

Linguistic Verbal Arts and the Problem of Overpopulation Growth in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

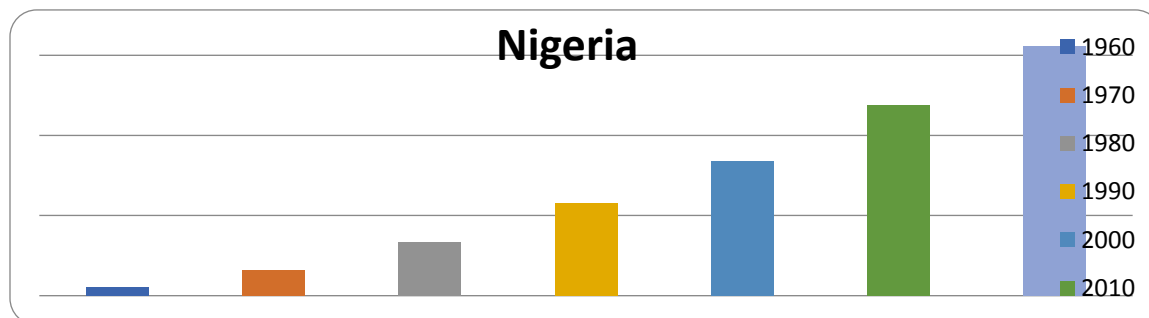
Linguistic verbal arts deal with the use of chants, statements and verses of oral and written materials in expressing feelings using one language or the other. Among the challenges militating against expected human and material development in many African countries is population explosion. Available social infrastructures can no longer adequately satisfy the needs of the people. At present, in Nigeria compared with what obtained many years ago, religious practices are taken as excuses for marrying many wives when in the actual sense, there are often misinterpretations of the doctrines of the religions. This paper derives its strength from collation of verbal arts as expressed in the Holy Books of the Muslims, Christians and Ifá Oracle, one of the African traditional religions. The paper posits that no religion in Nigeria advocates for many wives and many children. The paper also provides valuable information on Nigerian population particularly as this concept remains a great troubling issue for Nigerian and many African governments. It is yet an attempt aimed at discouraging Africans from creating more problems for themselves and the continent.

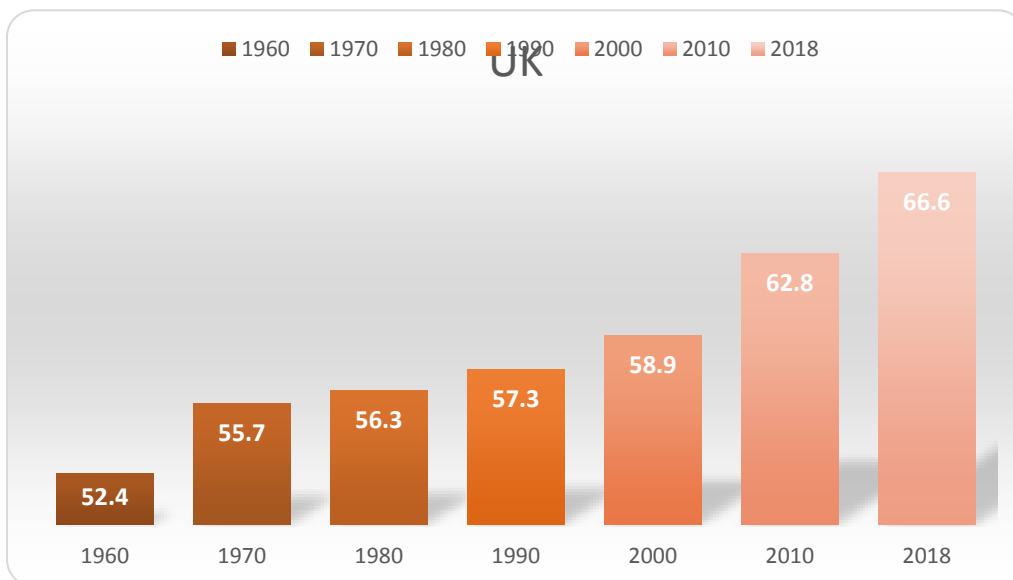
1- INTRODUCTION

In African child upbringing as enshrined in African education, references are usually made to relevant verses in African religions. There are verses that teach moral and decent ways of life. In Nigeria, adoption of foreign religions like Islam and Christianity is one of the consequences of European and Arab colonization. The northern pre independent Nigerians were introduced to Islamic religion while the southern ones embraced Christianity though few Nigerians are still with African traditional religions. Issues of population and population explosion have attracted the attention of some researchers and government policies makers in several countries of the world (see Ruzicka and Kane, 1986; Preston and Donaldson, 1986; Ogunbiyi, 2012; Odeyemi, 2017; <https://www.tributeonlineng.com>, November 1, 2018). For example, Preston and Donaldson (1986) submit that:

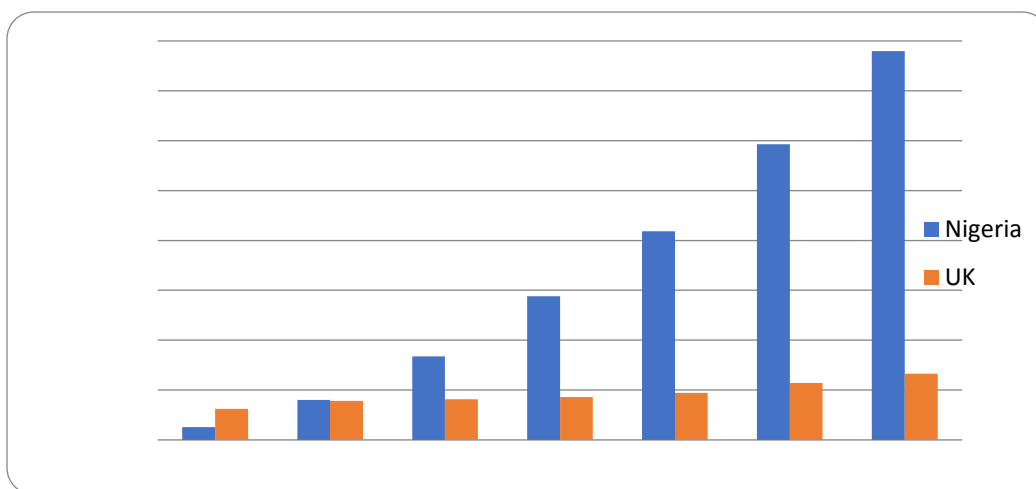
Since 1950, population growth rates in developing countries have averaged around 2 per cent per year, enough to double the size of a country's population in 35 years. The calculation is not merely hypothetical; the population of the developing world (Africa, Latin America and Asia, except Japan) has in fact doubled between 1950, when it numbered 1.7 billion and 1984, when it reached 3.6 billion.

Ogunbiyi (2012) also reports that Nigeria is one of the 15 hot spots countries in Sub-Sahara Africa that is currently experiencing high rates of population growth. Globally too, Nigeria is said to be in the seventh position (see <https://www.internetworldstats.com>). To further confirm that there is population explosion in Nigeria, the Nigerian population with that of its colonial master from 1960 to 2018 is presented in Graphs 1, 2 and 3 below. The percentage of increase in every ten years especially between 1960 and 2010 is also shown in Table 1 below.





Graph 2: UK Population in Millions



Graph 3: Comparing Nigeria and UK Population

Years	Nigeria (%)	U.K. (%)
1960 - 1970	19.36	5.86
1970 - 1980	23.79	1.15
1980 - 1990	24.69	1.64
1990 - 2000	21.12	2.78
2000 - 2010	22.00	6.18
2010 - 2018	19.03	5.71

Table 1: Percentage of increase in every 10 years

Still on the population increase, it has been predicted that between 2018 and 2050 at least 189 million people will be added to the existing population and as a result the projected Nigerian population will be around 400 million (see <https://www.premiumtimesng.com>, 17/5/2018). The uncontrollable population increase between 1960 and 2018 is now a source of concern and worry to the present Federal Government of Nigeria as shown below:

For some time now, there has been palpable worry in official circles over Nigeria's rising population figure. For instance, last week, Vice President Yemi Osinbajo and the Minister of Finance, Hajia Zainab Ahmed, speaking at the 24th Nigerian Economic Summit in Abuja, expressed concern about the country's population. According to Osinbajo, the government is working to reduce the country's population by half through education (see Nigerian Tribune Nov 1, 2018).

But, before the Federal Government of Nigeria embarks on its plan to reduce the Nigerian population by half through education, a plan that may not witness the light of the day or that the government has not disclosed the content of its proposed system of education, Michael and Odeyemi (2017: 109-111) identify seven factors that they claim are responsible for the current outrageous population of Nigeria. The factors are multiculturalism, religion, illiteracy, inadequate resources, approach adopted in policies formulation, lack of political will and lack of incentive. However, at present and from the available evidence, there is no concrete measure that has been put in place to curb the Nigerian population explosion. In this paper, we submit that the teaching of *Ọyẹkú Méjì*, an *Ifá* verse, if adopted and put into use, will not only help to address the problem of population explosion in Nigeria but also in some other third world countries of the world where population growth has become a source of concern and worry.

1.1 Some Related Works

Several factors have been identified as factors that have been responsible for the present outrageous population increase in Africa (see Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987; Michael and Odeyemi, 2017). It has been argued that one of such factors is African traditional religion. Caldwell and Caldwell (1987: 427) say:

Traditional African religious values have sustained high fertility in two ways. First they have acted directly to equate fertility with virtue and spiritual approval and associate reproductive failure or cessation with sin. Second, they have placed both positive and negative sanctions on filial piety and maternal homage to the older generation so that fertility is rarely disadvantageous.

While we agree with Caldwell and Caldwell (1987: 427) that infertility in Africa is a serious issue we want to submit that infertility is traceable to women only though science has now shown that infertility can also be traced to men. However, one question which Caldwell and Caldwell (1987: 427) do not address is: Does fertility mean indiscriminate practice of polygamy and procreation abuse or indiscriminate procreation?

Similarly, we are of the opinion that lack of understanding of the Biblical and Quranic teachings or messages with reference to monogamy and polygamy is also the cause of the uncontrollable population growth in Nigeria. For example; the Bible can be divided into two sections namely Hebrew and Greek scriptures. Information from the Hebrew scriptures can be divided into two also. There are Biblical references that support monogamy or one man one wife. Such references include Genesis 2:18 where God created only Eve for Adam, Genesis 6:18 where Noah married only one wife and Genesis 19:15 showed that Lot had one wife to mention a few. But each of Abraham, David and Solomon had more than one wife (see Genesis 16:2-4; 2 Samuel 12:11; 1 King 11:3). However, Greek scriptures endorse one man one wife and not one man many wives (see Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Timothy 3:2). In short and from our research, although Christianity had become a religion in Nigeria since the year 1772, polygamy had also been part of the Christian practices until the newly founded autochthonous Nigerian Churches started to have influence over the teachings of the European Churches in the 1980s and 1990s (see also Jégédé, 2008; Ìkòtún, 2013). However, that the teachings of the newly founded autochthonous Nigerian Churches are slightly different from that of the European Churches a few Christians, using the examples of Abraham, David and Solomon in the Bible, still engage in polygamy.

Still on the contribution of Islam and Christianity to the population explosion in Nigeria, what is the case among some Christians is also the case among some Muslims. There are instances where a Muslim marries four wives and such a Muslim claims to draw inspiration from the Holy Quran Chapter 4 Verse 3, where it is recorded thus:

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four, but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice (see The Holy Quran chapter 4:3).

With this Quranic verses the following questions came to mind: Is it expressly stated from this verse that a man can marry four wives? Is it possible for a man to be just among four women? Unless these two questions are answered, we will insist that so many Muslims who engage in polygamy do not have any reference in the Holy Quran to support their actions. We can defend the fact that those who embrace polygamy are only guided by their lust.

Another deduction from Caldwell and Caldwell (1987: 427) is procreation with reference to the number of children a couple can produce or have. It will be observed that when population explosion is being discussed the role procreation plays cannot be ignored. There are several examples where some individual Christians and Muslims have 6 or 7 or 8 or 9 children at least in some cases especially among Muslims and some members of the European Churches. The question that arises is: Does the Holy Quran with the Holy Bible prescribe the number of children a couple can have? The answer is no. But, an injunction that is recorded in 1 Timothy 5:8-9 which says "Certainly if anyone does not provide for those who are his own and especially for those who are members of his household, he has disowned the faith and is worse than a person without faith" is, in most cases, not considered by many Christians. Instead, they do say "God is the One that provides and is the One that takes care of us. Just believe in Him, He will provide ". The sentence "believe in God" which shows a strong union between Muslims and Christians is responsible for the indiscriminate procreation among the two groups and especially among Muslims.

Furthermore, the indiscriminate procreation among Nigerians as a result of the sentence "believe in God" reminds us of what Muhammad Sanusi II, the Emir of Kano, says:

We talk about miracles, ancient miracles. I don't like the word miracles because they are associated with angels with wings that you do not see, coming from the sky. The Chinese are human beings like us and they did it. When we say miracle, it sounds like something supernatural that has some certain powers to it. Every time you think about it, the only deficit we have is a policy deficit...So, for all Nigerians, who care about this country, the real task before us is to know that we have 30 years on the outside in which we need to make sure that we do not become the poverty capital of the world, and slum of the world. Earlier in 2018, Nigeria overtook India to become the poverty capital of the world. According to British prime minister Theresa May, 87 million Nigerians are living below the poverty line.

In addition to the information given by Sanusi and May several State and Federal government workers have not been regularly paid in the last three years despite the monthly allocations, bailout funds, Paris Club loan refund and Abacha loot. In fact, some States are still owing their workers six or more than a year salaries. We want to remind the Nigerian Muslims and Christians that faith without works is dead. In other words, the current situation in Nigeria has shown that the word 'belief' as it is embraced by Nigerian Muslims and Christians is not beneficial unless it is accompanied by Allah's or God's wisdom. Therefore, in view of the information in Graphs 1 and 3 and Table 1 in the introductory section of this paper where Nigerian population has been on the increase in the last forty years especially when Islam and Christianity can be said to be dominant in Nigeria, we submit that Islam and Christianity are responsible for the current population explosion and not the Traditional African religion as advanced by Caldwell and Caldwell (1987: 427). In this paper, we show that if the message contained in *Ọyèkú Méjì*, an *Ifá* verse, a Traditional African religion that is now practised in Cuba, Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago, is adopted and put into use by the Federal Government of Nigeria as well as other third world countries, it will help to address population explosion that is, at present, a source of concern.

Another area of interest to the present research is what Michael and Odeyemi (2017: 109-111) call lack of political will on the part of the various governments in Nigeria to put in place measures that can help to monitor and check uncontrollable population growth. The researchers argue that:

Lack of political will is a challenge to the effectiveness of the policies. This occurs most where the government in power does not have population growth control in its manifesto or agenda. The consequence of this becomes lack of both financial and administrative support. Where fund is at all allocated to the policies implementation, the bureaucratic nature of government and corruption among the implementers caused delays in implementation...

We agree with Michael and Odeyemi (2017: 109-111) that since 1953 when Nigeria was granted self rule by its colonial master and now there has not been any political party that has population growth control in its manifesto or agenda. What the political parties have are programmes or manifestoes such as free education, free water, free roads and jobs for all to mention a few which can mesmerize the voters and are manifestoes that encourage indiscriminate

practice of polygamy and indiscriminate procreation. In fact, it can be said that between 1953 and now, a reasonable number of the Nigerian leaders as well as many who have been in the position of authority might have lost count of the number of wives as well as children they have. Therefore, what the leaders do not have there is no way they can give it. So, that the present federal government of Nigeria is talking about reducing the population of Nigeria by half does not mean it has the issue in its manifestoes but because some international bodies and individuals are talking about the danger Nigeria is facing vis-a-vis its population growth that is why the government is talking too. Even now that seventy three political parties are campaigning for the 2019 general elections it is disheartening to observe that no single political party is talking about population growth control. In this paper, we submit that it is high time the Nigerian government emphasized the need to promote population growth control in its manifestoes and that it can only do that not with the help of Islam and Christianity as they are practised in Nigeria but with the help of the Traditional African religion with reference to *Ifá* that is indigenous to us.

2- DATA COLLECTION

The data that were drawn from verse 6 lines 29 to 52 of *Ọ̀yèkú Méjì*, a sub-section of *Ifá*, are examined in this paper. In Yorùbá culture, *Ifá* is regarded as a repository of the people's culture, history, tradition and values (see Abimbola, 2006). We wish to submit also that most Yorùbá wise sayings are drawn from *Ifá* and that some of the wise sayings are used in Yorùbá songs and in day-to-day language use in social interactions among the Yorùbá people.

2.1- Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, we present our data that are taken from *Ọ̀yèkú Méjì*, an *Ifá* verse. We implore our readers to carefully note the difference between the information in line one and the information in other lines.

Ọ̀yèkú Méjì

... Ọ̀kan soṣo póró lobinrín dùn mọ̀ lówọ̀ ọ̀kọ, 29

Bí nwọ̀n bá di méjì,

Nwọ̀n a dòjòwú.

Bí nwọ̀n bá di mẹ̀ta,

Nwọ̀n a dẹ̀ta ntúlẹ̀.

Bí nwọ̀n bá di mẹ̀rin,

Nwọ̀n a di ìwọ̀ lo rín mi ni mo rín ọ̀. 35

Bí nwọ̀n bá di márùún,

Nwọ̀n a di lágbájá ní ó run ọ̀kọ̀ wa tán lóhun susuusu.

Bí nwọ̀n bá di mẹ̀fà,

Nwọ̀n a dìkà.

Bí nwọ̀n bá di méje, 40

Nwọ̀n a dàjẹ̀.

Bí nwọ̀n bá di méjọ̀,

Nwọ̀n a di ìyá alátàrí bàmbà

Ló ti kó irú èyí sẹ̀ ọ̀kọ̀ wa lówọ̀.

Bí nwọ̀n bá di mẹ̀sàán, 45

Nwọ̀n a di ìyáálée wa ò níṣẹ̀ kan.

Kò lábò kan,

Bó bá ti jí,

Aṣọ ọkọọ wa ní mááá sán kiri.

Bí nwọn bá di mẹwàá,

50

Nwọn a di ilé ni ọkọọ wá jókòó

Ni nwọn ñwá ọkọọ waá wá. ...

English Translation

Double Oyeku,

A wife to a man is the ideal situation

Two wives generate jealous acts

Three wives brings disintegration

Four wives promotes quarrels

Five wives home promotes gossiping

Six wives encourages wickedness

Seven wives witchcraft

Eight wives promotes unvoth statements

Nine wives promotes backbiting

3- DISCUSSION

The information in verse 6 lines 29-52 in the Data above can be divided into two. The message in verse 6 line 29 shows the importance and beneficial nature of monogamy or one man one wife. The use of the phrase '*ṣoṣo póró*' (only) emphasizes one wife only. The information in verse 6 lines 30-52 shows that more than one wife must be discouraged and that there is no argument that can be advanced in its favour. Again, the consequences of marrying more than one wife which include envy in line 31, disorganization in line 33, wickedness in line 39 and witchcraft in line 41 as shown in the data above also confirm the Yorùbá saying that: *Ilé olórogún ọgbà wèrè ni* (A polygamous house is not different from that of the mad people). But, does verse 6 line 29 which insists on one man one wife discuss procreation abuse? Our answer is yes. This is because the Yorùbá people say: '*Omọ bẹẹrẹ òsì bẹẹrẹ*' (many children much poverty). Therefore, if the teachings of Islam, Christianity and Ifá, the African religion that has a reference book, are clearly understood and religiously embraced the Nigerian population explosion that is being witnessed today would not have arisen.

4- CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

In this paper, a precise definition of verbal arts in Linguistics was provided. The reasons for population explosion in Nigeria, traceable to many Nigerians' deliberate action of living polygamous life and over-procreation were also appraised. The paper revealed through its references to the three dominant religious in Nigeria that no religion preaches the doctrine of having many children and more than one wife. This article recommended that Nigerians religious leaders should encourage their worshippers not to engage in activities that will lead to having more children and wives that they can not cater for. It also called on African governments' intensification of awareness on the birth control and better planning that will benefit every citizen in enjoying the limited human and material resources available in the continent.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Ọpọlá Bólánlé Tajudeen holds B. A. degree in Linguistics, M. A. Languages and PhD Applied Linguistics. He is an Associate Professor of Linguistics at the Federal University, Oyé-Èkiti. His area of interest is Applied Linguistics. He has also published several works in the area of sociolinguistics and some of the papers include language interference in Africa, gender distinction in Ubang language and sociolinguistic implications of gender differences in Yorùbá burial rites.

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