

Yoruba Traditional Medicine: A Panacea to Challenges of Global Pandemic (Covid-19)

Akinlabi, A. Williams

Department of Yoruba

School of Languages

Federal College of Education, Yola

awakinlabi@fceyola.edu.ng

Abstract

Global pandemic has decimated jobs and placed millions of livelihood at risk. This outbreak and its variants caused a lot of havoc socially, economically, culturally and health wise (all over the world). The main objective of this paper is to look for traditional ways of tackling this virus that wants to overwhelm the whole world. The paper does not only trace the negative effects of covid but also proffered solutions to curb this nightmare. The research methodology adopted for this study was secondary data, using Cultural Approach theory to back up the subject matter. The finding of the study reveals coronavirus as a deadly virus that can kill, steal and destroy the life of its victims. The major finding of the work proffers Yoruba traditional medicine as a cure to this global pandemic. It concludes that effective use of traditional medicine can prevent the society totally from every form of diseases. Yoruba traditional Medicine, is, therefore recommended because researches have shown that it stabilizes hormones and metabolism

Keywords: Traditional Medicine, Covid-19, Pandemic

Introduction

Traditional medicine refers to the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories beliefs and experience indigenous to different culture used in the maintenance of health and on the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.

Traditional medicines in Nigeria have a high level of support from the government and research and development in this area are managed under the department for traditional medicine within the National Institute for Research on Public Health which is part of the Ministry of health. The main policy emphasis is on the use of improved traditional medicine, also referred to as material transfer agreements and for regulatory purposes, traditional medicine have been classified into four categories.

Category 1 – Traditional medicines that are prepared by a traditional health practitioner for an individual patient with fresh or dried raw materials with a short shelf life.

Category 2 - Traditional medicines currently used in the community that are prepared in advance and composed of crude raw plant materials.

Category 3 – Standardized plant extracts prepared in advance and supported by scientific research.

Category 4 – Isolated pure compound molecules from traditional medicines following scientific research (Bodeker and Kronenberg, 2002).

The improved traditional medicine is recognized on the basis of having pharmacological evidence of safety and efficacy, development of standardized dosage forms, and quality control. In some countries, traditional medicine or non-conventional medicine may be termed complementary medicine (W.H.O. 2013) for its more recently popular use in parallel with allopathic medicine, especially for the treatment and control of chronically diseases. Bodeker and Kronenberg (2002) opine that for some ethnic group traditional medicine has represented the only option for disease prevention and cure; this is mainly due to exclusion and extreme poverty in which they live, as well as the lack of health services. Following the submission of Bodeker and Kronenberg (2002), one can say that the effects of Traditional medicine in preventing Covid-19 are extremely high. It is not more a news that coronavirus pandemic is a deadly virus. It is an illness caused by a novel coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome. It is a communicable respiratory disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus that causes illness in human (<https://africdede.org>).

Using Traditional medicine is one of the solutions to the pandemic which is the aim of this paper. For critical analysis of this research, the researcher embraced cultural approach theory as theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Approach Theory

Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiongo that are propounders of this theory believe that there is a cordial relationship between culture and literature. And what literature does is to protect the culture and the tradition of the people. Therefore, the tasks before critics are to analysis and bring out the culture, value, norms and the tradition that reflects in literary work. Prof. Wande Abimbola says:

Therefore, in order to envelop an acceptable format for the Appreciation of oral literature, we must blend our knowledge of the most up-to-date techniques of literary criticism and Stylistics with a thorough understanding of Yoruba culture Without this, any critical work is bound to be sterile (1982:78)

The above excerpt is acceptable because literature and culture are interwoven and cannot be separated. The theorists see culture as pillars that hold the three genres of literature, i.e. Poetry, Drama and Prose. What expected from the Critic is to picture out the culture and tradition of the people and do a critical analysis to promote such a culture. It seems Yoruba writers take culture very important when it comes to literary works. As good as this theory is, one of the demerits is that it focuses on culture. There is a need for Critic to look at the relationship of that culture to the society and one should be able to relate it to the people. Secondly, can culture portray in the literally work bring development to the society? The way and manner the writer portrays the culture must be critically checked if such culture can bring set back to the people or the readers. The theorists divided into two, the First category believes that culture should be conservative, society should follow the tradition the way it is, and it should be stagnant. The second category sees culture as Progressive and dynamic, they see culture as a tool to be used to develop the society. The theorists in this category believe that those Cultures of witch crafting, killing of twins, using human being for ritual, sacrificing man to gods etc should go to extinction. Fanon (1967) and Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986) in Adeyemi (2006) say Culture that can bring development, Culture that can make the society to fight for their right, culture that can make the masses to be liberated from oppressors should be showcased in literary work most especially from any writer . What is expected of any writer is to portray culture that teaches moral, culture that society can proud of, culture that can preserve the tradition of the people. Ngugi wa Thiongo says using language for literary work is tantamount to preservation of culture because language is part of culture. The theorists believe that language can be used as a tool of freedom, He says, there is mutual understanding if the two people that are fighting understand each other (language), it will be difficult to overwhelm them, until one used another language, because language is power and authority. (Adeyemi, 2006: 25-26). The application of Cultural approach theory to this study is appropriate because it captures one of the aspect of Yoruba culture which is Yoruba traditional medicine and the study sees the Yoruba traditional medicine as part of Yoruba culture that need to be Progressive and dynamic. Therefore, the researcher adopted this theory due to its strength and principles

Yoruba Traditional Medicine

Yoruba people predominantly occupy the south western part of Nigeria which comprises the states of Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, Kwara and substantial part of Kogi state (Ajuwon,2015). Yoruba medicine is quite different from homeopathy, which uses medicinal ingredients that imitates pathological symptoms. Rather in a similar manner to mainstream orthodox medicine, it strives to destroy the agent that causes disease.

Yoruba people believe in herb that is why they used to say “Ewe n be Oogun wa, Oogun ti ko je ewe re lo ku kan” meaning, There is herb and there’s charm, any charm that does not function, that mean the process is not complete. Traditional herb is what Yoruba called “Agbo” Agbo as an important aspect of trado-medical practices in Yoruba land. Agbo has been a veritable source of medicine before the advent of orthodox drugs and it is still being used today by most of the population literate and illiterates alike, Yoruba traditional medicine can also be referred to as herbalism. This is a study of pharmacognosy and the use of medicinal plants, which form the basis of trado-medicinal basically, includes fungal and be products, as well as minerals, shell and certain animal parts. If Agbo is the traditional way of treating illness therefore, Agbo can be used to cure Corona virus. Before orthodox medicine there has been traditional medicine. During the olden days there was no easy access to orthodox drugs therefore Agbo became a veritable source of medicine. Even before access to orthodox drug, Agbo was the only thing available for usage. The use of medicinal plants or herbs as a fundamental component of the African traditional healthcare system is perhaps the oldest and the most assorted of all therapeutic system.

The bush according to Yoruba’s belief, though physically remote, is crucial to Yoruba’s well-being. The bush is the place where the spirit world infused the natural world with power. This made the plant and animal products of the bush potent substances that could strengthen bodies and physical boundaries. Oyebola (1980) explains that there are Yoruba people who prefer herbs for so many reasons which include being born and bred with traditional medicine, being stuck or used to it or just by preference. However, there is still insufficient scientific evidence to show that these herbs are effective and safe for human.

One cannot talk of traditional medicine without mention the traditional healers, Oyebola classified traditional healers into seven categories, these are, the Babalawo Onisegun or Adahunse, Alasotele (Soothsayer) Olorisa or Abore, Awon Leku-leja (traditional pharmacists) specialists comprising of traditional bone setters, traditional

psychiatrists, traditional birth attendants or midwives and the Olola and a miscellaneous group consisting of Aafa (Mallam) and Aladura (Spiritual healer) The functions of each category of traditional healers identified were clearly defined. Yoruba traditional healers are capable to heal all manner of diseases including Coronavirus.

Covid – 19

On 31st December, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was notified of an outbreak of respiratory illness of unknown cause in Wuhan, China. This disease was known as the 2019 Corona virus disease (COVID-19). The virus spread like wildfire to other countries of the world, including Nigeria, thereby causing the Director-General WHO to declare the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. (World Health Organization, 2013. <https://www.who.int.health>). According to National Primary Health Care Development Agency (2020a), the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health confirmed the first COVID-19 case in Lagos State on 27th February, 2020. On 11th March 2020, COVID-19 was declared as a pandemic (an epidemic of global scale). As the world became ravaged by the pandemic, nations are grappling with how to contain the spread and limit its effects within their borders (Obiakor, 2020). Thus, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), in line with the prescriptions of the World Health Organization (WHO), outlined the following safety measures, as presented by the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (2020b).

1. Use of face mask
2. Physical distancing – maintaining a distance of at least two meters or six feet (2 arm's length) between you and another person;
3. Social distancing – avoiding crowded places and places where people congregate;
4. Stay at home – no visiting neighbours, no receiving visitors, only you and your family at home.
5. Hand hygiene – washing hands regularly with soap under running water for about twenty seconds or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
6. Avoid hands shaking or hugging – rather wave at the person or bow.

In this era of COVID-19 and its other variants, where human physical closeness has largely been restricted, communication between entrepreneurs, especially small and medium enterprises, and their clients/customers has been amply hampered. This ultimately, has affected productivity and sales, and by extension profits and goodwill of these business establishments. The need, therefore, arises for alternatives way(s) of maintaining and even improving their business relationships and statuses. Effective communication by leveraging on its channel through the agents (the new media tools) becomes a viable option in this regard.

Therefore, given the routes of its transmission which are mainly directly from person to person who are in close contact with each other and indirectly from infected materials to humans, equally through physical contacts (usually hands), the need to isolate oneself became higher. It was on this basis and the fact that many citizens had become infected and ultimately were dying that the Federal Government of Nigeria announced a total lockdown in March 2020. To that effect, schools, airports, worship centers, market places, night clubs cum recreational centers, motor parks, and so on were closed down. Dawn to dusk or even to dawn curfew was introduced, in many towns! This shattered the economy and brought attendant hardships on the Nigerian masses. (Obiakor, 2020).

The impacts of Covid -19 on Nigerians are enormous. Nevertheless, the first major victims are entrepreneurs, institutions and government offices. These are businessmen and women and medium enterprises (SMEs) whose establishments were shut down as a result of the restrictions on human mobility. The lockdown led to considerable decline in the demand for goods and services and by extensions the reduction on funds and liquidity. This forced many entrepreneurs to quit from their businesses with the corresponding result leading to economic crises.

In fact, small and medium enterprises could not absorb the involved risks and afford the cost as a result of depreciating business activities which led to scarcer funds. They were unable to service their clients/customers, pay salaries of their employees and shoulder the responsibilities of effective supplies. The need to down-size, therefore, created unemployment. This, in turn, created multiplicity of other effects which the scope of this paper would not let the researchers delve into.

Despite the above negative impacts, COVID-19 outbreaks have led to an increase in entrepreneurial activities. This is so because innovative entrepreneurs have moved into areas that could thrive in the post-pandemic world. Such areas include, for instance, health care, education, entertainment and basic day-to-day necessities. Equally, it afforded some people the opportunities to switch over to a new product line, online sales and increase in marketing efficiency. The innovative aspect of the online marketing activities and e-learning through new media channel was adopted during this era. Up till date some country has not come out of the tragedy caused by coronavirus.

Positive Effects of Yoruba Traditional Medicine in Curtailing Global Pandemic

Traditional medicines have been around for millennia. They are the oldest and most diverse forms of healing that form the foundation of medical systems in any regions of the world. There are many sickness and diseases that western medicine did not have solution to them, diseases like Rheumatism/Arthritis, Epilepsy etc but tradition medicine has proffered solution. During the Covid era, some of our traditional healers and research institutes used plants and natural elements to treat a Coronavirus and its variants.

The ancient art of well-being is still highly relevant in the modern world, though religion, (Islam and Christianity) modernization, and western education make many to disbelieve traditional medicine and make their worshippers to see it as an idol, which is wrong. The knowledge of natural remedies has been passed down from generation to generation. Even modern medicine can trace its roots back to medicinal plants and some of the techniques still being used in traditional medicine today. That is why these practices will continue for years to come; providing affordable healthcare to local communities.

The World Health Organization (W.H.O) recognizes traditional medicine and its importance to healthcare. W.H.O states that these practices are actually growing in popularity in many regions of the world as they offer complimentary healing for modern medicines. Numerous other scientific organizations have been studying traditional medicine and their effectiveness.

Yoruba herbal remedies can ease the symptoms of coronavirus, looking at the symptoms of this ailment. (coughs, cold, flu, fever, sore throats) traditional healers can use plant such as African Wormwood (Iwo), Ginger (Atale), Bitter Kola (Orogbo), Basil (Efinrin), Alligator Pepper (Ataare), Garlic (Ayu), Black Pepper (Iyere), Lemon (Orombo), Cloves (Kannafuru) to cure the first stage of coronavirus, once the ailment have been dealt with from the root, there will be no room for the virus to germinate into the next stage. Some remedies can support the entire immune system, making them ideal for supplementary medication. In the modern Era, traditional remedies are often used in conjunction with mainstream medicines as complementary treatments. They can be used to counterpart some of the side effects of pharmaceutical drugs and to speed up recovery times. Here are some other positive effects of Yoruba traditional medicines according to Oyebola (1980):

- They are more affordable than most conventional medicines
- They are easy to obtain and don't require prescription
- They strengthen the overall immune system
- They can stabilize hormones and the metabolism
- They can be found in nature, so cost very little to harvest and produce.

Chukwuma in *Guardian newspaper* 2022 suggested a blend of three local plants, King of bitter (Jogbo or Mejemeje- Seven Seven), Bitter kola, and Guava as remedy to cure covid-19, Bio-resources Development Group (BDG) developed the natural blend .i.e. King of bitter (Jogbo or Mejemeje- Seven Seven), Bitter kola, and Guava, called IHP Detox Tea. The presentation of the findings was made at College of Medicine University of Lagos and Lagos State University Teaching Hospital on Monday April 11, 2022 during the visit of the World Health Organization (W.H.O) team to Nigeria to evaluate clinical trials conducted in the country for Covid-19 using traditional medicine or herbal medicinal products. The IHP Detox Tea clinical trials showed clearly that the herbal product was effective in the treatment of Covid-19, with no single death recorded in the treatment group against three deaths in the control

Conclusion and Recommendations

Yoruba traditional medicines are still popular today and it will continue to be relevant as they have numerous benefits over modern medicines, especially in societies with little access to state healthcare and medical aids. The knowledge used in these practices has been passed on for centuries and the remedies are tried – and – tested. Modern medicine can still learn from traditional remedies and practices a belief held by the W.H.O and many other scientific organizations. The paper recommends that, Nigerian society should endeavor to use traditional herbals to remedy their health conditions. We share ways to improve our health through the lifestyle choices we make it's all about healthy living and being the best version of yourself. Society should disengage from the doctrine that says traditional medicine is a way of practicing idol. More studies and researches on traditional medicine should be encouraged, exhibition on herbal medicine should be promoted and those traditional healers should impart the knowledge and the skills to younger generation, if possible the knowledge and skills should be documented.

Furthermore, traditional healers should look for ways to modernize their products in such a way that it will not cause havoc to the body system and meet the international standard. Development of standardized dosage forms and quality control must be seriously looking into. Looking at the theoretical framework especially the second

principles of cultural approach theory, the study therefore concludes that Yoruba people should go back to the traditional medicine of using plants and herbs because there are lots of benefits in it and its merits are more than demerits. Traditional medicine has always been useful and is still useful till date. Yoruba people should not allow this special heritage to go into extinction because the elders say “Tiwa – n – tiwa takisa ni taatan” This paper concludes that effective use of traditional medicine can prevent the society totally from every form of diseases. Yoruba traditional Medicine, is, therefore recommended because researches have shown that it stabilizes hormones and metabolism in the body system

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