

EFFICACY OF SELECTED YORUBA SONG LYRICS IN TEACHING CHRISTIAN VALUES TO CHILDREN IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

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Abstract

The study examines and analysis some Yoruba song lyrics in teaching Christian values to children within Sunday School. Yoruba songs are situated within cultural, linguistic, and moral contexts and can be used as tools for Biblical messages through the medium of songs that are easily remembered and understood in a particular culture. An analysis of selected songs describes how music is involved in moral formation, spiritual development, and ethical teaching among children: “Semi ni’omo rere bi Samueli,” “Owo mi kò ñ kóló,” and “Dáwọ́ Dáwọ́.” Results show that these songs enhance biblical literacy by turning abstract ideas into concrete, understandable forms; promote embodied learning via gestures and repetition; and reinforce communal values like obedience, respect for others’ property stewardship, and honesty. This study brings out the very important role that culturally contextualized musical pedagogy plays in bridging gaps in Yoruba-language ecclesiastical resources toward holistic Christian education.

Keywords: Yoruba Song Lyrics, Teaching Christian Values, Children, Sunday School

Introduction

Yoruba songs serve as a vital medium for the transmission of Christian values to children, especially in the context of Sunday school teaching. In most Yoruba communities, music has never been considered just an entertainment form; rather, it is a cultural channel through which knowledge, moral values, and beliefs are kept and passed from one generation to another. When these songs are taken into the Christian context, they become effective pedagogical tools that communicate biblical messages and influence the moral development of children. Sunday school is important in instilling early basic Christian values since at this stage children easily respond to structured learning experiences that involve repetition, interaction, and emotional attachment. Music provides an attractive and effective format within which such instruction can be delivered especially when rendered in familiar languages like Yoruba thereby increasing understanding and retention (Campbell 2002; Murphey 1992). The influence of music on a child’s educational development has attracted considerable attention within the field of education in recent years (Akande, 2024).

The Yoruba songs used in Sunday School normally carry biblical stories, scriptural teachings, and moral lessons in a very accessible and memorable way. Whether directly through paraphrased

scripture or indirectly through storytelling and metaphor, these songs help to reduce complex theological ideas into simpler terms for the young learner. (Gardner, 1983) have supported the theory of multiple intelligences by saying that musical intelligence is one of those factors that make some children learn best. This therefore makes music integration into religious education compatible with different learning styles hence increasing comprehension.

Moreover, children usually internalize values embedded in song lyrics because of the repetitive nature of music that is fun to listen to. These are songs that will be sung outside the classroom; at home, on playgrounds, or even in churches thus reinforcing lessons learnt in different contexts. Recent studies conducted within cognitive neuroscience have discovered that music triggers various regions of the brain including those related to memory and emotions making it a very strong element for long-term retention (Schellenberg, 2005). This proves how much more effective Yoruba songs could be when used by children who are trying to remember biblical teachings as well as moral principles.

The role of music in education is quite evident when we look at general theories on education. Music has been a practical instrument for many years, helping to teach and making the process more engaging for learners. Singing is a natural way to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains; hence, it should be used in early childhood care and education. In church settings, songs with good and inspiring messages can serve as moral teachings (Kodály, 1974). The use of Christian lyrics in Yoruba songs also keeps the moral teaching practical and spiritual. By using Christian morals and stories in songs that are already popular, teachers make the lessons feel real and relatable. This aligns well with the goals of Christian education, which is not just about imparting knowledge but also about transforming lives and minds according to Biblical principles. Yoruba songs are an effective medium for expressing Christian teachings in Sunday school because they are culturally relevant, pedagogically appropriate, and spiritually uplifting. Such songs are powerful instruments for teaching children religious values and morals because they engage children's emotions, enhance memorization, and facilitate cross-contextual learning.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hung on two key theoretical frameworks: evidence-based studies on the music-based pedagogy cited in Bailey (2017), and critical theories of contextualization regarding language, culture, and learning. These frameworks ensure that the study employs a culturally relevant pedagogy, enabling children to integrate what they are taught with their daily experiences. Sunday schools are encouraged to adopt a model of contextualization that gives attention to the Yoruba language, culture, and the song lyrics.

Bailey (2017) explored the use of song lyrics as a pedagogical tool for reading readiness among K-1 students and concluded that children's recognition of letters and words, singing, and humming during school and playtime, attention, enthusiasm, and engagement all improved significantly in connection with the use of lyrics. Contextualization then addresses the language, culture, and generational gap between childhood and adulthood (distinction within the Yoruba-speaking community) that Yoruba-speaking teachers of children must negotiate (Ozueh, 2021). Children's attachment to Christian songs learned in the home and from church, and accompanying exploration of similar songs published outside church settings, further motivates attention to them (Timmy, 2022). People of Yoruba heritage access or engage with the Bible predominantly through the Yoruba language (Orisha, 2020). Instruction for children in the Yoruba tradition thus places emphasis on the Yoruba language (Yaiyesimi, 2021). Instruction outside the home during early childhood generally continues to use the Yoruba language (Afolabi & Obafemi, 2018). The

availability of song lyrics in Yoruba invites further exploration of the relevance of Yoruba song lyrics to children's understanding of Christian values taught in Sunday school.

Music-Based Pedagogy in Religious Education

The integration of culturally situated resources like Yoruba song lyrics has the potential to significantly enhance music-oriented pedagogy in religious education. Music serves as an actualized cultural practice among the Yoruba people through which values, beliefs, and social norms are communicated. When these musical forms are brought into Christian contexts, their lyrics often become saturated with biblical narratives and moral teachings that align perfectly with the objectives of Sunday school teaching. Therefore, Yoruba song lyrics become valuable resources that offer rich content for effectively communicating Christian values to children.

In Sunday school, such lyrics do not merely serve as musical engagement; rather they act as pedagogical tools that integrate cognition, emotion, and cultural identity. Through singing, repetition, and performance, learners internalize moral messages while developing their artistic and expressive capacities at the same time (Dewey, 1938). This is in line with the view that arts-based education brings about holistic development by engaging both intellectual and affective domains of a learner.

Also, Yoruba song lyrics help teachers relate religious teachings to the daily lives of children. The themes found in these songs—like obedience, kindness, honesty, and fear of God, often reflect actual situations that kids face at home, with friends, or in their larger community. This makes it more relevant and easier for them to apply morals outside of school. Socio-cultural theory emphasizes how cultural tools and social interaction play a big role in learning; it suggests that using materials familiar from culture like native songs can greatly improve understanding and internalizing values (Vygotsky, 1978).

A major issue in current education is the prevalence of Western musical styles and teaching methods dominating classroom practice even in places outside the West. This trend threatens to push indigenous musical traditions that are deeply connected to community life and identity into the background. Scholars have pointed out that this imbalance could limit learners' cultural awareness and lower instruction effectiveness when it does not connect with their real-life experiences (Okafor, 2005). In contrast, Yoruba song lyrics offer an entry point for emphasizing local cultural expressions while still conveying universal Christian teachings. The systematic integration of Yoruba songs into religious education, therefore, represents a culturally responsive pedagogical approach. By aligning Christian instruction with indigenous musical traditions, educators can promote both spiritual formation and cultural continuity. As noted by Samuel (2013), the intentional use of culturally relevant songs in teaching not only enhances learners' understanding of Christian values but also fosters a deeper appreciation of their cultural heritage. This dual benefit is particularly important in pluralistic societies where identity formation and moral education intersect.

Furthermore, incorporating Yoruba song lyrics into Sunday school curricula can bridge the gap between church, school, and home environments. Because these songs are easily memorized and frequently performed outside formal learning spaces, they reinforce moral teachings across multiple contexts. This continuity strengthens value acquisition and encourages consistent behavioral expression, thereby fulfilling the broader aims of Christian education.

Yoruba song lyrics represent a powerful convergence of culture, pedagogy, and spirituality. Their

integration into music-based religious education not only enhances instructional effectiveness but also affirms the cultural identity of learners. By moving beyond the overreliance on Western musical paradigms and embracing indigenous resources, educators can create more meaningful, engaging, and contextually relevant learning experiences for children.

Contextualization and Cultural Relevance in Yoruba Christian Instruction

In the Yoruba Christian tradition, it is widely accepted that the Bible is the revealed Word of God to man and should serve as the ultimate foundation for faith and morals. This belief within the Yoruba people emphasizes their commitment to Scripture as both a personal and communal guide for worship. Yet, the appropriation of this divine revelation can be effectively realized only through a proper knowledge and understanding of biblical texts, particularly when these texts are mediated through language.

Studies have shown that comprehension of biblical teachings in the Yoruba language has significantly declined, particularly within Sunday school instruction. Annan (2007), Davies and Ogbuagu (2003), and Jacobs (2006) have all warned about an increasing trend in learners' inability to fully comprehend scriptural truths expressed in Yoruba. This could be due to several factors: lack of exposure to formal instruction in Yoruba, the growing use of English for formal education, and inadequate availability of well-developed teaching materials in Yoruba.

Despite all these challenges, Yoruba remains a principal language of communication and worship in most churches. Sermons are preached in Yoruba; prayers are offered up in this same tongue; hymns are sung, as well as all liturgical expressions. There is however a very glaring absence of formal ecclesiastical literature commentaries, instructional manuals, children's religious books in Yoruba. Thus creating a gap between the language used for worship and that available for systematic teaching and learning.

In response to such a situation, church leaders and educators have increasingly stressed integrating elements of the Yoruba language and culture into religious instruction since effective teaching can only take place when it resonates with linguistic realities as well as cultural realities surrounding learners. Within this context, song lyrics emerge as very powerful resources. Songs are not formal written texts but are widely available, easily memorized, and deeply rooted within communal life.

The relative scarcity of written ecclesiastical materials in Yoruba enhances further the importance attached to these musical resources. Concisely put, Yoruba Christian songs usually summarize biblical narratives, doctrinal teachings, or moral principles packaged engagingly. They thus provide alternative channels through which scriptural knowledge may be communicated and reinforced among children or new learners; the very same group that needs such knowledge most urgently to bridge that gap between limited textual resources on one hand and effective biblical instruction on another hand.

Song Lyrics as Moral Devices

Songs function not only as artistic expressions but also as effective moral instruments for communicating teachings grounded in biblical content. Within the cultural context of the Yoruba people, music has long served as a medium through which societal norms, ethical expectations, and communal values are transmitted. An examination of traditional Yoruba folk songs shows that they frequently address core moral concerns such as discipline, respect, purity, and social responsibility.

For example, the children's song "*Semi l'omo rere bi Samueli*" (Be a good child like Samuel) teaches obedience, reverence, and respect for authority, drawing from the biblical character of Samuel as a model of faithful conduct. Through its simple and repetitive structure, the song encourages children to emulate godly behavior, particularly attentiveness and submission to divine and parental guidance. Such songs demonstrate how moral and spiritual instruction can be effectively embedded in culturally familiar musical forms.

These examples illustrate that moral education has historically been woven into indigenous musical traditions, making them accessible and meaningful tools for instruction. When adapted into Christian contexts, these musical forms can be intentionally shaped to reflect biblical teachings, thereby reinforcing the moral lessons delivered in Sunday School.

This pedagogical approach is supported by scholarship on music and learning. Songs enhance the retention and internalization of messages due to their rhythmic and repetitive qualities, which promote memory and engagement (Murphey, 1992). Similarly, (Campbell, 2002) emphasizes that culturally relevant songs create meaningful learning experiences by connecting instruction to learners' everyday lives. In this way, Yoruba children's songs used in Sunday School can effectively communicate Christian doctrines and moral values in forms that are both engaging and memorable.

Furthermore, (Samuel, 2013) highlights the enduring communicative strength of songs, noting their capacity to preserve core messages and inspire audiences, particularly within Yoruba political music. Just as political songs are used to mobilize and shape collective consciousness, this same communicative power can be harnessed within Christian education. Yoruba songs, therefore, can be deliberately employed to convey biblical teachings and cultivate moral behavior among children.

Given the limited availability of Yoruba-language ecclesiastical materials, the strategic use of song becomes even more important. Yoruba songs provide an adaptable and culturally resonant means of bridging this gap, enabling educators to communicate scriptural truths and ethical principles effectively. By embedding Christian values within familiar musical traditions, these songs not only enhance comprehension but also encourage children to practice biblical teachings in their daily lives.

Language, Culture, and Biblical Literacy

The intersection between language, culture, and biblical literacy is both inherent and crucial, especially within the context of the Yoruba people. Language is not just a medium for communication; it carries worldview, values, and identity. Therefore, how well learners understand biblical teachings depends greatly on the language used to communicate those teachings.

Biblical literacy refers to reading, understanding, interpreting, and applying scriptural teachings significantly depends on linguistic accessibility. When Scripture and its interpretations are given in a familiar language like Yoruba, learners are more likely to understand not only the literal meanings but also the deeper moral and spiritual implications as well. This agrees with (Vygotsky, 1978) who said that learning happens through language and cultural tools. In this way, Yoruba becomes an important medium through which biblical knowledge makes sense and applies in

everyday life.

A major challenge comes when there is a mismatch between the language of instruction and the cultural environment of the learners. The growing dominance of English in formal education and church instruction has sometimes led to a decline in biblical literacy among children who feel more at home with Yoruba culture. (Bediako, 1995) argued that real Christian understanding in African contexts must be based on indigenous languages because these languages carry the conceptual categories needed for expressing faith meaningfully. Without such grounding, biblical teachings are likely to become abstract, distant or poorly internalized.

Culture also shapes how biblical messages are received and interpreted among different peoples. Elements within their cultures like proverbs, storytelling music or communal practices provide interpretive lenses that can either enhance or hinder understanding. For example, using culturally familiar forms such as songs folktales idiomatic expressions can make biblical narratives more relatable memorable. (Sanneh, 1989) emphasized that Christianity was translated into local languages historically enabled faith taking root diverse cultures transforming both message its reception underscoring importance contextualizing instruction within indigenous frameworks

This means that it is not optional but very necessary to integrate language and culture into biblical education. Yoruba-language resources, including songs, oral narratives, and simplified scriptural interpretations serve as bridges between sacred texts and lived experiences. In particular, music-based approaches to teaching Scripture enhance retention and engagement with the truth of the Bible by embedding biblical truths within culturally resonant forms (Murphey, 1992; Campbell, 2002). These are mostly more effective with children. However, there should be a lot more comprehensive ecclesiastical materials in the Yoruba language available. This gap puts more responsibility on other forms of knowledge transmission like oral teaching and song. These methods are good but they need to be systematically developed and supported for accuracy and depth in understanding the Bible to be ensured. Otherwise, there is a risk of superficial engagement with Scripture whereby familiarity does not translate into true literacy.

Songs Text

Semi mi omo rere

Semi mi'omo rere bi Samueli

Omo to gboran, to ni 'teriba

Omo ti ki n ba obi re ji yan

Ni ko semi o, Oluwa

Make me a good child

Make me a good child like Samuel

An Obedient and respectful child

A child that does not argue with his Parents

That's who you should make me.

The Yoruba children's song "Semi ni'omo rere bi Samueli" reflects a profound integration of language, culture, and biblical literacy within the context of the Yoruba people. From a scholarly and researcher's perspective, the song exemplifies how music functions as a medium for moral formation, spiritual instruction, and cultural continuity in Christian education, particularly in Sunday School settings.

At its core, the song is a prayerful aspiration: "Make me a good child like Samuel." The reference to Samuel is significant, as Samuel is widely regarded in the Bible as a model of obedience, humility, and attentiveness to God (1 Samuel 3). By invoking Samuel as an exemplar, the song translates an abstract biblical narrative into a concrete and relatable moral model for children. This

aligns with the argument of Lamin Sanneh that the translation and contextualization of biblical concepts into indigenous forms make Christian teachings more accessible and meaningful (Sanneh, 1989).

The lyrical emphasis on obedience “*omo to gboran*” and respect “*to ni 'teriba*” highlights core values deeply embedded in both Yoruba culture and Christian doctrine. Respect for elders and authority is a foundational moral principle among the Yoruba, and its reinforcement through song demonstrates how indigenous cultural values can harmonize with biblical ethics. African Christianity thrives when it engages indigenous cultural categories that resonate with local understandings of morality and community (Bediako, 1995).

Furthermore, the line “*omo ti ki n ba obi re ji yan*” (a child who does not argue with parents) reflects the importance of discipline and social order. From a pedagogical standpoint, such moral instructions are more effectively internalized when presented through music. (Murfhey, 1992) argues that songs enhance learning by promoting repetition, emotional engagement, and memory retention. Similarly, (Campbell, 2002) notes that culturally familiar songs provide meaningful contexts for learning, enabling children to connect instructional content with their lived experiences.

The structure of the song also deserves attention. The repetitive and supplicatory nature of the phrase “*Ni ko semi o, Oluwa*” (That's who you should make me, O Lord) transforms the song into both a learning tool and a form of prayer. This dual function reinforces the internalization of moral values while fostering spiritual consciousness. It reflects what (Dewey, 1938) describes as experiential learning, where knowledge is constructed through active participation and reflection.

In addition, the song addresses a critical gap in Yoruba-language ecclesiastical materials by serving as an accessible and engaging medium for biblical instruction. In contexts where written resources may be limited, such songs become vital tools for transmitting scriptural knowledge and ethical teachings. They bridge the divide between oral tradition and formal religious education, ensuring that children not only hear biblical stories but also embody their moral implications.

From a critical perspective, the song also raises important considerations about the nature of obedience and authority in child upbringing. While it promotes respect and discipline, educators must ensure that such teachings are balanced with critical thinking and understanding, preventing blind conformity. Nonetheless, within its intended religious and cultural framework, the song effectively communicates values that are both biblically grounded and socially relevant. It demonstrates that when language and culture are thoughtfully integrated into religious instruction, learning becomes not only effective but also deeply meaningful.

Owo mi ko n kolo

Owo mi kon kolo, ma fi gbe Oluwa ga
Enu ti mo fi n jeko, ma fi gbe Jesu ga

My Little Hands

My little hands, will I use to praise God
My mouth that I used to feed, will I use to
lift Jesus high

Orimi Ejika

Orimi, ejika, orunkun, ese
Orimi, ejika, orunkun, ese
Orimi, ejika, orunkun, ese
Tire ni Oluwa (patapata)

My head and shoulder

My head and shoulder, my knees and toes
My head and shoulder, my knees and toes
My head and shoulder, my knees and toes
They all belong to You Lord.

The song emphasizes the dedication of different parts of the body to the service and praise of God: “*Owo mi kon kolo, ma fi gbe Oluwa ga*” (My little hands, I will use to praise God) and “*Enu ti mo fi nje ko, ma fi gbe Jesu ga*” (The mouth I use to eat, I will use to lift Jesus high). In the same vein, “*ori mi, ejika, orunkun ese*” (My head, shoulder, knees and toes) refers to the part of the body. These lines communicate a theology of total devotion, where even ordinary human faculties are consecrated for divine purposes. This idea resonates with biblical teachings such as Romans 12:1, which encourages believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices. By simplifying this theological concept into a child-friendly Yoruba song, abstract doctrine is made concrete and relatable.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the song exemplifies embodied learning. John Dewey argues that meaningful learning occurs through active engagement and experience (Dewey, 1938). In practice, children often accompany this song with gestures, raising their hands or pointing to their mouths; which reinforces understanding through physical participation. This aligns with multisensory learning approaches, where combining movement, sound, and language enhances comprehension and retention.

The song also reflects the socio-cultural learning framework proposed that emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through interaction with cultural tools such as language and music (Vygotsky, 1978). Here, Yoruba language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a cultural resource that shapes how children understand and internalize Christian teachings. By expressing devotion in their mother tongue, learners experience a deeper emotional and cognitive connection to the message.

Furthermore, the moral implication of the song extends beyond praise to the idea of responsible use of the body. Implicitly, it teaches that hands should not be used for wrongdoing, and the mouth should not be used for harmful speech, but rather for glorifying God.

Dawo Dawo

Dawo dawo, dawo sile Olorun

Dawo dawo, dawo sile Olorun

Owo Jesu

Call: Owo Jesu,

Response : E ma fira epa je

Give Offering

Give your offering into the house of God

Give your offering into the house of God

Jesus' Money

Call: Jesus' Money

Response: Don't use it to buy groundnut

The Yoruba songs “*Dáwọ́ Dáwọ́*” and “*Owó Jẹ̀sù*” provide compelling illustrations of how music serves as a medium for instilling financial ethics and spiritual responsibility among children within the Yoruba people Christian tradition. From a researcher's perspective, these songs extend moral instruction beyond personal behavior to include stewardship, honesty, and accountability in relation to God and the religious community.

The song “*Dáwọ́ Dáwọ́, dáwọ́ sí ilé Olórun*” (Give your offering into the house of God) emphasizes the importance of giving as an act of worship. It introduces children to the concept of offering as a spiritual obligation and a form of participation in communal religious life. In biblical teaching, giving is often associated with gratitude, obedience, and trust in God (e.g., Malachi 3:10). By embedding this principle in a simple and repetitive Yoruba song, children are encouraged to view giving not merely as a routine practice but as an expression of faith.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this reflects experiential learning as articulated by John Dewey,

where values are learned through active participation in meaningful practices (Dewey, 1938). When children sing about giving and simultaneously practice it during church activities, the lesson becomes internalized through both action and reflection.

Closely related is the song “*Owó Jésù*” (Jesus' Money), which adopts a call-and-response format: “*Owó Jésù*”—“*È má fì rà èpà jẹ*” (Jesus' money; do not use it to buy groundnuts). This song conveys a clear moral warning against the misuse of funds dedicated to God. It teaches integrity, self-control, and accountability, emphasizing that money given in a sacred context must not be diverted for personal or trivial use. This song addresses ethical formation in a practical and culturally relatable manner. The mention of “groundnut” (a common snack) situates the moral lesson within the everyday experiences of children, making the instruction vivid and memorable.

Furthermore, the call-and-response structure of “*Owó Jésù*” promotes active participation and communal reinforcement of values. Such interactive musical forms are deeply rooted in Yoruba oral traditions and are effective in sustaining attention and engagement. From a theological perspective, both songs contribute to early financial literacy within a Christian framework. They introduce children to the idea that resources, especially money are not merely for personal consumption but are to be managed responsibly as part of one's relationship with God. These songs exemplify this integration by linking financial behavior with spiritual accountability.

In addressing the broader issue of limited Yoruba-language instructional materials, these songs again demonstrate their value as accessible teaching tools. They communicate essential biblical principles giving, honesty, and stewardship; in ways that are easily understood, remembered, and practiced by children. Through repetition in church and at home, the lessons become ingrained, shaping attitudes and behaviors over time.

Conclusion

The study confirms that Yoruba song lyrics are highly effective pedagogical tools for teaching Christian values to children in Sunday School. Songs such as “*Semi ni'omo rere bi Samueli*” and “*Owo mi kò ñ kóló*” integrate biblical narratives, cultural norms, and moral instruction, making complex theological concepts accessible and meaningful. Through repetition, embodied participation, and culturally relevant language, children internalize values such as obedience, respect, humility, and devotion. Additionally, songs like “*Dáwọ́ Dáwọ́*” and “*Owó Jésù*” extend moral education to practical domains, including stewardship, honesty, and financial responsibility, reinforcing ethical behavior within a spiritual context. These findings align with scholarship on experiential learning (Dewey, 1938), socio-cultural learning (Vygotsky, 1978), and music pedagogy (Murphey, 1992; Campbell, 2002), which emphasize the importance of active, culturally situated, and multisensory engagement in effective education. Ultimately, Yoruba Christian songs serve not only as educational tools but also as vehicles for cultural continuity and spiritual formation, demonstrating that language, music, and faith can be harmoniously integrated to cultivate morally and spiritually grounded children in Sunday School settings.

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