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Superstitious Beliefs Held By the People of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract. This study examined the scientific explanations and educational implications of superstitious beliefs held by the people of Ilorin in Kwara State, Nigeria. A total number of 250 respondents were purposively sampled across the three local government areas (LGAs) in Ilorin metropolis, namely, Ilorin South, Ilorin West, and Ilorin East. The instrument used for the study was research designed interview protocol. The interview protocol was to find out the superstitious beliefs held by the people of Ilorin metropolis and to provide their scientific explanations. Four research questions were raised and answered. The data collected were subjected to frequency counts, percentages, and chart presentation. The results showed that the people of Ilorin South, Ilorin West, and Ilorin East held some superstitious beliefs about nutrition, menstruation, health, diseases, death, heredity, barrenness, animals, birth, family planning, growth, pregnancy, and water. The superstitious beliefs collated and their scientific explanations undergone both face and content validation by three experts from the Department of Science Education, University of Ilorin. From the findings, it is recommended among others that religious parastatal should lay emphasis on personnel responsibility in the determination of one's fate rather than blind reliance of some spiritual processing.

Keywords: superstitious beliefs, scientific explanations, people of Ilorin, Ilorin metropolis, educational implication

1. Introduction

Taking a cursory look at the standard of living and welfare of people globally, the impact of science and technology cannot be over emphasized. The attitude of humans towards nature manifests their traditional way of life and culture, which is prevalent in Africa. The traditional or common sense refers to one's viewpoints, beliefs, attitudes, outlook, or ways of life. For instance, in the traditional belief, the elders' words are assumed to be words of wisdom. Scientists (philosophers) use logical, consistent, and systematic thinking in their efforts to reach sound conclusions about man, the world, and everything that exists—natural and supernatural. From the philosophical point of view, pure reasoning is used to clarify ideas by asking questions. This is unlike physical sciences, which use empirical data to establish the truth of their findings. While the traditional believers search for the wholeness of knowledge and beliefs of people to an extent, scientists and philosophers ask and answer second-order questions which deal with qualitative analysis as against the quantitative analysis that characterizes the empirical studies.

The question which requires direct answer is scientific, but the question that is approached from different angles as deemed necessary by the individual respondents is logical. "What is her name?" is a direct question which requires a specific answer like "Her name is Bilikis

Abdulsalam". A question like "Who is she" is not a definite question and so does not anticipate a straightforward answer. It could require knowing her name, her mission, her family background, her occupation, her qualifications, and so on. Therefore, different people may approach the question from different perspectives. The first question which required a direct answer is scientific but the second question which could be approached from different angles is a logical question. A logical question is a second-order question. It tries to give a holistic and comprehensive answer to questions and implies the traditionalists' belief that "There is no absolute knowledge or truth". Based on this, "Every conclusion reached is tentative and open to future or further investigations" (Amaele, 2005).

A superstitious belief is a belief or practice generally regarded as irrational belief resulting from ignorance or fear of the unknown. It implies a belief in unseen and unknown forces that can be influenced by objects and rituals. Examples of common superstitions include the belief that "Bad luck will strike the person, in front of whom a black cat walks under a ladder", "A bird in the house is a sign of a death", and so on.

It is prevalent in Ilorin metropolis that some categories of people have mystical powers or knowledge to predict future occurrences through the use of sand, water rotary, and glass. So, sorcerers, fortune tellers, and even spiritual Islamic scholars were looked upon to tell their future and even determine their prosperity in life. Some pastors were looked onto as well for safety. Therefore, scientific explanations and people's superstitious beliefs for a phenomenon may, in some cases, contradict each other. In view of this, the negative effect of superstitious beliefs is that they often serve as misconceptions to the interpretation of natural phenomena. Thus, the researchers decided to conduct a study on the superstitious beliefs held by the people of Ilorin. This study documents the superstitious beliefs that are prevalent among the people of Ilorin metropolis, provides scientific explanations to the identified superstitions, and finds out the educational implications of the superstitious beliefs to classroom teaching.

2. Statement of the Problem

People find it difficult to accept wholly scientific explanations for natural phenomena as a result of information disseminated to them by their elders, royal fathers, and spiritual leaders. The people of Ilorin attached much value to faith than scientific concepts, so, their superstitious beliefs inhibit their scientific learning and meaningful understanding of its concept. The problem is further compounded by the fact that superstitious beliefs that are prevalent among the people of Ilorin were attached with misconceived ideas, religions, explanations, and spectacular ways of thinking. If not so, the appearance of solar and lunar eclipses would not be superstitiously believed to be a bad omen. Instead of finding scientific explanations to these phenomena, they embarked on special supplication and offer of supererogatory prayers. A superstitious belief about an eclipse is that during an eclipse, the sun is being swallowed by demons. Some people do not cook during an eclipse because they think that there are many germs around during that time. Some pregnant women who believe in superstitions believe that they should stay indoors during an eclipse as their baby may develop abnormalities.

The following three questions guided this study:

1. What are the superstitious beliefs prevalent in Ilorin metropolis?
2. What are the possible scientific explanations for each of the superstitions?
3. What are the educational implications of superstitious beliefs?

3. Research Method

The research type adopted for this study is the descriptive type, using the survey method which describes and interprets what exists, such as opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and events, without manipulating the variables. The beliefs prevalent among people of Ilorin metropolis were documented and a scientific explanation was given to each of the superstitions by the researchers.

The researchers chose 250 people as the sample size from 2,950,000 people (Ilorin Emirate Development Progressive Union (IEDPU), 2005). This was the population of Ilorin East,

Ilorin South, and Ilorin West local government areas (LGAs). These areas were subdivided into sub-units to create effective awareness. Out of 16 wards in Ilorin East, Ilorin South, and Ilorin West LGAs, a stratified sampling of five wards was selected. A list of towns and villages in each of the five wards selected was made and a stratified sampling of male and female, young and adult, educational and uneducational, and Muslims and Christians was used.

The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A requested for basic and personal information of the respondents, such as age, sex, religion, and educational background; section B contained 15 items based on the research topic. The items were intended to find out the various superstitious beliefs on different areas of life among the people of Ilorin metropolis. The researchers asked the respondents to mention superstitious beliefs in specific areas of life which included family background, life (marriage and and child rearing), death, funeral, health, pregnancy, courtship, occupation (such as farming trading), weather conditions, religion, witchcrafts, spirit, and so on.

The instrument was validated by administering it to 20 people from a ward which was not among those selected for the study. They were asked to study and make comments on the categories of the superstitious beliefs. They were also asked to mention the superstitious beliefs which they hold onto in the categories. It was given to three science education lecturers from the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin for their comments on the structure and usability of the instrument. A pilot study involving 25 people (15 males and 10 females) was conducted using the interview protocol. The 25 people were selected from the towns and villages, where the face validation of the instrument was done. The instrument was administered twice leaving an interval of four weeks. The responses of the subjects on the two administrations were analyzed using percentage.

The researchers were assisted by two research assistants to collect data and information from the 50 potential respondents from each ward, using the interview protocol. The researchers worked in three wards while the research assistants worked in two wards. They were trained on how to administer the interview protocol and the tape recorder that was used.

The research questions raised were answered using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, rankings, and the quantitative analysis of the respondents' responses to interview items. Thereafter, the superstitious beliefs compiled were given their scientific explanations by the researchers and three other science educators validated the scientific interpretation.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Out of the purposive sample of 50 respondents in each of the proposed LGAs, there were 653 responses from Ilorin South, 959 from Ilorin West, and 716 from Ilorin East during the interview.

The most prevalent superstitious beliefs held by Ilorin East people are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: *Presentation of Data Obtained From Ilorin East*

Age of class respondents	No. of respondents within the age class	Nu	Me	Ba	Pr	Bi	Hr	Fp	Tr	Di	He	An	Wa	Dh
21-30	23 (46%)	24 (24.44%)	22 (38.60%)	21 (35%)	26 (31.32%)	26 (40.63%)	26 (45.61%)	28 (38.89%)	31 (46.27%)	17 (40.48%)	13 (31.71%)	22 (40%)	22 (42.31%)	3 (25%)
31-40	20 (40%)	23 (42.59%)	26 (45.61%)	31 (51.67%)	45 (54.22%)	29 (45.32%)	25 (43.86%)	32 (44.44%)	29 (43.28%)	20 (47.62%)	21 (51.22%)	27 (49.09%)	23 (44.23%)	8 (66.61%)
41-50	7 (14%)	7 (12.96%)	9 (15.79%)	8 (13.33%)	12 (14.46%)	9 (14.06%)	6 (10.53%)	12 (16.67%	7 (10.45%)	5 (11.91%)	7 (17.03%)	6 (10.91%)	7 (13.46%)	1 (8.33%)
Total	50	54	57	60	83	64	57	72	67	42	41	55	52	12

Notes. Number of males = 29, number of females = 21; number of uneducated = 15, number of educated = 35; number of Muslims = 43, number of Christians = 7.

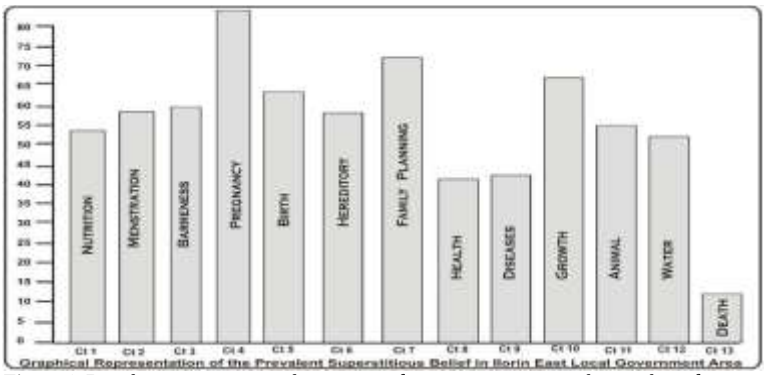

Figure 1. Bar chart presenting each category of superstition against the number of responses from people of Ilorin East.

The most prevalent superstitious beliefs held by Ilorin West people are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2

Presentation of Data Obtained From Ilorin West

Age of class respondents	No. of respondents within the age class	Nu	Me	Ba	Pr	Bi	Hr	Fp	Tr	Di	He	An	Wa	Dh
21-30	15	30 (19.74%)	25 (35.71%)	24 (30.38%)	21 (25%)	23 (31.08%)	19 (30.16%)	21 (26.92%)	20 (28.51%)	22 (29.73%)	18 (25.71%)	23 (30.67%)	17 (29.31%)	3 (15%)
31-40	27	46 (30.26%)	32 (45.71%)	43 (54.43%)	47 (55.95%)	40 (54.05%)	37 (58.73%)	43 (55.13%)	39 (55.71%)	40 (54.05%)	37 (52.86%)	41 (56.90%)	33 (56.90%)	12 (60%)
41-50	7	75 (46.34%)	10 (1.43%)	11 (12.66%)	12 (14.29%)	9 (12.16%)	7 (11.11%)	13 (16.67%)	9 (12.86%)	11 (14.86%)	13 (18.57%)	10 (13.33%)	6 (10.34%)	4 (20%)
51-60	1	1 (0.66%)	3 (4.29%)	2 (2.53%)	4 (4.76%)	2 (2.70%)	-	1 (1.28%)	2 (2.86%)	1 (1.35%)	2 (2.86%)	1 (1.33%)	2 (3.45%)	1 (5%)
Total	50	152	70	79	84	94	63	78	70	74	70	75	58	20

Notes. Number of males = 30, number of females = 20; number of uneducated = 19, number of educated = 31; number of Muslims = 48, number of Christians = 2.

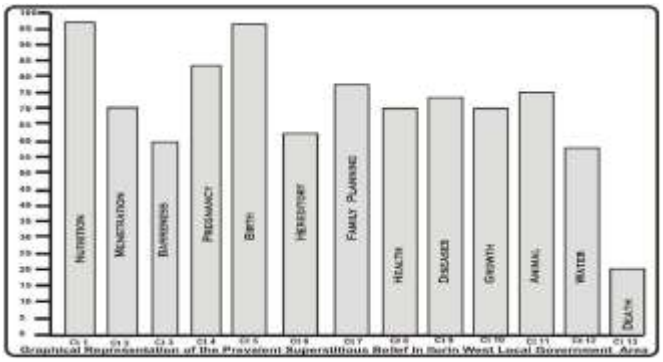

Figure 2. Bar chart presenting each category of superstition against the number of responses from people of Ilorin West.

The most prevalent superstitious beliefs held by Ilorin South people are shown in Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 3

Presentation of Data Obtained From Ilorin South

Age of class respondents	No. of respondents within the age class	Nu	Me	Ba	Pr	Bi	Hr	Fp	Tr	Di	He	An	Wa	Dh
11-20	3 (6%)	5 (9.62%)	5 (7.94%)	2 (2.77%)	5 (7.33%)	2 (4.29%)	2 (3.28%)	1 (6.64%)	7 (12.28%)	1 (2.78)	2 (4.76%)	5 (8.33%)	2 (4.65%)	-
21-30	21 (42%)	20 (38.46%)	24 (38.8%)	25 (47.17%)	26 (38.24%)	17 (36.17%)	25 (40.98%)	27 (44.26%)	21 (36.84%)	17 (47.22%)	17 (40.48%)	24 (40%)	17 (39.53%)	6 (60%)
31-40	20 (40%)	22 (38.46%)	27 (42.86%)	20 (37.74%)	30 (44.12%)	23 (48.12%)	26 (42.62%)	24 (39.34%)	20 (39.34%)	17 (47.33%)	17 (46.48%)	25 (41.67%)	15 (34.88%)	5 (60%)
41-50	3 (6%)	4 (7.69%)	5 (7.94%)	5 (9.43%)	3 (4.42%)	2 (4.26%)	5 (8.20%)	5 (8.20%)	5 (8.77%)	1 (2.78%)	3 (7.14%)	4 (6.67%)	5 (11.63%)	-
51-60	3 (6%)	1 (1.92%)	2 (3.18%)	1 (1.89%)	4 (5.88%)	3 (6.38%)	3 (4.92%)	4 (6.56%)	4 (7.08%)	-	4 (7.14%)	2 (3.33%)	4 (9.30%)	-
Total	50	52	63	53	68	47	61	61	57	36	42	60	43	10

Notes. Number of males = 29, number of females = 21; number of uneducated = 17, number of educated = 33; number of Muslims = 44, number of Christians = 6.

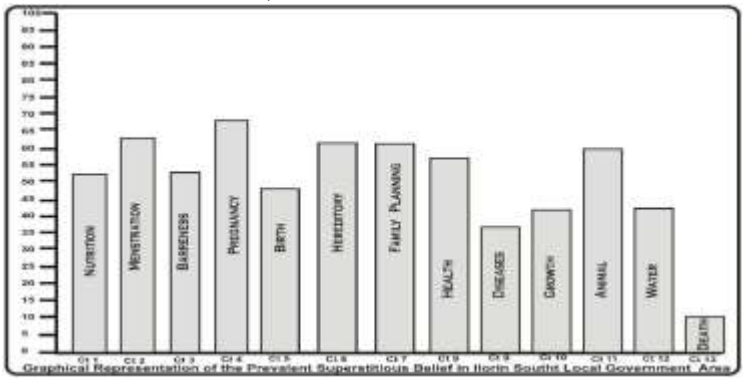

Figure 3. Bar chart presenting each category of superstition against the number of responses from people of Ilorin South.

The superstitious beliefs held by the people of Ilorin metropolis were in the following areas: nutrition, menstruation, heredity, health, death, animal, water, disease, barrenness, family planning, and birth.
Most of the superstitious beliefs held by the people of Ilorin metropolis are found to be non-prevalent. This is confirmed from the total percentage of the prevalent to non-prevalent superstitious beliefs (59%), which might be due to the fact that these superstitious beliefs are not widely used any more.

5. Superstitious Beliefs and Their Scientific Explanations

The most prevalent superstitious beliefs and their scientific explanations are listed in Table 4.

Table 4
Superstitious Beliefs and Their Scientific Explanations

No.	Superstitious belief	Scientific explanation
1	To predict the sex of a baby: Suspend a wedding band and held by a piece of thread over the palm of the pregnant woman, if the ring swings in an oral or circular motion, the baby will be a boy.	During the fertilization of egg when male Y-chromosome meet with X-chromosome of a female defiantly, the off-spring will be male. The woman will only give birth to a baby boy because her egg was fertilized by one of her husband's sperm bearing Y-chromosome.
2	In order not to see a ghost, all windows should be opened at the moment of death so that the soul can leave.	Scientifically, overcrowded locations lead to poor ventilation and ill-health stress. But, there is no scientific proof.
3	A pregnant woman eating snail will cause excessive salivating of the child.	Excessive salivating is due to the salivary gland present in the child's mouth and has nothing to with eating snail by the mother.
4	People believe that the god small-pox (sonpona) should be called by its name especially if one wants to prevent the re-occurrence of the outbreak.	Small-pox is not a disease caused by god but through infection. Small-pox virus is responsible .
5	Eating garri and mangoes may lead to stomach disorder.	Scientifically, cassava contains hydro cyanide and it has been removed during the garri processing, but if not properly removed, it is likely to cause stomach disorder to some people.
6	Some women find out that when they breastfeed, their sexual arousal and desire are diminished.	It is doubtful if this is due to lactation. A young baby takes up a great deal of time and energy so that less is available for other things, one of which may be the libido. And with a helpful man, you can enjoy both breast feeding and sex either simultaneously or in sequence.
7	Mandrak is a mysterious plant believed to have the power of preventing sterility in men and animals, causing barren woman to bear children and compelling love.	Mandrak is thought to have aphrodisiac and fertilizing properties.
8	Never look at a cat closely because when it spits into your eyes, the eyes will go blind.	To prevent us from the possible bite from cat that can result to serious health problem, like rabies.
9	It is a taboo to lean on the wall while it is raining.	The electric charge from the lightning can be conducted by building materials, via the rod, thereby, causing electric shock.

10	A solution of lime and salt taken by a woman is a family planning method.	This may prevent proper development of the baby in the womb which may lead to the death of the baby.
11	If you want your child to resemble you, sleep with her picture under your sleeping mat or pillow.	This is just to bring the husband close to the pregnant woman.
12	Never pass a child or bay through the window because this may stunt its growth.	This is just to teach moral and precaution on where to and how to handle babies.
13	Having sex with a menstruating woman is unclean and spoils traditional medicine used as protection by man.	Since menstrual discharge is a waste product, therefore, it may cause infection.

6. Educational Implications of Superstitious Beliefs

1. Loss of concentration: Indulging in activities of superstition can have negative impacts on the study of a student. A mind which waivers towards beliefs and curriculum lacks concentration. One may not be able to give his/her full output or may fail in his/her exams;
2. Lack of interest in studies: The knowledge of unknown becomes a matter of excitement for kids. They might start finding the discovery of something different and more interesting as compared with the repetitive school curriculum. This can lead to lack or total loss of interest in studies;
3. Mental disorders: When a person's personal experience in superstitions leads to a strong belief, it becomes a tough task to make him/her realize the reality from truth. The foundation of a personal experience is closer to one's intellect than other's fact-based realities. It can result in paranoia and other mental conditions which may exhibit unnatural behavior and unknown fears;
4. Hampering the development of an individual's personality: Change of focus amongst the students hampers the development of their personality instead of acquiring virtues necessary for individuals to live in a society. Individuals are seeking in seemingly beneficial tasks;
5. One's belief strengthens another's: Just like a communicable disease, superstition can manifest itself through the word of mouth. For a teenager who has a slight inclination towards such beliefs, a casual conversation with a superstitious person can spread and strengthen his/her own personal beliefs in such matters.

7. Conclusions

The findings have shown that the respondents from Ilorin West have more superstitious beliefs followed by Ilorin East and Ilorin South, as part of their culture and traditions. Some illiterate and educated people in Ilorin believe in superstitions because they were passed onto them by their elders, which gives a clear idea that superstitious beliefs play an important role in directing and shaping attitudes, norms, and behaviour of people of Ilorin metropolis. Out of 245 superstitious beliefs held by the people of Ilorin metropolis, only 35 (29.56%) were prevalent. The remaining (71.44%) were not prevalent. This is in agreement with Atmore and Stacey (1979) (as cited in Adewara 2012). who proposed that "The past is gradually becoming a lost past". This implies that superstitious beliefs are gradually fading away.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations were considered appropriate and relevant based on the findings of this study:
- Science educators should endeavor to relate science more closely to learners' societal or cultural environment so as to minimize the conflicts that might arise from the students' views of the world and that of science;
- Government and other organizations should support any association in its efforts to eradicate superstitious beliefs and discriminate against women and children;
- Civil society must not shy away from openly discussing the effect of superstitions on the social and spiritual lives of the people;
- It is important for religious organizations to stress on the role of personal responsibility in the determination of one's fate rather than the blind reliance on some spiritual processes to automatically change one's fortunes from poverty to riches overnight.

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