment.

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### Introduction

That which belongs to the ancient custom which is established in the culture of a particular people usually used within the socio-cultural life of the people can be referred to as folk tradition. A practice which is generally accepted and practised by the generality of the people belonging to the society from ancient time and it has been passed from generation to generation constitute the folk

tradition. The folk tradition is widespread in many cultures of the world, from Europe to Africa, Asia to America among others, and it is often a practice which when remembered, reminiscence about the culture and tradition of the people who practised them comes alive. Folk dance, folk art, folklore or folk tale, folk music or folk songs among others are different folk cultures within different societies. Folklore as an example of folk tradition in Africa could be seen as an ancient practice which encompasses the storytelling of myths, and legends sometimes with role-playing activities as well as songs. This is sometimes practised in the cool of the day under the moonlight after the day's activities by the children being coordinated by one or two elders within the society. The various folk traditions are generally categorized under oral literature by Akporobaro (2012) which he established as the earliest forms of artistic self-expression. He subsequently stresses the importance of folklore which include social binding and development, education, entertainment, philosophical and historical documentation also moral, social and artistic development. Folk music as a form of folk tradition is generally seen as the social music of the traditional society with no specific composer. It is a societal property commonly used in the social engineering of society. However, further advancement has given extensive look at folk music from a broader perspective as defined by Folk Council in Scholes (1970) and revealed by Okafor (2017):

Folk music is music that has been submitted to the process of oral transformation. It is a product of evolution and is dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation and selection... the term can therefore be applied to music that has evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by art music and it can also be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten, living tradition of a community. But the term does not cover a song, dance or tune that has been taken over ready-made and remains unchanged. It is the fashioning and re-fashioning of the music by the community that gives it its folk character.

Many kinds of folk music, therefore, have gone through the process of recycling and representation in many literate cultures. In these societies, folk songs have been preserved for future generations through proper documentation of both audio and written form. Several American, French, British, and Russian...folk songs are available in scored pieces arranged and rearranged for contemporary and future performance. Unfortunately, similar and adequate effort in Nigeria is still lagging causing many folk music to be lost because the generations that lived with the folk tradition are fast fading away as many rural societies are giving way to modernity in Africa. Abe (2018) stresses that it is, therefore, necessary to have African folk music become commonplace by documenting them to preserve them from going into extinction like some useful ancient knowledge in Africa.

### **Preservation of Nigerian Folk Opera**

The folk tradition appears to belong to the past and very few remote rural settlements in contemporary Nigeria due to the spread of modernism. Many folk practices of the past that keep societies rejuvenated have almost totally been replaced with modern social development such as home video, viewing centres, and radio and television systems that have eradicated ancient social and educational systems. By extension, it has reduced major means of philosophical and educational tutelage, entertainment, and moral and artistic development which were primary to the upbringing of individuals and for communal binding. This unfortunate development, therefore, has given the African society a foreign and 'secondary' culture becoming her adopted way of life.

With the foregoing, for the safeguard and preservation of true values, ethics, education, and primary and artistic cultures which are embedded within the traditional folk practices of various Nigerian societies, there is a need for conscious and systematic active documentation. Documentation could be passive and active, when documentation is in written form it is seen as passive while documentation in participatory form becomes active. Both forms of preservation of various folk traditions within the various cultures in Nigeria are necessary.

### **Passive Form of Preservation**

All forms of documentation in written form are regarded as passive in this paper, this is because it is established in textual form only and is static. The readership needs the imagination to have a visual representation of the art, it is therefore regarded as passive. Passive documentation is needed to provide a literary presentation of the folk tradition for scholastic purposes. This has been ongoing in various departments of related disciplines of the folk tradition, these include music departments, languages and literature departments, drama or theatre departments, linguistics departments and even among cultural studies departments within various institutions in Nigeria. In addition, different attempts by scholars are noted, a few among them are Olubobokun (1988), Okonkwo (2009), and Okafor (2017) among others who attempted the documentation of folk tunes in some parts of the nation. Okpewho (2003), Olatunji (2005), and Akporobaro (2012) are examples of those who have attempted the documentation of Nigeria's oral literature in written form. Passive documentation may be strictly textual or transcribed, textual documentation simply presents the lyrics (words) of the song while transcribed documentation shows symbols and signs that guide the verbal presentation of tonality. Sometimes accompanied by textual content of the speech or song folk tradition. Transcription of the specific speech sound representation such as phonology or tonal or musical sound and perhaps dance movement used in the folk tradition. All these are passive forms of preservation because they are represented in written forms.

### **Active Form of Preservation**

For documentation to be active, life will be injected into it for a continuous movement in form of action. It must be involved or moving for it to be active. A drama presentation is active because it

involves action. Active preservation of folk tradition therefore must be action-packed and must come alive. Such can be a reenactment in drama, dance, musical rendition, poetic recitation, opera, cartoons and so on. Such documentation will involve technological input in audio-visual projection. Representation of characters in folkloric narration or role-playing of figures or personalities within any folk tradition makes it come alive and lucidly comprehensible. Any of this documentation can be recalled or represented as it will remind the participants of the tradition and educate the learners in clear terms about what the tradition is all about as it relates to concrete ethics and values embedded within the folk tradition.

### **Education benefits of Folk Tradition**

Folk tradition in its entirety possesses one form of education or the other and it is a potent way of teaching and learning from the ancient past. It occupies one of the knowledge systems of traditional societies where almost everyone belonging to the society passes through a particular stage of life or the other. Mostly, it is a channel that equips the children within the society with a relevant body of knowledge that guides them in life apart from parental nurturing. It helps in the building of individuals as well as the commonality of a people. This is explained by Oyekan (2000) when he explicates that education is a social service which ensures the refinement of human behaviour in terms of his/her processes of reasoning, feeling and doing things in a happy expectancy. While he quotes Farrant (1980) who postulates that education is society's cultural reproductive system, he also adds that it is essentially a social process in the maintenance of a dynamic society since the creation of human beings. Folk tradition, therefore, is an important body of the education system which is still relevant in the making of the individual as well as collective meaningful society hence its preservation for educational needs. Folk tradition presents a wide spectrum of knowledge that is needed by contemporary and future generations. Some of these are found in the following areas:

**Moral education:** This is the type of education that builds the affective domain of a learner. It is the education that equips learners with the formation of character, ethics and forthright personality. A lot of the folk traditions in embedded with moral education.

**Cultural Education:** The way of life of a particular person distinguish them from another set of people. The culture of a people is the set value that is already embedded within their ways of life. Most of these can be found in the folk tradition. So unfortunately, many of the younger persons in our contemporary society were not brought up with cultural education, one of the reasons for rampant social vices within our 'modern' community.

**Philosophical Education:** Logical, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics are the main branches of philosophy which form basic knowledge in folk traditions one way or the other

and from where knowledge can be supplied. It helps learners acquire some level of reasoning whether logical or metaphysical, ethical or aesthetical. For some older folks in today's world who were brought up experiencing the folk tradition, their first contact with reasoning would likely be that of the folk tradition.

**Linguistic / Language Education:** All folk traditions are carried out with indigenous languages, sharing originality and linguistic properties of the local language with learners. It is a great concern witnessing the incapacitation of younger folks who have faint no idea of their local languages. Folk tradition can help preserve and promote some of the local languages going into extinction. However, for the benefit of universality, such tradition can as well be interpreted in widely accepted language while documenting. Nonetheless, language education is derivable from folk tradition.

**Artistic Education:** Creativity knowledge that abounds in the folk tradition cuts across the visual, literary and performing arts. Artistic Knowledge of figures, colours, shapes, songs, dance, poetry, adage and many more are constituted in the folk tradition.

**Scientific Education:** Science entails intellectual and concrete activities that study the physical and the natural world through observation and experiment. It is a fact that some knowledge within the folk traditions is the result of observation of the physical activities of animals, imageries and phenomena (abstract or tangible) around the environment. Some on the contrary may be perceived, howbeit, a level of scientific knowledge is derivable within the folk tradition which is useful for education.

**Religious / Spiritual Education:** The involvement of divinity within the folk tradition gives it religious knowledge that educates. Spiritual forces within human society with the interaction of gods/goddesses culminating in the worship of divine being/s are all forms of religious education within a folk tradition which are useful forms of education.

In his assertion about myths, Akporobaro (2012) states that ...from the literary, poetic and imaginative uses of the resources of language, the myth becomes a culturally significant creation having great value for people and their religious and cultural beliefs.

## **Conclusion**

When the tradition of a people is lost, the essence of the people is gloomy. Folk practice is an important ancient tradition with great benefits for people in their generations. Nigeria has huge resources of folk traditions in her multi-ethnicity and the folk traditions are useful for education and many other benefits. Unfortunately, many of these folk traditions are being lost to modern encroachment and it seems to rob Nigerians of their identity in many ways. However, taking steps

to actively preserve the folk traditions and teaching the same will be an important step towards regaining our identity in the modern world.

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