

# Moving Towards Mastery in a World of Opportunities: The Role of Yoruba Language Education.

By

**ABOLARIN OMOLADE ARINOLA**

*Yoruba Department, Federal College of Education, Kontagora Niger State*

*Email: arinolaabolarin@yahoo.com*

## *Abstract*

*Education is a very vital part of human existence be it formal or informal. It is the type or level of education we acquire that determines our level of prosperity and place whatever type of education we have or want cannot be acquired without the use of language, which means without language human beings will find it very difficult to achieve anything meaningful. An adage says "anything worth doing is worth doing well" meaning that any field of work we choose or find ourselves in, we must utilize all the available means to be successful and outstanding. The available means to utilize taken from Yoruba cultural heritage and how to utilize them is the main focus of this paper. Major keywords of this paper were defined, some cultural heritage of Yoruba people which can be taught to people (even from cradle) with the use of Yoruba language were listed and discussed, for example respect, truthfulness, hardwork, endurance, prudence etc. The paper therefore suggested advertisement, neatness, good approach to customers, attending private and government organized seminars relating to one's field etc. as a way of moving towards mastery for artisans. Lectures for farmers on mechanized farming or modern day farming will definitely help the farmers in moving towards diverse opportunities and make their work less strenuous as these will put more money in to their pockets and give them job satisfaction and fulfillment.*

**Keywords:** *Mastery, Opportunities, Yoruba Language, Cultural Heritage and Education.*

## **Introduction**

Vocation is what a person is occupied with or practice in order to earn a living. In order words, vocation is occupation and occupation is vocation. Almost everybody is occupied with one occupation or the other, be it daily or monthly earners. The monthly earners are mostly civil servants while daily earners (self employed) are mostly artisans, traders, market women etc. Be it daily earners or monthly earners, all must pass through one form of education to become fully or gainfully employed. Therefore, to be employed, one must be educated through the

use of language, because language is the medium through which education is being passed across.

Before the advent of the missionaries that brought Western Education to Nigeria, all the tribes already had their own mode of education which does not include reading and writing like that of the missionaries, these are the types of education that we give our children from birth to enable them live a normal, prosperous and beautiful life full of peace, joy and fulfillment according to every tribe, culture, norms and customs. (Abolarin 2017).

Everyone aspires to be the best in his/her field of occupation because the best always gets it right and also get it all. This paper focuses on the self employed, who are mostly artisans which are mostly illiterate.

Yoruba people have their own ways of educating their children from time immemorial through traditional means that are embedded in their culture, religion, norms, beliefs, taboos etc. There are many occupations of the Yorubas in the olden days, some of which are still practiced till today and some gone into extinction because of civilization and technology. This paper is combining the use of technology and civilization as a tool of making one a master in his/her chosen occupation in order to be able to dig deep into a world of diverse opportunities that abounds all over, thereby making the person an achiever.

### **Mastery**

The word "Mastery" is gotten from a noun "Mastery" which means a person who is skilled at something, the something is usually occupation, hobbies etc. Mastery according to Hornby (2001: 726) is defined as

*"Great knowledge about or understanding of a particular thing"*

Vocabulary.com defines Mastery as

*"Mastery refers to having great skill at something or total dominance over something."*

From the above definitions of "**Mastery**", we were able to understand that mastery means or refers to having versed knowledge, full understanding of something, particularly about one's occupation.

### **Education**

According to (Okeke 2007) in Aremu (2017), education in its broadest sense, encompasses all the processes individuals go through in life to develop and optimally utilize their potentials through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that are necessary for effective living in society.

For Gertrude (2016), the term education is defined as any experience or practice that has a decisive effect on the mind, temperament, or physical capacity of

a human being. In its practical sense, education is the procedure by which society intentionally transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, and values from generation to generation.

While Shukla (2010) sees Education as a process involving the teaching of specific skills and imparting of knowledge, good judgment and wisdom. It creates choices and opportunities for people, reduces the twin burdens of poverty and diseases and gives a stronger voice in society. More so for nations, it creates a dynamic work-force and well-informed citizens able to compete and cooperate globally, opening doors to economic and social prosperity.

It is also widely believed that Education is the best legacy a parent can give his/her children.

### **Cultural Heritage**

Diana and William (1977) in Abolarin (2010) defines culture as the act and behaviour, experience, thoughts, religion and acts of a tribe who has the same descendants with the same language that they got from them and are also ready to pass all these to their coming generation.

Hornby (2001) explains something cultural as being connected with the culture of a particular society or group, its customs, beliefs, etc. And Heritage as traditions and qualities that a country or society has had for many years and that are considered an important part of its character.

Ajayi (2005) also has this to say about culture.

*It (culture) is the established pattern of behavior among people. It includes everything that makes man what he is, as well as the heritage he possesses. It finds expression in his religion, architecture, political organization, technology and so on. Everything made by men is culture, everything created by God is nature.*

### **Culture is divided into two among the Yorubas, they are:**

1. **Material culture:** These are the types of culture we can see with our eyes that men made with their hands, examples of such are pots, drums, guns, foods, cloths, farm equipments etc.
2. **Non-material culture:** These are the ones that cannot be seen with our naked eyes but with the inner eyes, we can only think, hear, say, and comprehend it in our hearts, for example governance, greeting, language, religion, commandments, etc.

The Yorubas has these two types of culture in abundance and it is always seen and felt in their day to day activities, and this has made it part and parcel of their

lifestyle because it is being transmitted from one generation to another. The cultural heritage/ values to be examined in this paper are Respect, truthfulness, hard work, endurance and prudence.

### **Yoruba Language**

Yoruba is a language spoken by the Yoruba. Speakers of Yoruba language are predominantly found in the South Western part of Nigeria with about thirty million speakers. They are found in these states: Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Edo, Ekiti, Osun, Kwara, Kogi and Delta. They are also found in the West African countries of Republic of Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra - Leone and in the Caribbean and Southern - American countries of Cuba, Brazil, Venezuela, Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago. (Adeyemi 2010).

Research by scholars has shown that there are about six thousand and eight hundred (6800) languages in the whole world and three hundred and sixty (360) in Nigeria. Yoruba language is one of the three major languages in Nigeria and the rest two are Igbo and Hausa. (Omolasoye ,o and Omolasoye, A 2015)

Yoruba people are very rich in culture and this made their tribe very distinct and different from others in everything they do, their language, their beliefs and their way of life generally is embedded in their culture. They have rich cultural heritage passed to them from their fore-fathers.

### **Yoruba cultural heritage and link with moving towards mastery**

Now that the phenomenon of modernization is seriously poisoning our tradition and cultural heritage, the application of non-material culture in this century goes a long way in serving as an antidote, especially in moving towards mastery in our different vocations or occupation. There is a saying in Yoruba land that "kekere ni imole ti nko omo re laso" which means that it is from childhood that Moslem teaches his children Quranic recitation. As a norm in Yoruba land, everyone must have one handwork or the other, it can be the generational one or another one learnt outside, and this starts from when the child is of age. The parents will take the child to learn the chosen occupation, the art of learning occupation in Yoruba land is often a tedious one because there are many hurdles to scale.

There are six steps to follow when taking your children / wards for apprenticeship, these are:

1. The next thing to do after choosing a vocation is to look out for a good master in that aspect
2. Look for a good and trust-worthy person to be a guarantor or an intermediary between the parents of the lad and the master.

3. Duration of the apprenticeship should be discussed and agreed upon by the two parties. It may be two, three years and above, just like the duration of formal education today.
4. Payment of registration and apprenticeship fees, just as school fees is being paid today
5. The place of abode of the new apprentice will be discussed between the two parties, that is if the lad will be coming to work from the parent's house or staying with the master through out the duration of his/her apprenticeship. This one is like the boarding house system in our schools these days.
6. Freedom is the last step, it is for the apprentice to gain his/her freedom and become a boss of his/her own. Freedom in this sense is synonymous to graduation.

### **Method/Ways of Teaching Apprentices**

Yoruba artisan masters also have their memory in built syllabus, the same way school has theirs in written form. And it is from this that they pick one by one, step by step what to teach their apprentice. These are listed and explained below:

1. **Identification and uses of instrument or equipment:** They will start with this as the first step. They will tell the apprentice the names and uses of instrument used for their work.
2. **How to use the instrument:** After telling them the usefulness of each instrument, they will practicalize it for them to see.
3. **How to behave:** The Yoruba teaches their children how to behave from childhood when they are at home and outside home. This also continues anywhere they find themselves, especially their place of apprenticeship. Their behavior is put to test here as seniority is not by age but based on first come first serve, the senior must be respected, loved and obeyed at all times. The more respectful and gentle an apprentice is, the more the senior will love to teach him/her the basic things needed to be learnt in their vocation. A new apprentice will not be allowed to touch anything relating to their vocation but will be sent on errands for like two months of arrival. He or she must do all his/her chores with joy and humility which is part of the training but if not it will be counted against him/her.
4. **Learning the vocation parse:** After been taught the elementary basis of the vocation by the seniors, the master will now take charge by giving the apprentice small works to experiment with and from there graduate to big ones till he or she is perfect and confident of him/herself at the chosen

profession. The master will be giving the apprentice works to do on her/his own without supervision and correct him/her if the need arises, but if not he/she will continue working for the master until the appointed time for freedom approaches.

5. **Freedom:** The freedom day is usually a ceremonious event when the parents/guardian of the apprentice, the master and his mates with the remaining apprentices will gather to conduct the freedom ceremony. After the master has collected the necessary items, the people gathered (especially elders) will pray for the freedom lad to be successful in every of his/her endeavour, then the master will give a short or long speech about the freedom person's behavior, if his/her behavior is bad, the master will say it there and then, thereby giving the lad public disgrace and embarrassment. The master will round up the programme by praying for the lad thus:

*Adigun, mo se iyonda fun e loni lati lo da duro, ki o lo da ise tire sile. Wa sori ire ni idi ise yi, wa fi yaa, wa fi raa. Gbogbo bi o se se ati iwa ti o nhu simi patapata nigbati o nkose ni awon omo ise ti e naa yoo hu si e.*

*Adigun (the name of the freedom lad), I release you from under my tutelage today to go and establish on your own. May you be fortunate in this vocation; you will prosper and make headway. When you begin to have apprentice too, everything you did to me is what they will do to you.*

Note: The last sentence in this prayer is a very heavy one for those that understands the meaning because it is a prayer that brings blessings or curses. If the lad was of good behavior to his master during the years of his/her apprenticeship, it will be a blessing for him/her, but if he/she is the type that is lazy, lies, backbites, steals, cannot endure, does not respect, or spend his master's money anyhow, the prayer is a curse on him/her because the same will become his/her lot.

It is what the master says about the freedom lad on the day of freedom that will attract or send customers away from him/her when he/she establishes his/her own vocation.

Being very good at what one does or ones vocation is not the only instrument one needs to use in moving towards mastery in our vocation / occupation there are many others taken out of Yoruba cultural heritage, such as:

- **Respect:** - Yoruba people cherishes respect and it is one of the most common attributes. The girls/women kneel down to greet elders while the boys/men prostrate as a mark of respect. Anyone planning to move towards mastery

must possess this quality. You don't look down on your customers because looks, can deceive at times. It's the way you attend to your customers the first time they come that dictates if they will come back or not, it is also the way you respect and attend to them that will give them the chance to know if you are good at what you do or not.

- **Truthfulness or Honesty:** Yoruba people always instill it in the heart of their children or wards to always be truthful and be honest in whatever they do. When you are dealing with the customers, one needs to be as honest as possible, one should not inflate price of products or services so that the intending customer will stay to experience your art of mastery.
- **Hard work:** Hard work is very important if one wants to be successful and accomplished in life. Laziness does not pay, because it chases customers away when they give you work and you don't do it instead you laze about and abandon customer's work. A hardworking person will always be willing to work hard, seek for new innovations, try his/her hands on new things or experiment to upgrade his work experience as a way of moving towards mastery, but a lazy person will always be contented with whatever he/she learnt under his/her master and be using an 18th century experience in the 20th century, thereby making that kind of person backward and static.
- **Endurance:** A person who can endure will be able to weather any storm because instead of him/her to give up on something, if he/she fails the first time, he/she will repeat the process severally until he/she gets it right. But somebody who cannot endure will keep changing vocations and become jack of all trade, master of none at the end.
- **Prudence:** A person trying to move towards mastery in his/her chosen profession must be very prudent with money, extravagant spending must be avoided at all cost. The person must not be a drift spender, he/she should be keeping money aside to expand his/her vocation, so that anytime a customer needs something, it will be readily made available but if it happens that a customer asks for an item first, second and third time without getting it, surely, the person won't come back again. Also, if a workshop is not properly arranged or stocked with work tools, any customer that comes won't stay, believing that the person does not know anything.

Anybody trying to move towards mastery in his/her area of vocation should be able to possess the aforementioned qualities, and should not rely only on being versed in his/her area of specialization because they all go hand in hand. It is only

then people from far and near will be able to assess one as someone who has a mastery of his/her chosen vocation.

### **Conclusion**

No country has ascended to the level of a first rank economic power by excessive dependence on foreign languages and cultures. Japan rose to dazzling industrial heights by scientificating the Japanese language and making it the medium of Japan's industrialization (Isola 2010).

This paper therefore concludes that revitalization of Yoruba cultural heritage is needed in order for the artisans to be able to move towards mastery in their chosen fields. Yoruba has civilization before the missionaries came with western Education, there are various ways of teaching and learning in Yoruba land that is very vital to moving towards mastery in a world of opportunities that abounds everywhere if one is ready to. Self employment is one of the advocating policies of the government in the 21st century and this can only be achieved if some of our children can divert their attention to learning a vocation instead of looking for government jobs that is not in abundance. There are many graduates walking round the streets looking for white collar jobs that are not available. Several ways of using our cultural heritage in moving towards mastery have been discussed.

### **Recommendations**

For artisans, market women, farmers, medium scale enterprises (SMES) to move towards mastery in a world of opportunities in their chosen fields in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proffered:

- Government should include Yoruba cultural heritage education in the primary and secondary schools syllabus, so that the students will have the advantage of learning different vocations.
- Government should equip tertiary institutions that have department of Vocational Education to be effective so that when students graduate from there, they will become masters or employers on their own thereby depopulating labour market.
- Parents should try to encourage their children to learn one handwork or the other and they can be going for training after school instead of constituting nuisance in the neighbourhood or playing around.
- The rich and the educated in the society should stop looking down on the artisans because their impact in the society can not be quantified.

- The artisans should endeavour to advertise their vocation for proper patronage. This can be done technologically and traditionally. e.g. placing of advert in news papers, radio television, online, posters, handbills etc.
  
- Neatness is an added advantage because neatness attracts greatness and good customers.
  
- Lectures for farmers on mechanized or modern day farming by Governments or NGOS will surely help the farmers in moving towards diverse opportunities and make their work less strenuous ,it will also put more money into their pockets and give them job satisfaction, fulfillment and sense of belonging in this modern day of ours.

## References

- Abolarin, O. A. (2010) Yoruba Cultural Values and National Development. A Paper Presented at the National Conference at Federal College of Education, Pankshin, between 8th – 11th June, 2010.
- Abolarin O.A. (2017) " Sustainable Development in Africa and Innovation in Education: The Role of Yoruba Indigenous Knowledge" Ì. A Paper Presented at the 6th International Conference of World Educators forum, held at Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State. Nigeria between 13th – 17th November 2017.
- Adeyemi, A.A. (2010) Yoruba Numeral System in the New World. A Paper Presented at the 2010 Annual National Conference of Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria (YSAN) held at F.C.E Abeokuta between 5th – 9th October, 2010.
- Ajayi, A. (2005) African Culture and Civilization. Ibadan: Atlantis Books.
- Aremu, O. D. (2017) "Re-equipping Education Sector and Repositioning Academic Research for Accelerated and Innovative Sustainable. Development: Remedying Science, Social Science and Vocational Education" in Journal of International Journal for the Society of Common Wealth Scholars in Research and Sustainable Development. (JJSCWSRSD) .
- Gertrude, M.M. (2016) "Women and Education in Africa" in Journal of Women is development: Essays in Memory of Professor Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde. Ibadan: John Achers (Publishers) Limited .
- Hornby, A. S. (2001) Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 6th Edition. Britain; Oxford University Press.
- Isola, A. (2010) Making Culture Memorable. Ibadan: DB Mortoy Books.
- Omolasoye, O and Omolasoye, A (2015) "Ojo Iwaju Ede ati Asa Yoruba" in Ede, Asa ati Litereso Yoruba, a journal of Association of Yoruba Language Lecturers In Colleges Of Education In Nigeria (ASSYLLCEN) in honour of Oloye Diipo Gbenro and Alagba Funso Fatokun.
- Shukla, R. (2010) Dictionary of Education. New Delhi: A.P.H Pub. Co. .
- <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/mastery> retrieved on 15/03/2019.