

TEACHERS' OPINION ON THE RELEVANCE OF YORUBA MYTHS AMONG YOUTHS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria. The study was descriptive in nature where 207 randomly selected basic school teachers of Yoruba language participated. An eighteen-item researcher-designed questionnaire was employed to elicit responses from the respondents. A research question and one hypothesis were answered and tested respectively. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation, while the t-test was employed to test the hypothesis. The teachers' opinion was measured on a 4-point scale of Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.49); Disagree (1.50-2.49); Agree (2.50-3.49); and Strongly Agree (3.50-4.00). The findings of the study revealed that teachers had an "Agree" opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria with a mean score and standard deviation of 2.67 and 0.613 respectively; and gender significantly influenced teachers' opinion. The study concluded that Yoruba myths are still relevant to instill fear and teach morals, among others in the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria. It thus recommended that teachers should maintain and sustain narration of Yoruba folk stories, especially myths in order to employ the values of these stories to enrich the youths.

Keywords: Opinion, Relevance, Myths, Youths, Century

Introduction

It is believed that when a Yoruba elderly person called his or her children and grandchildren together, usually every evening to tell them stories about a certain event which was believed to have taken place in the remote past, he or she was not trying to merely amuse the children but to teach certain lessons. Usually, some moral lessons were drawn from the stories, and one of such stories is myths. A myth is a narrative or traditional story, without historical or scientific basis, embodying a popular idea regarding natural phenomena or historical events or deeds of gods, heroes and so on (Raglan, 2012). Raglan's definition of

myth, however, seems to be contradicting and not to be true because his definition also includes historical events which he earlier claims to have no historical basis. In the same vein, deeds of gods and heroes can only be regarded as legends, not myths.

Similarly, Akporobaro (2012) corroborates the above definitions when he observes that myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. He stresses further that myths symbolise human experience and embody the spiritual values of culture. According to Akporobaro (2012), some myths

explain origins, natural phenomena and death; others describe the nature and functions of divinities; while some others provide models of various forms of behaviour by relating the adventures of heroes or the misfortunes of arrogant humans. It could be deduced from the various definitions given above that a myth is one of the main traditional prose narratives which is invented, though beyond a scientific proof but with the ultimate aim of amusing, entertaining and educating the youth.

In another development, Adeyemi (2013) defines myths as imaginary, fictional or invented stories which are used to explain natural events. He gives some examples of such natural events as the creative story in the Yoruba thoughts and beliefs such as “Why the earth is far from the heaven” and “The fight between the sun and the moon”. He stresses further that a mythical story is usually an illustration of origin of life, death and the fundamental patterns of nature. Yoruba myths, which Adedeji (2016) regards as *Ìtàn Ìwáṣẹ̀*, are anonymous stories, presented as history, that deal with cosmological and supernatural traditions of the Yoruba people, their gods and goddesses, culture, heroes and heroines, religious beliefs, among others. Yoruba myth is a traditional story in a prose or verse form created in the pre-literate Yorùbá society and handed down orally and it purports to explain events or phenomena which are beyond rational or scientific justification (Fásorò, 2012). Yoruba myths, which are symbols of human experiences, are created through a critical observation of nature and interpretation of the behaviour of human beings. The main characters in the Yoruba myths include deities and culture heroes, whose actions were set in an earlier world, when the society was different from what it is today, or in

another “world” such as the Sky or River.

Every society of the world, especially the Yoruba society, preserves its myths by narrating (telling) them to the young ones. This is because the belief and worldview found within them (myths) are crucial to the sustainability and survival of the Yoruba culture (Fasoro, 2005). When a myth is being narrated in the traditional Yoruba society, the youth are not expected to query or disagree with the views of elders concerning the veracity or otherwise of the stories (myths). This is because there is an element of dependency in the process of moral education among the Yoruba. The most important thing for children when a story is being narrated is for them to be attentive to the respected elder (story-teller) and derive the messages of the stories meant to educate them.

As Akporobaro (2012) observes, myths address fundamental questions that each right thinking person continues to ask. He identifies such questions as:

- i. Where do we come from?
- ii. Why do we die?
- iii. How do I relate to the universe?
- iv. How much control do I have over my own life?
- v. What can I do in order to survive?
- vi. How can I live a satisfying life?
- vii. How can I balance my own desires with my responsibilities to my family and my community?
- viii. How can I reconcile myself to the inevitability of death?
- ix. Is there life after death?

Although there are various Yoruba myths, one of the most popular among them is the creation of the universe at *Ilé-Ifè*. This myth vividly explains the origin of man and the creation of the universe which makes it very significant for two specific reasons. The first reason is the fact that the myth

expresses a nationalistic point of view for appropriating the creation of man and the earth to *Ọ̀bàtálá* (god of creation) and at Ilé-Ife`. The second is because of the way it has offered an explanation for the diversity and differences in human types and patterns of behaviour (Akporobaro, 2012).

The myth features *Olókun* (the river goddess, who ruled the endless water and wild marshes. Although her kingdom did not contain vegetation, animals or human beings, she was, however, contented with it. Another character is *Ọ̀bàtálá*, the god of creation, who lived in the sky and was not satisfied with the water-soaked state and absence of living things in the *Olókun*'s Kingdom. Another major character of the myth is *Ọ̀rúnmilà* (the first son of *Olódùmarè* - God), who, with his superior knowledge and wisdom, taught *Ọ̀bàtálá* how to move from the sky above to the water below in order for him (*Ọ̀bàtálá*) to accomplish his mission of populating the Earth with living things who will be able to raise vegetation and build villages. The dramatis personae of the myth also include the blacksmith who manufactured a long gold-like chain for *Ọ̀bàtálá* to land on the water that filled the earth.

Similarly, there are some Yorùbá myths in a verse form. Fásorò` (2012) identifies the following in this category:

- i. *Kí ọ̀mọ̀dé má sọ pé aṣọ àgbà n` rùn* (The youth must not say the cloth of the elders are smelling).
- ii. *Má se dúró lẹ`nu ọ̀ nà tí òjò bá n` rọ̀`* (Do not stand at the doorstep when it is raining).
- iii. *Má se jeun ní òdòró* (Do not stand while eating).

From the first mythical belief identified above, the Yoruba assumed that the youth would not grow to a ripe

age to be regarded as an elder. The lesson derived from this myth is to prevent waywardness on the part of the youth and to encourage respect for elders, especially old age. From the second, it is a Yoruba belief that *Sàngó* (the god of thunder), might be angry; therefore, the wisdom behind this myth is to prevent someone from being hit by a thunderbolt. In the third, it is assumed that the person would never be satisfied because the food that should go directly into his/her stomach might go to another part of the body. This mythical belief encourages good table manner; to eat in a relaxed atmosphere rather than fidgeting about while eating (Fásorò`, 2012).

Yoruba myths go beyond amusing and entertaining the listeners (usually the youth). They have some other values which, according to Fasoro (2012), include the following: they provide much room for intellectual thought and debate because most of them employ divinities and spirits to explain why we are here and why things happen; from the literary and imaginative use of language, Yoruba myths become a cultural significant creation having a great value for people and their religious and cultural beliefs; Yoruba myths are an important way to understand ourselves and our connection to other people of the world; Yoruba myths enhance the vocabulary development of the youth (children). By listening to various narrations of myths, the youth will come across new words which will be added to their vocabulary bank. They teach morals and instil fear into the minds of the youth. Yoruba myths also have a value by exploring and explaining the world of invisible forces; and Yorùbá myths have a value of instructing members of the society about the attitudes and behaviour necessary to function effectively in life.

Gender variation is a strong variable that can have influence on teachers' opinion. Gender refers to the difference in sex, that is, either male or female, and how this variable influences one's perception, opinion, disposition, etc. towards life situations (Oyeniya, 2014). Oyeniya affirms that gender is a determinant of the proficiency of an individual in certain areas. Kamarasinghe (2009) conducted a research on the importance of folk narratives and the art of storytelling in child development. One of the intervening variables considered in the study is gender. As a part of the findings of the study, it was reported that gender had no significant difference in respondents' opinion on the importance of folk narratives and the art of storytelling in child development. Also, Ebeonuwa-Okoh (2010) investigated influence of age, financial status and gender on academic performance among undergraduates. One of the findings of the study revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female undergraduates' academic performance. From the foregoing, the role of gender and how it influences parents' opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria needs to be examined.

Statement of the Problem

In traditional Yoruba society, stories were told to the young ones by the elders to teach morals and educate the youths about values and virtues of life. Some of these stories, especially myths, were invented and told to the younger generation in order to ensure that they are disciplined in all ramifications. Myths instill fear in the youths and teach them to respect selves, peers, parents and constituted authorities. Some myths are also told to teach the youths against waywardness

and how they can live a satisfying life and function effectively in the immediate and distant societies. However, the rate at which Yoruba myths are being told in this twenty-first century (compared to the past centuries) is gradually fading out and cases of immoral acts among the youths are being reported almost every day. There are cases of youths engaging in evil deeds, such as money rituals, kidnapping, raping, banditry, insurgency, among others. Do Yoruba myths which were truly used to instill fear (fear of the parents, fear of the constituted authorities, fear of the gods and fear of the God) in the youths in the past centuries still relevant till today? This study therefore, examined the opinion of basic school teachers of Yoruba language in Oyo State on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. examine teachers' opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria; and
2. investigate the influence of gender on teachers' opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria.

Research Question

The following research question was answered in this study.

1. What is the teachers' opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the Youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested in this study.

Ho: There is no significant influence of gender on teachers' opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research method which allows the researchers to collect data and examine variables in different groups that are similar in other characteristics. Two hundred and seven teachers of Yorùbá language were randomly sampled from Basic Schools in Oyo State. An eighteen-item instrument personally designed by the researchers was used for data collection. The instrument was titled: Teachers' Opinion on the Relevance of Yoruba Myths among the Youths in the Twenty-first Century Nigeria Questionnaire (TORYMYTCN). The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The options attract 4, 3, 2 and 1 mark(s) respectively. The instrument was validated by two experts, one in Yoruba Education and the other in Yoruba Literature, while its

reliability was tested using split-half reliability procedure. The instrument was administered to 34 respondents outside the sample scope but within the study population. The respondents' responses were split into two equal halves and correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient where a value of 0.72 was obtained. Frequency count, mean and standard deviation were employed to answer the research question, while the hypothesis was tested using the independent t-test at .05 significant level.

Data Analysis and Results

In order to answer the research question, inferences were drawn from the mean scores and the critical ranges of scores on a 4-point scale were used as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Table of Inference

Critical Range	Inferences
1.00-1.49	Strongly Disagree
1.50-2.49	Disagree
2.50-3.00	Agree
3.50-4.00	Strongly Agree

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the Teachers' Opinion on the Relevance of Yoruba Myths among Youths in the Twenty-first Century Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Rank	Inferences
1	Yoruba myths instill fear in the youths.	2.22	1.091	18 th	Disagree
2	Yoruba myths teach the youths to have respect for elders (old age).	3.13	.576	1 st	Agree
3	Yoruba myths teach the youths to be cautious about the dangers of life.	3.02	.606	3 rd	Agree
4	Yoruba myths help the youths to understand the power of divinities and deities (gods).	2.71	.646	7 th	Agree
5	Yoruba myths teach the youths against waywardness.	2.52	.657	14 th	Agree
6	Yoruba myths teach the youths how to prevent anger of the gods.	2.59	.712	11 th	Agree
7	Yoruba myths encourage good manners among the youths.	3.03	.520	2 nd	Agree
8	Yoruba myths provide room for intellectual thoughts among the youths.	2.66	.677	8 th	Agree
9	Yoruba myths explain to the youths why we are in this world.	2.90	.703	4 th	Agree
10	Yoruba myths explain to the youths why things happen through divinities.	2.54	.533	13 th	Agree
11	Yoruba myths teach the youths how to live a satisfying life.	2.75	.487	6 th	Agree
12	Yoruba myths employ literary and imaginative use of language that aids the youths' education.	2.61	.576	9 th	Agree
13	Yoruba myths help the youths to understand their connection to other people of the world.	2.58	.637	12 th	Agree
14	Yoruba myths teach morals among the youths.	2.82	.526	5 th	Agree
15	Yoruba myths have the capacity to explain the world of inevitable forces to the youths.	2.46	.542	16 th	Disagree
16	Yoruba myths instill discipline among the youths.	2.36	.873	17 th	Disagree
17	Yoruba myths instruct the youths about the necessary attitudes to function effectively in life.	2.49	.388	15 th	Disagree
18	Yoruba myths have a value of instructing the youths about the necessary behaviour to function effectively in life.	2.60	.463	10 th	Agree
Grand Mean		2.67	.613		

Table 2 indicates that 18 items addressed the teachers' opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the 21st century Nigeria. Each of these 18 items was ranked accordingly. As shown in the table, Items 2, 7, 3, 9, 14 and 11 with the mean scores of 3.13, 3.03, 3.02, 2.90, 2.82 and 2.75 were ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th respectively. Each of the six items had an inference of "Agree". This implies that teachers had an agreed

opinion that in the twenty-first century Nigeria. Yoruba myths are still relevant to teach the youths to have respect for elders, encourage the youths to exhibit good manners, caution the youths about dangers of life, explain the reason we are here in this world through divinities, teach morals, and also teach the youths on how to live a satisfying life.

Items 4 (understand the power of divinities), 8 (provide room for

intellectual thoughts), 12 (literary imaginative use of language to aid youth education), 18 (instruct the youths about the necessary behaviour to function effectively in life) and 6 (teach how to prevent angers of the gods) with their mean scores of 2.71, 2.66, 2.61, 2.60 and 2.59 were ranked 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th respectively. Item 13 (important way to understand our connection to other people of the world) with a mean score of 2.58 was ranked 12th, while Items 10 and 5 with the mean scores of 2.54 and 2.52 were

ranked 13th and 14th respectively. All other items were also ranked accordingly. Items 17, 15, 16 and 1 with their mean scores of 2.49, 2.46, 2.36 and 2.22 were ranked 15th to 18th respectively. Each of these four items had an inference “Disagree”. It was also revealed in the table, a cumulative mean score of 2.67 which falls within the critical range of “Agree”. By inference therefore, teachers had an “Agree” opinion that Yoruba myths are still relevant among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3: The T-Test Analysis of the Difference in the Teachers’ Opinion on the Relevance of Yorùbá Myths among the Youths in the Twenty-first Century Nigeria on the Basis of Gender

Gender	No	Mean	Std.	df	Cal.t-Value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Male	97	57.89	4.77	205	2.76	.006	H₀₁ Rejected
Female	110	56.21	3.96				

P<0.05

Result on Table 3 shows, t-value = 2.76 with p-value = 0.006 < 0.05 alpha level. Since 0.006 is less than 0.05 alpha level, the hypothesis is thus rejected. This indicates that there was a significant difference in the teachers’ opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria on the basis of gender, with the male respondents having higher mean score (57.89) than their female counterparts with a mean score of 56.21.

Discussion

The study’s findings revealed that teachers in Òyó State had an “Agree” opinion on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the 21st century Nigeria, with a mean and standard deviation scores of 2.67 and 0.613 respectively. The teachers

had an “Agree” opinion for 14 items (i.e. Yoruba myths teach the youths to have respect for elders – old age, Yoruba myths encourage good manners among the youths, Yoruba myths teach the youths against waywardness, how to prevent angers of the gods, how to live a satisfying life, .and Yoruba myths teach the youths to be cautious about the dangers of life, among others). The teachers had a “Disagree” opinion for four items (i.e. Yoruba myths instill fear in the youths; instruct the youths about attitudes to function effectively in life; have a capacity to explain the world of inevitable forces to the youths; and instill discipline among the youths) on the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria. This implies that Yoruba myths have a low tendency of instilling fear in the

youths, instilling discipline among the youths, explaining the world of inevitable forces, and instructing the youths about the necessary attitudes to function effectively in life in the twenty-first century Nigeria.

These findings corroborate Fasoro (2012) who reported that Yoruba myths are deliberately and consciously told to the youths with the primary objective of cultivating moral values in them. The findings also align with Akporobaro (2012) who observed that myths are tools that answer some fundamental questions of life, such as: How do I relate to the universe? What can I do to survive? How can I live a satisfying life?

Another finding of the study revealed that gender has a significant influence on teachers' opinion of the relevance of Yoruba myths among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria with male teachers claiming higher mean score than their female counterparts. This finding seems not to conform with the Kamarasinghe's (2009) study outcome that gender had no significant difference in respondents' opinion on the importance of folk narratives and the art of storytelling in child development. This finding also negates Ebebuwa-Okoh's (2010) research outcome that there was no statistical significant difference between male and female undergraduate students' performance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that Yoruba myths are still relevant among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria. This means that they still have a high tendency of instilling fear in the youths and propel them to have respect for old age, be cautious about the dangers of life and encourage

them to always exhibit good manners and be disciplined in all their dealings. It was also concluded that Yoruba myths are capable of teaching the youths how to cultivate good attitude and necessary behaviour to function maximally in life and teach them against waywardness. In the same vein, Yoruba myths are still capable of providing intellectual discourse among the youths in the twenty-first century Nigeria. It was also concluded that Yoruba myths have a tendency of facilitating the youths in acquiring cultural practices in the past and use those practices to build up their personality.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusion drawn from the findings, it thus recommended that teachers of Yoruba, especially at the primary and secondary education levels should maintain and sustain narration of Yoruba folk stories, especially myths in order to employ the values embedded in them to enrich the life of the youths in all ramifications, most importantly at this twenty-first century where access to, and exposure of the youths to internet has turned many and still turning some against the norms and values of the society. Parents should also complement teachers' efforts by engaging their children in narration of Yoruba myths and some other folk narratives (i.e. folktales, legends) and optimally employ the benefits derived from these narratives to shape and reshape the life of their children (youths) towards becoming responsible and reliable individuals who will be useful to themselves, their community and the humanity at large. Similarly, it was recommended that, the youths, who are the leaders and future of the nation should always engage themselves in Yoruba folk

narrations and protect and guide the beautiful values, culture and traditions of the Yoruba jealously, irrespective of the challenges and threats posed by foreign culture and traditions through technology.

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