

IBIBIO TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN THE INCULCATION OF MORAL VALUES IN EDUCATION

BY

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Abstract

This work explores the Ibibio traditional religion, deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Ibibio people which plays a significant role in inculcating moral values in education. This paper technically assesses the religious beliefs, ethical principles, and moral teachings, embedded in Ibibio traditional religions and their impact on character formation within educational settings. The religion emphasises virtues such as truthfulness, respect, communal responsibility and discipline, which are reinforced through myths, folktales, proverbs, and traditional institutions such as Ekpo and Ekpe Societies. These moral teachings serve as an informal but effective educational system that shapes behaviour and social order. Despite the increasing influence of modern education and religious pluralism, elements of Ibibio traditional religious values continue to be relevant in promoting ethical consciousness among students. This work adopts a survey method. The study highlights the

integration of traditional moral teachings into contemporary educational practices, advocating for a holistic approach that blends indigenous knowledge with formal education. This work concludes that recognizing and preserving these traditional moral values, can enhance ethical education, promote cultural identity, and contribute to societal development.

Keywords: Ibibio Traditional Religions, Moral, Values, Education.

Introduction

Moral education refers to the process through which individuals are taught the principles, standards, and values that define right and wrong, good and bad, in society. It involves the cultivation of characters, ethical behaviour, and social responsibility. Moral education is not just about learning prescribed rules but about internalizing values that guide individuals in their interactions, their sense of justice, fairness, empathy, and their role in the community. The aim of moral education is to produce individuals who are not only academically knowledgeable but also virtuous, responsible and capable of making bound ethical decisions in everyday life. This is particularly relevant in societies where cultural and religious values serve as the backbone of social norms and behaviour.

In many African societies, including Ibibio land in South-South Nigeria, moral education has traditionally been intertwined with cultural practices, beliefs and religious system. African Traditional Religion (ATR) has played a significant role in shaping moral education across various communities.

Unlike formal or institutionalized religions, ATR is deeply embedded in the cultural and daily lives of the people. It is a holistic belief system that governs not only spiritual and metaphysical concerns but also societal norms, moral, codes, and ethical behaviour. In Ibibio land, traditional religion has been a cornerstone of moral education for generations. The teachings of Ibibio traditional religions emphasize virtues such as honesty, integrity, humility, and respect for elders, compassion, and justice. “These values are taught to children from early age through communal activities, storytelling, and participation in religious ceremonies” (Bassey, 2019:27). Elders play a critical role in impacting these moral lessons, often through direct instruction or by setting examples through their own behaviour.

The community, therefore, becomes a school in itself where children learn the values of life and the importance of living in agreement with the forces of nature and the spiritual world. The moral teachings in Ibibio traditional religion are transmitted through rituals, taboos, and stories. Moral instruction is often conveyed through the performance of rites of passage, where young individuals are inducted into the adult community, learning the values and responsibilities expected of them. This includes learning to uphold the community’s laws, maintaining social harmony, and honouring both the living and the dead. Nana (2023:5) enthuses that the ancestors act as checks and balances on the moral life of the community. They reward the morally upright person here on earth with success, happiness, good health and place them in the ranks of the ancestors in the life after. The Ibibio place a story emphasis on integrity, humility,

hospitality and respect for elders. The elders are viewed as moral examples and are tasked with ensuring that the young generation upholds these values. A core aspect of moral education in Ibibio society is the concept of communalism, where the welfare of the community is placed above individual desires. Moral education, therefore, is not only about the individual but also how one's action affects the broader social order.

The idea of 'goodness' in Ibibio society; is inextricably linked to the collective well-being and so, people are encouraged to act in ways that contribute to the harmony and prosperity of their community. The influence of Western culture particularly through the introduction of Christianity and colonialism has significantly altered the religious and moral landscape of many African societies, including the Ibibio. The arrival of Christian missionaries in the 19th century, along with the imposition of colonial rule, led to the marginalization of African Traditional Religion. Christianity, with its monotheistic teachings, not only replaced indigenous beliefs but also taught to discredit traditional African religious practices as "Pagan" or "Barbaric". "This process led to a gradual erosion of African cultural practices, including those related to moral education" (Uboh, 2009:96). Western education systems, which were introduced alongside Christianity, also had a profound effect on moral education. The focus of western education was often on academic achievement, rather than the development of character and ethical behaviour as understood in Ibibio context.

Western educational models placed less emphasis on communal values and the integration of religion and

culture into the educational process. This shift in educational priorities has contributed to a disconnection between younger generations and the moral values that once formed the bedrock of Ibibio society. In contemporary Ibibio society, the influence of western education, culture and religion is evident in the growing decline of traditional religious practices and moral teachings. According to Nana (2019:320), culture defines the social forces within the community involving its conventions for behaviour, ranging from food preparation techniques, to forms of entertainment that keep the community together like music or dancing, to dating, rituals, and so on. Religion defines how the community members interpret their role in the universe, with this teachings based on the local culture, so different religions rise out of different cultures. Younger generations and increasingly expose to globalized values that prioritize individualism, material success, and secularism. This shift has created tensions, as the moral values taught in school and through western religions often contradict the communal and spiritual grounded values that are central to Ibibio traditional religions. The result is the generational gap in moral understanding, with many young people struggling to reconcile the moral teachings of their ancestors with the pressure of modern life. This study is undertaken to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Ibibio traditional religion and its role in the promotion of moral education, and to explore the way in which these values can be used to promote moral education in Ibibio land today and tomorrow.

Traditional Education System

Traditional education, often viewed through the lens of historical and cultural contexts, encompasses the methods, practices, and philosophies that have shaped learning across generations. It is a system deeply rooted in the customs and values of a community serving not only as a means of imparting knowledge but also as a vehicle for cultural transmission. In view of this, O' Sullivan (199:79) defines traditional education as the time-honoured teaching methods and practices that are deeply embedded in the cultural heritage and historical traditions of a community. This approach to learning often relies on the spoken words, hands on experience, and active participation in community life to pass on knowledge and values from one generation to the next. In this perspective, traditional system of education can be seen as a structured approach to learning that is typically characterized by a strong emphasis on oral traditions, rituals and community involvement.

Traditional education system is fundamentally about the transmission of cultural values and knowledge from one generation to the next. Through this system of education children learn through stories, proverbs, and participation in community activities. This form of education is holistic; it nurtures not only the intellect but also the moral and social dimensions of a person. It is an integrative nature of traditional education system where learning is not just academic but also ethical and social. The purpose of traditional education extends beyond mere knowledge acquisition. It aims to instill a sense of identity and belonging within individuals.

Another significant aspect of traditional education is the role of rituals and ceremonies. Those events often mark important milestones in an individual's life, such as coming of age ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. Bassey (2019:77) explains that "... rituals are educational in themselves." They teach us about our roles in society, our responsibilities, and the value we hold dear. Such ceremonies reinforce social norms and expectations, provide to individuals with a framework for understanding their place within the community. While traditional education has its strengths, it is not without challenges. In increasingly globalized worlds, the relevance of traditional educational practices is often questioned. The influences of modern behaviour dern education systems, characteristics by formal schooling and standardized curricula, pose a threat to the continuity of traditional knowledge.

Ayomide (2010:12) expresses concern about this trend, stating, "We must find a way to integrate traditional education with modern approaches. Our children need to learn the wisdom of our ancestors while also being prepared for the challenges of the contemporary world." This call for integration reflects a growing recognition of the need to preserve cultural heritage while adapting to changing circumstances.

The Nexusbetween Moral Education and Traditional African Religion

The connection between traditional Africa religion and moral education is profound and far-reaching. Traditional African religion refers to the indigenous belief systems practiced by various African

communities before the introduction of Christianity and Islam. This religion is characterized by a rich collection of rituals spiritual beliefs, and cultural practices that are deeply ingrained in the everyday lives of practitioners. Traditional African religion includes a wide range of beliefs from animism and ancestor worship to a deep reverence for nature and cosmos (Durkheim 1964:218). Central to these practices is the understanding that the spiritual and physical worlds are interconnected, influencing individual and communal well-being. Traditional African religions have always played a pivotal role in shaping the moral value and principles of African societies.

Morality, in this context, is not merely a set of abstract rules but is woven into the very fabric of community life. It is through religious beliefs and practices that individuals learn about right and wrong, justice and injustice, and their responsibilities towards others and the community as a whole. (Mbiti (1969:28) has pointed out that in African societies, "... the individual is in a continuous relationship with the community, the ancestors, and the spiritual world." The connection between individuals, their community and their spiritual world helps people feel responsible and accountable to one another. Similarly, Gyekye (1995:92) asserts that "... traditional African moral systems are grounded in a communal ethics, where the well-being of the group takes precedence over individual desires." This communal approach to morality shapes behaviours, encouraging cooperation, respect for elders, and the importance of social harmony. In this way, the

traditional religious practices teach importance values that help keep the community in harmony.

According to Ejizu (1999:86), in many African cultures, traditional religion is not simply a set of beliefs but a comprehensive way of life that encompasses every aspect of human existence, including moral education. It teaches people right from wrong through various activities like rituals, storytelling, and community gatherings. These rituals, storytelling, and communal gatherings serve as a vehicle for transmitting moral values, for instance, proverbs in making ethics decision and choices. The teachings embedded within these narratives reflect core value such as honesty, integrity, respect, and communal solidarity. Traditional African religion provides a moral philosophy that guide human behaviours in all aspects of life, shaping individuals' actions and decisions. This holistic approach ensures that moral education is deeply ingrained in cultural identity and community cohesion. From the above explanation, it is noticeable that the traditional African religion has provided a framework for understanding right and wrong and has helped individuals to develop a sense of moral responsibility and accountability.

The moral teachings of traditional African religion have also been instrumental in promoting social justice, fairness, and equity, which are all essential components of moral education. Thus, the relationship between traditional African religion and moral education providing a rich, source of moral teachings and principles that have shapes the cultural identity and values of African communities. However, the influence of western culture and other religions has weakened its

impact. When western countries colonized Africa, they brought new ideas about what is right and wrong that often conflicted with traditional African values. Western societies often prioritize individual success and wealth over community well-being, which has led to a decline in traditional African values that emphasize community and shared responsibility. As a result, many African communities are struggling to balance their traditional values with modern influences, leading to a loss of connection to their traditional moral teachings. It is therefore, essential to recognize and revive the moral teachings of traditional African religious to preserve African cultural identity and keep communities strong in today's world that is saturated with western influence and culture.

Moral Values In Ibibio Traditional Religion

In traditional Ibibio religious system, morality is deeply intertwined with the laws, customs, and traditions that govern social life. These norms though, not codified in formal written instruments, are transmitted through oral traditions, rituals, and the teachings of elders. Ibibio people recognize that their community is sustained by a system of moral and legal principles that is passed down from generation to generation. These principles shape the behaviour of individuals and ensure the cohesion and well-being of the society. A strong sense of communal responsibility is ingrained in the people, guiding them to act in accordance with established norms, knowing that their actions will lead to either rewards or punishment based on their adherence to the law. The concept of morality in the Ibibio traditional religion is not only

about personal virtue but also about maintaining harmony within the community (Uboh, 2009:116). Nana and Udom (2024:154), observed that norms exist in every society and governs how members of such society behave, think, make judgment and perceive their world. He also expressed the hidden dimension of Ibibio social norms institution revolves around the moral sanctions that help in shaping an Ibibio person. Nana and Udom (2024:154), a good character is a solid weapon against various bad behaviours in Ibibio land. The moral values are reflected in various aspects of life including family relationships, social conduct and communal duties.

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2019:116). The moral values are reflected in various aspect of life, including family relationships, social conduct, and communal duties.

Respect for elders is considered one of the highest virtues. Elders are seen as the custodians of morality, wisdom and tradition, and their guidance is essential to moral conduct. This respect for elders is central to the moral education of young Ibibio people, who learn from them through stories, proverbs, and direct teaching. Ibibio morality is articulated through a system of customs, laws, duties, taboos, and etiquette. These categories form the foundation of traditional Ibibio education which is transmitted through observation, participation in communal activities, and direct instruction. In Ibibio, customs, also known as *edu-unam mkpo*, represent the long-standing practices that regulate the way people conduct themselves both in private and public settings. These customs are considered sacred because they are believed to have originated from the ancestors, and they are followed with deep reverence. Rituals are often performed to ensure that these customs are observed correctly and to maintain the moral order of society.

The (*Mbed*) laws in Ibibio society are the specific rules and regulations that given behaviour. These laws regulate everything from land use to village maintenance, ensuring that resources are shared equitably and that the community's collective needs are met. For instance, there are rules governing land tenure system, where lands must be left to fallow for a period of seven years before they are put in used, and laws concerning communal work, such as sweeping the

village pathways. These laws, were not written, are enforced by the elders and the village council, ensuring that all members of the community adhere to the established norms. *Utom*, or duties and obligation, reflects the moral responsibility each individual has to do to their family and community. These duties are seen as essential for maintaining social order and are taught from a young age. As observed by Etim (2017:59), children are expected to care for their parents and elders, while adults are responsible for providing for their families fulfilling communal duties, and helping their neighbours. The sense of duty is so strong in Ibibio culture that even the most basic acts of service, such as contributing to communal work, are viewed as moral imperatives.

Ido (etiquette), in Ibibio society governs how individuals interact with each other, particularly in public settings. It dictates how respect is shown, especially towards elders. For example, a youth is expected to greet an elder first and show humility in their interactions. There are also strict rules about behaviour during communal events, such as not drinking palm wine in the presence of Elders or not responding to their advice, as it is believed that advice should be listened to without challenge. These manners reflect the deep respect for hierarchy and the importance of maintaining harmony and order in social interactions. Taboos, or *Ibed*, are moral prohibitions that are considered sacred and are enforced through ritual violating a taboo is believed to bring misfortune to the individual and the community and rituals are often performed to atone for the transgression.

Some taboos are linked to specific times or actions, such as the prohibition against fetching water from the community stream on certain market days or the belief that a woman who engages in infidelity will cause the death of her husband. These taboos serve to reinforce moral behaviour by attracting serious consequences to transgressions, which are often seen as violation not just of societal norms but of divine order. Through these various mechanisms customs, laws, duties, order, etiquette, and taboos, the Ibibio moral system is transmitted to each generation. The elders as the custodians of tradition play a vital role in teaching the younger generation about the expectations of the community. In this way, morality in Ibibio religion is not merely a set of abstract principles but a living evolving part of daily life; shaping the action of individuals and ensuring the continuity the community's values.

Rituals and Ceremonies in Moral Education

Moral education in traditional Ibibio society occurred within the fabric of daily life, and one of the key channels through which this education was passed was through rituals and ceremonies. These ceremonies were more than just cultural performance they serve as critical avenues for reinforcing the values, ethics, and social norms of the community. The role of elders in this process was pivotal, as they held the responsibility of transmitting the collective wisdom, moral standards, and societal expectations to younger generation through a combination of storytelling, symbolic acts, proverbs and direct teachings during these event. Ibibio society

ensured the preservation and continuity of its moral values (Usoro, 2012:71).

Usoro Obufa Udia (New yam festival) is one of the most significant ceremonies in Ibibio culture. It marks the harvesting of the first yam and is celebrated with great communal enthusiasm. In Ibibio community, the new yam festival is not just a celebration of abundance but also a moment for moral teachings. Elders particularly in the context of the festivals' rituals would speak to the community about the importance of hard work, humility, respect for nature, and gratitude. The yam, being a symbol of life and sustenance, teaches us that nothing comes without effort: in Ibibio, the occasion was used for advising the youth about their roles in the family, community, and society, at large. The ritualistic sharing of yam during the festival, especially the presentation of the first yam to the elders, also carries a great moral lesson about respect and honour for one's elder. It serves as a reminder of the duty to honour those who come before, a value central to Ibibio moral education.

The *Usoro Ndo* (Marriage Ceremonies) are elaborate, often spanning several days, and are rich in cultural rituals. Through these ceremonies, moral values about family, fidelity, and the roles of husband and wife are passed down. Marriage is the foundation of our society. Through the marriage ceremonies, we teach young couples about loyalty, responsibilities and the importance of mutual respect.

During these ceremonies, elders would often address the couples and the community, offering advice on how to live harmoniously within the family structure.

The exchange of gifts, the payment of dowry, and the communal involvements all serve as reminders of the interdependence that characterized Ibibio social life. Furthermore, marriage ceremonies also emphasize the concept of responsibilities but to one's spouse and to the wider community. The collective nature of the event reinforced the idea that marriage is not just a union between two individuals but a bond between families and by extension, the entire community. The *Mbopo* initiation, a key rite of passage for girls in Ibibio culture, is another important ceremony through which moral education is imparted. This initiation marks the transition from childhood to womanhood, and it is accompanied by a series of rituals that instill social and values in the young women. The initiation ceremony is designed to prepare girls for their roles as women in the community.

Nana (2023:176), enthuse. "*Mbopo*" festivals is a rite of passage and intensification which are common among the Ibibio communities. The custom requires especially in those lays before the eroding influence of agents of social change every parents to put her daughter through the process of seclusion before she goes into her matrimonial family. "Through the *Mbopo*, the young girls learn about the virtues of modesty, patience, and respect for elders. They are taught the significance of their role within the family, both as daughter and future mothers." The *Mbopo* ceremony also teaches the young women the responsibilities they will bear a custodian of culture and tradition. Elders emphasize the importance of nurturing relationship, caring for children, and being pillars of support within the extended family system. During the ceremonies,

elders will often provide advice through songs, dances, and rituals that underscores the importance of morality, respect, and communal living.

There are numerous other smaller but equally significant ceremonies where moral education is imparted. These include rituals surrounding birth, death, and important milestones within the community. For instance, during funeral rite, elders may offer moral guidance on issues such as death, the after life, and the legacy one leaves behind. These teachings often reflect the importance of living a life of integrity and service to the community. At funeral, we remind ourselves that the life we live today impacts the legacy we leave behind. The living should learn from the actions of the dead, ensuring the live honourably and contribute to the community”, through ritual and ceremonies, Ibibio society has historically ensured that moral education is passed down from one generation to the next.

Conclusion

The Ibibio traditional religion plays a significant role in the inculcation of moral values within the educational frameworks of the Ibibio people. Rooted in a deep respect for nature, community, and ancestral wisdom, the religious practices and beliefs of the Ibibio provide a rich moral foundation that informs their worldview and societal structures. Concepts such as justice, respect, honesty, and communal responsibilities are deeply embedded in Ibibio spiritual teachings and rituals, and these values form an integral part of their approach to education. The traditional religion, with its emphasis realm, harmony between the individual,

society, and the spiritual realm, contributes to a holistic form of education that extends beyond intellectual growth to encompass ethical and social development. Through rituals, proverbs, storytelling and community life, moral lessons are passed down from generation to generation, fostering a sense of responsibility and ethical conduct among the youths. In the context of contemporary education, incorporating the moral values embedded in the Ibibio traditional religion offers, a valuable complements to formal schooling, providing students with a broader, more culturally relevant moral compass. While modern education systems may emphasize academic achievement and technical skills, the integration of indigenous moral frameworks like those found in Ibibio tradition can cultivate a balanced character, encouraging students to become responsible, ethical, and socially –conscious individuals.

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