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# Exploring the Impact of Oral Literature on the Morality of Learners in Primary Schools: A Case of Busongora North Constituency, Kasese District, Uganda

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## *Abstract*

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of oral literature on the morality of learners in primary schools in Busongora North Constituency in Kasese District, Uganda. The study was inspired by the fact that oral literature was 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, the study focused on investigating how teachers integrate oral literature into their lessons, teachers' perspectives on the effect of oral literature on the moral development of students, and students' perspectives on how oral literature influences their behavior and decision-making. The qualitative approach was employed, with in-depth interviews used to collect data from both teachers and students. Sample sizes were determined by data saturation, while respondents were recruited through convenience sampling. Findings reveal that oral literature plays a significant role in the moral development and decision-making processes of primary school learners. Additionally, teachers integrate oral literature in their lessons through various ways, such as storytelling and dramatization. The researchers recommend that the Ministry of Education and Sports and its partners should develop the curriculum further to make oral literature a key topic. There is a need for policy reviews, community partnerships, and further research to investigate the long-term impact of oral literature on moral development and its incorporation into other subjects. These recommendations will maximize the relevance of oral literature in the moral growth of learners.

**Keywords:** oral literature, morality, moral growth and development, teaching, primary schools

## Introduction

Morality is an essential component of understanding oneself, motivating interactions, and achieving equilibrium between one's body, spirit, and society. It reflects an established character structure in individuals and guides volitional behaviors (Kimani, 2010; Ozge, 2021). Societies have traditionally passed on beliefs, opinions, understandings, and performance patterns to future generations through oral literature. However, the failure to teach oral literature genres in schools has increased societal immorality. Previous research has found disturbing levels of immorality at the international, continental, regional, national, and local levels, which should concern all stakeholders in child development (Syllevast et al., 2024). For example, in Busongora, Kasese, Uganda, 50% of early marriage and pregnancy victims were primary school dropouts (Save the Children, 2020). Similarly, significant rates of immoral behavior among elementary school children have been recorded in Sindh, Pakistan (Unar & Hussain, 2022), Zaria, Kaduna, Nigeria (Sanusi & Omoniwa, 2022), and Borno, Nigeria (Umar et al, 2020).

While studies such as Goudarzi et al. (2017) highlight education's significance in eradicating violence and avoiding immoral behavior, aspects like oral literature that instill morals in children have been largely neglected in contemporary teaching (Syllevast et al., 2024; Ganyi, 2016). Moreover, effective instruction involves advising and nurturing trainees to develop positive behavioral habits, primarily influenced by peers, teachers, and school staff. Additionally, curriculum effectiveness has been shown to have a significant favorable impact on student moral development (Abbound, 2017; Ullah et al, 2021; Unar & Hussain, 2022). Therefore, educational institutions, as a link between communities and families, should be more proactive in combating aggressiveness and other forms of immorality (Goudarzi et al., 2017). Many investigations have claimed that oral literature has a substantial influence on learners' behavior (Syllevast et al., 2024). Good literature instills morals, whereas bad literature can teach constructive lessons by highlighting the mistakes made by villains. Thus, oral literature has an important role in molding learners' morality (Syllevast et al., 2024; Ganyi, 2016). However, there is limited research on the impact of oral literature morals in Busongora North Constituency, and the area has not been explored in the context of primary school pupils. Furthermore, qualitative research focused on students and teachers as essential stakeholders is scarce.

Therefore, it is essential to first conduct a qualitative exploration of the impact of oral literature on the morality of primary school students in order to establish a

solid foundation for subsequent quantitative studies. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the perspectives of both learners and teachers regarding the influence of oral literature on moral development in primary schools in Busongora North Constituency. The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To investigate how teachers integrate oral literature into their lessons to improve the moral development of primary school students in Busongora North Constituency.
2. To explore teachers' perceptions of the effect of oral literature on the moral development and behavior of primary school children in Busongora North Constituency.
3. To explore primary school students' perceptions of how oral literature influences their behavior and decision-making processes in Busongora North Constituency.

This research intends to strengthen the relevance of oral literature in influencing learners' morality in various situations by incorporating in-depth viewpoints from both teachers and students. Understanding and nurturing positive moral values in youngsters is critical for future generations. When you undermine a child's values, you endanger the entire society. Therefore, it is critical to research children's morals and how education may instill good morals in children to ensure the future well-being of societies.

## Literature Review

The study was guided by the Social Development Theory which was proposed by Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky. The theory proposes that 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 (Taber, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). According to the theory, young learners develop norms, morality, views, and the ability to solve challenges through interactions with adults in society (Taber, 2020). 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.

On the other hand, the researchers acknowledge that there are many previous studies that have delved into the nexus between oral literature and the morality of learners. Nnyangu (2017) emphasizes oral literature as an important component of literary history that is appreciated throughout Africa for its educational significance. Despite its importance, it is frequently criticized for its transitory nature if not documented. Oral literature consists of narratives, poetry, songs, riddles, and other creative forms that are remembered and performed at events. On the other hand, morality is described as principles that shape perceptions of good and wrong and present themselves via action (Mynbayeva et al., 2020; Ogunbameru & Rotimi, 2006; Petrakova, 2016). 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 the growth of society.

Previous studies have found a relationship between oral literature and the moral development of learners (Adiguzel & Ayaz, 2020; Barnett, 2019; Das, 2023; Jirata & Simonsen, 2014; Tzuriel, 2021). For instance, Youssef (2023) discusses how African writers use stories to empower young minds, as evidenced by the writings of Achebe and Youssef, which instill inspiration, values, self-esteem, and cultural pride in Nigerian and Egyptian youth. Achebe's *The Drum* and *The Flute* teach moral lessons about greed, inventiveness, and dignity, while Youssef's *Unique Encounters* and *I Am a Burāq* examine Arabic Islamic tradition and encourage critical thinking. Furthermore, *The Water Pump* by Abdel-Tawab Youssef highlights the function of oral literature in instilling values such as selflessness, accountability, and honesty, demonstrating how oral storytelling promotes moral growth, character development, and community bonding (Youssef, 2023). However, the studies focus on broad settings, leaving a gap in our understanding of the effects of oral literature on children in school. Therefore, more in-depth research is needed to determine its impact in broader contexts outside Nigeria and Egypt.

Many other studies in Africa, Europe, and Asia highlight the significance of orature in shaping the morals of youngsters (Adiguzel & Ayaz, 2020; Ariyani, 2023; Das, 2023; Idenyi et al, 2014; Ojukwu, 2014; Rokhmawan & Firmansyah, 2017; Ugwu,

2022). 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) emphasizes 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 behaviour of elementary school learners (Rokhmawan & Firmansyah, 2017).

However, despite the significance of oral literature highlighted in these reviewed studies, it is surprising to discover that oral literature remains underrepresented in curricula within many institutions in Africa, Asia, and Europe (Kidd & Castano, 2017; Sone, 2018). Much as 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. In addition, including oral literature into elementary school curricula presents problems such as limited resources, cultural sensitivity, and standardization (Pulimeno, Piscitelli & Colazzo, 2020; Ugwu, 2022; Taber, 2020; Tuwe, 2016). By incorporating oral literature into educational curricula, educational systems can capitalize on their ability to foster moral education, cultural pride, and overall growth. Therefore, more research is needed to investigate effective integration tactics, including training, the effects on learners' moral values and cultural identity, as well as the development of context-specific curricula and pedagogy.

Ojukwu (2014) and Fafunwa (2018) support the revival of 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 or 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 a need for further research to address the integration of oral literature within modern education.

## Methodology

We used a qualitative approach where in-depth interviews with both teachers and students were employed to investigate the impact of oral literature on the moral development of primary school students in Busongora North Constituency. This method was chosen to capture the participants' diverse opinions and original personal experiences, which are critical for understanding the intricate relationship between oral literature and morality. To ensure data reliability and depth, we arrived at sample sizes for both students (10) and teachers (6) using the data saturation principle, which states that interviews should continue until no new information or themes emerge (Moura et al., 2021). This method enabled a comprehensive and thorough examination of the subject matter and provided valuable insights into the impact of oral literature on moral development. Teachers were labelled TA to TF while students were labelled S1 to S10 for anonymity. All the respondents were selected through convenient sampling.

## Findings and Analysis

The study addressed three specific questions, each derived from its corresponding research objective. For Questions 1 and 2, the respondents were teachers, whereas for Question 3, the respondents were students.

Question 1: How do you integrate oral literature into your lessons to improve the moral development of primary school students?

The themes that emerged from the responses are storytelling sessions, role playing and dramatization, Proverbs, Riddles, collaborative activities and discussions, thematic integration, recitations, and songs. However, respondents revealed that oral literature is not a major subject at the primary school level but is mainly taught under English and other subjects through thematic integration. Many respondents noted that aspects of oral literature, such as stories, poems, songs, proverbs, and riddles, are often used to enhance English language skills such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Respondent TC said, “I love to integrate oral literature in my lessons, especially when I’m teaching English, because some genres, such as those short stories, are interesting and attract the attention of my pupils.” In addition, Respondent TD said, “English and oral literature are inseparable. Whenever I am teaching English, automatically I’m teaching oral literature.” Respondent TF said:

Oral literature helps my students to be attentive and follow the lesson because its aspects are interesting. In the long run, they develop critical listening skills, which are good for morally upright pupils. Even when I don’t have a story or proverb in my teaching text, many times I introduce my lessons with an anecdote, proverb, or wise saying. When I have an aspect of oral literature in the text, I emphasise it. I also give my learners a chance to participate by allowing them to tell stories to their fellows. They enjoy it.

Some respondents pointed to the fact that integrating oral literature in lessons is sometimes hampered by many factors, ranging from time to attitude and the kind of materials to use. Respondent TA said:

*Thorough integration of oral literature is still a challenge for me because of time. Oral literature is good, but it needs time. I end up ignoring some of those stories because I want to focus on finishing the syllabus, especially the examinable parts. The administrators want us to bring our marks. They don’t care how we get them. I usually ignore parts that don’t frequently appear in examinations. I think oral literature will benefit lower primary teachers more.*

These findings resonate with previous studies. Many researchers believe that oral literature and the English language are intertwined. Oral literature is therefore utilized to improve language proficiency (Jerald & Nuh, 2024; Jones, 2012; Kidd & Castano, 2017). According to Mpumuje et al. (2024), English teachers emphasize on folk dramas and tales, myths, proverbs, sayings, and tongue twisters during their lessons as the most important components of oral literature. Other researchers, however, remark that the incorporation of oral literature in primary schools has many challenges, such as the fact that oral literature continues to be underrepresented in curricula in many institutions. The emphasis is typically on important disciplines such as science, as oral literature is only emphasized at higher levels of education (Kidd & Castano, 2017; Sone, 2018). Other challenges that undermine the integration of oral literature in lessons include limited resources, cultural sensitivity, and standardization (Pulimeno et al., 2020; Taber, 2020; Tuwe, 2016; Ugwu, 2022).



Question 2: What are your perceptions of the effect of oral literature on the moral development and behavior of primary school children?

The major themes that emerged are moral values and lessons, cultural identity, critical thinking and problem solving, and a sense of community belonging. The majority of the respondents noted that oral literature is significant in shaping the morals of students by exposing them to important real-life lessons, cultural identity, societal values, and awareness about right and wrong. Respondents also noted that oral literature enables students to think critically, solve problems, know what is expected of them, and make rational decisions. For example, Respondent TA said, "Students pick many lessons from oral literature. As we teach it or use it in our lessons, we emphasize certain lessons." Respondent TE explained:

I took oral literature genres for granted and only taught them to students to pass time. It wasn't until I advanced to diploma and degree levels that I learned how important oral literature is in a pupil's life, since it prepares them to fit in society.

Respondent TB noted:

*Stories, prayers, legends, myths, songs, and other examples of oral literature foster moral growth in young people by instilling values like discipline, togetherness, and accountability. Through storytelling, I believe orature teaches essential life lessons, cultural pride, and social norms, shaping the conduct of our pupils and preparing them for responsible citizenship.*

Respondent TC said:

Mindsets of teachers these days are geared toward uplifting students solely for examination purposes, as opposed to previous years when teachers focused on teaching and upbringing a pupil or individual as a whole. That clearly transmitted Oral Literature genres that taught morality and livelihood skills in general and allowed one to fit in society harmoniously.

*This could be the reason why we are experiencing a moral decline in our learners. We need to go back and pay attention to the moral growth of these pupils and oral literature will surely help us improve it.*

Respondent TF said:

Although some teaching resources for oral literature are available, I don't teach it because it is not examinable. I know how impactful it is on moral development so I think Uneb should increase on the examinable aspects of oral literature, or even make it a separate paper if possible. That will make us serious. We shall teach it and in the long run, our pupils will learn a lot and change positively.



Respondent TD said:

*Oral literature has the capacity to polish the behavior of our pupils especially at their young age. However, teachers need to be careful when teaching negative literature such as stories with villains. If learners are not well guided, they will behave like those villains. I'm always careful enough to emphasize the lessons I want my pupils to learn from the stories or songs I use in my English lessons.*

These findings are consistent with previous research on oral literature and children's moral development. Many academics agreed that oral literature should be emphasized in order to strengthen attempts to promote moral values in students and society (Fafunwa, 2018; Ojukwu, 2014). Storytelling is an example of oral literature that allows students to interact with complex moral concerns, acquire empathy, and grasp community norms. Previous research has also shown that teachers can employ oral literature to develop moral education, social skills, and cultural awareness (Kidd & Castano, 2017).

Question 3. How does oral literature influence your behavior and decision-making?

Majority of the students said they like behaving like the heroes in the oral literature pieces while they tend to avoid what brings some characters trouble. Their responses revealed themes such as moral growth through storytelling, interpersonal relationships, critical thinking, cultural awareness, application to real-life situations, and awareness of values. Most students noted that the genres of oral literature they are exposed to give them the awareness they need to make critical decisions and improve their behaviour. For example, Respondent S3 said:

*Our teacher told us a story about the daughters of the king where I learned truthfulness is good but greed is bad. The stories teach us many lessons that help us to be good children. We also exchange stories in class and outside class with our friends. At home, my father and grandmother also tell me good stories and we sing songs with my grandmother that teach me good behaviours.*

Many respondents said their behavior is inspired by the good characters in the pieces of oral literature they study in class. Respondent S2 said, "I struggle very much to have wisdom like that of Hare from the stories we use in class." Respondent S8 also said, "I admire many animals and people from our English class stories. I want to be disciplined like them."

According to previous research, students may view oral literature as a useful instrument for moral growth and decision-making. Through stories, proverbs, and

riddles, they learn virtues such as honesty, kindness, and responsibility, which govern their actions. Oral literature frequently presents relatable settings and moral quandaries, allowing students to critically assess options and consequences. It instills empathy, cultural pride, and a sense of belonging in students, influencing their values and encouraging smart judgments in real-life situations (Adiguzel & Ayaz, 2020; Das, 2023; Tzuriel, 2021; Youssef, 2023).

## Conclusion

Findings reveal that oral literature plays a significant role in the moral development and decision-making processes of primary school learners. Teachers integrate oral literature in their lessons through methods such as storytelling, dramatization, proverbs, and thematic integration, despite challenges like time constraints and limited resources. Teachers perceive oral literature as a valuable tool for fostering moral values, cultural identity, critical thinking, and community belonging among learners. Students, on the other hand, find inspiration from the positive characters in oral literature, which aids their moral growth and guides their behavior. Despite its proven benefits, oral literature remains underutilized, as it is not a standalone subject and faces challenges from an exam-oriented education system and curriculum gaps.

Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that the Ministry of Education and Sports and its partners should develop the curriculum further to make oral literature a key topic or provide specific rules for its systematic integration into existing subjects. Secondly, professional development programs such as refresher courses and workshops should be implemented to provide instructors with novel strategies for effectively incorporating oral literature into classes. Schools should be given suitable materials, such as textbooks and teaching manuals for oral literature genres. Additionally, education policymakers should emphasize its value and thoroughly integrate its components in assessments to stimulate the use of oral literature in the classroom. Schools should also encourage partnerships with the community to resuscitate and preserve local oral literature traditions, thereby strengthening students' cultural identification and moral growth. Lastly, there is need for further studies to investigate long-term impacts of oral literature on moral development and its incorporation into other subjects. These recommendations will maximize the relevance of oral literature in the moral growth of learners.

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