

# THE *OMOLUÀBÌ* IMPERATIVE: REIMAGINING TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*To properly educate a child, we need to bear in mind the importance of their cultural environment. One of the vital functions of education in any community is the transmission, improvement, and preservation of the culture of the people in a society. To achieve this, the schools, teachers, and parents play central roles. The principles of Yorùbá indigenous education are based on the concept of “*Omoluàbí*”. To be an *Omoluàbí* is to be of good character or a well-rounded individual, which is derived from Yorùbá philosophy in all its ramifications. It is observed nowadays that moral decadence is of the highest order in our schools, as a result of Western education and modernization. It is on this note that this paper examines the relevance of indigenous education to teacher education in Nigeria. The *Omoluàbí* imperative posits that teacher Education in Nigeria should prioritize the development of teachers who are not only knowledgeable in their subject matter but also embody the values of good character. This approach recognizes that teachers play a critical role in shaping the minds and values of future generations. By instilling values of such as empathy, creativity, and critical thinking, teachers can foster a love of learning and promote the holistic development of their students.*

**Keywords:** *Omoluàbí, Cultural environment, Moral decadence, Indigenous education, ‘Apélóko’.*

## Introduction

**O** Ọmọ̀lúàbí is very rich as a concept in Yorùbá culture because it encompasses values such as good character, moral uprightness, and exemplary behaviour. Integrating it into teacher education could have a profound impact on shaping the next generation of leaders and citizens. The need to inculcate Yorùbá traditional education in teacher education is quite imperative due to moral decadence and indecency in the way of lives of our youths, especially students. Teachers' role in uplifting culture and imparting knowledge to students is so important that teachers must possess good qualities of character and live an exemplary life that students can emulate. It is so unfortunate nowadays that the attitude of Youths in teacher training his/her instructions towards character building, which is the basis of traditional education, is cliché. The youth have modernized every aspect of their life endeavours to the detriment of their culture and personality, forgetting the great values embedded in Yorùbá traditional education. It is obvious that what the formal school system imparts to students mostly is the subject matter of their choice of courses and theoretical knowledge. Yorùbá traditional education has seemingly lost its place with advent of Western education and civilization. It is worthy of note that theoretical knowledge without any foundation in the culture of the people becomes a sham (Awóníyì, 1975:361).

The aim of Yorùbá traditional education is to build good character in the people and to make them responsible and balanced people wherever they find themselves. As teachers, education should help them in preserving and building cultures but the reverse is the case today. Culture has been diluted in the name of formal education and modernization. Whoever is even trying to uplift his culture and be an Ọmọ̀lúàbí is often referred to as "Aráoko or *Apé̀lọ̀ko*" (a village person). In this wise, their notion of being educated is to be Europeanized (Awóníyì, 1975: 358), whereas making education relevant is a matter of ensuring that it

generates, informs and maintains the students vision of life including their professional activities, attitudes, beliefs and values (Òyékà̀n, 2005:3).

The end-product of education is to make an individual an *Omọlúàbí*, no matter the level of the education attained. According to Fádípè (1970);

Good character in the Yorùbá sense includes respect for elders, loyalty to one's parents and local traditions, honesty in all public and private dealings, devotion to duty, readiness to assist the needy and the deformed, and sympathy. Sociability, greetings, courage, modesty, decency, and an itching desire for work, and many other desirable qualities.

Without mincing words, we would find out nowadays that generalize, these qualities are found wanting in our teachers-in-training because we are living in times of great changes. Most of them are lazy, ignorant of their culture, insincere, and disrespectful. They abnormally crave fashion, prostitution is of the highest order, their dressing is so shameful that most of them dress half-naked on campuses. When teachers-to-be lack good qualities of moral behaviour, I wonder what they will inculcate in students, because the fact remains that nobody gives what he does not have.

The *Omọlúàbí* concept is in home rooted in the informal training. Today, however, most parents are busy in their daily struggle for survival that they hardly ever are able to set aside the time to inculcate the necessary moral values in their children. The practice of listening to folk stories, proverbs, myths and Legends, all aimed at teaching good moral lessons from the elders which get the young ones cultivated in the “*Omọlúàbí* concept is no more. Instead, students now occupy themselves with clips on television that pay no attention to the concept of “*Omọlúàbí*”.

To the Yorùbá people, good morals are cherished and imbibed from Youth. They inculcate in the child, the act of

behaving uprightly and decently through their oral literature, such as folk stories, taboos, myths and legends, proverbs, drama and theater, *ifá* literary corpus to mention a few. The concept of morality has to do with the rightness of behaviour or actions of individuals, groups or the society at large. Thus, morality of a class would have to do with the right beliefs, or principle approved and recommended for the class in question (Oke and Esikot 1999:3).

### **Ethics in Yorùbá Context**

Ethics are the approved standards of moral behavior to which the Yorùbá people also conform within African Society. The concept of *omọlúàbí* is the bedrock of ethics in the Yorùbá traditional society. Conformity to these culturally approved standards earns a Yorùbá person the prestigious and noble name of *omọlúàbí*. There are different definitions of ethics all over the world. The word ethics is commonly used interchangeably with morality. Sometimes it is used more narrowly to mean the moral principles of a particular tradition, group, or individual. Basically, ethical theories are divided into three general subject areas: metaethics, applied ethics, and normative ethics. Metaethics is the study of the origin and meaning of ethical concepts. Applied ethics involves examining specific controversial issues while normative ethics deals with practical expression of moral standards that regulate conduct. Generally, ethics involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior in the society. Yorùbá ethics and etiquette fall under normative ethics; they involve articulating the good habits people should acquire, the duties they should follow, and the consequences of their behavior on others. (Olúnládé 2017:806).

### **Yorùbá Moral Values**

The importance of morality to the Yorùbá people of Nigeria as the major component of its worldview driven by moral philosophy cannot be overemphasized. Morality to the Yorùbá

simply means 'ìwà'; hence, they refer to good morals as 'Ìwà rere' and bad morals as 'ìwà búburú'. To them, the good or bad nature of a person is often determined by his or her closeness to or departure from 'ìwà rere'. Abímbólá (1975) clarifies this point when he writes that:

A man's 'ìwà' can be used to characterize his life, especially in Ethical terms ... 'ìwà' is regarded by the Yorùbá as one of the very aims of human existence. This is why the Yorùbá regard 'ìwàpèlẹ́' as the most important of all moral values (p.394).

Moral values, in the view of Yorùbá culture, are standards of moral behavior to which people should conform. These moral values can be divided into positive and negative. Examples of positive values are justice, love, truthfulness, solidarity, integrity, peacemaking, hospitality, generosity, transparency, and accountability. The negative values are wrong actions and behaviors from which people must abstain. Examples of negative values are corruption, dishonesty, injustice, stealing, cheating, and indolence, to mention but a few. Therefore, it is clear that the basic concern of Yorùbá ethical values is the entire community; it presents a society committed to give and take, a society where one thinks of others before taking any decision or performing any action. These ethical values are referred to as good character, humane qualities inculcated into a person during childhood. Later, these values develop the mind to a full *omolúàbí* standard. A Yorùbá person should display the above-mentioned ethical values.

The equivalent of ethics is the Yorùbá concept of *omolúàbí* (dignified child), which is broader and weightier. It encompasses all the ethical values expected of a person that make him or her fit to live in society in peace and harmony. The ethical standards that evolve from the family setting to the community levels are: greetings and respect, faithfulness and chastity, home training, communication ethics, communal ethics, mutual help and solidarity, time management, hospitality and generosity, integrity

and honesty, professional ethics, religious ethics and political ethics.

### **The Concept of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* (Character -Building)**

To be an *Ọmọ́lúàbí* goes beyond having formal education, for schooling is only an aspect of education. A great deal of expectation and responsibility goes to becoming an *Ọmọ́lúàbí*. For instance, an *Ọmọ́lúàbí* becomes an exemplary character and a role model for the coming generations. A well-bred person who has really imbibed good manners is referred to in Yorùbá as *Ọrọ́lúàbí*. It is the duty of the parents to live exemplary life so that *Ọmọ́lúàbí* can be easily inculcated in the future generations. The main focus of Yorùbá Indigenous education is to bring out an *ọmọ́lúàbí* in an individual and to make him a responsible person. It is in character building that Yoruba education is manifested in its entirety. Májàṣán (1967) corroborates this when he says that, among other things, character-training and religious education are the two main objectives of the Yorùbá education. The child that behaves himself or herself in manners acceptable to the society is called an “*Ọmọ́lúàbí*” while the one who behaves contrary to the norms of the society is referred to as “*Ọmọ́láhígídí*” literally meaning a “good –for-nothing” child and such a person is not given recognition in the society.

Parents and the immediate family employ diverse methods in bringing up a child to an *Ọmọ́lúàbí*. The child is taught through proverbs, folktales, myths, direct instruction, songs, words of elders, folklore, poems for the purpose of informing and influencing the behaviour of the child in the community (Awóníyì 1978:9). For instance, Modesty is a desire to protect the body from public view. A mother encourages modesty when she teaches her daughter to sit with her legs crossed if she is wearing a loose dress rather than sitting spread eagle or wearing a dress that covers her breasts and not wearing shorts that her buttocks are hanging out. Mothers can teach modesty by instructing their daughters about

appropriate clothes to wear, how to stand, talk, walk and behave generally in public. Children are also taught suitable greeting forms for appropriate occasions and to respect elders, custom, authority and tradition. Yorùbá education also touches on issues of essential principles and contradictions of life.

A person that exhibits good character is seen as a great person and he or she is often equated with a dove (*ẹyẹ àdàbà*). The Yorùbá refers to such a person as '*oníwà tútù bí àdàbà*' "as cultured as a dove'. Character is regarded as a virtue in Yorùbá culture. Abímbólá (1975:384), even says that character is regarded by the Yorùbá as one of the very aims of human existence. It is also the greatest attribute of any man, for it enables man to lead a good life. Little wonder then why Yorùbá proverbs pertaining to character is numerous. Such proverbs are: *ìwà rere lẹṣọ èniyàn* (Good character adorns a person). *Ìwà lẹwà* (Manner is beauty) *obínrín sọ ìwà nù, ó lóun ò lórí ọkọ* (A woman with questionable characters complains she is not destined to be married). *Èḗfín ní ìwà* (Man's character is like smoke) *Ìwà lọba àwúre* (Character is a catalyst for success). These proverbs confirm the place of good character among the Yorùbá. It is their belief that when character is lost in a person, he is just existing for nothing. No wonder, Billy Graham suggesting losing character is the greatest loss. '*Omólúàbí* is the accumulation of a lot of build training and learning that results in the shook-proof, ability to resist evil. The concept of *Omólúàbí* is vital for the sustained welfare and development of a person

### **Relevance of the Concept of Omólúàbí to Teacher Education**

As we have earlier stated that a child cannot be properly trained outside his cultured environment, education and knowledge are the key to good character. Somebody may be educated and not knowledgeable. In this wise, the Yorùbá will say "*Ogbón ìwé ló ní, kò ní ogbón inú*" meaning one can be educated without having wisdom. This is the situation of our youths in our modern society.

They no longer bother about traditional way of living. They have thrown away their culture with nothing of value to replace them, forgetting that education is what remains when everything learnt at school has been forgotten (Awóníyì, 1975).

Character-building often brings out the best of the individual in both private and public places. The Yorùbá often say *ìwà lóba àwùre* (good character is a catalyst to success). Students are no more doing well academically and morally due to the fact that they lack basic characters which an *Omolúàbí* must possess such as: faithfulness, hard work, humility, thoughtfulness in speech and action, endurance, respect for others and other virtues capable of enhancing their success in their life endeavours. Akínjógbin, (2009: 16-17) gives four reasons why children are educated. These include:

- i. For individuals to know the Language, culture and religion of his people which helps to see themselves as a group different from the other group of the world.
- ii. For individuals to be useful to himself and his community.
- iii. To help people to be able to lift up the glory of their land when they are grown up.
- iv. To be prepared to fight the enemies and antagonists who would want to destroy the glorious of the land.

Good teachers must possess all these virtues because they are role models as students grow up imitating their teacher and adult members of the family while their teachers are often held in high esteem in this regard. Whatever a teacher tells his students is always right to them even if it is wrong. “That is what my teacher taught me” is their language. This is the more reason why a teacher must be an *Omolúàbí* in all ways so that the coming generation can be morally upright, academically sound in order to move our nation forward as education helps in propagating all the useful cultural principles and values of the society (Oyékàn, 2002: 299).

However, the relevance of the concept of *Omọ̀lúàbí* to teacher education lies in the fact that apart from teaching the students the subject matter of their chosen courses, the teacher centrally plays a vital role in shaping their attitudes and conditioning their behaviour and responsive in our society. Teachers who are suitably equipped with good character are more likely to shape and retain tomorrow's enterprising and responsive leaders for cultural renewal and moral rectitude.

Modernization and civilization have brought great changes to our society thereby eradicating our old order and putting the whole society in a moral degeneration. The economic recess in the nation has made parents and the adult members of the society to deny the youths their right to adequate character nourishment. This calls for teachers to be well cultured so that the nation could be rescued from moral decadence if parents are failing in the responsibilities towards their children.

The concept of *Omọ̀lúàbí* provides some socially-acceptable rules and virtues which govern individuals and behaviours in the process of socialization within and outside the school so that formal education can have good impact on the lives of students. It will also prevent tension, social vices and frustrations that often emerge from civilization. If teachers are deeply rooted in the concept of *Omọ̀lúàbí*, they will be able to inculcate morals, principles and cultural values that will eradicate corruption, indiscipline, examination malpractice, indecency, dishonesty and cultism from our society.

Character building, like in most culture of the world, is of great importance to the Yorùbá people. It is their belief that the end-product of education is to make an individual an *Omọ̀lúàbí*. If a person then exhibits unwanted behaviour having been to the four walls of formal school system, he is often referred to as *Alàìnláárí* or *Àkọ̀gbà* (a good for nothing child or a child that is taught but refuses to learn). Most cultural or ethnic groups of the world have similar concepts of *Omọ̀lúàbí*. The Yorùbá, Igbo and Hausa too

have their ways of exhibiting *ìwà Omọlúàbí* (good character) in their society. *Omọlúàbí* in Igbo language is *Ezi mmadu* or *Mmadu Nwere Ezi Omume* and *Mutumín kirki* in Hausa language. For instance, this concept is observed in the way they greet, sing, dress, instruct, make proverbs and tell folktales.

A Hausa man stoops when he comes across his neighbours. This is a sign of respect and humility. Among the Ibo, a child is not expected to be in the midst of elders when eating, while it is necessary for people to join hands together in communal work. All these are termed to be concepts of *Omọlúàbí* when viewed in another cultural perspective. Inculcating character building in teacher education will produce a modest, truthful, and morally sound teacher who will always strive to maintain and promote good qualities of character.

More so, it will nullify the idea of knowledge being mistaken for character and situation, whereby certificates replace knowledge and efficiency. Teachers in training will be able to know that success in life does not lie only in their academic performances, but also in the extent to which they are in line with the unwritten norms of society. No wonder, Awóníyì (1975). says:

*Morality is not only taught, but it is also lived.  
Courage is not only formally taught, but it is also  
demonstrated. Endurance and devotion to duty are  
not only formally taught, but they are also exhibited  
(p.376).*

In other words, the worth of a person can only be measured in terms of his conduct and character, not in terms of the various certificates the individual obtained. An *Omọlúàbí* is cautious of time, and conversant with his environment, he/she does not cheat. The use of folklore in teacher education will have great influence on teachers' thinking and behaviour as they perform diverse functions which in turn will be transmitted to students to refine and sharpen them in-born traits, so that they can be cultured and be of good conduct wherever they find themselves in life.

The child is taught by example through myths, direct instruction, proverbs, folktales, songs and so on. To authenticate the level of importance placed on the dignified child or *Omolúàbí*, Oúnjò (1972) says:

Kàkà kí n bí ẹgbàà òbùn  
Ma kúkú bí ọkan ọ̀so ọ̀gá  
Ma rọhun fí yán aráyé lójú  
Ma rọhun gbéraga  
Şé ọkan ọ̀so àràbà,  
Kì í ẹ ẹgbẹ .ẹgbàà ọ̀súnşún  
Omọ tó já fáfá kan ọ̀so  
Kì í ẹ ẹgbẹ .ogbà irúnbí omọ.  
Àkúkú ibí sà̀n ju ịşé .ràdàràdà.  
Ká kú lońmodé kó yẹ ni,  
Ó sà̀n ju ká dągbà datọrojẹ lo (o.i.33).

Instead of giving birth to two thousand filthiers  
would prefer to have one dignified child.  
I would have a priceless child amongst many  
I would have the one to boast off.  
Because one big oak tree,  
Is not a match for, and could not be compared to?  
Two hundred wishy-washy children.  
It is better not to have a child at all,  
Rather than having a never-do-well as a child,  
To die young with dignity is better than  
Begging for arms at old age.

The point being stressed in this oral traditional poetic wordings is that the child would be a good ambassador of both his immediate and nuclear world, as well as the macro world where he would eventually find himself.

In addition to this, an *Omolúàbí* is expected to act in conformity with the laid-down principles of the society. Ordinarily, the perspective with which the Yorùbá view *Omolúàbí*



If trees cannot be human, humans can be trees!  
Trees don't give birth only humans do,  
How come that a child, born of human,  
Now becomes an offshoot of a tree?  
It is one's character give one a name.  
The python gives birth to a young python  
The anaconda gives birth to long offspring  
The young turkey is heavily bearded from infancy.  
They said a child most resemble his parent  
After all, the chose ones are called humans,  
A child born by the owner of character  
But who refuses to destine good characters,  
Such is born as a human but turns a tree.

The point being stressed in the above oral poetic wordings is that when character is lost in a person, he is just existing for nothing. It also confirms the place of good character among the Yorùbá. No wonder, Ohiweri (2007) says;

Work hard play hard, and keep straight when  
wealth is lost, nothing is lost, when character is  
lost, all is lost (p.20).

The above quotation affirms that without character every wealth gathered amounted to nothing. A man's character is his fate. The greatest way to live with honor in this world is to be what we pretend to be in the name of modernization and social change, Youths jettison *Ọmọlúàbí* as a virtue and embrace undesirable behaviours says Adétóyè (2002:88), whereas in the words of Òyékàn (2005), good character that is based:

On our dynamic culture should prepare us for a  
changing society and should itself generate social  
change for stability and prosperity. Social change  
does not erase our social institutions, customs and  
cultural heritage since they constitute the  
progressive souls of any nation (p.297).

This shows that dynamism should not erase our rich cultural norms.

The only way to save our society from the menace of social vibes is that curriculum planners, educators and educational administrators should inculcate positive aspects of Yorùbá education in teacher education based on the concept of *Ọmọ̀lúàbí*. Parents and adult members of the society should also strive to live by examples which the children can emulate within and outside the school. The concept of *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* should be integrated into the teacher education curriculum. Until this is done, our higher schools of education will continue to produce uncultured and half-baked teachers to the detriment of the development of our nation and cultural heritage. Emphasis should be laid on good behaviour and personality, not academic excellence at all levels of education. Grades should also be awarded for good character in academic certificate. Also, the concept of *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* should be offered as a general course in our schools of education.

### **Cultivating Ọmọ̀lúàbí Principles into Teacher Education**

Incorporating ‘*Ọmọ̀lúàbí*’ into teacher education can be a fantastic way to foster a sense of cultural heritage and moral values in aspiring educators. *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* rooted in Yorùbá philosophy emphasizes moral uprightness, hard work, contentment and good character. Below are some potential strategies to consider in incorporating *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* into teacher education;

- i. Curriculum Integration: Embedded *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* principles into teacher education curriculum. This could involve dedicated courses or modules that explore the philosophy’s significance values an application in modern educational setting.
- ii. Cultural Immersion: Organize cultural immersion and induction experiences where student teachers can engage with Yorùbá culture and traditions. This might

- include workshops, community outreach programmes to visits to historical sites.
- iii. Mentorship Programmes: Student teachers can be paired with experienced educators who embody *Ọmọ́lúwàbí* values. This mentorship can provide practical guidance and support in developing good character and professional ethics.
  - iv. Reflective Practice: This entails encouraging student teachers to reflect on their own values and practices in relation to *Ọmọ́lúàbí*. This could involve journaling, peer discussions or group projects that apply the philosophy to real-world teaching scenarios.
  - v. Community Engagement: Foster partnerships between teacher education institutions and local communities. This could involve service-learning projects or community initiatives that promote *Ọmọ́lúàbí* values. By incorporating these strategies, teacher education programs can help aspiring educators develop deeper understanding of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* and its relevance to modern teaching practices.

## Conclusion

Having discussed the concept of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* and its relevance to teacher education, it is essential to conclude that the contents and techniques of Yorùbá education can be applied to teacher education curriculum. Character-moulding is a tool for the preservation and continuity of culture and society. It also serves as one of the informal processes by which man is taught to exhibit and govern his conduct with unwritten norms of the society. It must be noted, however, that the relevance of character-moulding has been greatly affected by western education, civilization, unemployment, economic and political stress and modernization. Despite these militating factors against character-moulding, it is still of great importance to the Yorùbá because when character is

lost, everything is lost. The ability to read and write is not a yardstick for being educated in all its ramifications. The Yorùbá say: “*Olá á sá, ẹwà á sá, iwà ni i bá ni dé sàrèè*” (wealth will fade, beauty will fade, only character remains with a person in death). It is, therefore, recommended that the Yorùbá *Omolúàbí* philosophy and practice should be integrated into the school curriculum. There is the need to review the curriculum to reflect African needs in general and Yorùbá needs in particular. Also, the Yorùbá language and *Omolúàbí* related cultural materials should be used in modern telecommunication gadgets including the internet. Finally, it is our submission that we go back to the drawing board and enforce the spirit of *Omolúàbí* in our social, political, economic and religious action so that the society’s moral standard can be improved.

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