

Interplay of Behaviorism and Cultural Influences: A Critical Analysis through African Literature and Linguistics Policy

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Abstract

This paper delves into an in-depth exploration of the interplay between language policies, education, and behaviorism as depicted in African literature. It seeks to showcase the shortcomings of behaviorism - a theory largely dependent on external stimuli such as rewards and punishments, in fully capturing the essence of learning processes presented in African storytelling. Drawing from classic and contemporary works in African literature, the paper elucidates the power of intrinsic motivation, personal experiences, symbolic language use, and socio-cultural influences - features often overlooked in behavioristic frameworks. The paper further delves into the importance of multilingual education policies, cultural sensitivity in pedagogies, teacher training programs, and inclusive curricula to cater to diverse language backgrounds, as highlighted in various scholarships. The paper concludes by underscoring the need for pedagogical transformations that acknowledge the importance of language and culture, respect linguistic diversity, and promote inclusive and accessible education. The goal is to evoke an understanding of learning and personal development that transcends the reward and punishment system. The work reiterates the significance of a multi-pronged approach in education, featuring not just behaviorist principles but also inclusive, socio-cultural approaches that are adaptive to the modern-day learner.

Keywords Behaviorism; African Literature; Pedagogical Transformation; Intrinsic Motivation; Multilingual Education Policies; Socio-cultural Approaches; Linguistic Diversity; Criticism

Introduction

The inextricable bond between language and culture finds expression in educational practices, shaping not just learning methods but influencing learner experiences and outcomes. While the concept of Behaviorism has been instrumental in the field of education and psychology, its potential limitations surface when confronted with the culturally rich, diverse, and expansive canvas of African literature and its depiction of learning processes. This brings us to the point of convergence and conflict. Behaviorism, by focusing primarily on observable behavior because of stimuli, disregards the influence of unobservable mental states and cultural factors. It proposes that learning is a process of conditioning, where the visible changes in behavior are the result of external stimuli. While this theory provides a simple and systematic explanation for certain learning processes, it struggles to accommodate the intricate interplay of intrinsic motivation, emotions, dreams, and sociocultural contexts depicted in African literature. African literature, both the classics

and the contemporary, expertly showcases the role culture plays in shaping mindsets and actions. Personal desire, interest, or ethical commitment serve as intrinsic motivators, often driving learning more than extrinsic rewards or punishments. Palpable in narrative arcs across widely celebrated African novels, plays, poems, and even digital writings, these aspects challenge the foundational tenets of Behaviorism, bringing forth its weaknesses.

This paper dwells on this multifaceted issue, exploring how the behaviorist theory, while holding its ground in certain educational settings, falls short in fully encompassing the breadth of experiences, emotions, and contexts highlighted in African literature. It underscores the necessity of striking a balance between global pedagogical approaches and the uniqueness of individual experiences as nested within their sociocultural and linguistic contexts. The primary objective is to shed light on the critical intersections between language policies, education, behaviorism, and cultural diversity as painted in the vibrant

tapestry of African literature. In doing so, it urges the academic and educational communities to reconsider, and where necessary, remodel pedagogical approaches to respect and value linguistic diversity and cultural identity. Guided by such focus, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on more inclusive and culturally responsive educational practices. The exploration of language, educational practices, and behavioral theory through the lens of African literature leads us to challenge the assumptions underlying these disciplines. For instance, the rich narratives of African literature illustrate that a person's motivations and learning processes are often far more complex and subtly nuanced than what can be explained using a strictly behaviorist attitude. This brings us to the hypothesis that is to be explored in this paper. We hypothesize that Behaviorism, reliant as it is on observable behaviors and the concept of reward and punishment, fails to fully capture the intricacies of learning processes illustrated in African literature. We propose that African literature, with its emphasis on cultural, personal, and socio-political influences, advocates for a comprehensive model that goes beyond behaviorist notions. This perspective acknowledges learning as not merely reactionary but as a dynamic and intricate process influenced by intrinsic motivation, emotional states, cultural contexts, and personal experiences.

Further, our hypothesis also conjectures that an alignment with a solely behavioristic model potentially impedes the efforts towards ensuring inclusive, accessible, and culturally sensitive educational practices. We suggest that an effective pedagogical model should respect linguistic diversity, incorporate multilingual education policies, and understand the significance of cultural narratives in shaping students' learning experiences. Through the development and exploration of these hypotheses, this paper aims at fostering a broader understanding of the realm of education, thereby buffering the importance of adopting culturally inclusive, multifaceted pedagogical approaches that affirm and celebrate diversity. The purpose of this research is not only to challenge existing theoretical frameworks but to contribute to and inspire the evolution of more holistic educational practices also substantially. The principal aim of this study is to explore and critically analyze the intersection of behaviorism, language policies, education, and African literature. It seeks to gauge the proficiency of behaviorism, a theory heavily relying on observable behaviors and external stimuli, in encapsulating the intrinsic motivations, emotions, and socio-cultural contexts inherent in African literature and storytelling. Simultaneously, the study intends to underscore the significance of promoting inclusive, culturally responsive, and linguistically diverse pedagogical models in education. To achieve this objective, the study will address the following research questions:

➤ How does African literature challenge the principles of behaviorism in the context of learning and personal development?

➤ What aspects of learning and motivation, as represented in African literature, are potentially overlooked, or simplified in behaviorist theory?

➤ How can the principles of behaviorism be reconciled with the pedagogical needs highlighted in African literature for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to learning?

➤ What policy recommendations and pedagogical transformations can be inferred from African literature to promote linguistic diversity and culturally responsive education?

➤ How can the adoption of these proposed changes contribute to improving accessibility, inclusivity, and quality in the education system?

In addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the broader academic discourse on redefining educational practices to create a more inclusive and diverse learning environment that respects and values every learner's unique socio-cultural and linguistic context.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Behaviorism, as a critical theoretical framework for this study, is rooted in the works of renowned scholars such as John B. Watson, B.F. Skinner, and Ivan Pavlov. John B. Watson, often considered the father of behaviorism, advanced the idea that psychologists should focus solely on observable behavior rather than unobservable internal mental events. In his book *Behaviorism* (1924), Watson argued that learning takes place through responses to stimuli in the environment without the need for any internal mental processes. B.F. Skinner expanded on Watson's ideas and developed Operant Conditioning theory, often significant in educational settings. Skinner's [1] work emphasized the role of reinforcements and punishments in shaping behavior. His notable book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, showcases the theory that behavior is learned from the environment through the process of operant conditioning, implying that all action is determined and not free. These ideas have had extensive influence over educational practices, particularly in designing behavior management systems. Ivan Pavlov [2] contributed to behaviorism by introducing the concept of Classical Conditioning. His famous experiment with dogs, initially aimed at studying digestive systems, resulted in the foundational principles of classical conditioning theory where he showed how physiological reactions could be trained from previously neutral stimuli. His findings, presented in his work *Conditioned Reflexes*, have had far-reaching implications across fields, from psychology to education and beyond.

These seminal works form the heart of behaviorist theory. The main contention of behaviorism that learning is a mechanistic process involving responses to stimuli forms the theoretical bedrock against which the assertions of African literature and multicultural pedagogical approaches are compared within this

study. The theoretical framework for this study is underpinned by the principles of critical pedagogy and socio-cultural theory. Critical pedagogy, as originally proposed by Paulo Freire, asserts that education is an inherently political act and emphasizes the need for education to be liberatory and focused on the realities of the students. This framework urges for the relevance and contextual considerations within the classroom, preferences that are echoed in African literature and contradicted in behaviorist theory. Complementing it, the socio-cultural theory posited by Lev Vygotsky emphasizes the impact of social, cultural, and historical contexts on learning. It underscores the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-creation of knowledge, stressing that cognitive development is fundamentally intertwined with cultural practices, tools, and language. The intersectionality of these theories provides a comprehensive curricular and pedagogical lens for this study, helping in delving deeper into the research questions.

In analyzing the discourse and narrative in African literature and its critique of behaviorist perspectives, a qualitative research methodology offers the most effective approach. This method focuses on understanding phenomena from a close and interpretive perspective. It values the context, honors the voice of participants, and appreciates the complexities and intricacies of the lived human experience – features particularly significant to this study. The proposed method would involve a detailed document analysis of selected works of African literature. The focus will be on characters' portrayal, intrinsic motivations, emotional states, socio-cultural contexts, and personal experiences that influence learning processes. This would be carried out through critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis centered on the reading and interpretation of texts. Much like African literature itself, this qualitative method allows the inclusion of diverse voices, narratives, and perspectives - showing resonance with the pedagogical shifts advocated. While challenging the behaviorist theory underlying education, it opens room for exploring more holistic, culturally responsive, and sensitive pedagogical practices within the educational realms.

Findings

African literature, from classics like Chinua Achebe's [3] *Things Fall Apart* and Wole Soyinka's plays to contemporary digital writings such as Tunde Leye's blog stories, often highlight the role culture plays in shaping a person's mindset and actions. The behaviorist theory's focus on conditioning doesn't account for the influence of cultural context, which is integral in African storytelling. Behaviorism relies heavily on rewards and punishments as motivators for learning. Novels like *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Bâ [4] or the poems of Leopold Sedar Senghor, however, emphasize the power of intrinsic motivation fueled by personal desire, interest, or ethical commitment. Behaviorism pays little attention to the internal thought processes, emotions,

and dreams that are central to many African novels and autobiographies, such as *Dreams in a Time of War* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Behaviorism's focus on observable behaviors overlooks the human capacity for imagination and creativity, key elements in African poetry and drama. Behaviorism would find it hard to explain the creativity that the renowned Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka exhibits in his plays. Digital writings, like those found on *Brittle Paper*, represent an array of personal narratives and voices that contrast with behaviorism's generalization of learning processes. It seems to sidestep the complexities of individual identities brought to light in autobiographies such as Thabo Mbeki's [5] *The Dream Deferred*. Characters in African novels often undergo deep learning and transformation in nuanced and complex ways that transcend simplistic notions of stimulus and response. For instance, in Ayi Kwei Armah's [6] *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the protagonist's ethical learning cannot be reduced to a process of conditioning.

African texts like Tsitsi Dangarembga's [7] *Nervous Conditions* or Yaa Gyasi's [8] *Homegoing* delineate how personal, psychological, and emotional factors influence people's learning and behavior. This nuanced view of human behavior is often missing in behaviorist theory which relies heavily on observable responses. In multiple African novels, characters evolve over time. For instance, in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's [9] *Purple Hibiscus*, the main character Kambili undergoes significant growth and change. This demonstrates that learners are not constant entities, but evolve continuously, a facet overlooked in behaviorism theory. Many African texts, especially plays and poetry, exemplify the power of language and expression which is not simply a learned behavior but a medium for individuals to express their feelings, critique societal norms, or create aesthetic pleasure. This is as apparent in the works of celebrated poets like Kofi Awoonor or Gwendolyn Brooks as in millennial African poets' expressions on social media platforms. Autobiographies often shed light on how societal structures shape individual behavior, a critical factor streamlined in behaviorist theory. In his memoir *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela interweaves his personal journey with the larger societal struggle against apartheid. Digital writings often rely on interactive learning, public discourse, and inspiration from others' writings. This contradicts the behaviorist idea of learning as a solitary, reward-driven process.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* proposes that language is more than a tool for communication, but critical in shaping our worldview and culture. Behaviorism is often criticized for simplifying the complexity of language learning and its sociopolitical implications into mere response to stimuli. While behaviorism has a lot to do with molding behavior through intervention, African literature often underscores the importance of personal autonomy. This is evident in No Violet Bulawayo's [10] *We Need New Names*, where the protagonist, Darling, takes decisions based on self-impulse

or circumstances rather than external reward or punishment. In African poetry, much like digital literature, open interpretation is highly encouraged. This allows the individual to come up with unique perspectives that may not align with mainstream thinking, adding richness to the global discourse. Such creative and critical thinking contradicts the passivity often associated with behaviorist learning models. Much of African literature and digital writings emphasize how behaviors and attitudes are deeply rooted in the geographical, historical, and societal context. In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, the protagonist's behavior cannot be comprehended fully without considering the historical and cultural setting, a dimension that behaviorism fails to address.

African novels such as *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie [11] greatly emphasize personal experiences, memories, trauma, and their role in shaping the characters' understandings of the world. Behaviorism dismisses these personal experiences and focuses predominantly on a universal response to stimuli, which can be viewed as an overly simplifying approach. The creation of African literature, poetry or digital content is not just an observable process but involves a high level of artistry, creative expression, and personal vision. These further challenge the behaviorist approach, which does not fully account for the artistic and imaginative part of learning and development. African literature, be it novels like *The River Between* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, portrays a diverse range of characters with different learning paths and personal growth. However, the behaviorist approach could be criticized for assuming homogeneity among learners and not giving enough recognition to learner diversity and the need for differentiated learning processes. African novels and digital writings often rely on symbolic and metaphorical references to convey meaning. These facets underscore the complex layers of language use and understanding, which go beyond the simplified stimulus-response continuum that behavioral theory adheres to. Digital writings, especially in our increasingly interconnected world, enable global and collaborative learning experiences. This perspective contrasts with the behaviorist model's focus on individual learners responding to specific stimuli, without a substantial role for collaborative learning.

Discussion

Addressing issues related to education and language certainly calls for a multi-pronged approach. Based on the work of Canagarajah [12] in *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*, promoting multilingual education policies can be an important step. Embracing local languages in the education system not only acknowledges cultural diversity, but can also improve accessibility and inclusivity in education, thus fostering a more equitable society. Thomas and Collier [13] in *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement* argue that curricula should be adaptive to cater to diverse language backgrounds. This will ensure that students are not disadvantaged due to language barriers, thus

promoting inclusivity. In War Child Holland's (2015) report *Accelerated Learning Programs in Crisis and Conflict: Building Evidence and Learning*, the significance of teacher training programs is emphasized to ensure educators are equipped with skills to teach in multilingual settings. A teacher's ability to handle linguistic diversity can directly affect the quality of education. Fishman [14] peering through "Can Threatened Languages Be Saved? Reversing Language Shift," suggests that efforts toward language preservation, such as the documentation of endangered languages, can help maintain linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. This can also help in creating learning resources that support multilingual education. Mundy and Dryden's [15] article "Public-Private Partnerships for Educational Development:

A Case Study of the World Bank in Indonesia" recommends these collaborations. By working together, they can help develop policies, curricula, and resources that reflect linguistic diversity, meeting students' language needs while ensuring quality education. Affordable internet and digital education tools can facilitate language learning and open new avenues for improving access to education, as Bain, Houghton, and Sahay [16] in "Digital Promise and Pitfalls: Digital Learning in the Time of COVID-19," argue. Research by Ball [17] in *Enhancing Learning of Children from Diverse Language Backgrounds: Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual or Multilingual Education in the Early Years* shows that mother tongue instruction in early years of schooling improves educational success, especially for minority-language students. Policies promoting mother tongue instruction can address potential language barriers in education. In *Multicultural dialogue: Dilemmas, paradoxes, conflicts*, Sirkku Latomaa and Tarja Palmu [18] argue promoting multicultural dialogue in the educational system can help integrate various linguistic cohorts into mainstream education.

According to Branch [19] in *Language supports to refugee-background students in Canada and the U.S.* additional language support services such as after-school language programs, language support staff, and tutoring services can augment language acquisition and be instrumental in bridging language gaps. International scholarly collaboration can foster the exchange of pedagogical practices, adaptive teaching methodologies, and curriculum design that could help address education and language issues, which is advocated by Teichler, Arimoto, and Cummings [20] in *The Changing Academic Profession*. Ladson-Billings [21] explores the notion of relevant pedagogy in but that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. A pedagogy that is aligned with students' cultural and linguistic contexts contributes to a more inclusive and attuned learning environment. Hallinger and Dimmock in *School Leadership in Diverse Contexts* highlight the role of policy in promoting educational equity. To reconcile education and language effectively, we must think beyond the classroom and into the realms of policymaking, cultural preservation, local community involvement, international

cooperation, and equitable practices. The overarching aim is to promote an inclusive, accessible, and quality education system that respects and values linguistic diversity.

Motivated by such literature, pedagogical transformations are required to acknowledge the importance of language and culture in the learning process. As insinuated by the findings of Hedges, Cullen, and Jordan's [22] Teaching in Early Years of School project, transformative education should go beyond reward and punishment systems to considering the desires, experiences, traditions, and history of the learner. The focus should be on creating a teaching and learning environment that recognizes the importance of culture and identity, as well as intrinsic motivators in the learning process. Adopting an inclusive learning approach that accounts for individual differences, as advocated by Andresen, Boud, and Choen [23] in Experience-based Learning, may necessitate a shift from behaviorist pedagogies to more constructivist or socio-cultural approaches. Such approaches value the learner's active role in knowledge construction, contextual learning, interaction and dialogue, psychological, emotional, and cultural factors influencing learning. However, challenges remain in translating such pedagogical transformations into classrooms, curricula, and educational policies. Teachers may need to be trained to adopt culturally sensitive pedagogies, curriculum needs to be inclusive of different cultures and experiences, and policies need to consider the rights to education and language of all learners, as highlighted in Inclusive Education: Achieving Education for All by Including those with Disabilities and Special Education Needs by Ainscow and Miles [24].

This expansive scope of work brings into sharp focus the impact of language policies on education. Linguistic diversity, a global phenomenon, presents both challenges and opportunities for education systems worldwide. It is vital that our approaches to these issues are multifaceted and malleable, capable of evolving with changing cultural landscapes to support equitable education practices. Moreover, the interrelationship of language and education as outlined in the various scholarly works emphasizes the necessity of systemic transformation, not mere incremental adjustments. Linguistic diversity needs to be recognized as an asset rather than a hurdle, reshaping the entire education system into one that truly respects and supports the broad range of linguistic and cultural experiences of modern-day students. The element of digital technology, as highlighted in the works of Bain, Houghton, and Sahay, presents another versatile tool in our mission to promote language inclusivity. The potential of digital education tools and online resources in facilitating multilingual education opens unprecedented possibilities for learning and cultural exchange. However, this potential must be tempered with an understanding of the limitations and challenges posed by digital disparities and internet access issues, particularly in poor areas.

Furthermore, the work of Thomas and Collier demonstrates that an education system that accommodates linguistic diversity can lead to substantial improvements in academic achievement and socio-cultural inclusivity. This is not just about creating a supportive environment for language minority students; it also involves developing a curriculum that is responsive to the diverse backgrounds of all students. However, as Andresen, Boud, and Choen stress, a shift towards an inclusive learning approach demands a significant change from traditional pedagogies. Teachers need to be trained in culturally sensitive pedagogies, curricula need to accommodate diverse cultures and experiences, and policies need to uphold the language and education rights of all learners. The learning environment should value the learner's active role in knowledge construction and leverage the psychological, emotional, and cultural factors influencing learning. As Ainscow and Miles argue in their study, inclusive education should be the goal. To create such an environment, a systemic rethinking of education practices and policies is mandatory. Current structures need to be dismantled and rebuilt with the clear intention of celebrating linguistic diversity. This necessitates the involvement of coordinated efforts from educational institutions, government bodies, international organizations, and local communities.

Finally, it is important to note that addressing the intersection of language and education is not an isolated or one-time effort. As the works of various scholars prove, it is an ongoing process of evolving, learning, and adapting to ensure the pursuit of inclusivity, equity, and linguistic diversity in education is never compromised. Nonetheless, the journey towards reimagining the role of language and culture in education, albeit challenging, is a necessary one. African literature offers an essential lens to explore the possibilities and challenges of this journey. In a rapidly globalizing world, such literature offers a unique opportunity for students to engage with diverse cultural and linguistic realities, encouraging a more empathetic, inclusive, and nuanced understanding of the world.

Conclusion

While behaviorist theory has been instrumental in teaching many concepts and skills, African literature suggests that a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior and learning processes is needed, which includes the impact of cultural context, personal experiences, emotions, creativity, language, and societal structures. It attests to the need for a diverse set of theories to explain the complexities of human learning and behavior. Therefore, as educators, researchers, and policymakers, we should seek to understand and apply different theories of learning and teaching, tailored to specific learners, cultural contexts, and learning objectives. In this way, we can ensure a richer, more relevant, and effective learning experience. Moreover, appreciating and preserving linguistic diversity and ensuring inclusive educational practices should be critical components

of any education reform. Therefore, in addition to theories, African literature suggests that grassroots activism, collaboration among stakeholders, policy interventions, teacher training, and harnessing digital technologies should be leveraged to address the challenges presented by monolingual and exclusionary education systems.

Thus, African literature not only enriches our understanding of human behavior but also motivates us to reimagine education in more inclusive, equitable, and relevant ways. In the end, the goal is to foster a learning environment that not only appreciates diversity but also facilitates the holistic development of learners through culturally appropriate, sensitive, and responsive education. A nuanced and strategic multi-level approach is required to reconcile issues of education and language. This involves strategic policymaking, adopting inclusive curricula, training teachers to manage linguistic diversity, preserving threatened languages, advancing multi-sector collaborations, and leveraging technology to bridge the language-education gap effectively.

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