

INDIGENOUS LITERATURE AS A PREDICTOR OF MORAL RECTITUDE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The prevalence of moral decadence among secondary school students in Nigeria has remained a persistent concern despite various interventions. However, empirical attention to the role of indigenous literature in addressing this challenge has been limited. The study investigated indigenous literature as a predictor of moral rectitude among secondary school students in Ogun State, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey design, utilizing a multistage sampling procedure to randomly select four local government areas, eight public senior secondary schools, and 320 SS2 students across the Ogun East Senatorial District. Data were collected using the Literature Text Exposure Questionnaire and the Moral Rectitude Questionnaire with reliability coefficients of .76 and .81, respectively. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and regression analysis. Findings revealed a moderate level of student exposure to Yoruba literature (Grand Mean = 3.39). Results indicated that Yoruba literature (Grand Mean = 3.60) significantly promoted positive moral values among students. A significant correlation was established between Yoruba literature ($r = .235$, $p < .05$) and students' moral rectitude. Furthermore, the analysis showed that Yoruba literature ($\beta = .151$; $t = 2.262$; $p < 0.05$) positively influenced students' moral rectitude by 15.1%. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that indigenous literature plays a significant role in promoting moral values among students. The study recommended, among others, that teachers should consistently incorporate morally orientated lessons from indigenous literature into classroom instruction to foster positive moral behaviours among students.

Keywords: Indigenous literature, moral rectitude, school, students

INTRODUCTION

Young learners' values, beliefs, and moral behaviour are greatly influenced by indigenous literature, especially in culturally diverse settings. Indigenous literature, which has its roots in oral traditions, folklore, proverbs, and historical accounts, reflects the moral standards and social mores of the community. Students' moral growth throughout the early

years of secondary school can be greatly impacted by their exposure to indigenous literary works (Olawale, 2025). Examining indigenous literature as a predictor of moral rectitude provides important insights in a setting where moral degradation among young people is a significant concern.

Indigenous literature, encompassing oral traditions, folktales, proverbs, myths, and local

narratives, plays a crucial role in the transmission of moral values across generations. In the context of Ogun State, Nigeria, where cultural identity is deeply rooted in Yoruba heritage, indigenous literature serves not only as a repository of cultural knowledge but also as an informal educational tool that influences the moral development of secondary school students. The moral lessons embedded in indigenous literary forms often promote values such as honesty, respect, obedience, empathy, and communal responsibility. These moral constructs are transmitted through characters, plotlines, and consequences that reflect societal expectations and ethical standards.

The predictive capacity of indigenous literature in shaping moral rectitude among students can be understood through the lens of social learning theory and cognitive moral development. Through repeated exposure to culturally grounded stories and proverbs, students learn by observing modeled behaviour and internalizing ethical lessons. Akinwale and Ojakorotu (2024) emphasize that Yoruba folktales provide rich moral instruction that contributes to the development of socially responsible behaviours among youth. Similarly, Akinsola and Olaosebikan (2021) argue that the inclusion of oral literature in school curricula fosters moral consciousness by engaging students in culturally familiar and value-laden narratives.

Undoubtedly, good moral rectitude plays a crucial role in fostering peaceful, ethical, and sustainable development for both individuals and society as a whole. It is therefore imperative that all individuals, particularly young adults, uphold positive moral values. However, recent trends indicate a troubling increase in immoral practices and moral decline among secondary school students in Nigeria. These immoral behaviours constitute a significant social problem, as they have far-reaching implications for the nation as a

whole. It is not surprising that communities are actively seeking measures to address this issue. As Ihuoma (2015) noted, a society that fails to curb the growth of immoral practices is destined for doom.

Moral decadence refers to any act or conduct that breaches societal standards and rules. Idensi (2020) asserted that moral decadence denotes immorality such as rape, illicit sexual behaviour, truancy, examination malpractice, disrespected to the elderly and constituted authorities, bullying, school-based violence, drug addiction, and cybercrime are prevalent among school children and young adults globally and in Nigeria in particular. According to Ekwukoma and Osagiobare (2021), the prevalence of unethical conduct in Nigeria is quite high. Respect, sincerity, kindness, social ideals, and justice are among the fundamental ethical principles that many secondary school pupils throughout the federation lack. Therefore, academics and educators are really concerned about how to handle this difficulty.

The pervasive moral decline exhibited by secondary school students in Nigeria can be attributed to a confluence of factors. These include inadequate parental guidance; societal pressure, particularly those stemming from economic challenges; deficiencies in the educational system with respect to moral instruction; the sway of peer groups; and, more recently, the transformative impact of technological advancement (Badru & Odutayo, 2023). The rapid technological evolution, driven by globalization and modernity, has significantly eroded traditional moral values, thereby undermining the ethical foundations upon which society was once firmly anchored. As Badru (2021) poignantly observes, humanity, at no other point in history, has sunk to such depths of moral and spiritual deprivation as are now manifest in the daily chaos afflicting Nigeria. Consequently,

genuine progress appears to have stalled, and the nation teeters on the brink of societal fragmentation. The foregoing implies that there is an urgent need to find a lasting solution to the menace prevalent among secondary school students in recent times.

Previous research works relating to (Ogueche et al., 2021; Idensi, 2020; Nahian et al., 2020) aimed at combating immorality among secondary school students have yielded several recommendations. For instance, Ogueche et al. (2021) suggested that school stakeholders implement sensitization programs and sanctions to promote moral rectitude in students. Idensi (2020) emphasized the need for parents, religious institutions, and schools to instill moral values in children. Nahian et al. (2020) recommended that the government reintroduce moral values education into the school curriculum. Despite these recommendations, immoral practices among secondary school students continue to rise significantly. Thus, there is a pressing need to explore alternative measures that can effectively stimulate moral rectitude in students. One area that has received little attention is the role of moral values education inherent in indigenous literature.

Moral values Education has long been a part of indigenous Nigerian society, particularly in traditional communities, where it was primarily conveyed through folktales and stories shared by elders under the moonlight (Akanbi, 2014). These tales helped to impart enduring lessons about avoiding disobedience, betrayal, robbery, and greed (Suleiman, 2023). The tortoise, a common character in these tales, often embodies craftiness, leading to trouble and serving as a source of proverbs and reflections (Badru, 2021). Such narratives were designed to help youth develop ethical principles and discern societal norms (Nahian et al., 2020). However, in recent years, the traditional oral methods of imparting moral

values have diminished due to globalization and societal changes. Instead, moral values education is now found in literature textbooks authored by writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Fagunwa, who translate oral stories and folktales into written texts (Suleiman, 2023).

Values serve as a standard by which individuals are judged based on their actions, indicating how good or bad they are. Culture is closely connected to history, shaping the way people think by influencing the development of individual thought patterns and intellectual potential. According to Sagiv and Schwartz (2022), values are beliefs tied to preferred behaviors or desired outcomes that extend beyond specific situations. They influence how people choose or judge actions, individuals, and events, and are organized based on their perceived importance. Didactic values possess educational qualities and promote positive behavior, often seen as moral values like courage, responsibility, love, respect, faith in God, and humility. Kadir, Alwi, Adnani, and Tismat (2023) describe didactic values as those that encourage positive changes in attitude and behavior, focusing on moral development, intellectual growth, and character formation. These values serve as fundamental principles for teaching and guiding thought and behavior.

Didactic literature represents a branch of literature that conveys moral, religious, or philosophical teachings through imaginative or fictional narratives. The term "didactic" itself means "intended to teach," making didactic literature essentially educational in nature (Abram & Harpham, 2009). One of the key roles of literature is its use in education. Through literary works, readers are exposed to various life experiences, often gaining perspectives and emotions they might not encounter in real life (Mulyadi, 2016). However, Sumiyadi (2010) emphasized that

while didactic literature is instructive, it cannot always be applied directly in educational settings as expected. For literature to serve as an effective educational tool, it must align with specific learning objectives, enabling students to enjoy the content while enhancing their personal growth, expanding their knowledge, and improving their language skills.

The primary aim of literary learning is to provide students with knowledge and experience in literature (Leibrandt, 2022). Literary appreciation engages students' intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities, allowing these aspects to be nurtured and developed. It goes beyond simply reading texts; students are encouraged to explore the deeper meanings and values within literary works. This process helps refine their emotions, reasoning, imagination, and awareness of societal, cultural, and environmental issues.

Indigenous Yoruba literature textbooks encapsulate various stories, folktales, and poems embedded with moral values education that can foster moral rectitude in both children and adults. For example, Yoruba literature is rich in proverbs, poems, and folktales that effectively incorporate moral training into the education of Yoruba children. These texts convey important lessons on decency, respect for oneself and others, discipline, humility, obedience, and truthfulness (Badru & Odutayo, 2023). Suleiman (2023) posited that Yoruba literature, folktales, and poetry serve multiple purposes: they sensitize children to their local environment, help develop self-confidence, sharpen survival instincts, strengthen patriotism, and promote moral development.

Badru and Odutayo (2022) found that parents and educators in Ogun State perceive Yoruba folktales as effective in instilling moral values such as truthfulness, diligence, and humility.

Fayemi and Adediran (2024) also support the integration of indigenous literature in formal education as a means of reinforcing character education and reducing moral laxity among secondary school students. These studies suggest that the inclusion of culturally grounded narratives such as folktales, proverbs, and oral traditions contributes meaningfully to students' ethical development. For instance, Fayemi and Adediran (2024) found a strong positive correlation between exposure to character education infused with Yoruba indigenous stories and students' demonstration of honesty, respect, and empathy in secondary schools in Ogun State. Using a structured questionnaire and teacher assessments, their study revealed that students regularly engaging with such narratives exhibited higher levels of moral consciousness and discipline.

Similarly, Olaniyan-Shobowale, Jimoh, and Shittu (2021) conducted a quasi-experimental study involving secondary school students in Ewekoro Local Government Area, which demonstrated that prose literature containing indigenous content significantly enhanced students' moral behavior. Their analysis indicated that students who were exposed to culturally resonant literary texts showed improved interpersonal relationships, respect for elders, and accountability compared to those taught with conventional texts.

In a related mixed-methods study, Akinsola and Ojakorotu (2024) explored the impact of Yoruba folktales on children's moral reasoning and found that storytelling sessions facilitated through schools led to a better understanding of ethical decision-making among adolescents. The researchers noted that stories portraying consequences for immoral actions helped reinforce values such as truthfulness, loyalty, and communal living. Moreover, Odewumi and Anyanwu (2024) conducted a qualitative content analysis of

traditional folktales and confirmed that students who engaged with indigenous stories showed improved comprehension of moral norms and were more inclined to apply them in real-life situations. These findings collectively affirm that indigenous literature is not only a cultural artifact but also a potent educational resource for promoting moral development among secondary school students across Nigeria.

While it is evident that indigenous Yoruba literature has the potential to instill moral rectitude in secondary school students, there is a lack of studies examining its impact specifically on their moral development. Previous research (Odejobi, 2014; Badru & Odutayo, 2023) has mainly focused on teachers' knowledge of proverbs and the academic effects of literature. According to Idensi (2020), the majority of research in the literature has focused on evaluating students' academic performance, with little emphasis on the effect of learning on moral values. Thus, there is a clear gap in the literature regarding the role of indigenous literature on the moral rectitude of secondary school students in Nigeria, particularly in Ogun State. This gap underscores the necessity for the current study.

Statement of the Problem

Literature has consistently indicated a high prevalence of immoral practices such as truancy, illicit sexual misconduct, stealing, bullying, examination malpractices, cybercrime, and so on among secondary school students in Nigeria (Idensi, 2020; Ogueche et al., 2021). The menace, if not urgently curtailed, will not only affect societal growth and development but also promote young adults who will constitute a nuisance in society and be a major threat to the peace and security of the nation. The foregoing immoral behaviour needs urgent remediation. Moreover, there is a notable scarcity of studies examining the influence of indigenous

literature on students' moral rectitude in Nigeria. Based on the above submission, this study investigated indigenous literature as a predictor of moral rectitude among public senior secondary school students in Ogun State.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of students' exposure to indigenous literature in public secondary schools in Ogun State?
2. To what extent do indigenous literature lessons drive positive moral behaviours among students in Ogun State?

Hypotheses

- H01:** There is no significant correlation between indigenous literature and the moral rectitude of students in public secondary schools in Ogun state.
- H02:** Indigenous (Yoruba) literature has no significant influence on the moral rectitude of students in public secondary schools in Ogun state.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is well-suited to its objectives. The population of this study encompasses all students enrolled in public senior secondary schools within the Ogun East Senatorial District. To ensure comprehensive and equitable representation across the district, a multistage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, four (4) local government areas were randomly chosen from the nine (9) that constitute the Senatorial District. Subsequently, in the second stage, two (2) public senior secondary schools were selected from each of the previously chosen local government areas using the simple random sampling method. At stage three, forty (40) senior secondary school II (SS2) students were selected in each of the selected public senior secondary schools using the ballot method without replacement. In all, a total

number of 4 local governments, 8 public schools, and 320 SS2 students constituted the study sample.

Data were collected using the Literature Text Exposure Questionnaire (MILITEQ) and Moral Rectitude Questionnaire (MOREQ) with reliability coefficients of .76 and .81, respectively, using Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistics. To determine the reliability, the instruments were subjected to a pilot study involving thirty (30) Senior Secondary School II students whose characteristics closely resembled those of the target sample. Descriptive statistical methods

were employed in answering the two research questions raised. Hypothesis one was tested using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC), while Hypothesis two was tested using linear regression analysis. Both hypotheses were tested at a .05 significance level.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the level of students' exposure to indigenous literature in public secondary schools in Ogun State?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics indicating the extent of students' exposure to Yoruba Literature (N = 320)

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D.	Remarks
1	Indigenous languages, such as Yoruba, are enriched with moral principles, which our teachers sometimes express in proverbs during classroom instruction	3.51	1.53	High extent
2	During Yoruba lessons, we are exposed to lots of folktales and stories about animals like the tortoise, with enormous moral lessons	3.62	1.26	High extent
3	During Yoruba lessons, we are exposed to historical events that are embedded with lots of moral teachings	3.63	1.37	High extent
4	In the Yoruba lesson, we are exposed to poems and proverbs that educate individuals to shun evil, stealing, betrayal, and dubious practices	3.18	1.36	Moderate extent
5	We are exposed to Yoruba folktales and stories about bad leadership and its consequences	2.93	1.59	Moderate extent
6	We are exposed to Yoruba poems and stories, which teach teenagers the need to be faithful and abstain from illicit sexual activities until they are married	3.34	1.40	Moderate extent
7	Yoruba literature lessons also educate us on the pride and respect for families whose children got married as virgins	3.59	1.27	High extent
8	Yoruba literature, such as poems and proverbs, educates me on the moral benefits of doing good to others and showing respect to parents, the elderly, and constituted authorities in society	3.37	1.46	Moderate extent
9	We are exposed to Yoruba literature such as stories or poems that emphasize the benefits of hard work and diligent to duties	3.44	1.24	Moderate extent
10	We are exposed to Yoruba literature, such as stories or poems that emphasize the benefits of acquiring education, be it formal or informal education	3.26	1.26	Moderate extent
	Grand Mean	3.39		

Decision Rule: A mean score of 1 – 1.45 (Not exposed), 1.46 – 2.45 Low extent), 2.45-3.45 (Moderate extent), 3.46 – 4.45 (High Extent), 4.46 - 5 (Very High Extent).

Given the results presented in Table 1, the grand mean for all ten items assessing the extent of students' exposure to Yoruba literature was 3.39, which implied that the sampled students are exposed to Yoruba literature in classroom instruction to a moderate extent. Item-by-item disintegration revealed that four out of the ten items assessing the extent of students' exposure to Yoruba literature were rated highly by the respondents. These items included: Indigenous language, such as Yoruba, which is enriched with moral principles, which our teachers sometimes express in proverbs during classroom instruction. During Yoruba lessons, we are exposed to lots of folktales and stories about animals like the tortoise, historical events that are embedded with lots of moral teachings, and Yoruba literature lessons also educate us on the pride and respect for families whose children

got married as virgins, with mean scores of 3.51, 3.62, 3.63, and 3.59, respectively.

Conversely, the remaining six items indicate a moderate extent of students' exposure to Yoruba literature, with mean scores of 3.18, 2.93, 3.34, 3.37, 3.44, and 3.26, respectively. These items highlight that Yoruba lessons include poems and proverbs that educate individuals to shun evil, stealing, betrayal, and dubious practices; folktales that illustrate the consequences of bad leadership; and stories that teach teenagers the importance of being faithful and abstaining from illicit sexual activities until marriage. Additionally, Yoruba literature imparts the moral benefits of doing good to others and showing respect to parents, elders, and authorities, as well as emphasizing the value of hard work and diligence in one's duties and the importance of acquiring education, whether formal or informal.

Research Question Two: To what extent do indigenous literature lessons drive positive moral behaviours among public secondary school students in Ogun State?

Table 2: Descriptive statistics indicating the extent to which Yoruba literature drives positive moral behaviours among students (N = 320)

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D.	Remarks
1	Anytime the Yoruba teacher or any teacher talks in Yoruba proverbs or parables, it drives me to elicit good moral behaviours at all times	3.82	1.50	High extent
2	I imbibe moral lessons learnt in Yoruba lessons, proverbs, poems, or folktales at all times	3.41	1.26	Moderate extent
3	I try as much as possible to practice the moral teachings learnt during Yoruba lessons	3.55	1.33	High extent
4	I try as much as possible to shun immoral practices due to the moral lessons I learnt in Yoruba lessons	3.38	1.34	Moderate extent
5	Yoruba lessons have shaped my moral behaviour positively	3.82	1.36	High extent
	Grand Mean =	3.60		

Decision Rule: A mean score of 1 – 1.45 (Not exposed), 1.46 – 2.45 Low extent), 2.45 – 3.45 (Moderate extent), 3.46 – 4.45 (High Extent), 4.46 – 5 (Very High Extent).

The results presented in Table 2 indicated that the grand mean for all five items measuring the extent to which Yoruba literature drives positive moral behaviours among students was 3.60, which implied that Yoruba literature, to a great extent, positively drives good moral

behaviours among students. Further examination of Table 2 showed that three out of the five items were rated highly by the sampled students. The items include: Anytime the Yoruba teacher or any teacher talks in Yoruba proverbs or parables, it drives me to

elicit good moral behaviours at all times. I try as much as possible to practice the moral teachings learnt during Yoruba lessons, and Yoruba lessons have shaped my moral behaviour positively, with mean scores of 3.82, 3.55, and 3.82, respectively. On the contrary, I imbibe moral lessons learnt in Yoruba lessons, proverbs, poems, or folktales at all times and shun immoral practices due to moral lessons learnt in Yoruba lessons, with

mean scores of 3.41 and 3.38, respectively, which were items students rated to a moderate extent.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant correlation between Yoruba literature and the moral rectitude of students in public secondary schools in Ogun State.

Table 3. PPMC table indicating the correlation between Yoruba literature and the moral rectitude of students

Variable	N	Mean	Std dev.	r	Sig	Decision
Yoruba Literature	320	51.85	9.99	.235**	.000	Significant
Students' Moral Rectitude	320	41.41	10.94			

** . Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed)

Table 3's findings show that the correlation coefficient (r) is significant ($r = .235$, $p < .05$), implying that a significant relationship exists between exposure to Yoruba literature and students' moral rectitude. This finding suggests that as the mean score for exposure to Yoruba literature increases (mean = 52.53), there is a corresponding decrease in the mean score for moral rectitude (mean = 41.41) among students. This implies that increased exposure to the moral teachings embedded in indigenous Yoruba literature is associated with increased positive moral rectitude among

students and a decline in negative moral behaviors. Consequently, the null hypothesis asserting that there is no significant correlation between Yoruba literature and students' moral uprightness is rejected.

Hypothesis Two: Indigenous (Yoruba) literature has no significant influence on the moral rectitude of students in public secondary schools in Ogun State. The linear regression was used to test this hypothesis, and the result is presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4: The beta (β) coefficients in the Regression Analysis showing the relative influence of indigenous literature on the moral rectitude of students. Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
1	(constant)	24.104	3.623		6.653	.000
	Yoruba Literature	.165	.073	.151	2.262	.024

a. Dependent Variable: Moral Rectitude

Regression coefficients in Table 4 indicate that Yoruba literature ($\beta = .151$; $t = 2.262$; $p < 0.05$) positively influences students' moral

rectitude by 15.1%, with prediction strength also found to be statistically significant.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from Research Question One indicated that students in public secondary schools across Ogun State are moderately exposed to indigenous literature. These findings were attributed to the moderate ratings of all items assessing students' exposure to Yoruba literature. However, they contradicted Suleiman's (2023) findings, which reported a low extent of students' exposure to moral teachings in literature textbooks.

Research question two indicated that Yoruba literature significantly promoted positive moral values among students in Ogun State. This finding suggested that students practiced the moral teachings learnt from Yoruba literature, such as proverbs and parables, which encouraged them to consistently exhibit good moral behaviour. These teachings also positively shaped their moral conduct. The results aligned with Ogunrinade's (2014) findings, which highlighted the values of folk music, including folktales, showing that such knowledge could enrich youth in various aspects. This means that folk music helped adolescents grow in a variety of ways, ultimately contributing to the development of positive character traits. Similarly, the findings of this study were consistent with those of Odejobi (2014), who explored the significance of Yoruba indigenous folksongs in revitalizing moral education and discovered that these songs were crucial for improving moral education among preschool children.

The findings of hypothesis one established a significant correlation between indigenous (Yoruba) literature and students' moral rectitude. This relationship suggested that students' positive moral rectitude was directly linked to the moral value teachings inherent in Yoruba literature. In simpler terms, as students absorbed the moral values conveyed in literary

texts, their moral rectitude progressively improved. These results supported those of Olaniyan-Shobowale et al. (2016), who investigated how senior secondary school students in Ogun State were taught moral values through English prose literature. They found that prose literature had a major impact on students' moral value acquisition. In a similar vein, parents had a moderate opinion of the educational usefulness of Yoruba oral literature in southwest Nigeria, according to Badru's (2021) study, which suggested that it may improve pupils' education.

The results of hypothesis two revealed that indigenous Yoruba literature had a significant positive influence on students' moral rectitude. This result was consistent with the empirical findings of Olaniyan-Shobowale et al. (2016), who discovered that the development of moral values among secondary school students in Ogun State was significantly impacted by prose literature. Similarly, Badru (2021) observed that parents had a moderate opinion of the educational impact of Yoruba oral literature, suggesting that it could moderately enhance students' education.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Sequel to the study findings, the authors concluded that integration of moral teachings inherent in indigenous language (Yoruba) literature texts into classroom instructional practices had great potency in shaping students' moral rectitude positively. Additionally, the study concluded that secondary school students demonstrated positive moral behaviours due to the moderate moral teaching exposure they got from Yoruba literature lessons.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered:

1. Teachers are encouraged to engage students with moral teachings inherent in

indigenous language (Yoruba) literature texts.

2. Teachers are encouraged to integrate morally inclined literature lessons into their classrooms at all times to shape students in eliciting good moral behaviours.
3. Parents are encouraged to revive the African culture through engaging their children with morally inclined poems, folktales, and stories that could positively shape them to elicit good moral behaviours in society.
4. Students are encouraged to shun immoral practices and elicit good moral values inherent in indigenous language literature textbooks.
5. The government and other education stakeholders are encouraged to revive the school counsellor units through the recruitment of qualified school counsellors who will, at all times, engage students with group and individual counselling sessions to drive students to elicit good moral behaviours.

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