FUW CENTRE FOR RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES (FUWCRJH)

The Revelation of Artificial Intelligence through the Lens of Biblical Knowledge and the Ifa Corpus among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explored the intersection between Artificial Intelligence (AI), Biblical knowledge, and the African Indigenous knowledge (Ifa corpus), with a focus on how these spiritual and philosophical systems can inform and shape the understanding and ethical development of AI. Rather than viewing AI as a purely modern, secular invention, the study traces its conceptual origin of innovation to ancient wisdom traditions. The Bible reflects on creation, wisdom, and human invention as divine gifts meant to serve humanity under ethical guidance (Proverbs 2:6; Genesis 1:28), while Ifa divination system, in Yoruba spirituality, employs binary logic akin to AI algorithms, using 256 Odu to interpret human conditions, make decision and interpret mystery that lead to innovations, reflecting a sophisticated African epistemology. These Odu predict the evolution of technological (Abimbola, 1977). The paper argues that both Biblical and Ifa knowledge provide moral and metaphysical foundations that can guide the responsible use of AI, ensuring it serves communal good and spiritual values rather than replacing them. Rather than allowing AI to displace these traditional knowledge systems, the study advocates for their integration of these ancient knowledge in order to enhance both spiritual insight and technological innovation. This synthesis promotes a holistic vision where AI development aligns with communal values, moral consciousness, and ancestral wisdom, ensuring technology remains a servant of humanity, not its master.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Biblical Knowledge, Ifa Corpus, Indigenous Knowledge and Ethics

Introduction

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) marks a transformative moment in human history, with its potential to redefine the boundaries of human thought, creativity, and social interaction (Russell, 2019). As AI technologies rapidly evolve shaping economies, communication, education, and governance they also raise critical questions about purpose, morality, and the future of humanity. These questions are not new. For centuries, spiritual traditions such as the Bible and African Indigenous belief systems have addressed the origins and purpose of knowledge, the responsibilities that come with power, and the place of humans within creation. This paper brings the ancient wisdom of Biblical teachings and the Ifa corpus into discussion with the contemporary realities of Artificial Intelligence, particularly within the cultural and spiritual context of the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria.

Biblical knowledge provide deep insights into the origin of wisdom and human ingenuity. From the Genesis account of creation to the wisdom literature in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, the Bible portrays knowledge as a sacred trust, given by God for the purpose of

nurturing life, promoting justice, and sustaining creation. Proverbs 2:6 declare that "the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding," while Genesis 1:26–28 affirms that human beings are made in God's image, with the capacity and mandate to create, name, and organise. In this light, AI can be viewed not as a threat to spirituality but as a continuation of humanity's God-given ability to solve problems, build tools, and extend the possibilities of creation so long as it remains under moral discipline.

Knowledge according to Ifa corpus popularly known among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria is not seen as neutral or purely intellectual, but as something sacred, relational, and accountable to both the divine and the community. The Ifa corpus, which forms the spiritual and philosophical bedrock of Yoruba knowledge, contains 256 Odu symbolic verses knowns as "Odu" that guide decision-making and reveal patterns in human and cosmic life. The divination process in Ifa is remarkably structured, employing binary logic (e.g., single and double marks) similar to modern computing systems. The use of ikin or opele to cast and interpret these verses closely resembles the input-output logic of AI algorithms, where patterns are decoded to reach conclusions and anticipate future outcomes (Bascom, 1991). For the Yoruba, Ifa is not merely ritual, it is applied knowledge used to address predict outcome, settle disputes, choose leaders, or understand one's destiny.

However, the global discussion on AI has largely ignored scriptural and indigenous ways of thinking, favouring secular, Western models that often separate science from spirituality and morality from technology. This exclusion not only limits the ethical depth of AI development but also marginalises cultural systems that have long wrestled with the questions AI now raises: What is the purpose of knowledge? Who controls power? How should decisions be made for the good of the community? In many Yoruba communities, Ifa and Biblical worldviews continue to guide daily life, yet these systems are rarely consulted in technological discourse even though their wisdom can contribute meaningfully to current debates.

The Rise of Artificial Intelligence and the Spiritual Search for Knowledge

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has led to profound advancements in technology, prompting new questions about human intellect, creativity, and the search for meaning. As AI begins to play a pivotal role in shaping the future, it mirrors humanity's age-old quest for knowledge. Both Biblical scripture and African Indigenous knowledge, particularly the Ifa corpus, provide valuable insights into how knowledge is sought, understood, and applied. In these traditions, the pursuit of wisdom is not solely a human endeavour but one deeply entwined with divine guidance and spiritual insight (Ayantayo, 2001).

The Bible portray wisdom as a divine gift, as seen in Proverbs 2:6, "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (NIV). This suggests that true knowledge comes from God and all human innovations and and inventions are gift bestowed on human from creation. Similarly, the Ifa corpus, a system of spiritual knowledge and divination, speaks to the role of divine insight in human understanding. The Ifa oracle offers guidance through divination, emphasising that wisdom originates in the spiritual realm, accessible through divinely inspired means. For instance, the verse "Ọmọ l'ẹru, a fi ẹṣin kẹtà"

(Odu Ifa, Oyeku Meji) suggests that tools, like AI, serve as instruments to access greater wisdom, much like a horse aids in reaching distant places.

Theological Foundation of Human Innovation

From the opening verses of Genesis, the Bible portrays God as a creator a being who brings order out of chaos, crafts humanity in His image, and entrusts humans with the responsibility to "subdue the earth" and exercise dominion over creation (Genesis 1:28, NIV). This foundational idea frames human innovation not as a rebellion against divine authority but as a reflection of the divine nature bestowed within humanity. As such, the development of Artificial Intelligence can be seen through a biblical lens as part of the human mandate to explore, create, and extend knowledge in ways that mirror God's own acts of design and wisdom (Cole, 2008).

Wisdom holds a particularly revered place in Scripture, often personified and elevated as a divine attribute. Proverbs 8:22–31 presents Wisdom as present at the beginning of creation, working alongside God, saying, "The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works… I was there when he set the heavens in place" (NIV). This passage does not just glorify intellect but links wisdom to the very essence of creation. It implies that any genuine human innovations and inventions, including AI, must be recognise as a pursuit of wisdom that aligns with God's principles wisdom that is not merely technical but moral and spiritual.

Prophecies of Knowledge and Technological Advancement in the Ifa Corpus

Long before the rise of modern machines, algorithms, and Artificial Intelligence (AI), African Indigenous knowledge systems such as the Ifa corpus had already articulated deep reflections on knowledge, foresight, and the future of human ingenuity. Rooted in Yoruba cosmology, Ifa is far more than a divination system, it is a comprehensive repository of spiritual wisdom, cosmological order, and philosophical knowledge. It speaks to both the seen and unseen dimensions of life and remains a vital force in shaping Yoruba ethical life, decision-making, and worldview. It is preserved through oral tradition and now documented in texts, the verses of Ifa, known as Odu, offer insight into human destiny, social transformation, and technological evolution. Scholars and practitioners have come to recognise that certain Odu Ifa not only provide historical and moral instruction but also contain prophetic elements that anticipate the emergence of complex technologies including AI (Abimbola, 1977).

Among the Yoruba, divination is a daily instrument for navigating uncertainty used in family decisions, agricultural planning, healing practices, and political leadership. These practical applications reflect a structured, symbolic system of knowledge that mirrors the logic of modern AI, collecting data (through casting), interpreting patterns (using Odu), and producing guidance for action. An illustrative verse from Odu Ogbe Oyeku states, "Aiye to fe mo o tan, won ni ki won to lo ri ohun gbogbo" translated as "The world that desires complete knowledge, they say they must see everything before they act." This saying resonates strongly with the essence of AI, which seeks to process vast volumes of information in order to make data-driven decisions. The Yoruba knowledge system here captures a timeless human aspiration to know enough before acting and AI is but a modern instrument of that same desire.

As Professor Wande Abimbola has observed, Ifa speaks not only of current realities but of the potential for future tools that extend human capabilities. He notes that the Ifa corpus envisions mechanisms capable of storing, retrieving, and interpreting knowledge at remarkable speed capacities central to the function of AI (Abimbola, 1977). These verses reflect an epistemological imagination that is not confined to ancient ritual but is open to evolving modes of knowledge transmission and application.

Central to Ifa's philosophy is the concept of ọgbọn inú inner wisdom. This principle affirms that the pursuit of knowledge must be balanced by ethical insight and spiritual discernment. In Odu Irosun Meji, we read, "Ọgbọn ju ọgbọn lo, ṣùgbọ́n ọgbọn Olúwa l'ọpẹ" "Wisdom surpasses wisdom, but the wisdom of the Creator is supreme." This verse is a cautionary reminder that no matter how advanced human technologies become, they must be guided by moral discipline and divine alignment. AI, therefore, should not be seen as separate from the spiritual order but as a continuation of humanity's journey toward understanding one that must remain rooted in humility and reverence for the sacred.

Fatunmbi (1991) emphasis that Ifa not only encourages the use of tools but requires their alignment with iwa pele (good character), communal welfare, and spiritual balance . The Ifa corpus thus not only anticipates the emergence of intelligent tools but offers moral instruction for their responsible use. In this context, AI must be understood not as an autonomous force, but as a "horse" to borrow the imagery from Odu Oyeku Meji a powerful means of transport toward wisdom, but one that must remain under the control of a morally guided rider.

Parallels Between Ifa Divination Systems and Artificial Intelligence

Ifa operates as a vast database of knowledge, comprising 256 verses (Odu) and symbols that are consulted to provide insight into complex human situations. Much like AI systems, which rely on input data, algorithms, and decision-making protocols to generate outputs, Ifa uses binary patterns (such as single and double markings known as ikin or opele) to derive meaning, predict outcomes, and offer solutions (Bascom, 1980). This structured and dynamic process of knowledge interpretation reflects an early form of logic-based reasoning deeply rooted in African epistemology.

The divination process in Ifa is not random, it relies on selecting from 256 principal Odu and thousands of verses, making it one of the most intricate and codified spiritual knowledge systems in the world. Each Odu operates like a dataset, and the babalawo (diviner) functions similarly to an AI interpreter matching human queries to a vast body of encoded wisdom to find the most appropriate guidance. Scholars like Wande Abimbola have described this system as an African science of meaning, where complex human conditions are translated into structured codes and interpreted through trained expertise (Abimbola, 1977). AI systems convert raw data into structured knowledge through pattern recognition, machine learning, and inference mechanisms.

Both Ifa and AI aim to simulate or supplement human intelligence in decision-making. AI does this through algorithms and predictive analytics, while Ifa does it through divine inspired patterns and oral memory. For example, in Odu Irete Meji, Ifa teaches, "Bi

eniyan ba fi oju ri nkan, o gbọdọ fi ọpọlọ ye e" "If a person sees something with the eyes, they must interpret it with the mind." This aligns with how AI must "see" data inputs but also "understand" through programmed reasoning to provide meaningful outcomes. Both Ifa and AI remind us that interpretation is not merely about seeing, but about understanding context, patterns, and consequences.

By drawing these parallels, it becomes evident that Ifa and AI, while developed in different eras and under different worldviews, both represent humanity's attempt to organise knowledge, anticipate outcomes, and make sound decision. Recognising this connection underscores the value of Indigenous African systems in conversations about modern technology and reveals that AI may not be as "new" as it often appears.

The Role of Biblical and Indigenous Knowledge in the Development of Technology

Spiritual knowledge has historically served as a compass for human innovation, providing moral guidance and deeper insight into the use of knowledge for the benefit of humanity. In many African and religious traditions, spirituality is not viewed as separate from science or technology, rather, it serve as a guide for ensuring that technological advancements are used ethically and purposefully. In the Yoruba tradition, the Ifa corpus, for example, presents a rich body of spiritual wisdom that not only guides personal and communal decisions but also reflects a form of logical reasoning and data interpretation akin to modern computational systems (Abimbola, 1977).

Biblical and African Indigenous knowledge systems have long played a significant role in shaping human understanding of the world, including the pursuit of technological advancement. Far from being opposed to science, both traditions present wisdom that encourages inquiry, creativity, and the ethical use of knowledge. In the Bible, the creation narrative in Genesis portrays God as the ultimate craftsman, forming the universe through intentional design and order (Genesis 1:1–31). Humanity, made in God's image, is given the mandate to "subdue the earth" and steward creation (Genesis 1:28), which many interpret as a divine endorsement of human innovation and technological development, provided it aligns with moral responsibility (Schaeffer, 1970).

African Indigenous knowledge particularly the Ifa corpus of the Yoruba people presents a vast, structured body of wisdom that reflects an advanced understanding of systems, patterns, and outcomes. The Ifa system relies on binary logic, a form of divination based on 256 odu or signs, which can be seen as a precursor to computational reasoning (Abimbola, 1977). For example, the odu Ogbe Meji speaks to the acquisition of deep knowledge and insight, emphasising that wisdom is a gift from the spiritual realm, to be used for the benefit of society. This mirrors the biblical view that true wisdom comes from God (Proverbs 2:6), and that innovation must be guided by justice and compassion.

Together, these traditions offer not only historical insights but also ethical frameworks for developing technology today. While modern science often focuses on utility and progress, biblical and Indigenous systems ask deeper questions about purpose, impact, and responsibility. Scholars such as Bediako (1992) and Olupona (2014) have argued that the fusion of spirituality and knowledge in African thought offers a holistic worldview in which

technology is part of a sacred relationship between humanity, the divine, and the environment. Thus, these traditions do not hinder scientific advancement; they enhance it with values that ensure innovation serves the greater good.

Implications of Artificial Intelligence for Biblical and Indigenous Knowledge

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has created a significant transforamtion in technological advancement, offering unprecedented opportunities in various fields. However, it also presents challenges to the preservation and relevance of both biblical and indigenous knowledge systems, such as the Ifa corpus. The integration of AI with these systems should not result in their erosion, but rather serve as a tool to enhance and preserve them. One of the most practical ways AI can be used is in the digitisation and preservation of sacred texts and oral traditions. AI-powered tools could transcribe, translate, and analyse biblical scriptures and Ifa texts, making them more accessible globally while ensuring their original wisdom is maintained. Additionally, AI can help preserve oral traditions in indigenous cultures by recording and sharing the teachings of elders and spiritual leaders, ensuring the continuity of knowledge for future generations (Abimbola, 1977)

The ethical principles embedded in both biblical and Ifa teachings can guide the development of AI systems that prioritise justice, fairness, and compassion. The Bible, for example, teaches that wisdom and innovation should align with divine principles, emphasising justice and the dignity of all people (Micah 6:8; Proverbs 2:6). Likewise, Ifa emphasises balance, harmony, and interconnectedness, which could guide AI's design to be socially responsible and fair, mitigating the risks of bias in decision-making (Abimbola, 1977). By embedding these ethical guidelines into AI systems, we can ensure that technological development promotes social well-being rather than exacerbating inequalities.

AI has the potential to support community development and social welfare initiatives rooted in biblical and indigenous values. AI systems could analyse social data to identify community needs and help design targeted interventions aimed at alleviating poverty, improving healthcare, and ensuring educational access. The Bible stresses caring for the vulnerable (James 1:27), and Ifa encourages communal responsibility (Abimbola, 1977). By aligning AI tools with these values, technology can support the creation of more equitable societies. AI could also facilitate interfaith and intercultural dialogue, promoting mutual understanding and respect by comparing ethical teachings from diverse religious traditions, fostering unity rather than division. Ultimately, the development of AI should serve not only the advancement of technology but also the ethical and spiritual values inherent in both biblical and indigenous knowledge systems, ensuring that progress aligns with humanity's deepest moral and cultural teachings.

Ethical Implications of Artificial Intelligence in Light of Ifa and Biblical Teachings

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to gain influence across healthcare, security, education, and economic systems, critical ethical questions arise about how such power should be wielded, by whom, and for whose benefit. These concerns are not new to human civilisation. Both Biblical scripture and the Ifa corpus of the Yoruba people contain long standing teachings on the responsible use of knowledge and power.

Knowledge and innovation are portrayed as divine gifts that come with the responsibility to uphold justice, compassion, and humility. The prophet Micah summarises the ethical core of scripture in the words: "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NIV). This verse captures the moral expectations placed on human agency whether exercised through speech, tools, or intelligent machines. Proverbs 11:14 also warns, "Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety," suggesting that decisions including those involving AI must involve communal wisdom and accountability.

The Ifa tradition is deeply grounded in ethical living. The Yoruba concept of iwa (character) forms the moral bedrock of human flourishing. Good character (iwa rere) is considered more valuable than wealth or achievement, and technology, like any other human innovation, must be judged according to whether it aligns with iwa rere and promotes balance (alafia) in the community. In Odu Eji Ogbe, Ifa warns against arrogance in the pursuit of knowledge, affirming that all wisdom must serve the collective good: "Iwa l'ewa, iwa rere ni ipe eniyan" "Character is beauty, good character is what makes a person truly human." AI, therefore, must not be judged by its sophistication alone, but by the extent to which it supports social harmony, respects life, and serves the vulnerable.

Among the Yoruba people of Southwest, ethical knowledge is not abstract. It is applied in everyday life through ritual consultation, communal deliberation, and generational transmission. When a babalawo interprets Ifa, the question is not simply, "What does the system say?" but "What is right, balanced, and wise in this context?" This moral deliberation mirrors what is needed in AI design and deployment today. As AI systems continue to influence decisions in African societies from biometric surveillance to financial algorithms questions must be asked about cultural fit, transparency, bias, and justice.

Conclusion

The paper concluded that the development and application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) should not be viewed in isolation from the ethical and spiritual traditions that have long guided humanity's understanding of knowledge, innovation, and responsibility. By examining AI through the lens of Biblical teachings and the Ifa corpus of the Yoruba people, it becomes clear that these Biblical and indigenous knowledge predict the invention of Artificial Intelligence. These traditions offer more than religious insight they provide enduring principles that can help shape the moral direction of modern technology. The Biblical portrayal of wisdom as a divine gift and the Yoruba understanding of knowledge as spiritually mediated both affirm that technological progress must serve the greater good and remain accountable to moral and communal values.

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