INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND PHILOLOGY

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DOI: https://doi.org//10.69648/XRFO8796

International Journal of Education and Philology (IJEP), 2024; 5(2): 29-39

ijep.ibupress.com

Online ISSN: 2671-3543

Application : 01.12.2024

Revision : 12.12.2024

Acceptance : 24.12.2024

Publication : 30.12.2024

Syllevast, B., Jerald, K., & Semei, B. (2024). Oral Literature and Morality of Learners in Primary Schools: A Review. International Journal of Education and Philology, 5(2), 29-39. https://doi.org//10.69648/XRFO8796

Baluku Syllevast
Ibanda University, Ibanda, Uganda
bsyllevast@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2792-7614

Kule Jerald
Benadir University, Mogadishu, Somalia; Ibanda University, Ibanda, Uganda
jeraldkule@gmail.com / jerald.kule@bu.edu.so
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2984-8574

Baluku Semei
Ibanda University, Ibanda, Uganda
semeibaluku@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8734-9713

We declare no conflict of interest.

BALKAN JOURNALS

Oral Literature and Morality of Learners in Primary Schools: A Review

Baluku Syllevast
Kule Jerald
Baluku Semei

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of oral literature on the morality of learners in primary schools. The study is inspired by the fact that oral literature is not widely taught in primary schools even when it could have the potential to shape the morals of learners. This could be the reason behind the morality gap among young people in many societies. Therefore, this paper reviews studies on the impact of oral literature on the morality of learners so as to give a deeper insight into the relationship between the two. The study also highlights challenges relating to the neglect of oral literature and the morality of learners. The researchers looked up relevant existing literature using search engines like Semantic Scholar, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Connected Papers. The evaluation highlighted significant gaps in methodologies, constructs of studies, theories, and scope, hence recommending further empirical studies to fill the gaps. Most importantly, there is a need to study the possibility of entirely integrating oral literature in context-specific teaching situations to reinforce its impact. There is also a need to address how modern societal changes might impact the effectiveness of a traditional method like oral literature. Therefore, there is a need for further research to explore how oral literature should be integrated within modern education. This could help enhance the long-term effects of oral literature and consolidate its role in shaping the morals of learners in different settings. This study contributes to already existing literature and efforts to address moral decadence in learners and the entire society.

Keywords: Oral Literature, Morality, Literature, Learners, Primary Schools

Introduction

Morality is an essential component of understanding oneself, motivating interactions, and achieving equilibrium between one's body, spirit, and society. It is a disposition, nature, or manners that expresses the established character structure in persons as well as individual behaviors that take place in volition (Ozge, 2021; Kimani, 2010). Societies have been able to pass on beliefs, opinions, understandings, and patterns of performance to future generations through oral literature. The lack of teaching oral literature genres in schools has exacerbated the degree of societal wickedness. Previous studies reveal alarming levels of immorality on the international, continental, regional, national, and local levels, which should worry all stakeholders in child upbringing. For example, in Busongora, Kasese, Uganda, 50% of the early marriage and pregnancy victims were primary school dropouts (Save the Children, 2020). Previous studies have revealed a high prevalence of immorality of all forms, such as sexual immorality, devilry, foul play, irreverence, and blasphemy, among children of primary school going age in Sindh, Pakistan (Unar & Hussain, 2022) in Zaria, Kaduna, Nigeria (Sanusi & Omoniwa, 2022) and in Borno, Nigeria (Umar et al, 2020)

Much as many studies such as Goudarzi, Sarmadi, and Rezaei (2017) highlight education's significance in eradicating violence and avoiding immoral behavior within personal and societal rearing, certain aspects of education, such as oral literature that instill morals in children have been largely neglected in contemporary teaching (Ganyi, 2016). Accordingly, instruction involves the process of advising and looking after the trainee in such a way that he is familiar with particular behaviors and abandons others, as well as recognizing behavioral trauma and oversights, and the practice assists the child in developing habits of behavior from a school, particularly peers, teachers, teaching staff, and non-teaching staff. The institution, as a connection linking communities and families, ought to have a more efficient role in addressing and mitigating many forms of aggression (Goudarzi, Sarmadi & Rezaei, 2017). Studies have found a significant and positive impact of effectiveness of curriculum on students' morality development in primary schools (Unar & Hussain, 2022; Ullah et al, 2021; Abbound, 2017). More specifically, many researchers have suggested that orature exposed to learners in school has a significant impact on their behaviour. Bad literature instills immorality, while good literature instills morality. Researchers still point to the fact that even bad literature would form positive lessons for learners as they aspire to avoid the mistakes made by the villains. Therefore, orature is an integral part in efforts to shape morals of learners (Ganyi, 2016).

This paper presents a review of studies on oral literature and the morals of students, giving a deeper insight into challenges relating to the morality of these learners and the neglect of oral literature. This could help consolidate the role of oral literature in shaping the morals of learners in different settings. This review could contribute to the already existing literature and efforts to solve gaps existing in the morals of learners. Children form the coming generations. Therefore, to ensure the posterity of the following generations, children have to be preserved. When you destroy a child, you destroy am entire society. It is thus important to study child morals and how education can help to inculcate good morals in children and the future generations to ensure the posterity of societies.

Theoretical Review

The study is guided by the Social Development Theory which was proposed by Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky. The theory proposes that in social interaction, the more knowledgeable members of society, culture, and language play a crucial role in developing morals and intellectual capabilities such as speaking and rationality in learners (Vygotsky, 1978; Taber, 2020). According to the theory, young learners develop norms, morality, views, and the ability to solve challenges through interactions with adults in society (Taber, 2020). Knowledgeable adults such as teachers can meaningfully impact children's reasoning and morals. Researchers have used the Social Development Theory to effectively study how language, social interactions, classroom settings, mediation, and cultural perspectives influence moral development (Barnett, 2019; Taber, 2020; Tzuriel, 2021). Therefore, the theory is relevant in explaining how exposing primary school pupils to oral literature can help instill morals in them. Learning is a social process, and oral literature, which is a cultural tool, plays a crucial role in transmitting values, knowledge, and moral understanding from one generation to the next. When pupils are exposed to oral literature, they can internalize societal norms and develop certain morals. However, the Social Development Theory does not fully explain why some pupils develop positive morals while others develop negative ones after being exposed to the same oral literature. This suggests a need for more research to understand these differing outcomes better.

Methodology

The researcher employed search engines such as Semantic Scholar, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Connected Papers to look for literature on prior studies, journal articles, and dissertations on oral literature and morals of children in elementary education institutions. Using different search engines improved recall and increased coverage of the topic hence helping the researcher get a better understanding of the topic and maximize available data. ProQuest gave the researcher user friendly experience, clean interface and response design and allowed easily sorting documents by their publication dates, number of items per page and excluding duplicate documents. Connected Papers allowed switching between graph and list views, making it easy to sort articles by citations, references, and similarity to the original paper. Lastly, Google Scholar helped the researcher identify highly cited literature, check metrics and easily save articles. The key term parameters used were oral literature and morality of primary school learners because they were representative of the search undertaken. Initially, 59 papers were obtained; however, following screening, 30 articles were used in this work. In arriving at the 30 articles, many articles older than 10 years were dropped, while many of those that were not about primary school learners or not strictly conforming to the key words of the search key words oral literature and morality were all dropped.

Findings and Discussion

Nnyangu (2017) posits that oral literature is an important aspect of literary tradition, preserved and conveyed through spoken words rather than written words. Oral literature is highly valued in Africa for its pedagogical value. However, some argue that oral literature is ephemeral, maintaining that unless a work is written down, it cannot be considered literature. Oral literature also refers to high-value oral works that are the result of the artist's creative use of the mind's eye with vocal language in illiterate societies. Literature like this is written rationally by the untrained storyteller, kept in the memory, and hence uttered, read, recited, or sung at specific events. It consists of narrative, verse, stories, poems, songs, legends, rites, dramatic works, sayings, traditional tales, and riddles (Nnyangu, 2017). Morality also refers to the compilation of primary governing principles; what a person considers to be acceptable and desirable in life, most especially in terms of one's own conduct. It refers to values and views on what is accurate, incorrect, and important in life. Moral standards are individual views and attitudes that guide decisions on what people want to do (Ogunbameru & Rotimi, 2006; Petrakova,

2016; Mynbayeva, Anarbek & Nurgaliyeva, 2020). Therefore, principles may not be visible, but they become apparent through the child's behavior. As future leaders, younger people are provided fundamental moral and cultural instruction to enable them to take over adult obligations so as to maintain and perpetuate society's growth.

Researchers across the globe have delved into the connection amid oral literature and learners' morals, with many finding relationships between the two (Jirata & Simonsen, 2014; Adiguzel & Ayaz, 2020; Das, 2023). Research by Youssef (2023) underscores the importance of exploring children's literature in Africa, where writers reclaim and reorient the narrative, empowering young minds. Analyzing Achebe's and Youssef's works demonstrates that oral literature exposure has a good impact on Nigerian and Egyptian children's inspiration, values, morals, and self-esteem. These stories immerse youngsters in fascinating experiences while instilling pride in their identity, culture, and ancestry. For example, Achebe's The Drum and The Flute show the ephemeral nature of exploitative power and the consequences of greed while also teaching Black youngsters the importance of creativity, dignity, and morality. Youssef's texts, *Unique Encounters* and *I am a Burāq*, expose young learners to narratives exploring Arabic Islamic heritage, encouraging critical inquiry and wise exploration. While Youssef (2023) focuses on Nigerian and Egyptian contexts, further research can expand oral literature's impact on morality beyond these boundaries. Again, Youssef (2023) studies children in general. Therefore, a similar study on children confined in school settings could be interesting to carry out as it could produce different results.

The Water Pump, a book by Abdel-Tawab Youssef, shows the function of oral literature in transmitting fundamental moral values to schoolchildren, which is consistent with Jones (2012) framework for conversational storytelling. It further specifically emphasises selflessness, accountability, and the need of prioritizing the needs of others and moral integrity. The lasting impact of *The Water Pump*, which aired on Cairo Radio, displays oral literature's ability to impart moral values to schoolchildren while also creating strong character and communal relationships. Youssef's internalization of the story's moral lesson - that what truly matters in life is not wealth, might, or power, but a pure heart - demonstrates the power of oral literature in changing young minds (Youssef, 2023). This emphasizes the importance of further investigating the impact of oral literature on morality in a variety of circumstances, going beyond Youssef's literature and Jones (2012), and their settings, Egypt and Japan.

Many studies in Africa, Europe, and Asia highlight the significance of orature in shaping the morals of youngsters (Rokhmawan & Firmansyah, 2017). While Jones (2012) believes that storytelling, a key component of oral literature, enables children to engage with complex moral issues, develop empathy, and understand community norms, Kidd & Castano (2017) emphasize that by incorporating oral literature into primary school curricula, educators can promote moral education, social skills, and cultural awareness. The perspective from Africa is not different, as Sone (2018) underscores that African oral literature plays a vital role in promoting moral values and cultural identity among students. In Indonesia, cultural literacy development through local oral stories has shaped the cultural identity and moral behavior of elementary school learners (Rokhmawan & Firmansyah, 2017). However, despite the significance of oral literature highlighted in these reviewed studies, it beats one's understanding to discover that oral literature remains underrepresented in curricula within many institutions in Africa, Asia, and Europe (Sone, 2018; Kidd & Castano, 2017). Much as the emphasis is put on institutions of higher learning, primary schools are more relevant in studies on oral literature and morals, given the critical appeal that orature has for young children in primary schools. To address the oral literature gap, Sone (2018) proposes that a new curriculum and pedagogy stress folklore and oral literature, acknowledging their importance as a repository of African cultural history. By incorporating oral literature into educational curricula, educational systems can capitalize on its ability to foster moral education, cultural pride, and overall growth. More research is needed to investigate effective integration tactics, including the effects on learners' moral values and cultural identity, as well as the development of context-specific curricula and pedagogy.

In African primary schools, oral literature provides a unique opportunity to reconnect students with their cultural history while also fostering moral values and identity building (Sone, 2018). Much as Tuwe (2016) focuses on oral literature as an appropriate methodology for the investigation of the encounters and difficulties of African groups in New Zealand, as well as their influence on the well-being of the people, findings highlight the relevance of oral literature in shaping moral values such as togetherness, discipline, and cultural identity. Traditional oral storytelling also provides important life lessons, social standards, and community values, helping students build a sense of belonging and responsibility (Adiguzel & Ayaz, 2020; Das, 2023; Ariyani, 2023). Oral literature also offers a forum for discussing complicated moral themes important to African contexts, such as social justice, equality, and environmental sustainability (Sone, 2018). However, including oral literature

in elementary school curricula presents problems such as limited resources, cultural sensitivity, and standardization (Pulimeno, Piscitelli & Colazzo, 2020; Ugwu, 2022; Taber, 2020). Further research is needed in context-specific situations to support efforts to offer solutions such as training and support to effectively integrate oral literature into context-specific teaching practices.

Several researchers have also delved into the consequences of limited or no exposure to oral literature among children and found grave concerns (*Idenyi, Adoyi & Oche, 2014*). According to Ugwu (2022), literature in modern civilizations has become disconnected from the majority of people's daily lives. A lot of young people in Nigeria have lost their connection with cultural traditions (*Idenyi, Adoyi & Oche, 2014)*. Today, you unusually encounter gatherings around a storyteller, enthusiastically paying attention to folklore told by his thunderous voice. Traditional festivals and festivities that provided opportunities for the performance of historians and recitals of tunes related to dramatic folklore are also becoming increasingly unheard of. Even if you they occur, invasions from various expressions of the West are noted.

Ojukwu (2014) stated that even religion's strength is beginning to appear useless in combating moral degeneration in society as religious institutions have become more focused on worldly advantages. The question is, what is the route out? Where are we going from here? This article believes that one method to rid society of these vices is to return to our ancestors' essential principles, which must be used to establish the groundwork for our children's education. As previously indicated, our oral literature (folktales/songs) incorporates these key ideas. Because our forefathers used them to educate their children and it worked for them, there is no reason why we should not use them again today in our various families (homes) and classes (school system) to educate and entertain our children and adolescents while instilling traditional values in them (Adeyemi, 2021). This can be accomplished by performing and teaching Igbo oral literature (folktales) at home and in the classroom, ensuring that Africa's rich cultural legacy is not lost. Parents and teachers must understand their responsibilities and act while the light is shining.

According to Fafunwa (2018), prior to the introduction of contemporary educational systems, parents used oral storytelling to express their views, customs, principles, and traditions to their youngsters orally in their native language (L1), as well as through active participation in and passive observation of both official and customary socio-religious, cultural, and political institutions. Members of the family used folktales, folksongs, proverbs, and riddles as instructional tools to address

any shortcomings discovered in children's values and personalities (Fafunwa, 2018). Parents, particularly moms in traditional houses, were seen telling folktales, singing folk songs, and solving riddles. Children occasionally stay with their parents, especially at night, to hear folktales, proverbs, and riddles about mythological animals like tortoises, elephants, ants, and grasshoppers. Folktales, folksongs, proverbs, and riddles, as well as their interpretations, show how people see and construct their surroundings. This may increase the value of education by allowing children to notice and consider how to behave in different situations (Tzuriel, 2021; Barnett, 2019). This may provide fertile ground for children to develop the ability to understand the do's and don'ts of society, as well as increase social serenity and harmony.

Ojukwu (2014) and Fafunwa (2018) support reviving oral literature to enhance efforts to instill moral values among learners and society. Ojukwu (2014) posits that there is a need to return to ancestral values through oral literature but does not provide empirical evidence to support this assertion and its effectiveness in contemporary society. On the other hand, Fafunwa (2018) provides a vivid picture of how oral traditions were used to teach values but lacks empirical explanations on how these methods fare against modern educational settings. Much as these articles support oral literature as a way of addressing learners' immorality, they do not address individual differences among learners. They also do not address how modern societal changes might impact the effectiveness of a traditional method like oral literature. Consequently, there is need for further research to address the integration of oral literature within modern education.

Conclusion

Finally, from the reviewed studies, it is clear that oral literature has a connection with the morality of children. Although the impact of oral literature on learners' morals is majorly positive, there are instances where it might be negative. Therefore, there is a need to be careful when approaching orature in primary schools. Learners need to be guided well such that they do not misinterpret the messages in the folklore they are exposed to. Generally, the integration of oral literature into primary school curricula has significant implications for moral education and character development (Jones, 2012). Oral narratives provide a unique opportunity for learners to engage with diverse perspectives, develop empathy, and cultivate moral reasoning skills (Kidd & Castano, 2017). Oral literature serves as a vital tool

for instilling moral values in primary school learners and fostering character development and cultural identity (Sone, 2018). Research has demonstrated that oral narratives provide a platform for exploring moral dilemmas, encouraging critical thinking, and developing ethical decision-making skills (Mynbayeva, Anarbek & Nurgaliyeva, 2020). However, the effectiveness of oral literature in moral education depends on the teacher's ability to facilitate meaningful discussions and connections to real-life experiences.

Based on the review, further research is needed to fill the identified gaps, such as exploring effective teacher training programs and strategies for integrating oral literature into primary school curricula and exploring the long-term impact of oral literature on learners' moral values and behaviors, as well as the effectiveness of oral literature in diverse cultural contexts. Research is also needed in context-specific situations, especially local contexts, due to differences in the curriculums of countries. Effective teacher training programs for the integration of oral literature, the influence of school settings on oral literature and morality, and other factors shaping learners' morals need to be studied widely, too. Additionally, the development of context-specific oral literature curricula and pedagogies requires collaboration between educators, community members, and oral literature specialists to ensure cultural relevance and authenticity. Finally, there is also a need to address how modern societal changes might impact the effectiveness of a traditional method like oral literature and explore how oral literature can be integrated within modern education. This could help enhance the long-term positive effects of oral literature and consolidate its role in shaping the morals of learners in different settings.

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