

Urhobo Game Songs as Vehicles for Enhancing Adolescents' Health and Didactics

By

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Agatha Ijeoma Onwuekwe, Ph.D**Department of Music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka**07036470957, musikdon@gmail.com**Abstract**

This paper unearths some Urhobo aboriginal games and their accompanying songs, it discusses their educational and health values. Although indigenous games and the songs associated with them may be sometimes viewed as mere recreational activities carried out by children for recess and fun after work, beyond this, they are avenues for informal cultural learning, and essentially contribute to the participant's well-being. The study utilizes ethnographic method with interviews, observations and documented works (books, journals and the internet) as instruments for data collection. Findings reveal that games alongside their songs are avenues for fostering children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical and creative growths. Thus, they make outstanding contributions to children's lives. The study recommends the use of native folk games and songs in the formal education system as ways of their preservation with implications for educational and health benefits to the children.

Keyword: Urhobo, Aborigine, Game songs, Adolescents, Health, Didactics**Introduction**

Songs are sung on different occasions and serve various purposes. Common among the Urhobo of Delta State, Nigeria, are children game songs usually performed by adolescents on playgrounds to accompany games or sporting activities during recreation. Apart from making games interesting, they are vehicles through which ample amount of learning takes place and also significantly contribute to the general health of the performers.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing of an individual, not merely the absence of disease and infirmity" (WHO, 1948). This definition observes that health encompasses the physical, mental and social (emotional and spiritual inclusive) state of a person. Man is a social being that lives in a society, and as such, inseparable from the concept of

socialization. He socializes more with a body with which he shares common interests and affections with. As a social being, man communicates with others around him at different levels of socialization, which defines his social health. To this effect, Ajima and Ubana (2018) note that "health is a state of balance, an equilibrium that an individual has established within himself and his social and physical environment." Irrespective of one's personality type, one cannot live in isolation from the community he finds himself. Thus, social health is a measure of the level of engagement of an individual with respect to peaceful and friendly relationship with others in the society and showing interest in matters of concern to all. As it relates to physical fitness, knowledge acquisition and dissemination, games as well as the songs that go with them are very vital for an adolescent's well-being.

The Concept of Games

A game is a recreational and developmentally stimulating physical and social activity, set up to test the knowledge, cognitive alertness, mental and physical skills, as well as the agility of the player (s). It is also referred to as a creative rule-bound manifestation, wherein people exercise themselves or a sporting activity embarked on in order to enhance (or facilitate) physical fitness. To Spolin (1963: 352)), "game is an accepted group activity which is limited by rules and group agreement, fun, spontaneity, enthusiasm and joy." From Spolin's definition above, a game can be considered as some set of competitive activities with a body of guiding rules observed by at least two competing opponents. It could be for fun, leisure or reward. Most games are associated with a scoring system and a definite timing. Others operate on an elimination system where candidate-players are repeatedly knocked out until a single winner emerges. A few others are performed for performance sake without emergence of any winner.

Games could be performed formally or informally. For formal performance, there is usually a well- organized set-up with an appointed experienced and qualified referee officiating over the game, and whose duty is to ensure that rules and regulations guiding the games are strictly adhered to, and if on the contrary, penalizes defaulters. Scores are awarded to the parties involved and at the end of the game, the winner is declared or a tie is announced if eventually both parties end- up with equal scores. Games performed formally are usually done for professionalism and are equally reward-motivated. On the other hand, informally performed games require no formal set-up and the participants typically umpire the game themselves. They are majorly performed for leisure and recreational purposes, with or without the awarding of scores to the participating members.

Games have no particular age limit. Both the young and the old can engage in one form of games or the other. However, there are children's games and adult games as well as games for all age groups and genders from childhood to adulthood. For children, plays and games are not just recreational activities, but integral parts of living and a lifestyle too.

Values of Games

Games are important component of social life, or at least, simulate a real social setting as seen in computer games. They are potential avenues for harmonizing people of various cultural backgrounds, individuals of different personalities, religious affiliations, crafts and occupations, etc. Thus, games are powerful tools for local and global unity of the human population, as seen in the Olympics and traditional festivals. Beyond their social benefit for harmonious human co-existence, they also foster creativity and aesthetic appreciation. The participants are given ample opportunities to express their thoughts and ideas in games. Again, games provide occasions for children to organize, plan, discover problems, reason, create, explore, etc. This, in turn, contributes to the development of their imaginative thinking.

Furthermore, games promote motor development. They are active activities that involve running, jumping, throwing, kicking, catching, leaping, hopping, walking, skipping, etc. These activities provide the exercise and physical fitness needed to strengthen and coordinate the players' muscles and bodies and as such play vital roles in keeping the muscles and joints flexible as well as the mind active and decisive, thereby fostering physical and motor skill development.

Adolescents' games vary and are usually accompanied with songs. They cover a wide spectrum of activities, including "hide and seek", "action songs", "tongue twisters", "breathe control games", "riddles" and "puzzles", etc (Uyovbukerhi, 2005). The games and songs associated with them are designed for children's amusement and recreational purposes. They are performed and sung by them for fun, entertainment and instructions on the rules of games being performed. Game songs keep children lively and make their company pleasurable on the playground. They enable children to express their joyful emotions to the fullest by singing, dancing, body movements and expression of different gestures.

Educational and Health Invaluableness of Adolescents' Game songs

Aside making a game a fun, game songs serve the purpose of educating children about appropriate social manners, the human body, gender roles, the surrounding environment, animals and relationships (Onyerisara, 2011). In game experiences, children learn to be both leaders (instructing others on what to do) and followers (adhering to what they are

told to do). In elucidating this, Onyeji (2005:93) writes that “moonlight games, which involve music-making sometimes, centre on leadership roles, moral development, achievement, acumen, cultural education and the development of ideal social persons within the Igbo society.” Game songs enhance socialization among children, thus, fostering their social health. Through the songs, children who are quiet among them and those with low self- esteem are motivated to participate in the fun of the game and share in the spirit of comradeship, hence, boosting their self- confidence and improving their social health skills. In a way, this helps to promote their ability to better fit into the social structure of the society and also serves as motivating stimulant for enhancing socialization and joyous emotions among children.

Furthermore, game songs are not performed without exercises that involve movement of the body corresponding with the rhythm of the song as the game is on-going. Children engage themselves in clapping, singing, dancing, jumping and acrobatics which exercise body parts and keep them physically fit. This contributes to the concept of health as speculated by the World Health Organization (WHO).

In addition, the games performed alongside their accompanying songs have potentials for mental stimulation. Inherent in them is the ability to exit mental alertness in children, preparing them for prompt response to changes in a cognitive manner. Thus, children are stimulated for smarter functional mental health.

In schools, game songs are utilized as tools for achieving didactic objectives. This is very much seen in physical and health education classes, where pupils/students are carried along by their teachers to play grounds during such lesson periods. At these moments, children are given opportunity to play, relax, and strengthen their friendship. All these encourage positively emotional development as they interact with one another through songs. Furthermore, game songs aid in expanding children’s vocabulary by providing opportunities for them to use new words and concepts as they converse and sing with their peers.

Among other things, these concepts entail educational knowledge on different subject matters, instructional guidelines for good character build-up and other areas in which children may show keen interest. Hence, these songs serve didactic purposes for childhood development as well as offers children freedom of action. However, not all game songs are performed outside of the classroom setting. In a few cases, they may be intentionally performed within the four walls of the class to spice up classroom teaching, ease fatigue during learning and getting better attention from the learners.

Paradigms of Adolescent's Game Songs in Urhobo Land

In time past, as it was practice in most African communities, adolescent play or game songs in Urhobo communities were featured prominently during moonlight games. The games are always performed in groups and are sometimes designed according to age or gender. For example, while *Idje ekọ* (hand clap) games are for girls, *abọ emuo* (wrestling) and *Ibọrọ efa* (football) are for boys. There are also games for both genders. Examples are *kelekele* (hide and seek), *Asiabe* and *eta ẹwẹrẹ* (verbal exchange games). Uyovukerhi (2005:602) notes that games in Urhobo land take place either in the courtyard of the family homestead (for tender children from five to eight years) or in the main street of the village (for children aged from about nine to eighteen years". Samples of the games are as follow:

1. Eta ẹwẹrẹ - (Verbal Exchange Game)

The verbal exchange game is played in a circle. It serves as both a verbal and a vocabulary drill to test children's understanding and how quick they can reason and respond to statements by differentiating the 'haves' from the 'have nots. This game helps the children to gain mastery of simple nouns in terms of their characteristics. The leader or caller starts a song describing the features of certain objects or animals and the participants confirm the correctness of that description by either responding accordingly or alternatively remaining silent if the description is wrong.

Here are some examples as written below:

Eta Ewerc
(Verbal Exchange Game)

Urhobo Game Song

Call

O ve to O ve to O hwo ve to

Respond

O ve to O ve to O ve

7

cal.

A fio to ve to U di ve to O re re ve to

Resp.

to O ve to O ve to O ve

13

cal.

U se kpe ve to O ve'a kon O ve'a kon

Resp.

to O ve'a kon O ve'a

20

cal.

O no gbo'vea kon U zo ve'a kon O ho ve'a kon

Resp.

kon O ve'a kon O ve'a kon

- i. Use: Ọ vẹto! ọ vẹto!! Call: It has hair! It has hair!!
 Ekpahọ: Ọ vẹto Response: It has hair
 Use: Ohwo vẹto Call: The human has hair
 Ekpahọ: Ọ vẹto Response: It has hair
 Use: Afioto vẹ to Call: The Rabbit has hair
 Ekpahọ: Ọ vẹto Response: It has hair
 Use: Udi vẹto Call: The grass cutter has hair
 Ekpohọ: Ọ vẹto Response: It has hair
 Use: Orere vẹto Call: The hare has hair
 Ekpahọ: Ọvẹto Response: It has hair
 Use: Usekpe vẹto Call: The Snail has hair
 Ekpahọ: (Aye fore) Response: (Silence)
- ii. **Use: Ọ vẹ akon! Ọ vẹ akon!! Call: It has teeth! It has teeth!!**
 Ekpahọ; Ọ vẹ akon Response: It has teeth
 Use: Onogbo vẹ akon Call: The cat has teeth
 Ekpahọ: Ọ vẹ akon Response: It has teeth
 Use: Uzo vẹ akon Call: The antelope has teeth
 Ekpahọ: Ọ vẹ akon Response: It has teeth
 Use: Ọhọ vẹ akon Call: The hen has teeth
 Ekpahọ: (Aye fore) Response: (silence)

In this particular game, any child not alert enough to know that a hen has no teeth or a snail has no hair receives a friendly beaten from his peers for failing and is thereafter, expelled from the circle. This is done continual untill a winner emerges.

2. **Abọ emuo (Wrestling)**

This two player's game is exclusively for boys and male adults. The players wrestle with each other till one of them defeats the other. The verse below is an invitation game song accompanying two wrestlers. The singing spectators continue clapping ceaselessly to inspire them. This they do sometimes with drumming. The defeated one is considered banana soft hands. The song discourages laziness but encourages hard work and diligence among children. The winner emerges by falling his opponent down.

Dadamu
(Praying Mantis)

Urhobo Game Song

Uneohwɔvosua: Dadamu mi muabɔ nonɛ
 Ekuɔ: Aughe
 Uneohwɔvosua: Dadamu mi muabɔ nonɛ
 Ekuɔ : Aughe
 Uneohwɔvosua: Ọ ri mi mu ru me vwerɔ
 ghwiɛ otɔ
 Ekuɔ: Aughe
 Uneohwɔvosua: Mi muɛ re
 Ekuɔ: Aughe
 Ayeje: Abo vworovworo kerɛ odibo, dibo

Solo: Praying mantis I’m wrestling today
 Chorus: Oh look!
 Solo: Praying mantis I’m wrestling today
 Chorus: Oh look!
 Solo: The one I get hold of, I’ll fall on the ground
 Chorus: Oh look!
 Solo: I’m wrestling now
 Chorus: Oh look!
 All: with hands soft as the banana

3. Asiabe, asiabe (Guiltless or guilty)

The *asiabe* game in some communities in Urhobo land is known as *mamako*. Before the game progresses, children participants sit down and stretch out their legs in an arc or straight line shape. Then at a point, the leader emerges to sing the song below while touching the legs of the children in consonance with the rhythm of the song. The leg that the song ends with is usually folded. Any participant who has his/her two legs folded is expelled from the game. This

continues until the last participant to stand up is declared the winner. This game fosters unity of purpose and encourages team work among children.

Asiabe, asiabe
(Guiltless or guilty)

Urhobo Game Song

A-sia-be a-sia-be eh e - uno -rhe A-sia-be a-sia-be eh e - mua - ro

o-re si-ri gbu'rhu kpe o -ru mue-mu fu-rhu ro kpa-sia ra kp'o-yo-bo obo ra vwu-nu

cho-r'o - bo Ge - ge to - na to - na o - vwa rhie ge

ko - ri - ko di di a - gba-muo - to aba ye - gh'o - wo

Asiabe, asiabe

Asiabe asiabe eh unorhe
Ore siri gbu'rhu kpe
Oru muemu furhu ro
Kpasia ra kp'oyibo
Obo ra vwunu chor'obo
Gege tona tona ovwa rhie ge
Koriko didi agbamuoto
Gba yegh' owo

(Guiltless or guilty)

Guiltless or guilty victory is sure,
The good one lits a lamp,
The evil one quenches it.
Kpasiara travelled out of the country,
To learn how to build a hut
You or you, take a knock
stick to the ground
fold your leg

4. Ibọrọ (Football)

Ibọrọ is a recreational game performed by children in Urhobo land for entertainment, pleasure and relaxation. This game keeps the participants physically fit thereby improving their health. The game song connotes the pangs (*anegbe*) associated with the football game. Each of the teams is anxious to emerge as the winner and this provokes anxiety both to them and their spectators. The eventful day fills both players and their fans with *anegbe* (pangs). The spectators' song during the game encourages high morale amongst the

players. The song teaches children life challenges and risk taking. As such, they should be resolutely brave to confront and overcome them for a successful life.

Iboro
(Football)

Urhobo Game Song

The musical score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of five systems, each with a Solo line and a Chorus line. The lyrics are in Igbo. The Solo line starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The Chorus line starts with a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: E - de e - mo na che - fa' i - bo ro E - de e - mo na che - fe' i - bo - ro a - ne - gbe. The Solo line continues with: ro U - tu _ r'ou - ghe si' - ge - de fia I - ti - sha ta - yen a - ne - gbe a - ne - gbe. The Solo line continues with: chu - ru' am wa fia i - ni r' e - mo - na chu - ru' am - wa fia a - ne - gbe a - ne - gbe. The Solo line continues with: Ee _ ó - na' i - won - da Ee _ ó - na' i - won - da a - ne - gbe. The Solo line ends with: da Ee _ ó - na' i - won - da a - ne - gbe a - ne - gbe.

Uneohwovosua: Ede emo na cha fa Iboro

Ekwo: Anege 2x

Uneohwovosua: Utu r'nughe si igede fia

Ekwo: Anege

Uneohwovosua: Itisha rayen churu amwa fia

Ekwo: Anege

Uneohwovosua: Ini r'emona churu amwa fia

Ekwo: Anege

Uneohwovosua: Ee ona iwonda

Ekwo: Anege

Uneohwovosua: Ee ona iwonda

Ekwo: Anege

Solo: The day the children will play ball

Chorus: Pang

Solo: The spectators prepared their drums

Chorus: Pang

Solo: Their teacher dress tight

Chorus: pang

Solo: Their mothers dress tight

Chorus: Pang

Solo: Hey! This is a wonder

Chorus: Pang

Solo: Hey! This is wonderful

Chorus: Pang

5. Kele! Kele!! (Hide and seek)

Kele kele is usually performed during moonlight.(oke re emeranvwe de no). The children participants in this game draw a circle representing the place of safety. The game begins with the caller echoing "kele kele" within the circle while the children outside responds 'kele'. (An Onomatopoeia used during the game). Thereafter, the caller gives a signal to alert others that he is emerging to catch any of them. At this point, children outside the circle start running into the circle to avoid been caught because the victim ends up repeating the process of catching someone else. When someone is caught, the game that started quietly becomes noisy with gamboling in excitement of joy for having caught one's target successor. This game teaches vigilance, commitment to duty, determination for success and perseverance in walks of life.

Another form of the hide and seek game is known as "use" meaning "the call" in which the catcher who makes the call is blind- folded while the responsorial participants go into hiding. Soon after that, the catcher (blind-folded) goes for their search after echoing "use" - ---- and all others (from their respective hiding places) respond u.... This indicates that they are already in their hiding places for the game to commence properly. As the catcher begins his search, these children already hiding start running into the circle to avoid being caught. Any child caught during this process becomes the catcher and the game continues in this manner. If in the long run, he/she is unable to catch any child, he/she repeats the process again until he/she is able to catch someone. Below is the song associated with the play game:

Kele Kele
(Hide and Seek Game)

Urhobo Game Song

The musical score is written in 8/8 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). It consists of five systems, each with a 'Call' line and a 'Response' line. The lyrics are as follows:

- System 1:** Call: Ke-le Ke - le Ke-le Ke - le le Ro'u-gba; Response: (Instrumental accompaniment)
- System 2:** Call: Ke - le Ke - le ro'u E-de ko - vo mi cha re; Response: (Instrumental accompaniment)
- System 3:** Call: Ke - le Ke - le Ke - le Ke-ke Ke - le Ke-ke Ke - le; Response: (Instrumental accompaniment)
- System 4:** Call: le Ke - le Ke - le le Ro'u-gba ro'u E - de ko - ; Response: (Instrumental accompaniment)
- System 5:** Call: le Ke - le vo mi cha re; Response: (Instrumental accompaniment)

Use:	Kele! Kele!!	Call:	Kele! Kele!!
Ekpahọ:	Kele!	Response:	Kele!
Use:	Ro Ugba! Ro Ugba!	Call:	Enter the circle, enter the circle
Ekpahọ:	Ro Ugba	Response:	Enter the circle
Use:	Ede ko vu	Call:	Today is today
Ekpahọ:	Kele!	Response:	Kele!
Use:	Me cha re o	Call:	I am coming now
Ekpahọ:	Kele!	Response:	Kele!

Conclusion

This paper discusses a number of indigenous games and songs of the Urhobo and their impacts on the total development of children. This includes: providing a base for language development, furthering interest and concentration, fostering good health, physical stamina and avenues for teaching values, morales and life skills to the participants, etc. Inherent in them as the children's creativity is the ability to exit mental alertness. Besides, concepts, precepts and memory are challenged, thereby promoting significant mental skills. Indeed, games and the songs associated with them are very valuable and can be academically structured to facilitate learning outcome.

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