

**CULTURAL COMMUNICATION SCHEMA FOR SOCIETAL COHESION:
PERSPECTIVES AND IMPACT OF MORAL DIDACTICS AND VALUES IN
NIGERIAN SOCIETIES**

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ABSTRACT

Life in African societies is interdependent and demands good behaviour towards each other in a manner that is socially approved, while lapses in the moral domain are obvious as resultant growing moral decadence experienced in the contemporaneous societies. Africans use several and diverse communication forms to address issues of morality to teach, inculcate and reprimand departure from approved society's behaviour. This however is seen in the diverse schema devised by different societies in Africa where moral value has much premium and transmitted to individual members from the cradle as enculturation in African societies starts from the home through informal education. In African societies immorality and exhibition of moral decadence are opprobrium seriously frowned at and accompanied by sanctions of various forms that make members of the society endeavour to live in line with approved norms and mores.

Keywords: Communication, Schema, Morality, Didactics, African, Behaviour, Society

Introduction

From the yore, Africans particularly Nigerian societies have always had several and diverse means of communicating morality within its confines. Enculturation is a tool for cultural assimilation especially, in disseminating values and this is embedded in taboos, proverbs, names, parables as well as folklores as communication formats meant to produce morally upright individuals in developing healthy attitudes acceptable in societies. Phenix (1961) posits; children and adolescents get to adulthood with unresolved emotional problems, worries, anxieties, fears, grievances with feelings of guilt and self-reproach resulting in delinquencies and crime attributable to inadequate education which tends to teach people all other things that are impersonal other than themselves.

Taboos, proverbs, names, riddles, folklores, address informal education for self-understanding in order to be socially integrated as one relates with other people throughout lifetime. Extant research has focused on the formal sector of education; take for example UNESCO United Nation Educational and Social Commission under the UN; child education in elementary and secondary school education in focused exclusively, and takes the front burner while the informal sector of child's education is largely ignored. Whereas education in African societies is an all-encompassing; starting from the home to the community in enculturation of values of the land. It is the opinion of Omoyajowo (1975) that to be cut off from one's natural relationship with the hearth and society is seen as a curse similar to that laid upon Cain in the Bible. It is therefore the Black man's incorporation in society that really makes a man.

This mentalistic view is embedded in the attitudinal expressions of socialization and enculturation that cover all the society's norms and mores necessary for the continued existence as a functioning unit (Andah 1982). It sets out to espouse taboos, proverbs, names, pynergerics, parables, myths as communication tools drawn from different Nigerian societies and communities. The method adopted for this study is ethnographic method of data gathering anchored on descriptive analysis. Data are collected from primary as well as secondary

sources. Primary sources are from sub-sections of Nigerian societies through in-depth interview and focus group discussions. Such information system delimits social, political, economic, kinship, family, parent/child, sibling, marriage, status, roles, worldview and beliefs embodying the collective accumulated wisdom of the people. This is communicated through various perceived symbol systems in the contemporaneous or future and preserved, in language- proverbs, taboos, names, poems, parables dance, poem, folklore, song as well as artifacts.

As it has been observed, it is imperative, to restore the African mind from the historical harrowing experiences of the Arab imperialism and slave trade, Islamic proselytizing, the American Atlantic slave trade, Western colonialism/imperialism and similar traumatic epochs of Western and Arab institutions. The restoration can be done through what Idowu (1973) sees as link among individuals in society. To Idowu (1973), there is no abstract entity called society: Whatever society there is; is a society of living human beings and this is why the education of the individual is given high premium in Africa.

Conceptual Review

Culture

Edward B. Taylor defined culture in his work *Primitive Culture* (1871) as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs or any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Bello (1991: 189) sees it as “the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours”. Aziza (2001: 31) asserts that Culture refers to the totality of the pattern of behaviour of a particular group of people.

It includes everything that makes them distinct from any other group of people for instance, their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns, rites of passages from birth, through marriage to death, traditional occupations, religious as well as philosophical beliefs. Culture is passed on from generation to generation.

The acquisition of culture is a result of the socialization process. Explaining how culture is passed on as a generational heritage, Culture is passed on from generation to generation. The acquisition of culture is a result of the socialisation process. Explaining how culture is passed on as a generational heritage, Fafunwa (1974: 48) writes that: The child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people and imbibes it. Culture, in traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imbibes and mimics the action of his elders and siblings. He watches the ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies.

Etuk (2002: 13) is of the opinion that “an entire way of life would embody, among other things, what the people think of themselves and the universe in which they live –their world view – in other words, how they organize their lives in order to ensure In the African society, the individual is very much conscious of his/her behaviour so as not to bring the name of the lineage into disrepute. The behaviour is of concern to all members not only of the immediate family, but of the community as a whole, for each has a certain moral standard to maintain.

Communication

Human communication is essentially the process of exchanging our views or feelings with another person. In its basic form, communication is the expression of thoughts, feelings or information. Communication is a process in which one individual conveys information – either intentionally or unintentionally – to another. Communication occurs when one person attaches meaning to the verbal or nonverbal behavior of another (Sheafor and Horejsi, 2011). Communication is the exchanging of information, creating and maintaining relationships and sharing understanding with those around us. Human communication from the perspective of linguistic anthropology sees social structure and social-structural behaviour as essentially communicative phenomena. Communication is the process of sharing ideas, information, and messages with others in a particular time and space. Communication therefore includes writing and talking, as well as nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, body language, or gestures, visual communication which is the

use of images or pictures, such as painting, photography, video, or film, and electronic communication in form of telephone calls, electronic mail, cable television, or satellite broadcasts. Communication is thus a vital part of personal life and is also important in business, education, and any other situation where people encounter each other.

Parables

These are simplified short stories that teach moral or spiritual lessons. They are told to illustrate the rhetoric. The Greeks originally gave the term parable to any motif illustration in the form of brief narrative, to introduce moral or philosophical id. Essentially, parables are brief succinct stories in prose or verse. The word proverb derived from Latin, *proverbium* is a simple, concrete, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are often metaphorical and use formulaic language. Collectively, they form a genre of folklore. Lord John Russell (1850) observed poetically that a "proverb is the wit of one, and the wisdom of many.

Proverbs are short and pithy sayings that express some traditionally held home-truths in terse language as ways of transmitting cultural heritage. They are usually metaphorical and often for the sake of memorabilia; alliterative. Indeed, almost nothing defines a culture as distinctly as its language and the element of language that best encapsulates a society's values and beliefs as in didactic proverbs. Proverbs have literal and interpretative translations.

Proverbs, riddles and narratives are made of communications in African societies that form daily events encapsulated in witty sayings in verses, prose or song meant to deliver strong messages of time-tested truth about human endeavours, life situation, morals and values. In similar vein, Fafunwa Babs (1974) describes proverbs as linguistic expressions that bring out meanings of obscurity in conversations and arguments. They are indirect modes of communication that are yet more effective than the direct. To Akpan (1971), proverbs are loaded with morals of the society.

Folkways and folklores

Folkways are the fixed customs of a particular group that are morally binding upon all members of the group and necessary to its welfare and preservation. They are the vast body of community beliefs which shapes private actions. Folkways are also moral attitudes that are in conformity to the ever-shifting ways of the moment most times intertwined with proverbs and taboos in some African communities. These are traditional customs, beliefs, dances, songs, tales, or sayings preserved orally and unreflectively among a people or group, such that form the life and spirit of a people or of peoples as revealed in their traditional customs and tales including mythology. Folkways specify what is considered prim and proper in the community in such areas like etiquette, clothing, use of language, eating habit. Folkways are habitual since they are the usual ways of doing things such as; standing on a queue, arriving on time for appointments, greetings, celebrating birthdays, eating three square meals. The breaking of breeches in folkways does not carry any punishment as such, it just attracts mild sanction or displeasure like ridicule, gossip, ostracism for doing what others don't do or not doing what others do. If one eats boiled rice with fingers, lick plate of food, dress obscenely, use bad language, shake hands with kings and not prostrating or kneel, one may thus be regarded as eccentric and against the folkways of many African societies.

Taboo

Taboo is an implicit prohibition on something usually against an utterance or behavior based on a cultural sense that it is excessively repulsive or, perhaps, too sacred for ordinary people. Such prohibitions are present in virtually all societies. Taboos are often meant to protect the human individual, but there are numerous other reasons for their existence. An ecological or medical background is apparent in many, including some that are seen as religious or spiritual in origin. Taboos can help use a resource more efficiently, but when applied to only a subsection of the community they can also serve to suppress a subsection of the community.

A taboo acknowledged by a particular group or tribe as part of their ways, aids in the cohesion of the group, helps that particular group to stand out and maintain its identity in the

face of others and therefore creates a feeling of "belonging". The meaning of the word "taboo" has been somewhat expanded in the social sciences to strong prohibitions relating to any area of human activity or custom that is sacred or forbidden based on moral judgment, religious beliefs, or cultural norms. "Breaking a taboo" is usually considered objectionable by society in general, not merely a subset of a culture. Taboos are also known as abominations. In other words, they are asocial or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place, or thing. Many taboos have also developed around physical exposure.

Findings and Discussion

From interviews and discussions with various sub-sections of societies in Africa, didactics on values, morals and social expectations of the society from members are illustrated and expressed in proverbs and taboos portraying the mentifacts of the group.

Contextual examples of Proverbs among Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria

Proverb: *Ogbón ológbón kù jé kí á pe àgbà ní wéré* **Translation:** The collective wisdom of others prevents elders from being regarded as fools. **Interpretive Meaning:** It is part of the culture of the Yorubas that elders usually like to listen to the ideas and opinions of younger ones, especially wherever there is an important controversy to take care of. As the younger ones speak, the elderly ones in the panel modify or confirm their own personal opinions and ideas. In the final analysis, the elders come in to sum up and conclude the case. The community then acknowledges the wisdom of the elders, although it may, most of the time, be the overall summary of the ideas of the younger ones. The language of the elders in such situations also helps in lending unusual quality to their final pronouncement.

Proverb: *Ilé ni àbò ìsìmi oko.* **Translation:** The Home is the place where you come to rest after working hard in the farm. **Interpretive Meaning:** It seems an obvious fact that the home is the place where one comes back to rest after working hard in the farm. 'Farm' and 'home' are used in figurative sense here to represent the period of hard work in life and the situation of future rest in this world. The proverb is therefore mainly used to remind people to 'prepare

for the rainy day', i.e. to make provision for comfortable retirement life. It is also used to warn people not to forget or ignore their place of origin during apparent prosperous days. One would need the company of the native community at some time in the near or far future.

Proverb: *Orùn kùkurú ni a fi ñ yá owó, orùn gígùn ni a fi ñ san án.* **Translation:** One's neck is usually short when one wants to borrow money, but one's neck becomes elongated when it is time to pay back.

Interpretive meaning: It is the custom in Yoruba land that a person who wants to borrow money goes to the lender with great humility. The borrower literally begs and sometimes prostrates before the lender. At this time his neck becomes contracted, looking very short. However, when it is time to pay as promised, the borrower keeps postponing the date of payment. After a number of approaches by the lender, the borrower stands straight at full height and shouts at the lender with this neck fully stretched, saying after all, how much is the money on which you will not allow me to rest? This proverb is used to warn people who become recalcitrant against their benefactors or mentors. Many people in high positions today may forget about their humble submission to mentors in the earlier days of their careers.

Proverb: *Kèrègbè ni yó sọ ibi tí a máa fi okùn sí ní orùn rẹ.* **Translation:** The gourd (container for palm wine) will always create where to put a rope around its neck.

Interpretive Meaning: An average Yoruba person knows that the gourd which is used for storing palm wine is the product of a crawling plant. In its natural form, its shape presents a big belly, a neck, and a small head. This natural shape dictates where to put a rope for carrying it when palm wine is poured into it. In the same way, a stupid, misbehaving or recalcitrant person, by his actions, dictates what type of punishment is suitable to correct him or repay him for his bad behaviour.

Proverb: *Kòkòrò tí ó ñjẹ èfọ́, inú èfọ́ ni ó ñ gbé.* **Translation:** The maggot that eats up the green leaves actually lives in the green leaves. **Interpretive Meaning:** Usually, green leaves or vegetable items which are not properly preserved eventually get eaten up and destroyed by maggots or other pests. Such maggots usually live inside the vegetable items and see the items

as their homes. The Yoruba use this observation to show that if a situation seems to be problematic, almost defying simple solutions, we should always look inwards or into our homes for the cause of the problem. Elders in the society are adept in discovering or highly suspecting that the cause of one problem or another is indeed among those who are crying against the problem. Therefore, the proverb is used to advise those concerned to look carefully and diligently among one another for the cause of the problem. The discovery of the cause is a logical beginning of the solution. Yoruba elders will not go directly to mention the person or persons who perpetrated the trouble. They take it that the proverb itself is a good pointer to the solution.

Proverb: *Eni tí a rò pé a kò fẹ́ rí, orí afára ni a ti n pàdé e rẹ̀* **Translation:** If there is someone you hate to see, you may incidentally meet him on a narrow bridge.

Interpretive meaning: If you hate somebody, it is natural that you try to avoid situations in which you may meet face to face. However, there are always situations which cannot be avoided. One of such situations is that in which the two of you are walking in opposite directions, face to face, on a narrow bridge. If you do not decide to turn back, contrary to your aim, the two of you will eventually meet on the narrow bridge. What then would you do? The Yoruba people constructed this proverb to show that there is no absolute conditionality in life situations. The proverb is used to plead with people not to be extremely adamant in taking rigid and negative decisions. Elders also use the proverb to expose the low-level intelligence of youths who think they are already wise enough to go their own way without the advice or assistance of others. It is also used to show that there can always be a way of reconciling with your adversaries.

Proverb: *Kíkéré ni abéré kéré, kìí ẹ̀ se míni adìẹ̀.* **Translation:** Although the needle is a very small object, it cannot be swallowed by the hen. **Interpretive Meaning:** In this proverb, the small size of the needle is used to represent the assumed low importance of a person who is usually not pompous and arrogant, but simple and humble. Such a person may occupy an important position in society, but he does not puff himself up because of this position. Hence

it is easy for careless and arrogant members of the society to underrate and attempt to cheat such humble ones. Fortunately, it is often discovered that the object of cheat has rare qualities which cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand. It is the possession of such qualities that make it impossible for others to succeed in cheating or underrating him. The proverb is therefore used to caution people to be careful so that they don't rush into cheating or underrating others whose background or qualities they do not know. Even in the literal sense, it is usual, in our society, for people to tend to underrate persons of small stature or those not flamboyantly dressed. Such a person may indeed be a minister, an ambassador, a priest or a professor.

Proverb: *Ajé n gbè'jà omọ rẹ ní idi, şùgbón kii dé'lé sọ fún un.* **Translation:** The witch usually defends her child at the meeting of the underworld powers, but she would not tell the child when she gets home.

Interpretive meaning: It is believed that witches and wizards usually hold meetings periodically at specific venues. The venue of the meeting is called 'idi' in Yoruba. At such meetings members are usually requested to donate some of their children for rituals. In fact, the meeting may specifically ask for certain children, especially if there are no voluntary offers. At that stage, each member may begin to defend her child against the request. However, those who succeed in defending their children must not tell the children when they get back home. The proverb is based on this seemingly fictitious behaviour of witches. The mode implies that each witch is required to be sufficiently self-disciplined so as not to reveal what transpired at the meeting to any non-member. This is to avoid undue publicity and undue joy by the innocent child, and also to preserve the secrecy of the behaviour of the secret group. The proverb is said by the speaker to let others know that something good is in the offing for the listener(s). It is also said by another person to defend the person who should have taken action, i.e. to let people know that positive action is in progress on an issue, but the action need not be revealed yet.

Contextual examples of Taboo among Yoruba Southwest Nigeria

Whistling: Men and women are not allowed to whistle at nights in Yoruba land. Whistling at nights is believed to invite demons and evil spirits into the house to torment people. Additionally, it is believed that whistling could attract snakes and reptiles into the house at night. **Suicide:** Committing suicide is a serious abomination in Yoruba land, and the body must not be lowered down until some sacrifices are performed to appease the gods. The body of such individual will be thrown into the evil forest or outside the town to avoid invoking the anger of the gods on the land. The family of an individual that commits suicide will be tainted forever in the community.

A strapped baby must never fall from its mother's back: It is an abomination in Yoruba land for a baby to fall from its mother's back. It is believed that if a male child falls from its mother's back, he will always lose his wife at adulthood, while for a female; she will always have a lover die atop her when she grows up. If a baby does fall from its mother's back, the mother is expected to carry out some rituals to prevent evil from happening to the child when it grows. **Killing of vulture:** This scavenging animal is not common in most of the places. There is a serious warning that this bird that feeds on dead animals shouldn't be killed. It is well said that anyone that kills a vulture will die when they do that.

A king and his royal crown: Kings in Yoruba land are forbidden from looking inside of his royal crown. A king must wear a crown but he must never peer into it. The day he does it is the day he will join his ancestors. Kings could be allowed to do this if they insist on committing suicide.

Stretching hand under rain droplet: Children most especially are warned not to collect rainwater by spreading their hands in the downpour. It is even said that thunder can strike one down if it is done. This is actually used as a step to personal hygiene.

Carrying ladder on shoulders: In some places in Yoruba land, carrying a wooden ladder on the shoulder symbolizes a coffin. So, for evil not to prevail, it is a taboo to carry a ladder just like undertakers who carry coffin on their shoulders during burial.

Sitting on Mortar: Mortars are used by the people in preparing some of their favorite dishes such as pounded yam, fufu and so on. A serious warning is then given not to sit on this mortar. This is practically used as a means of hygiene. It is therefore used as a taboo to strike fear into the hearts of the people.

Pregnant woman walking outside on a sunny day: It is also a taboo for a pregnant woman to roam about in the hot sun. It is the belief of the Yoruba people that demons roam about at this time of the day. It is believed that the unborn baby or the mother can be possessed by these demons. This is also used as a form of protection for the pregnant woman. Beating a male child with a broom: This is a common taboo. They say if you beat a male child with a broom, his sexual organ will disappear. This is just a device used to protect the child from physical abuse.

Adultery: Yoruba culture forbids a married woman to have sexual relations with a man that isn't her husband. A man that suspects his wife of cheating could be tempted to lace her with magun, which is one of the strangest traditions in Nigeria. Magun could lead to her lover losing his life or getting stuck while in the act. This taboo is more critical against women than against men, so it is highly frowned upon for a wife to cheat on her husband.

Corpse of a person that drowns must not be brought for burial at home: What this means is that the corpse of a person who dies in a river must be buried near the river, and the corpse of a person who falls from a tree must be buried at the base of the tree. Bringing their corpses home is believed to irk the gods who may cause people to die without causes.

A king must never prostrate for anyone again in his entire life: A royal king is considered a demi-god in Yoruba land and he must never prostrate to greet anyone in his entire life. Same sex relations: This is forbidden in Yoruba land. Although many people practice it in Nigeria, it is still considered an abomination in Yoruba land. The result of this act is believed to be prolonged bad luck and death.

Contextual examples of Proverbs among the Bajju ethnic group of Southern Kaduna and Plateau states

- i. *iyah pfong bu atang, Npye atang. Translation:* set a thief to catch a thief. **Interpretive Meaning:** be smart to win.
- ii. *Abuaka abyi diryenni aryuye. Translation:* A barking dog seldom bites. **Interpretive Meaning:** do not be afraid of dog that bark or people that threaten you { say they will do something bad to you } in both cases, they rarely take action.
- iii. *Jiyii ryen na uh byan kawonka. Translation:* spare the rod, and spoil the child. **Interpretive Meaning:** when you undisciplined a child, it means you are spoiling the child.
- iv. *Am Aka Bibi emi kiri ke, Ivin tubo towa mini ye. Translation:* The breaking palm kernel is better done, when there are teeth in the mouth. **Interpretive meaning:** A thing can best be carried out when there is the power

Contextual examples of taboos in Bajju land

- i. Do not answer a call at night. **Reason:** Only the evil one call at night. **Consequences:** It causes death.
- ii. Spirit snakes should not be killed. **Reason:** It may be the spirit of a person sleeping or having a fever. **Consequences:** when you kill the snake, the person will die.
- iii. Do not whistle at night. **Reason:** For it would call a spirit. **Consequences:** it causes bad luck to the person.
- iv. A visitor must not eat food alone. A person from the visited household must eat with the guest. **Reason:** to prove the food is not poisoned. **Consequences:** your family will be regarded to as a disrespect family.

Contextual examples of Proverbs among Urhobo in Southeast Nigeria

- i. *Okpole oteya gheleofe. Translation:* Big yam tubers grow despite the beetles. **Interpretive Meaning:** Despite the challenges and obstacles in life one must survive.

- ii. *Aye da rho n' ovorovwro roye, odjaye eje-e.* **Translation:** Even if the co-wife is taller, it doesn't stop them from choosing things. **Interpretive Meaning:** No matter how wealthy you are the culture has respect for position and age.
- iii. *Obo ewwere seru, urho ke se ruo-o.* **Translation:** The feat of the earthen cooking pot can't be achieved by the mortar. **Interpretive Meaning:** Where your strength and accomplishment lies is different from where my own strength and accomplishment lie.
- iv. *Oro vwovwerhare nyorhe iwirhi.* **Translation:** He who blows the fire perceives its smoke. **Interpretive Meaning:** You must enjoy the fruit of your labour.

Contextual examples of Taboo among Urhobo

It is a taboo to kill and eat an iguana lizard. **Reason:** The lizard is recognized as a deity they worship. People call them mother when they see them. **Consequence:** Spend huge money to conduct an actual burial ceremony if the lizard is killed.

- i. **Consumption of dog meat.** **Reason:** Bush dogs led trapped warriors out of the battle front. **Consequence:** Huge burial ceremony of the dog.
- ii. **Hunting fowls and taking their eggs.** **Reason:** They are regarded as deity. **Consequence:** Punitive measures are put in place for anyone who disobeys and calamity can befall the person.
- iii. **Taboo: A married woman to have sexual intercourse with another man.** **Reason:** She is meant for only her husband. **Consequence:** She will experience delivery difficulty and only if she confesses then she would deliver safely.

Contextual examples of proverbs in Ibiobio land Southeast Nigeria

- i. *Dabu nana bo bibi ka min.* **Translation:** "The person that has a problem knows how to solve it"
- ii. *Oya keme nomikeme.* **Translation:** "A poor man is as good as a mad man"
- iii. *Oya ebua.* **Translation:** "Poverty is not good".

- iv. ***Bebe dibabra dibabra ogun kou pei gha.*** Translation: “No matter the case you don’t use axe to solve the problem you use money”.

Conclusion

The major social fact embedded in a society’s culture is the moral guide and guard. Culture not only protects, but also preserves the society and this is accomplished through communication. The relationship between communication and culture is a very complex yet intimate one because, cultures are created through communication, communication is the means of human interaction through which cultural traits- values, traditions, customs, roles, rules, rituals, laws, or other patterns—are created and shared. It is not so much that individuals set out to create a culture when they interact in relationships, groups, organizations, or societies, but rather that cultures are a natural by-product of social interaction.

In a sense, culture is the residue of social communication. Without communication and communication media, it would be impossible to preserve and pass along cultural characteristics from one place and time to another. One can say, therefore, that culture forms the bedrock of society’s moral guide is created, shaped, transmitted, and learned through communication at the same time, communication practices are largely created, shaped, and transmitted by culture.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that Africans need to inculcate their culture, cherish and imbibe it into their lives to be epitome of what their societies envisage and not take on foreign values and culture that is alien to their social structure leading to confusion and disorientation of lives. Many African youth are in the throes of losing their identity, their roots in the quest for Western civilization. African values that embrace hard-work, dignity of man, respect for elders, abhorrence for crime and shedding blood, honesty, community life, care for others will go in no small measure to launch Africa into stable, peaceful and enviable lives.

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