



## Appraising the Training of Traditional Drummers in Aloyinlapa African Drumming Institute, Lagos State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*This study evaluates the training of traditional Yoruba drummers in metropolitan areas, focusing on the Alóyínlápá African Drumming Institute in Lagos. In traditional Yoruba society, the traditional drummers were trained in rural areas within the family circle of Àyàn, known as the practitioners. This tradition has led to a significant setback for non-Àyàn to participate in Traditional Yoruba Drumming practices. This study examines the teaching and learning methods of Yoruba traditional drumming practices in urban spaces. This study argues that established traditional drum training centres in urban areas have yet to be addressed, despite their relevance to the sustainability of the Yoruba traditional drumming system in contemporary Yoruba society. The study relies on data from traditional drum training centres using ethnographic techniques. Findings revealed that training people on how to play traditional drums, such as the Bàtá and Dùndún ensembles, usually carried out in the village, has found its way to an urban centre, making it more accessible to the general public. Therefore, tertiary institutions should embrace this initiative and create centres for traditional knowledge systems whereby traditional instruments are taught to preserve Yoruba cultural heritage for future generations..*

**Keywords** Ayan, Traditional, Drummer, Drumming practices, Practitioner

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### AUTHORS' BIO



POPOOLA, Temitope, obtained his NCE certificate in Music from Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education Oto/Ijanikin where he studied Music Double Major and graduated in 2006. He proceeded to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State where he obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree in Music and graduated in 2010 and later obtained his Master of Arts in Music Ethnomusicology in 2016 at the University of Lagos, Akoka Lagos. He is currently running his PhD program at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, River State. His research interest is in Ethnomusicology, African Studies, and the sustainability of Yoruba culture through the training of traditional drummers in urban centres. He is a member of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists (ANIM), the Society of Music Educators in Nigeria (SOMEN), the Guild of Organists in Nigeria (GON), and the International Council of Traditional Music and Dance (ICTM). He is an Assistant Lecturer at the Department of Music, Lagos State University of Education Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos State.

Traditional drumming practices are crucial indigenous knowledge in Yoruba land. They are predominantly practiced in rural areas by the *Àyàn* family members, posited as the practitioners and custodians of traditional drums for a long time. Many scholarly works attest to the claim that the descendant of *Àyanàgálú*, the progenitor of the drum, inherited the art of traditional drumming practices from their ancestor. Euba in Omojola (2010) affirms that *Àyanàgálú* is regarded as the deity spirit of the drum and a guardian spirit for all drummers. In light of this, traditional drummers adopted the prefix " *Àyàn* " as a sign of homage to the spirit of *Àyanàgálú*, which qualifies them as the practitioners and custodians of traditional drums among the Yoruba people. In a cultural context, the *Àyàn* family lineage is the only legitimate practitioner of traditional drums, and the training is made accessible to them from childhood through adulthood as they master the art of drumming. Agu (1990) and Okechukwu (2020) infer that the traditional system established in Africa allows for musical arts training right from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Moreover, Idamoyinbo (2019) and Olaniyan (2001) attest that *dùndún* musicians start to teach their male children the art of drumming at a very tender age. Once a child starts to walk, he joins his father and elder relatives for performances; this is called the period of observation, and after this, he starts to learn by imitation. Adults, youths, and children are involved in the training and performance activities at *Alóyinlápá African Drumming Institute*, which reflects the identity and cultural heritage of the Yoruba people. It teaches its traditional norms and values to all the participants to foster their understanding and appreciation of Yoruba culture. Durojaye (2019) states that "learning of *Dùndún* in indigenous Yoruba communities is not done in a rigidly fixed venue or specific days for learning" (p.13). Also, Euba (1990) explains the nature and methods of training *Dùndún* musicians in Africa and notes that;

The training of the *Dùndún* artist begins as early as the age of five or as soon as he can understand what drumming is all about. The first instrument he is given to play is the *Kànàngó*, which he uses as a toy. The *kànàngó*, being the smallest of the hourglass drums, is, of course, suited to the stature of the young player. After toying with the *kànàngó*, proper training begins with the *gúdúgúdú*. From the *Gúdúgúdú*, the pupils turn to *isáájú*, *ikéhìn*, and *kerikeri* (p.104).

On the other hand, Ogli (2002) opines that music training for the *Dùndún* ensemble is often through apprenticeship. The trainee must follow the laid-down (oral) syllabus of gradual progression from one drum to

the next, depending on appreciable mastery (p.35). In contemporary Yoruba society, traditional drummers now receive training through an apprenticeship in a more modern arena within specific days and time, as it allows non-members of the *Àyàn* family lineage to participate in the learning. This is evident in Lagos, as *Alóyinlápá Africa Drumming Institute* trains people, regardless of their backgrounds, on the art of drumming *Dùndún* and *Bàtá* ensemble in a more conducive environment for social and economic purposes, thereby preserving and sustaining the Yoruba cultural heritage in the urban centre.

Samuel (2014) asserts that drummers who do not belong to the *Àyàn* lineage but venture into the profession are referred to as " *Àyántojúbò* " (interlopers). They are deemed as unlicensed practitioners. Samuel's submission aligns with Yoruba myths regarding traditional drumming practices, describing the long-standing practice of the *Àyàn* as practitioners and non-members as interlopers. However, the training of traditional drummers, which is usually done in the village among the *Àyàn* family lineage, has found its way to the urban space of Lagos through the migration of most traditional drummers who moved from the rural area to the urban centre in search of greener pastures. Given this, non- *Àyàn* have challenged the long-standing Yoruba ideology and ventured into the art of drumming, construction, and production of drums in the urban centre. Ibude (2013) affirms that African traditional musicians are beginning to pursue other professions that could sustain them as a source of income. Supporting this assertion, *Alóyinlápá African Drumming Institute* came into existence due to the migration of Mr. Akeem *Àyàntúnjì Alóyinlápá*, from Oyo State to Lagos State in search of greener pastures. Traditional drummers migrated to the urban area for social and economic purposes, as the training of traditional drummers and other cultural activities have found their way to cities like Lagos, contributing to the preservation and sustainability of Yoruba drumming practices. *Alóyinlápá African Drumming Institute* is rooted in the community, and the training on the art of drumming, construction, and production of African drums, along with the performance of African music, made it unique and identifiable. The institute sustains age-long traditional Yoruba drumming practices in the urban centres, especially among young people.

#### Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theory of " musical change " propounded by Roberts (1925), Kolinski (1936), and Herskovits (1948). There is a continual emphasis on the idea of a musical system that moves and changes regardless of the individual diversity of its parts. Ibude (2013) used the theory of music in culture and musical

change to analyse Kalabari funeral rites music. The main concern of this theory is the continuity of culture in the presence of attending modifications that happen to it daily. This theory becomes relevant as a premise to gain new insights into the continuity and the change in the training procedure of Yoruba traditional drummers in the urban area. This theory is germane as *Alóyinlápá* Drumming Institute in Lagos continues the training of traditional drums in the cities of Lagos with changes that occur in the training procedure, methods of training, and the emergence of training centres which facilitated the involvement of non-practitioners in the art of drumming, compared to the time past. On the other hand, the continuity in using traditional drums such as *Gáangan* ensemble, *Bátá* ensemble, *Sákàrà*, *Àkúbà* and other traditional drums are prominent now in urban space as the establishment of the training centre, where the cultural heritage of Yoruba drumming practices has been sustained.

#### **Recruitment of Members**

Members were being recruited through registration. This is the process in which the participant picks up a registration form with five thousand naira. The training starts as soon as the participant fulfils other requirements, which involves payment for the training. The training, according to Mr Akeem Àyàntúnjì, is in two sessions: the theory session and the practical session. The first segment is called the theory class, while the second is the practical class. In the theory class, one of the participants, Miss Dúrójà Hannah Èbùnlúwa, explained that each participant was expected to purchase their traditional drum, which would be used during training. She added that the theory class encompasses the ability to play traditional drums and lead in the ensemble. In contrast, the practical class includes the ability to repair and construct new traditional drums like *Gáangan*, *Ìyá Ilù*, *Bátá*, *Omele Bátá*, *Kúdì*, *Sákàrà* and *Àkúbà*. Training is held every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, weekly, from 4 pm to 6 pm in Nigeria. Mr Akeem Àyàntúnjì added that participants can register for the two sessions depending on their financial capability. The theory and practical class attract the sum of a hundred thousand naira only for six months, negotiable, with participants given the privilege to pay in instalments. He added that the participants only need educational qualifications if they are interested, ready, and physically and mentally stable. Master Akinwunmi Obaloluwa, a 13-year-old teenager, states that his interest in attending the school is to become educated. Still, his greatest priority in attending *Alóyinlápá* African Drumming Institute is to be proficient in traditional drum instruments, which he believes can later be helpful for him in the future.

#### **Training Procedure**

The art of Drumming is a skill developed over a lifetime among the Yoruba people, who see it as a family affair. In *Alóyinlápá* African Drumming Institute, every training session starts with an introduction to the art of drumming, which involves the brief history of the drum, learning the part of the drum, the language of the drum, and the wisdom behind the tone shift. The training is done orally in an open environment. Firstly, the participants are taught to play *Sèkèrè* (Maracas) and *Agogo* (Gong), to help them learn how to keep a steady rhythm, which can take days, depending on the participant's ability. After this process, participants are introduced to a simple rhythm on their choice of drums using the drum's tone to pitch the sound *doh*, *reh*, and *mi*. Mr. Akeem Alóyinlápá explains that this can be achieved through the drumheads connected by leather tension cords, which allow the player to change the pitch of the drum by scraping the cords between their arm and body.

One of the participants Miss Dúrójà Hannah Èbùnlúwa who has spent a year at the institute narrated her experience and also expressed her gratitude to the institute for providing this unique opportunity to learn how to play the traditional drums of her choice. She explained that her interest in learning *Bátá* drums, started when she was seven years old. Unfortunately, there was no place to learn until she came across the *Alóyinlápá* African Drumming Institute. Having spent one year at the institute, apart from playing the *Bátá* drum, she has learned to play other drums, such as the *Gáangan*, and repair and construct a new drum. Similarly, Miss Deborah Olabunmi Shobo also shared his experience. She explained how she started the training 2years ago at *Alóyinlápá* Africa Drumming Institute; now, everybody calls her *Àyàn*, which makes her famous in school and her environment. She further explained that she was the first to learn traditional drums in her family because she did not come from *Àyàn* family lineage. Still, everybody calls her *Àyàn* because she plays *Gáangan* and *Bátá* drums. She narrated the training procedure, which she first started with *Sèkèrè*, after which she was introduced to *Omele Dùndún*, which helped her to keep a steady rhythm. The participants were primarily teenagers and youths between the ages of 13 years and above. Participants are both male and female. The institute also offers online, on-site, home, and school training.

**Figure 1:**  
Dúrójà Hannah Èbùnolúwa displaying her skills on the Bâtá drum



Source: Researcher (2023)



Source: Researcher (2023)

**Figure 2:**  
School Student participants receive training after school hours.



Source: Researcher (2023)

**Figure 3:**  
Akinwunmi Obaloluwa displaying his skills during training with Alóyinlápá

**Children participants receiving training (Figure 4)**



**Figure: 5**  
Female participants receiving training with Alóyinlápá



**Some of the instruments used for the training**

African musical instruments are locally made from soil, animal skin, wood, and metals. These instruments belong to the Aerophone, Idiophone, Membranophone, and Chordopone families from the four divisions on Curt Sach and Eric Hornbostel's (1933) classification of African musical instruments.

**Figure 6**



**Gangan**

**Figure 8:**



**Sèkèrè Ájé**

**Figure 7:**



**Àkúbà**

**Figure 9:**



**Ìyá Ìlù Dùndún**

**Figure 10:**



**Clave**

**Figure 12**



**Omele Bata**

**Figure 11**



**Sèkèrè Ájé**

**Figure 13:**



**Gúdúgúdú Drum**

**Figure 14**

### Bàtá Koto

#### The Life of Akeem Atanda Ayantunji Aloyinlapa

Akeem Atanda Ayantunji Alóyinlápá, is the founder of Alóyinlápá, African Drumming Institute in Lagos. He was born in Oyo Ile, Tapa, in Old Oyo Empire, Nigeria, in 1978 to the family of Mr and Mrs Shittu Ádió Áyánléye Alóyinlápá., a well-known traditional drummer, who was the Are Ilu of all traditional drummers in southwest Nigeria between the year 1997-2019. Alóyinlápá, was given to his forefather, a well-known traditional drummer who played for many musicians and artists during his lifetime, including the famous musician and artist the late Herbert Ogunde. Alóyinlápá, connotes a sweet sound from his arm (A-LO-YIN-LA-PA – one who has honey in his arms). Akeem Ayantunji Alóyinlápá, attended Ilado Baptist Primary School, Iseyin, Oyo State between 1988 to 1994. He also proceeded to Muslim Secondary Grammar School, Iseyin, Oyo State from 1995 to 2000. After his Secondary school Education, Mr Akeem Alóyinlápá, migrated to Lagos from a rural area for a better quality of life and improved social and economic prospects. His father, who had worked in various musical bands and tours with musicians to many Southwest States, including Lagos State, encouraged him to relocate to the city for a more profitable career, Unfortunately, he could not get a better job than expected because of his low academic qualifications. Therefore, he worked as a commercial bus conductor, dry cleaner, and bakery attendant for many years, but he was unsatisfied and fulfilled; this prompted him to return to the village and get his Bàtá drum and Dùndún drum to Lagos. His first engagement as a drummer in Lagos, his love for Yoruba

culture and tradition, and the money he realized made him think of starting a business of repairing and training people on how to drum. He started the Alóyinlápá, Drumming Institute in October 1996 in Agege, Lagos, which became an avenue to sustain Yoruba culture; he observed that many of those who left as drummers had abandoned the profession and pursued another form of business. He also shows concern for some traditional drums that have been abandoned because people are no longer playing them; one of the instruments is the Gúdúgúdú drum. Mr. Akeem Alóyinlápá, is a member of the Association of Professional Drummers of Nigeria, (APDON) Lagos Chapter, and served as Secretary to the association. Also, a member of the Bàtá Dùndún Drummers Association of Lagos.



#### Mr. Akeem Ayantunji Aloyinlapa

Source: Researcher (2023)

### CONCLUSION

The art of drumming is a skill that has developed over a lifetime among the Yoruba people. Teaching and learning take place through observation, imitation, and participation. To learn African musical instruments requires processes and procedures, which involve observing the master drummer, imitating him when he plays, and practicing for mastering. It is a general belief

that whosoever can observe diligently will always be able to replicate well. The Alóyínlápá African Drumming Institute participants learn by observing their instructors, imitating them as they play, and participating in musical performances to showcase their skills. There is a change in traditional drummers' training methods among the Yoruba people in southwest Nigeria. The established training centres, such as the Alóyínlápá, African Drumming Institute, introduced different procedures and processes for teaching and learning traditional drums, which had not been in place. In the traditional Yoruba Society, there were no registration fees, no form to be sold, and no certificate given at the end of the training until recently. The training of drummers continues as changes occur in the procedures and methods used to attract people and sustain and preserve the Yoruba culture. Participants purchase application forms before they can enrol in the training. The institute comprises teenagers, Youths, and Adults, male and female, from the age range of 6 years to 65 years. The Alóyínlápá, African Drumming Institute was established to fill the gap and train the younger generation living in the urban centre on the art of drumming, construction, and production of traditional drums for posterity's sake.

#### **Recommendation**

Based on the study carried out, the following recommendations are made:

1. Drumming and traditional music should be encouraged in the communities, as it helps their cognitive thinking and affects their social life by acquiring skills and providing job opportunities in vocational careers.
2. Public and private individuals should support the practice, promotion, and preservation of Yoruba Culture through this medium.
3. Public and private organizations should support using traditional drums during office ceremonies to ensure the continuity and sustainability of Yoruba culture.
4. The public and private organizations should support Alóyínlápá, Drumming Institute by providing a bigger venue for the training.
5. Public and private institutions and primary and secondary schools should encourage using traditional drums in schools.



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## Informants

Mr. Akeem Àyàntúnjì Alóyinlápá, was interviewed at the *Institute*. No. 33 Sura Ogunmakin Street, Agege, Lagos State. 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023. 2:03 pm.

Miss Dúrójà Hannah Èbùnolúwa was interviewed during the rehearsal at the *Aloyinlapa African Drumming Institute*. No. 33, Sura Ogunmakin Street, Agege, Lagos State. 12<sup>th</sup> November 2023. 4:50 pm.

Miss Deborah Olabunmi Shobo was interviewed during the rehearsal at the *Aloyinlapa African Drumming Institute*. No. 33, Sura Ogunmakin Street, Agege, Lagos State. 12<sup>th</sup> November 2023. 5:30 pm.

**Appendix**



**Researcher with Mr. Akeem Aloyinlapa, Instructors, and the Participants**



**Researcher and Miss Deborah, one of the trainees**



**Researcher with Mr. Ayantunji Aloyinlapa**