



Indigenous Language as Tool for Mending the Moral Fabric of Nigerians

Adenuga F. Titilola^{*}

Ola Mabekoje[†]

Adebukola Olu-Daniels[‡]

Abstract

Morals can be viewed as the norms and values of a society mostly observed by the standards of behaviour; principles of right and wrong which vary from culture to culture, group to group and society to society. Religion to some extent has an important place in people's definitions of right and wrong and in applying this to their lives. In recent times the trend of peoples' deviation from these moral values especially in the South-western Nigeria Yoruba in particular is becoming so rampant and alarming to the cultural development of the communities. The most worrisome acts among others are; indiscriminating killings of innocent people through kidnapping, child abuse, hired assassination etc. To a remarkable extent, one may conclude that morals in the Yoruba axis of Nigeria have been eroded and the moral fabric has been torn to pieces. The mostly tagged well-cultured Yoruba people now walk naked in public. This study therefore examined the concept of indigenous and its usage from the following perspectives; education, social, economic, and religious as it affects the moral upbringing of youths in the society. The study, however, adopted a correlational research design. Data was collected using a self-designed questionnaire from three hundred (300) students of secondary schools in Ogun state with equal representation of genders. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of samples were not aware of the moral implications of what they are doing, and also highlighted the gender, significant difference whereas differences were seen in educational background and home background differences on moral obligation but not at significant level.

Keywords: *Indigenous Language, Tools, Youths, Mending, Moral Fabric.*

^{*}English Studies Department, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun. Email: titilayoadenuga@yahoo.com

[†]English Studies Department, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun. Email: oluomomabekoje@gmail.com

[‡]Ogun State College of Health Technology, Ilese. Email: oludanielsbukonla75@gmail.com

Introduction

Language is a means of communication that is very crucial to human existence i.e. no language no human. Indeed, humans make use of language to interact with one another and the world around them. Language is the anchor to which the acquisition of knowledge and information is ensured. Language is the vehicle with which knowledge is transferred. Adekola (2005) views language “as a phenomenon that defines man’s humanity and enables him to survive”. While Awoyale cited by Osoba, Adenuga and Osoba, (2006) observed it as the cement that holds the curriculum together that all forms of education and learning are not possible without language. Language is a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols employing which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture express themselves. The functions of language include communication, passing information/instructions, expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release. Language is used in all phases of human life (home, workplace, religious arena, political gatherings etc.).

Human comes in contact with language either through acquisition or learning. Language is termed acquired when one comes in contact with a language without engaging in any formal education. This kind of language sometimes can be tagged: as the source, first or indigenous language; it might be the language of one’s parents, relatives or society. Studies revealed the existence of more than four hundred and fifty indigenous languages in Nigeria, this is an indication that Nigeria is a multi Lingual nation and the same time a multicultural country with three National languages - Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa.

Morals on the other hand are defined as an acceptable way of behaving in a community. It is therefore believed that anyone who is morally inclined behaves in a way that is right, proper or acceptable to others. The slogans “Do unto people what you want them to do unto you” shed more light on these attributes of morals. Religion is one of the agencies that lay emphasis mostly on morals. Religion is “a system of beliefs and rules which frequently guides human behaviours to his fellow human and all other living creatures. This supports the submissions of scholars on principles of morals (Bloom, 2012; Broom, 2003; Eren, 2007; McKay & Whitehouse, 2015) According to Bloom (2012), religious teachings emphasize moral rules. These teachings can develop feelings such as empathy and love among people, as well as cause prejudice and intolerance against those who do not have a similar mindset.

Broom (2003, p.1-4) defined morality as “a value pertaining to right rather than wrong”. ‘Immoral’ on the other hand is usually understood to be the opposite of moral, meaning the unacceptable way of behaviour among people that constitute a society. In general terms, morality can be referred to as what societies sanction as being right and acceptable behaviour in society. Morality often requires that people sacrifice their short-term interests for the benefit of society. Kılıç (2012) described ‘morality’ as temperament, character, or manners, which expresses the established character structure in humans and the behaviours of individuals that occur under their own will. While Özlem (2004) also views it as "the group or network of beliefs, values, norms, orders, prohibitions, and designs which are involved in the life of a person, group, people, social class, nation, or cultural environment in a certain

historical period and which guide their actions". On the contrary, people or entities that are indifferent to rights and wrongdoings are considered amoral, while those who do evil acts are considered immoral. So, morals are the principles that guide individual conduct within society. Morals may change over time, but they remain the standards of behaviour that we use to judge right and wrong. Darwall (2006) view morality as flowing from a version of a general schema and yielding claims about justifiability to others. Darwall claims that morality is a matter of equal accountability among free and rational beings.

The word 'moral' is synonymously or interchangeably used as an ethic, rule or law whereas the word can be used in different senses. For example, Wallace and Walker pointed out that sometimes 'moral' is a term of approval and is opposed to 'immoral' or 'morally wrong'. Philosophers like William K. Frankena also pointed out that the terms 'moral' and 'ethical' are often used as equivalent to 'right' or 'good' and as opposed to 'immoral' and 'unethical'. At times 'moral' is a classificatory term and has its contradictory to non-moral, but again even as a classificatory term moral occurs in a wide range of contexts, for example, that of an individual's moral principles, moral views, moral convictions which may be distinguished from his religious principles, views, convictions.

Language and morals are inseparable entities; language is the vehicle for morals transmissions. In other words, morality is a concept that is embedded in language as principles/ standards of behaviour following the rules and regulations or norms and values of a given society or profession i.e. the ethos or the ethics that stipulate the dos and don'ts of individuals in a community. Nigeria is a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic nation which of course has made it a cultural nation as well. The six largest ethnic groups are the Hausa and Fulani in the north, the Igbo in the southeast, the Yoruba predominate in the southwest, the Tiv people of North Central Nigeria and the Efik - Ibibio. In Nigeria however, there are three major ethnic groups, namely, Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo but this study only focuses on the Yoruba language and its moral and cultural doctrines.

Statement of the Problem

The importance and use of language especially indigenous language among indigents cannot be overemphasized in any meaningful society. The use of the indigenous language (Yoruba) amongst its indigents is presently fading away forgetting that useful and permanent information is better passed through indigenous language. This is because messages passed in indigenous languages go to the root of the understanding of the receiver. The moral that is mostly preached by religious leaders is not done in the language people understand. The issues on behaviours and instructions are not given in the language people are not well rooted due to civilization. Therefore, one may say that in recent times due to civilization people no long live in harmony fear of the unknown looms around citizens of Yoruba land. Reports of all sorts of immoral and uncultured acts like killings, raping and kidnapping etc now pervade Nigeria and the Yoruba community in particular. People no longer have respect for the dignity of labour, violation of law and order now becomes the order of the day and it now looks as if the Yoruba-speaking people have gotten it wrong somewhere. To a remarkable extent, one may conclude that the land is morally sick and its fabric has seriously tattered.

Having seen the moral fabric of people in Yoruba land dragged into the mud informed this study to establish the need to ameliorate some of the moral lapses observed among the youths in Yoruba land and to observe the relationships between the language (Yoruba language) and the moral upbringing of its indigents.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates students' upbringing and understanding of morals in Nigeria especially in Yoruba land. It also investigates the language that youths mostly used and what informed the usage.

Significance of the Study

The study allowed both culturally endowed and non-culturally endowed people in the Yoruba society to see the need to educate, protect and exhibit some moral attributes in the presence of the upcoming generation. The coming generations also stand to gain from this study as they will also see the need to embrace the norms and values to be relevant or fit into society.

Research Hypotheses

Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between morals and the gender of students.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between morals and students' home backgrounds.

Ho₃ There is no significant relationship between morals and students' class.

Methodology and Procedures

Design: This study used a correlational research design to compare the two genders on morality among the samples.

Sample: Using the simple random sampling technique, participants for the study comprised 300 youths, Age falls between 18 and 25 years with a mean age of 20.04 years and a standard deviation of 2.18, and equal representation of males (160) and females (150) were randomly drawn from the five public senior secondary schools in Ogun state, Nigeria. The socioeconomic backgrounds (high and low socioeconomic backgrounds) were recorded for in-depth study on their morality.

Population: The population for this study comprised three hundred (300) senior secondary students from five (5) public schools in Ijebu Ode, Ogun state.

Research Instrument: A self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection to evaluate the moral fabric of the samples, developed and validated by the researchers for the present study

Results

The raw data collected from the samples were analyzed using SPSS version 17 to meet the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics were used to demonstrate the responses of the sample on moral behaviour, and the independent sample t-test was calculated to test the null hypotheses postulated for the study.

Table 1 revealed that the majority of the respondents showed a poor perception of Human feelings; the majority of them don't help their siblings at home not to even talk of having feelings for sick people around them. The rate of killings and kidnappings in our country is not their business. Most of the respondents are self-centred; they do not care about the welfare of the people around them.

Table 1: Showing the percentage of good and poor responses of the samples on moral behaviour.

S/N Perception	Good (%)	Poor (%)
1. Human feelings	206 (34.38)	394 (65.62)
2. Understanding the concept of Moral	525 (87.5)	75 (12.5)
3. Speaking in Yoruba	150(25)	450 (75)
4. Frequent language used in conversation	356 (59,38)	244 (40.62)
5. Moral inclination	112(18.75)	488 (82.25)
6. Compelled to use a language	206 (34.38)	394 (65.62)
7. Easy Acquisition of norms and values	450 (75)	150 (25)
8. Societal influence on language frequently used	75 (12.5)	525 (87.5)

Table 2: Showing the significant gender difference (independent t-test) on Morals among the samples.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Degree of freedom	t-test	Sig.
Male students	150	28.74	3.61	598	1.471	0.214
Female students	150	27.44	3.28			

N = Number of participants; SD = Standard Deviation

Results (Table 2) revealed no significant gender difference in students' perception of moral behaviour (M=28.74; t = 1.471; p> 0.05), male students scored higher than female students.

Table 3: Showing significant differences between high and low socioeconomic backgrounds on Morals

Group	N	Mean	SD	Degree of freedom	t-test	Sig.
High socio-economic Students	185	27.15	2.71	598	1.153	0.023
Low socioeconomic students	115	21.42	3.64			

Results in Table 3 revealed a significant difference between the high (M=27.15) and low socio-economic (M=21.42) background of students in morals (t = 1.153; p > 0.05) with significance at a .05 level which can be explained as the Students' moral is dependent on their socioeconomic background.

Results in Table 4 revealed the difference between the Arts (M=29.12) and Sciences (M=19.45) streams of students on morality as Arts students scored higher than science stream

students. not at a significant level which can be interpreted as moral behaviour not dependent on their class of study. One may think that students in arts class should exhibit and understand what moral behaviour entails but the reverse is the case with this study.

Table 4: Showing the significant difference between Arts and Science students in Morals

Group	N	Mean	SD	Degree of freedom	t-test	Sig.
Arts Students	200	29.12	2.74	598	1.161	0.125
Science Student	100	19.45	3.61			

Discussion and Submission of Findings

The importance of Language in human existence cannot be underestimated especially when it comes to giving instructions. Language is a means of communication that is better understood when it is used appropriately. It is not a gainsaying therefore that communicating in the language one understands and is familiar with will make an effective communication. Therefore morals as ore in any society or nation, youths are known to be leaders of tomorrow. It is, therefore, necessary that elders that are morally groomed impact these youths with the necessary moral values that allowed them to fit into society. Religious doctrines on moral issues have an important place in the adoption of moral rules (Eren, 2007; Kılıç, 1996). Parents, siblings and relatives also have a role to play in the formation of characters of individuals to conform to societal norms and values. Charity they say begins at home, therefore these people should see themselves as an agent of morals and cultural values. Abiding by rules and regulations depicts that one is well-cultured and has a good moral upbringing. This corroborates Zimmerman's (2004) submission which state that external values are as important as internal values. Amongst these external values is religion. It was observed from the results that students' perceptions of morality still fall below expectations. From the responses, it was not as if there was a lack of awareness of what morality is but the nonchalant attitude of most parents may be attributed to this. One may also conclude that the majority of parents are not morally inclined and their loves for luxury are second to none. Another thing that contributed to this problem was the neglect of the mother tongue in society. The majority of the students claimed they don't speak their indigenous language in common places like; home, church and even in the marketplace. When they are spoken to in the language they seemed not to fully grab what is being passed across.

In a nutshell, one may conclude that ignorance played a prominent role in some of the moral problems pervading society. Most students are not well rooted in their indigenous languages and claimed not to be aware of it early in life. Some base their not speaking the language on the situations that surrounds them. Some of these students claimed that they are not always comfortable when speaking in their local languages either because of people around that would make jest of them or because of how people around perceive them. The findings of the study specified the importance of Language in the moral upbringing of youths. It also speculated what is likely to be achieved by a society whose youths are morally inclined. It is obvious from these findings that language determines the morals of students in secondary

schools. Language is however more important in determining students understanding of cultural heritage. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between students' moral according to demographic factors was not sustained by this study. All the demographic factors (gender, course of study, home background) significantly predicted the relationship between language and students' morals.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The results of the study made one understands that the root of all the uncultured and immoral acts like kidnapping, raping, violence etc that pervade society today cannot be far-fetched from the neglect of indigenous language and lack of moral upbringing among people in the society. It is now a known fact that this nation is morally sick and needs urgent treatment. The moral fabric is overlooked and the moral standards are supposed to hold the norms and values of every virtue in place for every person in the society.

We have had it wrong in recent times and we need to retrace our steps. We need to see culture as a strong part of human lives that influences their views, their values, their humour, their hopes, their loyalties, and their worries and fears. Therefore, we need to take it seriously and be ready to pass it down to the coming generation in good time. We also need to understand that when we are working with people and building relationships with them, we need to understand their cultures so that there will not be conflict.

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