

# Exploring African Proverbs as a Learning Resource in the Contemporary Society

Akinjide Aboluwodi  
Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria

## Introduction

In sub-Saharan Africa (especially among the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria) one of the elements of indigenous education is the use of such cultural resources as taboos, riddles, proverbs, myths and folktales to provide a symbolic explanation of the environment. The Yoruba elders use proverbs in such important issues as the choice of marriage partners, entry into business partnership, individuals' attitudes and conduct in the public and many others. This cultural resource is used to admonish young people seeking, for instance, to choose a marriage partner or to enter into a business partnership to be wary of their actions; hence, it is a call for precaution on choice making. The choice of marriage partner, among the Yoruba, is one of the complex social experiences that require the intervention of the elders, at least to forestall any misadventure. Proverbs are used to impress on the young adults the virtue of patience, rational choice, perseverance and prudence when they make decisions on issues that relate to their personal affairs. It is a common practice among Africans to engage proverbs when significant issues relating to the life of communal members are discussed. Proverbs are sometimes used to caution parents on how they bring up their children, serve as a cultural resource to resolve crises, at times, among couples and strengthening the bond among members of the various African communities. In this paper, the claim to the usefulness of African proverbs as cultural resource is stressed and this is defined specifically from the socio-cultural perspective. The paper attempts to show that proverbs can be used to appeal to the sensibilities of some individuals who sometimes make important decisions that affect them in life. It is concluded that parents may use proverbs to educate their children often in order to extol the virtues of patience, reasonableness, and prudence.

## Perceptual Experience in African Culture

Writing on the Yoruba world view, Oke (1989:384) points out that "the Yoruba generally believe and behave as if they hold the view that there is an external world existing independently of its being perceived." Like every other African group, in the Yoruba thought system, tables, trees, chairs and so on are objects which exist independently of their being perceived. As Oke (1989: 385) has remarked, "the Yoruba thought does not give room for naïve realist theory of perception." The reason for this is that in Yoruba thought, sense experience is not regarded as absolute authority on the nature and reality of the external world. This view rests on one singular point: the world may not always be as it appears to the senses. Thus among the Yoruba, a person sees an object with one property e.g. size, which he does not take to constitute an immediate perceptual object. Whereas a table has a shape and a size, neither the shape nor the size constitutes the table. Indeed, objects are sometimes said to possess certain symbolic meaning which may count to be esoteric. In this regard, symbolism rules the African world.

For Hallen and Sodipo (1986) one essential condition of knowledge in Yoruba thought system is that perceptual experience must be first-hand, a notion that is shared by most African people. This notion is directly linked with the notion of direct perception where perception is sensation plus judgment. Sensation is here defined in terms of simple seeing, while judgment is defined to mean inference and interpretation. Thus we have a situation where an object is presented to the percipient but the meaning is given in interpretation.

In Yoruba culture the question is not whether an object is directly or indirectly given to the percipient, rather it is usually whether such an object provides any meaningful explanation of its environment. In an attempt to understand their environment, Yoruba employ such cultural resources as taboos, proverbs, folktales, myths and so on to explain their environment. This paper is interested in how these cultural resources especially proverbs are used to explain the Yoruba cultural environment, and how proverbs serve as pedagogical strategy to teach the virtues of patience, prudence, perseverance, rational choice, honesty, transparency and many other ethical virtues in human interaction. Basically the applied methodology here does not intend to test the veridicality of the proverbs as set in this paper, rather it was meant to demonstrate the different logics of knowledge between Yoruba thought system and psychological analyses. In this regard, therefore, the cultural resources are not intended to be exposed to an evaluation of some psychological analyses.

## Proverbs as Cultural Resource

Yoruba elders seldom use proverbs when they talk, but when proverbs are employed either for pedagogic reasons or for predictive purposes they are often terse but explanatory. As paradigmatic entities, their life is predicated on the situations that bring them to life. Indeed, they are nothing but theoretical models upon which

ethical, social and religious situations are tested. For Fayemi (2010) “proverbs are an essential oral tradition that Africans use in storing and retrieving any aspect of their cultural worldview.” According to Fayemi, proverbs picture reality. Chiku (2004) contends that

African cultural heritage, (proverbs, taboos, dirge etc.) passed on from generation to generation, has been a source of guidance for African communities in times of peace, uncertainty, birth, life and death. It has been a basis of their self-identity, self-respect and self-confidence. It has enabled them to live in harmony with their physical, social and spiritual environments. This heritage provides a foundation for leadership, guidance, problem solving, decision-making, self-reliance and development.

Chiku (2010) also indicates that proverbs are used to identifying and dignifying a culture, clarifying vision, serve as metaphors to explain complex issues and create strong mental pictures of events. The question is: How do proverbs perform these cultural functions? Let us take some of these proverbs in Yoruba culture, for the purpose of illustrations. Consider for instance the proverb: *Ikoko ti yio je ata idi re a gbona*. The proverb extols the virtue of perseverance. It says that “success is attained through persistent efforts.” Such is the case with such other proverb; namely, *A kii nkanju la obe gbigbona*. which translates literally “one does not sip hot soup in a hurry.” This proverb extols the virtue of patience, and prudence in choice-making. It says that choice-making needs to involve some elements of prudence to avoid making irrational or arbitrary choice. There are some fundamental issues at stake here. First, there is the question of decision making which rests on prudence. Second, there is the issue of rationality in decision making, and third there is also the cognitive process that underpins the decision making. The issues are logically related in the sense that one lends support to the other. The elder who says one does not sip hot soup in a hurry knows that people do throw caution to the wind while making decision in life.

Sometimes the notion of prudence demands that a person is sure of the choice he wants to make. However, this is only possible where a person acts with a reasonable sense in selecting options where they are available. In this regard, the exercise involves a judicious selection of these options.

Another proverb which shares a similar logic with the earlier proverbs is: *Gbogbo Alangba lo danu de le a ko mo eyi ti inu nrun*. It translates literally: “All lizards lie prostrate on the ground no one knows which of them suffers a belly-ache.” A simple explanation that can be offered for this proverb is that no one can tell by sheer facial expressions a person’s intention, motive, purpose and so on. This proverb attempts to show that sometimes a person may be deceived by what he immediately sees in objects or things. A person may choose a particular object because of the impression caused by the object. In this situation, his belief about the object is founded on the immediate impression caused by A’s appearance (where A is an object). It may, however, turn out that what this individual believed to have seen may indeed be something else. Dretske, cited in Runzo, (1983: 208) seems to capture the picture when he says that what a person believes about what he sees does not itself determine what he sees. Thus a person who thinks he knows the characteristics which an object possesses because of the immediate impression caused by the object will be deceiving himself by assuming that he sees and knows correctly. We may use psychological and physiological explanations to show the logic of knowledge embodied in the proverb: *Gbogbo Alangba lo danu de le a ko mo eyi ti inu nrun*. The physiological explanation is derived from the belief that a person’s physical characteristics sometimes bear certain relation to his physiological features. Indeed, Ittelson and Slack (1958: 210) hold that both physiognomic and psychological characteristics of persons are mutually related. They contend, as most psychologists have done, that most perceptual judgments about person usually derive their solid foundation from the physical characteristics of the person being perceived. This process involves what Hochberg (1978: 217) called ‘encoding and storing faces according to schema’. A simple illustration may suffice here. For instance, we sometimes use the different physical characteristics of a person to distinguish them from other people; some facial ‘expressions’ are used as causal explanatory cues for making perceptual judgments about persons. An interesting example of how people relate the physical characteristics of persons to their psychological characteristics may be to consider the following from a teacher on a perceptual situation. An Elementary teacher once remarked in a case where Bayo was accused of committing an offence, that (i) Bayo’s *look* indicated that he actually committed the offence. Then there was a remark from Wumi’s friend who proudly said: (ii) Wumi’s *look* showed that she was the winner of the lottery. The term ‘look’ in the expressions clearly stresses certain physical characteristics e.g facial expression or emotional stress. This characteristic emanates from Bayo and Wumi’s dispositions. In each case, two things can clearly be discerned. First, the physical characteristics depicted by the term ‘look’, and second the acts: ‘committing an offence’ and ‘winning lottery’. What the two expressions suggest is that the *look* is causally related to the different acts. It says that the ways Bayo and Wumi appear provide some descriptions about their involvement in the acts (committing an offence and winning lottery). This position assumes that there is a logical connection between physical characteristics of a person and such other elements as motive, intention, and desire

and so on. Such an assumption rests on certain law-like explanations that characterize every psychological analysis which holds that there is a connection between persons and their actions. In this same psychology, theorists are still trying to contend with such an explanation that holds a logical relation between a person's facial impression and his attitudes.

The question as to whether a man, indeed, resembles his act may be asked at both psychological and physiological levels. At the psychological level, what may interest us in the question would be the causal connection between a person's look and his act (committing an offence). At the epistemological level, we may seek to determine in what sense we can relate such a facial outlook to the act. Indeed, the epistemological explanation seems to be central to any question of justification about our beliefs on person perception.

Heider (1958:124) offers an alternative explanation to how we can determine the relationship between the two terms 'facial impressions' and 'the act'. According to him, some people usually resort to *thought models* as a probable explanation for such a causal connection. In this case, we look at the facial expressions and then resort to guess work on what we think may possibly be the position of the other person. Generally, the *thought model* explanation does not specify whose thought is to be accepted as relevant or irrelevant. A probable suggestion may be to set our mind on the *observed's* thought and then ignore the perceiver's thought for our model, since both men are perceiver and observed.

Actually, the question is not whether we can infer human characteristics, namely, attitudes, behaviour and so on from cues as the arguments so far suggested, but the issue is whether even when these cues are inferred they are capable of providing knowledge claims about human behaviour. Indeed, the question is: can we *know* who and what a person is from his/her facial expressions or the traits we associate with him/her considering the fact that 'knowing' as explained by Agyakwa (1988:170) is incompatible with being wrong? This point is equally supported by Hallen (2003) when he says that Yoruba place priority upon hard evidence in their interpretation of perceptual experience. However, we may define perceptual experience of persons to reflect a 'lay conception of personality'. In this case, we can explain a person's perception in terms of what Hay (1958: 289) calls "a scheme of expectation and anticipation" derived mainly from our experience of others. Even with this scheme of expectation there is still doubt whether any explanatory cues can be provided for why people do not behave to the tune of prediction. Does this then show the relevance of the second proverb: *Gbogbo Alangba lo damu de le a ko mo eyi ti inu nrun* (All lizards lie prostrate no one knows which of them suffers a bellyache)? to real life situations.

Given Hay's (1958: 289) scheme if a person is considerate then we may infer that he will be reliable where both characteristics are states of human behaviour. Here we try to find a causal link between being considerate and being reliable. Sometimes this link may fail to agree with our expectations when a person adjudged to be considerate behaves in an unreliable manner. There may be different explanations for such behaviour. Even with such explanations we still have to contend with the notion that there is always the difficulty of explaining human behaviour. However, Bruner, Shapiro, and Targiuri (1958: 277) believe that the term 'know' may not be used in the sense of knowing correctly. Certainly, even if the term is used in its weak sense the question still remains whether we can ever know human characteristics as they are. The question seems to be fundamental to any explanation we may offer for the understanding of our second proverb: *All lizards lie prostrate no one knows which of them suffers a belly ache*. The assumption which the proverb attempts to refute mirror the epistemic model: S seeing x as y is to see that p. When translated to a complete sentence we have "Ade seeing Bola as pretty and jovial is to see that she will be responsible." Or in another sense "Charles seeing Bola as generous is to see that she will always help the needy any time people seek her assistance." The problem with this statement is that Bola may be generous yet fail to live up to the quality people attribute to her. It therefore suggests that there may be no logical relations between physical characteristics and human behaviour.

Usually, the Yoruba evoke the second proverb: *All lizards lie prostrate no one knows which of them suffers a bellyache*, first, to call attention to the problems of perception which they believe are inherently present in our perceptual judgment. Second, they want us to see that objects symbolically mirror their environment. This awareness is expected to generate responses which must take into consideration this symbolic meaning. Third, the Yoruba raise the question of patience and reasonableness in the decisions we make in life.

At least, the Yoruba, like other African people, are aware that most cases of perceptual judgment usually place much strength on the appearance of objects for inference purposes, for instance, the choice of marriage partner. For example, when Ade remarks that Bola is pretty and jovial, hence she must be responsible, what he observes in Bola provides for Ade a necessary cue for making the assertion that Bola will be responsible. It is obvious that this assertion is intended to be translated into a knowledge claim. This problem becomes more complex when the mode of explanation is facial or emotional traits, since these traits are sometimes deceptive to be useful for inference purposes.

However, Idowu (1985) thinks that in some cases facial expressions may serve as a cue to how the human mind works. He aligns with the proverb: *Oju loro wa* which translates literally "facial expressions seemingly convey the meaning of words" to champion the significance of facial expression in knowledge claim.

For Idowu, the Nigerian facial expressions are much more complex in meaning because they are situations in which they may be incongruent with speech. To support this notion, Idowu (1985: 56) believes that:

A smile, nod, or grin to an American usually means happiness and approval. To the Nigerian such cues may or may not convey a similar meaning. A Nigerian student who smiles when an American makes an uninformed statement about his or her culture might not necessarily be showing happiness and approval; rather such smiles can conceal anger and resentment.

This is an indication that the proverb: *Oju loro wa* can be explained from the two cultural perspectives, Nigerian and American. It thus suggests that the Yoruba sometimes use a proverb of this sort to refer to different human experience. The relevance of each proverb is tested against the framework for which it is designed. This framework is its socio-cultural background.

### **Challenges of African Youths in the Contemporary Time**

Those who have been following the world of the young people (especially youth within the ages of 18 and 25) in the last few decades will observe a glaring resemblance in their lifestyles. One needs to observe these lifestyles to be able to appreciate the strength of this development. Iyotani (1995:5) points out this resemblance when he says that “all over the world young people listen to the same media. Children play the same video game and women are wearing the same fashions without any time-lag.” The corollary of the matter is that all over the world young people parade the same values. This is apparent in their taste either to values or desires. These universalized values are contingent upon the effects of information and communication technology in the world. Today, almost every home, in urban areas, in the sub-Saharan Africa can boast of a television set and perhaps a video set. Where there are videos, such videos often parade numerous movies whether local or foreign. The results are obvious as children recount joyfully their experience of some of these movies, an opportunity it affords them to recount unceasingly the names of actors and actresses. To some parents it sounds a beautiful exploit to behold.

It would be wrong to argue that the effects of high technology alone are responsible for the strange behaviour often exhibited by young African children. Usually the media factor only lends its weight when other issues raise their head. Nevertheless, the impact of the media on the life of these young people is strong, as many of them often devote their time to watching video films and pinging on their mobile phones even when they are supposed to keep themselves in their study. Now that the digital television and chatting on facebook, skype etc. have become a mobile phone culture doing serious academic work has become a serious challenge. Ironically, young African children like their counterparts elsewhere have become part of this tradition. While they are often occupied with their mobile phone especially when they engaged chatting they have little or no time for children’s literary series. Medved (1998:5) holds it to be a universal problem. According to him, young children in America too prefer to spend their time watching television than speaking to their father. In Medved’s (1998:5) submission, “by the age of six, the average American child has spent more hours watching the tube than he will spend speaking to his father in his life time.” Medved (1998:6) believes that this is a child abuse, a situation that will pass unnoticed in African homes. Incidentally, some parents, in the sub-Sahara Africa, see movie experience among their children as a necessity, since the children need such experience to be able to think *westernly*. It looks more of an opportunity for young African people to hide under this untidy experience to undermine their cultural values.

Discussions of African values are predicated on the acceptance of African culture; except that there may be no consensus among scholars on what may count as African culture (Makinde, 2007: 232). Primarily, this is due to the varied beliefs and traditions that exist among African people. However, this may not count as a major reason to deny African culture. Iyotani (1995:5) tends to reinforce this belief with the analysis of the Japanese culture vis-à-vis the western culture. According to him, ‘western culture’ is not the culture of any specific country or people; rather it is only an imaginary construct. In other words, for him “there is actually no such thing as ‘the west’ and so there cannot be any reality in the idea of ‘western culture’.” Ross (quoted in Giroux, (1988:17) holds a similar view, though held in relation to an attack on ethnocentricity which rests on the assumption that America and Europe represent universalized models of civilization and culture. The implication is that the reference to African culture too rests on the assumption that we are dealing with a socially constructed term. Thus, the term ‘African culture’ may, therefore, be considered a ‘construct’ designed for the purpose of marking out ‘African culture’ from the rest of the world. In this respect, the particularity of certain cultural elements among African people does not invalidate any attempt to discuss the present issue under a general framework. The same view tends to be fundamental to any discussion on the youth culture and values, especially as it relates to young people in the sub-Saharan Africa. However, for the purpose of this work African culture and values depict the culture and values that are indigenous to African people. In this respect, African culture is defined in terms of a people’s way of life-taste, fashion, marriage, customs and so forth. This paper appreciates

the differences in the cultures and values of the people of the world; it however, focuses on the similarities within these differences especially as this relates to the sub-Saharan Africa. The paper, therefore, places these differences within the purview of African proverbs (specifically Yoruba proverbs) to see how proverbs can be used to arrest the drift recently observed in young Africans' attitudes to indigenous Africans' ways of life.

The disposition of young people to their culture cannot be divorced totally from the seemingly influence of the foreign values they imbibe. Young people no longer follow the dictates of their elders on matters relating to their life, for instance, the choice of partners in marriage. Most young people believe that their parents are out of touch with modern values, since they are thought to hold retrogressive views on life. However, parents are wont to tell these young adults that: *Bi omode laso titi ko le ni akisa bi agba* which translates "A young person may have a rich wardrobe, nevertheless, he cannot rival an elder in the acquisition of rags." Elders in Yoruba communities use this proverb to extol the virtue of experience. A young person who despises an elder for not being part of the global cultural train is usually reminded of the experience of elders on issues concerning life. While he may claim to have acquired 'book learning' elders will possibly tell him/her that they have the wisdom and experience to discern the complexities that are inherent in life. Young people cash in on the opportunity afforded by the waves of cultural conflict which become part of the trends at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to undermine their own culture. Zapf (2003:4) confesses that "the early modernization theory of the 1950/1960s one must remember that this theory was designed as a program explicitly directed to the non-Western world, that is, it was devoted to the "export" of Western institutions and values." The acceptance of this "exported" institutions and values creates a gap between the youths and their cultural heritage. Apparently, while the youths feel comfortable despising their own cultural heritage and align themselves with the global cultural trends, it does not itself give them the western identity they seem to crave for. The problem, indeed, is that while they succeeded in alienating themselves from their cultural root, sad enough, they found themselves not acceptable by the culture they try to embrace.

### **The Socio-Cultural Import of African Proverbs**

The question, indeed, is: why should parents be concerned about the life styles of their children and how does the use of proverbs provide alternative option in the education of young people in the African society? Let us use the marriage institution as an example of how parents caution their children against irrational decisions on the choice of marriage partners. For instance, in the past, marriage among young couples in African societies was held in high esteem. In most cases, it was devoid of dishonesty, infidelity, frivolities and separateness. Couples lived together till their old age and were separated only by death. They shared their differences and resolved their disagreements with little intervention from any members of their family, since for them marriage was a sacred institution. They followed the norms of the society, with little consideration for material comfort as a precondition for marriage. They were usually guided by myths, legends, folksongs, folktales, proverbs, dances and so forth (Marah, 2006:20). Thus, apart from proverbs the sub-Saharan African people use other cultural resources, as rightly indicated by Marah (2006:20) to educate their children on good behavior. They follow the dictate of the proverb: *A ki nkanju la obe gbigbona* which translates literally "one does not sip hot soup in a hurry", a proverb that extols the virtues of patience and rationality among individuals. It is an appeal to a man or a woman to exercise patience in his/her attempt to make a life time decision. Those who choose marriage partners or engage in acts that involve making choice are usually cautioned with this proverb. The same can be said of the proverb: *Gbogbo Alangba lo danu de le, a ko mo eyi ti inu nrun* which translates "All lizards lie prostrate no one knows which of them suffers a bellyache." This proverb tries to show that sometimes it may be difficult to establish a causal connection between physical characteristics of an individual and his psychological dispositions. Again, the proverb appeals to caution in decision making as physical appearance sometimes leads to deception. The recurrence of marriage as an explanatory paradigm in this paper is predicated on the premium which marriage attracts in African societies and the rates at which it crumbles among couples these days.

There is no doubt that sometimes a people's beliefs may defer the logic of reason at least when issues that border on emotions, passions and feelings are involved. In other words, the notion of reasonableness, (being appealed to in the choice of marriage partners or in the choice of important decisions in life) may sometimes fall flat on the ground in the face of human feelings and emotions especially with young couples. However, elders in Yoruba communities who think that individuals have no personal identity outside the corporate identity held in custody by the entire society may not be willing to accept this assertion. Nevertheless, if these young adults, considered to be old enough to take decisions on matters of life, seek to do things their own way then they should be ready to bear the consequences of their actions. At this point, elders may sound a warning through the proverb: *A ki i so pe ki omode ma de 'te bi o ba ti le da inu igbo gbe* which translates literally "A child may choose to become a leper provided he/she can live an isolated life in the forest". This proverb is considered more appropriate to address the consequences of an action by recalcitrant young adults who despise elders' advice. Kelly (2002:25) has a reservation for such a position by elders concerning the consequences of an action which they often insist must guide their young people in how they take decision in life. According to Kelly (2002:25)

“it is not the expected consequences of holding a desire that determines the rationality of the desire.” In which case, an individual who obliges to follow the advice of his elders does not do so because of the expected consequences that may follow if he does not accept the advice. But those elders who insist that individuals must be guided by rational principles in what they do are only trying to preserve their cultural heritage.

In the different Yoruba communities, elders frown at the culture of single parenthood, a practice that has become prevalent in different African societies. It is necessary to explain that single parenthood, as it is being used here, has nothing to do with the practice which involves a woman living alone as a result of the death of her husband. Rather, single parenthood is used here to mean a practice that involves a woman living alone with her child or children because [i] she is separated from her husband, for example, due to adultery or intractable quarrel between her and her husband [ii] a man refuses to accept her as a legitimate wife after she has got a child for him [iii] she decides to have a child while not willing to stay with any man and by this circumstance she is forced to live alone with the child. The Yoruba call this practice *dalemosun*, meaning, living alone without husband. Such a woman does not command any respect in the Yoruba society and is often scorned, especially when she had earlier been warned of the consequences of her actions. The issue becomes more challenging when it involves the woman leaving his only child in the care of a family member because she has to meet the demands of those men that pay her visits. Thus single parenthood in the form expatiated above, is considered an unhealthy practice among the Yoruba.

### **African Proverbs as Learning Resource**

Of what importance then is the study of this cultural resource to the education of African children? The education of African child usually begins from home, and it comes in terms of the interaction between the child and his/her environment. In this regard, education is not confined to the experience a child acquires in school. Such forms of education may take place at home. For instance, parents sometimes use proverbs, taboos and folklore to educate their children at home. These cultural resources are used to draw attention to the consequence(s) of bad conduct. African parents do not spare their children when they involve in misconduct. Corporal punishment is one of those measures often used to correct children’s misconduct. However, it may sometimes turn out to be counter-productive when it is used very often. Instead of corporal punishment parents may remind their erring children of the consequences of their actions through such cultural resources as folktales, taboos and proverbs. There are lessons for them to learn from folklore, proverbs and taboos as elders often organize moonlight stories where folktales are told and interpreted by young children. Marah (2006:18) captures this form of education when he says that “stories are used not only to amuse and express feelings, but to also teach ideal form of behavior and morality.”

In schools, a teacher may use proverbs to caution his/her pupils/students against bad conduct. When the need arises, a teacher may use the proverb: *Bi a ba so 'ko sarin oja ara ile eni nii ba*, which translates “If you throw a stone to the market place you may hit your own household.” This proverb performs some cautionary roles: (a) by warning students of the consequences of wrongdoing, and (b) by deterring them from engaging in social vices. The moral values embodied in this proverb are expected to moderate the students’ conduct and behaviour. Thus, proverbs are expected to provide a theoretical framework for championing (i) the virtue of patience, (ii) the notion of prudence in anything a person does, and (iii) the use of rational enquiry in conjunction with prudence where one is faced with choice-making. However, the epistemological import of proverbs lies in the predominant stress that is laid on the fact that: (i) behind every perceptual experience is the problems of perception (ii) the awareness of these problems may help to effect a cautionary role on how we perceive and interpret human behaviour (iii) facial expressions are much more complex, sometimes incongruent with intentional dispositions.

### **Conclusion**

So far, the discussions, in this paper, has largely centred on how proverbs as cultural resources can provide a theoretical base for the way an individual interprets his/her social environment. The discussions on the use of proverbs, as presented here, raises certain fundamental questions which are considered to be central to the question of whether there can ever be a logical relation between the physical characteristics of a person and his motives, intention and desires. This question leads to the contention on why individuals should be wary of using a person’s physical characteristics to explain his actions, attitudes and motives. The corollary of this matter is that parents must at all time let their children know that proverbs serve as mirrors for the understanding of the inherent problems e.g. deception, mistrust, dishonesty and so on which sometimes generate from interpersonal relations among human beings. It is the contention in this paper, therefore, that using the example of proverbs in Yoruba language, young people in sub-Saharan Africa should understand the virtues of patience, perseverance, and rational choice which should constitute the linchpin of their life.

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