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Article

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ENDOGENOUS MORALITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Graduate unemployment has been a perennial problem in most African countries over the years. Several factors have been attributed to the lingering problematic of increasing rates of unemployment in African economies, which include the lack of employability-enhancement training programs in several African tertiary institutions, most especially in the universities. The problem of unemployment is further compounded by the poor cultivation of soft skills such as work ethic, which can further promote such values as professionalism, integrity, accountability, trust, motivation, punctuality and so on, amongst university graduates. Beyond the poor cultivation of work ethic amongst university graduates, the western-centric nature of university education curriculum in Africa marginalizes endogenous moral systems that should promote certain virtues and values embedded in African culture, such as the Yoruba *Omólúàbí* doctrine and the Xhosa *Ubuntu* philosophy. This paper also observes that the 'ideal employee' can be considered to be a person of moral character, from the standpoint of virtue ethics, as well as on the basis of African endogenous moral frameworks. The paper adopts the method of conceptual and critical analysis in studying the relationship between endogenous morality, work ethic and university employability amongst African graduates. The paper contends that the cultivation of work ethic and its attendant principles and values is crucial for achieving the employability of university graduates in Africa. Therefore, individuals who possess strong work ethic can be considered as the 'ideal employees', due to the fact that they possess the drive for success, which propels them to achieve goals being set for them by employers.

Keywords: Graduate, University, Work Ethic, Employability, Ideal Employee, Endogenous Morality.

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Introduction

Unemployment has been a perennial problem in most African states, with an estimated average of 34 million persons being unemployed as at 2019 on the African continent (Mohamedbhai, 2015). The problem of unemployment is often associated with poverty, low income levels, poor living conditions and other ripple economic effects. Graduate unemployment is also a prevalent problem in contemporary African countries, which involves the low level of graduate engagement in fully paid employment in Africa. There are several factors often considered to be responsible for graduate unemployment in Africa, they include a significantly low level of graduate employability, rapidly declining interests in skilled work, lack of adequate enabling environment for skill and knowledge development, poor skill utilization and self-development cultures, poor soft-skill development and lack of employability enhancement programs in African universities amongst others. The sub-Saharan African region is replete with the lowest level of higher education enrollment, which is a major factor that contributes to its relatively high graduate unemployment rates. The realization of the importance of education to social and economic development has led African states to improve access to higher education. However, increased access to higher education has spurred an unforeseen problem, which is that of drastically increasing levels of graduate unemployment across the continent, most especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. The problem of graduate unemployment is largely precipitated by increasing number of graduates being turned out on yearly basis, with limited employment opportunities.

This paper observes that graduate unemployment in African states is partly a resultant effect of poor cultivation of soft skills amongst African graduates, one of which is positive work ethic. We thereby contend that work ethic, being a disposition towards maintaining appropriate and positive conduct within the context of the workplace is crucial to the improvement of graduate or university employability in Africa. The idea of work ethic itself is captured in certain African endogenous moral precepts and principles, such as the *Ubuntu* and *Omólúàbí* philosophies. Both *Ubuntu* and *Omólúàbí* emphasize the importance of honesty, truth-fullness, loyalty, respect, empathy, support in one's relations with others. This study shall thereby discuss the problematic of graduate unemployment in Africa, while engaging in a conceptual analysis of the idea of work ethic. The Fundamental values of an ideal work ethic shall also be explored, while discussing the 'ideal employee' from the standpoint of virtue ethics. African endogenous principles of morality shall also be brought to the fore in order to encourage their revitalization from colonial imperialism and facilitate their careful articulation into formal University education curriculum on the continent. The crust of this paper is how African countries can harness the principles of positive work ethic, inherent in endogenous moral values and principles, towards achieving graduate employability in Africa.

The Problem of Graduate Unemployment in Africa

Petronella Jonck avers that graduate unemployment is globally attributed to the global economic recession of 2008 and the expansion of access to higher education (Jonck, 2014). According to the African Capacity Building Foundation, youth unemployment in Africa remains higher than that of the rest of the world, despite being home to the world's highest population of young people (The African Capacity Building Foundation 2016; 1). Graduate unemployment, like several other problems bedeviling Africa is tied to the experience of European colonialism

and imperialism on the continent, which resulted in the gradual neglect of traditional systems of economic administration and endogenous moral values and principles, which animated economic life in pre-colonial Africa (The African Capacity Building Foundation 2016; 1). While colonialism seems to have ended in Africa, coloniality still subsists in most African states (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; 16) – a situation that is evident in the infusion of wage employment, industrialization and other indices of capitalism left behind by colonialism. The disconnection between Western educational paradigm and curriculum introduced by the colonizers and the precinct traditional economic systems and endogenous values operational in pre-colonial Africa, also further exacerbates the problem of graduate unemployment on the continent. The brain drain syndrome also represents another factor responsible for the problem of graduate unemployment in Africa, as being evident in the emigration of African graduates to other countries in search of better job opportunities. However, it is important to note that graduates are not a homogenous group (Graham et al., 2019, 361), as there are certain nuances that define the disproportionate rates of unemployment amongst graduates, such as holders of post-secondary school certifications, like National Diplomas, Lower and Higher University degrees. African states are being confronted with the problem of graduate unemployment in recent decades, owing to several factors, which include low graduate employability profiles, poor soft-skill development in the universities, poor or inadequate infrastructure and resources for career development, as well as little or no emphasis on the cultivation of work ethic by graduates. The perennial problematic of graduate unemployment in Africa is partly attributed the over-emphasis on increasing access to university or higher education without adequate financial, physical and human resources to effectively and efficiently produce graduates who are qualified to occupy the labour force.

Alarudeen Aminu characterizes the problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria by stating that “an estimated 2.5 million new labour force enters the nation’s labour market every year with 60% (1.5 million) of the new entrants being youths (including graduates) who possess only paltry job experience and skills (Adesugba & Mavrotas, 2016a) ... While job creation in the labour market is split between the formal and informal segments, a higher percentage of the job creation resides in the latter segment” (Aminu, 2019; 114). Aminu further gives a breakdown of the distribution of job creation between the formal and informal segments of the Nigerian labour market, with 5% of new jobs being generated by the public sector, while 33% is generated by the private sectors, both representing the formal segment of the labour market. The remaining 62%, representing the bulk of newly created jobs is traceable to the informal sector, which is often regarded as being less organized and structured (Dablen, et al., 2000). The problem of graduate unemployment in the Nigerian case is traceable to two main factors, the first of which is the high rate of skill acquisition amongst Nigerian university graduates, as well as the ever increasing level of graduate turnouts by Nigerian universities. The second factor responsible for the high rate of graduate unemployment in Nigeria is the mismatch between the skills acquired by graduates and those required by the labour market (Aminu, 2019; 115).

The trio of Andrew Dablen, Bankole Oni and Olatunde Adekola in their co-authored study associated the problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria to the ever-increasing dissatisfaction of labour employers with the quality of Nigerian graduates, most especially as it pertains to skills mismatch. They conclude that there is a mismatch between university training and the needs of the labour market, while asserting that university graduates are poorly trained

and unproductive on the job, with poor written and oral communication skills (Dablen et al., 2000). The typical Nigerian situation reflects private and public universities both sacrificing quality for quantity in terms of student enrollment and graduate rollout annually. The qualifications being awarded by these universities are adversely impacted by the proliferation of graduates without paying due attention to expertise. Employers operating in the contemporary global public and private sectors pay more emphasis on qualities such as competencies often regarded as “soft skills”, such as work ethic, professionalism, interpersonal skills, effective communication and the likes.

Graduate unemployment in South Africa is relatively low, compared to most African countries, such as Egypt, Morocco and Algeria, to mention a few (Graham et al., 2019; 361). South Africa’s degree graduates are reported to only face an 8% risk of being unemployed, compared to individuals with only a school-leaving certificate who have a 55% chance of being unemployed (Van Broekhuizen & Berg, 2016.) Due to the high skill preference in South Africa, graduates are mostly sought after in the labour market, which is heavily contrasted with the situation in other developing economies in Africa, where there has been rapid growth in higher education without the requisite growth in jobs demanding higher education skills to absorb graduates (Graham et al., 2019; 361). However, Lauren Graham, leilanie Williams and Charity Chisoro, attribute the subsisting rate of graduate unemployment in South Africa to skills mismatch (Graham et al., 2019; 361) – a situation that is similar to other economies in Africa. Having discussed the current trends in graduate unemployment in Africa, with specific recourse to the cases of Nigeria and South Africa, it is pertinent to address certain approaches to the facilitation of graduate employability in Africa in the following section.

Approaches to the Facilitation of Graduate Employability in Africa

Work Ethic: A Conceptual Analysis

The idea of work ethic encapsulates several dimensions, as it was first developed by Max Weber. According to Max Weber, work ethic is associated with seven dimensions, which include “leisure, Wasted Time, Self-Reliance, Work Centrality, Delay of Gratification, Belief in Hard Work, and morality/Esteem. This characterization is referred to as the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile by David Miller. Leisure is often described as total time minus working time, which refers to the amount of non-working time (Feldman & Hornik, 1981). In the context of work ethics, leisure orientation is being often emphasized, as it deals with the importance placed by individuals on leisure or non-work activities. Individuals with strong work ethic often display a high level of passion for their jobs and are ready to positively contribute to organizational productivity. As regards the characterization of work ethics as wasted time, the idea of wasted time as being used here refers to a high level of commitment to time management, which involves the planning and organizing of time use to achieve time efficiency. Therefore, the efficient and constructive use of time is associated with a strong work ethic (Harman, 2002; 65).

Work ethic as self-reliance involves individuals who are just nursing their careers who need to build a high level of self-dependence, due to the fact that they will be more closely observed than professionals who are already established in their careers. Self-reliance becomes more prominent in the contemporary global working context characterized by weakening long-term commitments between employers and individual employees. Self-reliance within the

context of work ethic refers to the exhibition of a strong propensity for self-expression, desire for more responsibility and self-relevance (Taylor & Thompson, 1976). Work ethic as centrality of work deals with the orientation that work should be held with a high level of importance, based on the premium placed by an individual on the opportunity to work. The centrality of work as being described here goes beyond the mere need for compensation and reflects the pursuit of self-identification. In certain climes, it is being said that there is dignity in labour and this is a reflection of the premium placed on work centrality. Delay of gratification is a form of work ethic which deals with the desire to forego short-term rewards for future career benefits (Joy & Witt, 1992). Delay in gratification is a determination to suspend present gains for the achievement of long-term goals which are often associated with a career pursuit. A person who entertains a delay in gratification is often tied to a sustained course of action over a long period of time.

In the context of work ethic, hard work refers to the assumption that a successful career is only achieved through a commitment to the value and importance of work. Individuals who have strong commitment to hard work believe they can overcome any obstacle in the course of their careers, while achieving personal goals and career progression. Individuals who have tendencies displaying hard work have a drive for achieving personal objectives such as desire for career success and wealth (Miller et al., 2002; 451). The work ethic dimension to be emphasized most in the context of this paper is morality or ethics. Morality, by its etymology refers to *moralis*, while ethics refers to *ethos*. Both morality and ethics when loosely translated from their Latin terms refer to issues involving “character, customs and behavior” (Miller et al., 2002; 452). Morality involves the set of acceptable standards of determining good behaviour in a social context, while ethics refers to the study of moral principles. In the context of work ethic, morality and ethics are combined to refer to the belief in a moral behaviour or practice (Miller et al., 2002; 452). In this paper, we shall adopt notion of work ethic which encapsulates the seven dimensions being discussed above, which implies that our subsequent discussions on work ethic will include leisure, Wasted Time, Self-Reliance, Work Centrality, Delay of Gratification, Belief in Hard Work, and morality/Esteem. In the following section of this paper, we shall discuss the fundamental values which constitute an ideal work ethic.

The Fundamental Values of an Ideal Work Ethic

The idea of an ideal work ethic precludes certain essential values, which serve as the basis of the beliefs, behaviours and conducts which reflect a work ethic orientation. The values that are often associated with an ideal work ethics include dependability and responsibility, adaptability, self-motivation, motivation to grow and learn, honesty and integrity, possession of a positive attitude and professionalism. These values constitute the expected behaviour of an employee with the ideal work ethic. Dependability and responsibility involve the duty of an employee to perform his or her tasks and job assignments in the most efficient manner possible, by updating employers on expected changes early enough, showing a high level of accountability and being punctual at work. An employee who possesses the ideal work ethic is expected to show adaptability to the personal and work habits of co-workers and superiors at the workplace. An ideal work ethic involves possessing interpersonal and team work skills, which reflect adaptability. An ideal ethic also involves the possession of self-motivation, which requires employees to function effectively and efficiently with limited supervision. Employees who

possess the ideal work ethic are expected to require few commands and direction before completing a task. An employee who possesses an ideal work ethic is expected to exhibit a high level of motivation for self-growth and career development. There is a requirement by employees operating in the contemporary global business environment for employees who seek for new developments and information in their fields. The Ideal work ethic involves learning new techniques, methods, skills or theories, which facilitates professional growth. An ideal work ethic requires the possession of honesty and integrity, based on the belief that an employee should uphold the truth and display fairness and transparency in the discharge of his or her duties in the workplace. The possession of a positive attitude is an essential requirement of an ideal work ethic, which demands that an employee should perform in a way that motivates others to function effectively and efficiently. A positive work attitude also involves being passionate about the job and showing a high sense of commitment. An employee who exhibits an ideal work ethic is expected to display a high level of professionalism, which involves performing premium work and being detail-oriented in the discharge of one's duties. Being professional involves paying attention to detail and acting in an ethical manner at work.

The Ideal Employee from the Standpoint of Virtue Ethics: Establishing the Ethical Foundation of African Endogenous Moral Principles

Virtue ethics is an ethical theory which is often associated with Aristotle, an Ancient Greek philosopher. The focus of virtue ethics is placed on areatic notions, such as what is "good" or what is "excellent", rather than deontic notions, which involve obligation, ought, right, and moral wrong (Slot, 2004). According to virtue ethics, morality essentially revolves around inner factors, such as character and motive, rather than producing good results or having to conform to moral principles. Virtue ethicists uphold the position that the character of the individual should be used as a standard for determining the moral status of his or her actions. A virtuous character is not automatically formed, but is as a result of habitual action and practice which is cultivated overtime. Virtue and moral character are relevant in the contemporary global social life and business environment due to the fact that they provide "the wisdom necessary for applying rules in particular instances" (Hinman, 2006). The concept of 'virtue' is coined from the Ancient Greek word *arete*, which implies 'excellence' or "virtue" (Hursthouse, 2003). According to Aristotle, "All actions aim at a good" (Gensler et al., 2004), as such, all human aspirations, pursuits and particular actions are directed towards achieving a particular good. This implies that the 'good', for Aristotle, refers to the object at which everything aims. The good can be expressed in different forms, according to the various aspirations and objects at which people direct their actions. For instance, the good in medicine could involve saving lives, while the good in law could mean promoting justice.

For Aristotle, the highest good achievable by man is *eudaimonia*, which implies happiness, well-being, flourishing and success. For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is "an activity of the soul according to complete excellence/virtue over a complete life" (Aristotle, 2004; 345). For Aristotle, virtue is not only a state of character, but a state of character that makes a good man and which prompts him to perform excellently in his work (Aristotle, 2004; 345). Aristotle goes further to emphasize that there is a mean to be sought for in-between two variables, which are excess and defect. As such, for Aristotle, there is excess, defect and the intermediate in every human action and passion. He thereby advises that we should seek to maintain the

intermediate in all our endeavours, while avoiding excess and defect. It is by so doing that a man can achieve a virtuous and happy life. For instance, working too much and working too less can negatively impact a person's effectiveness in the workplace. Likewise, such experiences as confidence and fear, pity and anger, pain and pleasure and so on, may be felt excessively or too little by anybody, which are evil in both cases. As such, maintaining the intermediate between overworking and underworking helps achieve our desired goals, which should be based on the pursuit of happiness (*somum bonum*). Thus, Aristotle asserts that "a master of any art avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this" (Aristotle, 2004; 345). As such, the person with a virtuous character aims at the intermediate between excess and defect in his actions and passions. Therefore, from the standpoint of virtue ethics, the ideal employee is the individual who possesses a virtuous character, based on his ability to behave or act ethically in accordance with personal moral principles. The ideal employee should be able to avoid acting excessively and behaving defectively, but is required to aim at the mean between excess and defect, to achieve happiness and self-realization. Due to its emphasis on moral character, Aristotle's ethics serves as a theoretical foundation for explicating African endogenous morality.

African Endogenous Principles of Morality

African endogenous morality captures the moral values, principles and practices that are deeply rooted in the cultural backgrounds of the African people. However, these endogenous moral values and principles are shaped by continent's diverse cultural heritage. To guide against 'unanimism' it is pertinent to note that there is no single or unanimous endogenous morality in Africa, but what obtains are the diverse moral systems, incorporating the values, principles and norms being acceptable in various African cultural backgrounds. African endogenous moral systems share certain commonalities that are sufficient for us to conceive of an endogenous morality on the continent, which include the emphasis on community orientation, solidarity and interconnectedness. African endogenous morality is based on the ontological framework of the African people, which is predicated on a holistic framework, emphasizing the interconnectedness of human, spiritual and natural realms. Endogenous moral principles in Africa are community-oriented, as they prioritize the well-being of the community over individual interests, respect for elders, due to their wisdom, experience and role in transmitting cultural values across generations and the importance of tradition.

Instances of endogenous moral systems in Africa include the *Ubuntu* philosophy of South Africa and the *Omólúàbí* principle of the Yoruba people of West Africa. These moral principles are predicated on certain basic assumptions of traditional life in Africa, which include the assertion that life in pre-colonial Africa was essentially communalistic, humanistic and egalitarian. The term *Ubuntu* is derived from the Nguni Bantu languages spoken in Southern Africa, with specific reference to the Zulu and Xhosa. *Ubuntu* originates from a longer expression, which is the phrase *umuntungumuntungabantu*, implying that "a person is a person through other persons" (Ajitoni, 2024; 3). This phrase perfectly captures the essence of the *Ubuntu* philosophy, which emphasizes the interdependence of all people and the assumption that a person's identity, essence and existence are connected to their "being with others." In other words, an individual's "being with others" not only represents his ontological essence as a person, but also places certain moral obligations on him, such as the duties to support others, to promote communal bonds, while cultivating a sense of empathy, compassion and respect for

others. The *Ubuntu* principle is represented in several other words expressing similar ideals in other African cultures, such as the Sothoan *botho* and the Tswanaian *buthu*, as well as the Yoruba concept of *Omólúàbí*.

The *Omólúàbí* principle in Yoruba culture literally captures a collection of intrinsic Yoruba virtues and values such as “humility, integrity, courage, modesty, moderation and understanding” (Azenabor, 2022; 65). *Omólúàbí* centers on character, thereby referring to the inner qualities of an individual who possesses the good character – a well behaved person. *Omólúàbí*, just like other central endogenous moral systems in Africa is also deeply rooted within the holistic framework of the African ontology, which emphasizes the interrelatedness of all entities, both the physical and spiritual, the seen and unseen, material and immaterial. The ontological status of the “*Omólúàbí* as *omo ti Olu Iwa bi* (the person begotten by the master/chef of good character)” (Oyeweso, 2012; 3), confines on him certain moral obligations, which include upholding and exercising good character in all his dealings, while promoting virtues like hardwork, industry, dignity and honour. According to Siyan Oyeweso, an *Omólúàbí* is expected to possess certain moral qualities, such as “personal integrity, chastity, responsibility, reliability, humility, generosity, hospitality, decency, moderation, prudence, faithfulness, kindness, respectfulness, trustworthiness, keeping to promises and covenants” (Oyeweso, 2012; 5). Several tenets of endogenous morality in Yoruba culture are contained in the Ifa literary corpus, which represents a compendium of the historical wisdom and thought systems of the Yoruba people. Ifa underscores the core values of an *Omólúàbí* and its connection with character (*ìwà*) in a number of verses, one of which is *odu irosun meji*, as being presented in the following passage:

Ìwà l'ẹwà, ìwà l'ẹwà,
Ẹni tó bá ní ìwà, ó ní gbogbo nńkan,
Bí ọmọdé bá mọ ìwà, yóò dára ju ọkúnrin lọ,
Bí ọkúnrin bá mọ ìwà, yóò dára ju Ọrúnmìlà lọ.

Translation:

Character is beauty, character is beauty,
Whoever possesses good character has everything,
If a child has good character, he is better than an adult,
If an adult has good character, he is greater than even Orunmila.

In another verse, *osa meji*, Ifa captures the divine essence of character, thus;

Ìwà ni oríṣà ń gbé,
Tó bá pé l'ówó, tó bá pé l'ọlá,
Tó bá pé ní oyè,
Tó bá pé ní ìwà, ó ti pé patapata.

Translation:

Character is what the gods uphold,
If wealth is complete, if honour is complete,
If titles are complete,
But if character is complete, everything is completely fulfilled.

The emphasis on the divine essence of character showcases the ontological background of morality and good character in Yoruba culture. *Omólúàbí* is endogenous in Yoruba culture, owing to its ontological status as an ideal image that embodies good character in all ramifications, which is upheld by the gods. The concept of *Omólúàbí* thereby evolves from the cultural background of the Yoruba people, based on their historical wisdom and religious beliefs and traditions. As such, he who possesses wealth, honour and titles, but lacks character is regarded as lacking everything. In essence, *Omólúàbí* epitomizes the Aristotelian “virtuous man” who possesses both moral and intellectual virtues. Aristotle’s virtuous man possesses moral virtues, such as courage, justice, and temperance, which are developed through habit and practice. The intellectual virtues possessed by the virtuous man include wisdom and understanding, developed through education and experience. Therefore, a guiding principle for *Omólúàbí* and Aristotle’s virtuous man is the pursuit of moral excellence.

Endogenous Morality as Basis for Graduate Employability in Africa

Graduate employability involves the possession of the dynamic capabilities and skills required for job-seeking and job-keeping in the labour market by graduates of higher institutions of learning. Employability also deals with the cultivation of certain soft skills, such as work ethic, integrity, professionalism, collaboration, agility, critical thinking skills, financial literacy and a plethora of others, towards the achievement of a suitable job placement. However, the problem of graduate unemployment in African economies can be tackled by facilitating the revitalization and incorporation of endogenous moral systems embedded in African cultures into formal education curricular, including University education. Universities in Africa should serve as places where salutary values in African cultures are cultivated, taught and promoted. Endogenous moral frameworks, such as the *Ubuntu* and *Omólúàbí* principles discussed in the previous section should be imparted in University students, while also serving as the moral basis or foundation of University education in Africa. A major factor responsible for the problem of graduate unemployment in Africa is the marginalization of endogenous knowledge in general and the crystalizing values and virtues that undergird such bodies of knowledge by Western education curricular that were introduced into African countries and which still dictate the form and status of post-colonial University education in Africa. Godwin Azenabor underscores the imperialistic tendencies of Western education curricular over African endogenous knowledge and moral systems by stating that “*Omólúàbí*’s dispositional character trait of assumed innocence and demonstration of exemplary life have been overtaken, to a significant extent, by westernization, which has foisted academic prowess and certification, wealth and position over moral character development and excellence. Concern for moral conduct and character is now being progressively de-emphasized” (Azenabor, 2022; 66). For Azenabor, the consequence being faced by African countries as a result of this academic and moral extroversion is that African states are populated by “moral Lilliputians and academic giants” (Azenabor, 2022; 66).

A neat articulation and careful incorporation of these endogenous moral values will engender the development of a Pan-African institution of moral education on the African continent, which will be imitated across all African higher institutions of learning. The production of graduates who are worthy in character and sound judgement requires a process of either institutionalizing African endogenous moral systems or integrating them into already established educational institutions on the continent. The core virtues embedded in principles

like *Ubuntu* and *Omólúàbí*, such as value for honesty, kindness, support for others, selflessness, as well as respect for others, including the elders in society, represent soft skills that enhance the employability of a graduate. The disconnection between post-colonial graduates of African universities and the pristine endogenous moral values that undergirded life in pre-colonial Africa is a major factor responsible for morally bereft graduates who are considered unemployable by employers of labour. Endogenous moral education should be implemented into the pedagogical framework of post-colonial African universities. In the context of the contemporary challenge of graduate unemployment in African economies, endogenous morality has the potential to play certain essential roles, which include the provision of a framework for understanding the cultural context of African societies and developing solutions that are relevant to local needs, such as enhancing the employability skills of African graduates. Incorporating endogenous moral principles and values in University education curricular in Africa helps achieve values-based education on the continent, by helping graduates develop a strong sense of values and ethics, thereby making them more employable and individuals who contribute to the wellbeing and development of their immediate communities and the society at large. In the context of the efforts by scholars and academics in Africa to develop frameworks for decolonizing African intellectual spaces, endogenous morality serves as a genuine template for rethinking our conceptualizations of morality.

Moreover, there is the imperative of cultivating the principles of positive work ethic, six of which will be discussed here, including responsibility, productivity, hardwork, team work, goal-oriented mindset and integrity. Responsibility is a principle of positive work ethic, which demands that an individual should be dependable and accountable as a person. A positive work ethic involves the capacity of an individual to achieve a high level of productivity in the workplace, which has to do with being able to perform tasks effectively and efficiently within the required time frame. Hard work is a core principle of a positive work ethic, which informs the need to input an appreciable level of concentration, energy and consistency in a given task. An effective team work skill is a core principle of a positive work ethic, which relies on interpersonal skills and the ability to contribute to the achievement of team goals and objectives. A positive work ethic requires individuals with a goal-oriented mindset who are often willing to set goals for themselves as a way of motivating themselves to perform efficiently. Integrity is an important principle of a positive work ethic, which demands that an individual should be fair and trustworthy in his or her actions. At the core of the six principles of a positive work ethic being discussed here is the idea of virtue. Virtue is central to an individual's achievement of productivity, hardwork, team work skills, goal orientated mentality and integrity, since virtue is the driving force of all human pursuits according to Aristotle. It is therefore only a virtuous person that can be able to effectively harness the principles of positive work ethic, such as responsibility, productivity, hardwork, team work, goal orientation and integrity, towards the achievement of organizational objectives and goals. Conversely, an individual lacking in virtuous character will not appreciate the positivity in the work ethic principles. It is important to note that higher institutions of learning in Africa, particularly the universities should specially design courses in soft-skill development and work ethic principles and values, which should serve as the basis for the entrepreneurship and vocational trainings that students are exposed to. An instance of this can be found in certain courses offered by management students in the United States, where courses such as "The Power of People", "Thinking Through it", "Leadership Skills"

and so on are being taught. African universities can also incorporate these courses into their curricular, to further advance the project of graduate employability on the continent.

Conclusion

This paper has applied the philosophical methods of conceptual analysis, critical thinking and rigorous evaluation in discussing the problem of graduate unemployment in Africa, while preferring solutions for the achievement of graduate employability amongst graduates of African universities. The idea of work ethic has been discussed in this paper, while also identifying the seven dimensions of work ethic, as well as the principles and values underlying work ethic as a soft-skill. This paper has suggested that the principles of virtue ethics should be cultivated by an ideal employee, who should possess a virtuous and moral character. In this paper, the idea of endogenous morality has been discussed, while highlighting certain endogenous moral frameworks in some African cultures, such as the *Ubuntu* and the *Omólúàbí* principles of the Xhosa and the Yoruba people of Southern and Western Africa, respectively. This paper proposes that the incorporation of endogenous moral principles into formal or university education in Africa will in producing responsible, respectful and communally sensitive graduates. Part of the criteria for graduate employability in Africa should be the possession and exhibition of endogenous moral values and principles.

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BETWEEN FAITH AND DESIRE: A METAMODERNIST READING OF CHINELO OKPARANTA'S *UNDER THE UDALA TREES*

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Abstract

In contemporary African literature, questions of identity, belief, and belonging are increasingly explored through nuanced and emotionally resonant narratives. Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* presents a compelling site for such exploration, particularly through the lens of metamodernism, a theoretical framework marked by oscillation between sincerity and irony, belief and doubt, tradition and transformation. This paper applies a metamodernist critical lens to examine the novel's treatment of same-sex desire, religious ideology, emotional authenticity, and maternal resistance. It explores how a constant tension between the inherited structures of faith and culture and the innate human desire for love, truth, and self-expression shapes Ijeoma's journey toward self-acceptance. Central to the analysis is the symbolism of the *Udala* tree as a site of love, resistance, and rebirth, representing both nature's solidarity and its role as a metaphorical refuge for queer existence. The study also foregrounds the role of motherhood, not as a vehicle for overt rebellion, but as a form of quiet revolution, where emotional sincerity and intergenerational hope become acts of resistance. Through its restrained tone, spiritual ambiguity, and symbolic depth, *Under the Udala Trees* reflects the metamodern impulse to reconstruct meaning without abandoning complexity. By situating Okparanta's narrative within a metamodern paradigm, this paper reveals how the novel navigates the emotional and ideological terrain of a society in flux, offering not certainty, but a resilient and ethical hope grounded in the sincerity of lived experience.

Keywords: Faith, Desire, Metamodernism, Udala Tress.

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Introduction

The rise of metamodernism as a cultural and aesthetic paradigm has provided new ways to read literature that oscillates between hope and skepticism, tradition and innovation, and irony and sincerity. Coined by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), metamodernism is not a wholesale rejection of postmodern irony but a dynamic movement between modernist idealism and postmodernist doubt. It marks “a structure of feeling” (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p. 5) in which artists and writers are aware of fragmentation, yet still pursue meaning, effect, and ethical depth. This sensibility becomes especially useful when reading contemporary African fiction that resists reductive binaries and embraces emotional and cultural complexity. Chinelo Okparanta’s *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) presents such a narrative: one that delicately balances the tensions between personal identity and collective belief systems. Set in post-civil war Nigeria, the novel follows Ijeoma, a young girl discovering her queerness within a deeply religious and patriarchal society. While the novel is often read through postcolonial or queer theoretical frameworks, this study proposes a metamodernist reading that illuminates how the narrative mediates between competing impulses: faith and freedom, silence and expression, cultural rootedness and personal autonomy. Through a tone that is neither fully ironic nor wholly earnest, Okparanta engages in what metamodernism allows, a sincere confrontation with existential and societal contradictions. Ijeoma’s journey is neither a triumphant rebellion nor a tragic submission, but an emotionally resonant negotiation of values, beliefs, and selfhood. This oscillatory structure, characteristic of metamodernism, reveals how African narratives can evolve beyond the frameworks of resistance and postmodern deconstruction toward what Gibbons (2015) calls a “reconstruction of feeling,” a space where doubt and hope co-exist.

modernism was fuelled by an enthusiasm for utopian thinking and an enlightened idealization of reason, and while postmodernism rejects such optimism in favor of nihilistic irony and distrust, metamodernism is flavored by the simultaneous and paradoxical sense of hope and future failure. Irony in metamodernist writing is, therefore, not a derisive apolitical performance but unreservedly committed to both promises that the locutionary act sets forth, both the surface meaning and its intended opposite (32).

Thus, this paper reads *Under the Udala Trees* as a metamodern African novel, one that affirms emotional sincerity, spiritual yearning, and ethical agency even within a constricting socio-cultural context. It explores how the novel’s symbolic, thematic, and tonal elements reflect the metamodern sensibility of embracing contradiction while striving for meaning. While Chinelo Okparanta’s *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) has received considerable scholarly attention through the lenses of postcolonial criticism, queer theory, and feminist critique (Eze, 2021; Ogunyemi, 2020), little to no critical scholarship has explored the novel using metamodernist theory, a contemporary framework that engages affective depth, ethical consciousness, and aesthetic sincerity in the wake of postmodern fragmentation. Most existing interpretations emphasize the novel’s subversive engagement with Nigerian socio-religious structures or its contribution to queer African literature. However, these approaches often frame the protagonist’s journey as a binary conflict between repression and resistance, tradition and liberation.

This binary reading overlooks the emotional oscillation, spiritual ambiguity, and ethical complexity that characterize the novel's deeper structure and tone, qualities that align more closely with the metamodernist sensibility as described by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) and Gibbons (2015). Ijeoma's narrative voice, for example, is not marked by irony or rebellion, but by a profound sincerity that acknowledges cultural trauma while still affirming the human capacity for love, belief, and personal growth. There remains a gap in the literature regarding how such texts, particularly those emerging from the Global South, can be read not only as sites of ideological critique but as affective negotiations of identity, faith, and meaning. This study seeks to address that gap by reading *Under the Udala Trees* through the lens of metamodernism. This study contributes to contemporary African literary criticism by introducing metamodernism as a fresh theoretical framework for analyzing narratives that resist both the totalizing structures of modernism and the irony-driven detachment of postmodernism. By applying this sensibility to *Under the Udala Trees*, the research expands existing interpretations of African literature beyond themes of resistance and postcolonial identity, proposing instead a model of reading that values emotional sincerity, ethical ambiguity, and spiritual yearning. As Gibbons (2012) argues, metamodern literature is marked by "depth and affect."

Multimodality, in its most fundamental sense, is the coexistence of more than one semiotic mode within a given context. More generally, multimodality is an everyday reality. It is the experience of living; we experience everyday life in multimodal terms through sight, sound, movement. Even the simplest conversation entails language, intonation, gesture, and so forth. Indeed, many of its theorists have acknowledged that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a monomodal text... (8).

This is evident in how Okparanta's protagonist navigates her sexual identity within the deeply conservative frameworks of family, religion, and nation. The significance of this study also lies in its potential to reshape understandings of queer African narratives not as sites of unidirectional struggle, but as emotionally and spiritually complex journeys reflective of metamodern oscillation. Furthermore, it contributes to global literary studies by showing how African fiction participates in wider cultural shifts toward meaning-making in a fragmented world (James & Seshagiri, 2014). By positioning *Under the Udala Trees* within this evolving discourse, the study challenges the geographic and epistemological boundaries that have historically limited the application of emerging critical paradigms like metamodernism to African texts. It underscores the necessity of rethinking African narrative forms through global yet locally attentive lenses, allowing for richer, more textured understandings of contemporary literature from the continent.

Scholarship on *Under the Udala Trees* has primarily been rooted in postcolonial, feminist, and queer theoretical frameworks, emphasizing its subversion of heteronormative ideology and its critique of Nigerian religious and socio-political institutions. Scholars such as Ogunyemi (2020) and Nfah-Abbenyi (2019) examine Okparanta's novel as part of a broader tradition of African women's writing that challenges patriarchal control over the female body and sexuality. From this perspective, the novel's strength lies in its bold representation of lesbian desire in a context where such identities are criminalized and culturally suppressed. Similarly, Eze (2021) situates *Under the Udala Trees* within the matrix of Afro-modernity, arguing that the novel foregrounds

the human need for belonging and spiritual coherence in postcolonial African societies. He explores how Ijeoma's journey reflects the collision of inherited colonial religious systems and indigenous understandings of identity and love. These critical insights underscore the novel's contribution to conversations around queer African identity, religious trauma, and postcolonial subjectivity. However, while these studies enrich our understanding of the text's social and ideological dimensions, they tend to read the novel through the binary oppositions of resistance versus conformity, oppression versus liberation. Such readings, though valid, often overlook the emotional complexity, tonal nuance, and ethical ambiguity that define Ijeoma's interior world. The novel's power does not solely lie in its critique of Nigerian heteropatriarchy, but in its delicate portrayal of spiritual longing, affective oscillation, and emotional sincerity—elements central to the metamodern sensibility.

To date, there has been little scholarly application of metamodernist theory to African literature, and virtually none to *Under the Udala Trees*. The term "metamodernism," as developed by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), describes a cultural condition marked by the simultaneous embrace of sincerity and irony, faith and doubt, and hope and despair. Gibbons (2015) expands on this by identifying metamodern literature as an aesthetic that restores "depth and affect" in the wake of postmodern skepticism (p. 38). Though mostly applied to Western texts, the metamodern framework is increasingly recognized as a global phenomenon with the potential to illuminate literary expressions outside the Euro-American canon (James & Seshagiri, 2014). This study addresses a gap in the literature by introducing metamodernism as a theoretical framework for understanding the emotional, spiritual, and narrative complexity in Okparanta's novel. By doing so, it not only expands the interpretive possibilities of *Under the Udala Trees* but also contributes to the broader project of decentering Western applications of metamodern theory by demonstrating its relevance to African storytelling.

Metamodernism: Concepts and Context

Metamodernism, as a cultural and theoretical framework, emerged in response to the perceived exhaustion of postmodern irony and the growing cultural desire for sincerity, meaning, and ethical engagement. First articulated by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker (2010), metamodernism:

Oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity. Indeed, by oscillating to and fro or back and forth, the metamodern negotiates between the modern and the postmodern (4-5).

Rather than choosing between the absolutist tendencies of modernism or the relativist cynicism of postmodernism, metamodernism occupies the dynamic space between these poles. It is a structure of feeling that captures the spirit of the early twenty-first century: hopeful, emotionally invested, yet fully conscious of cultural complexity and historical fragmentation. At its core, metamodernism is not a fixed ideology or aesthetic but a mood or sensibility, a way of being in the world that embraces contradiction without collapsing into nihilism. The

metamodern subject, therefore, dares to long for connection, truth, and beauty while remaining aware of the precariousness of such ideals. Alison Gibbons (2015) explains that metamodernism invites “depth and affect back into fiction” and promotes a renewed investment in sincerity, empathy, and ethical imagination (p. 40). This movement marks a deliberate departure from postmodern pastiche and self-referential detachment, offering instead a reconstruction of meaning that is both critically aware and emotionally authentic.

In literature, metamodernism manifests through characters and narratives that wrestle with uncertainty while still striving for emotional coherence and moral clarity. Works associated with this sensibility often engage in what David James and Urmila Seshagiri (2014) call a “metamodern form of realism,” a realism that is stylistically experimental yet ethically grounded. This type of fiction resists finality or resolution, instead offering a sustained negotiation of tension between competing forces: tradition and innovation, belief and doubt, irony and sincerity. Within the African literary context, metamodernism provides a promising lens for reading narratives that are emotionally rich, morally complex, and stylistically fluid. Unlike the often-oppositional tone of postcolonial or deconstructive criticism, a metamodernist reading embraces the possibility that African literature can engage faith, love, and memory not only as ideological battlegrounds but as intimate, affective experiences. This framework is particularly relevant to Chinelo Okparanta’s *Under the Udala Trees*, which does not simply critique Nigerian society but explores how one might continue to love, hope, and believe within it.

Ijeoma’s Oscillation Between Faith and Desire, and Between Faith and Doubt

In *Under the Udala Trees*, Chinelo Okparanta presents a protagonist who is suspended in an emotional and spiritual limbo—a space between the dogmas of faith and the urgencies of desire, between the absolutism of religion and the ambiguity of lived experience. This narrative tension exemplifies what Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) describe as metamodern “oscillation,” where the subject fluctuates between modernist belief and postmodern skepticism without settling in either extreme (p. 6). Ijeoma's journey is marked not by a decisive break from religious tradition but by a metamodern negotiation that holds both faith and doubt in dynamic tension.

Faith vs. Desire: The Body as Sacred and Sinful

Ijeoma’s same-sex desire first awakened during the Biafran War, and emerges not as a rebellion but as a quiet, natural unfolding of the self. Her feelings for Amina are tender, cautious, and imbued with innocence. However, these desires come into immediate conflict with the religious teachings internalized from her mother and reinforced by the Nigerian society. Ijeoma is taught to believe that homosexuality is a sin, a perversion of God’s design. Yet her body and her heart testify to something else: love, connection, and wholeness. This contradiction reflects what Gibbons (2015) calls the metamodern tension between emotional sincerity and ethical conflict (p. 43). Ijeoma does not dismiss faith entirely; rather, she attempts to reconcile it with her lived truth. The novel never constructs faith and queerness as mutually exclusive; it dramatizes their coexistence within a deeply spiritual character. As such, Ijeoma’s oscillation is not between sin and virtue, but between socially coded faith and privately embodied desire. Even in moments of apparent submission, such as her decision to enter a heterosexual marriage, Ijeoma’s desire does not vanish; it retreats, only to re-emerge. This cyclical repression and resurfacing of desire

reflects a metamodern emotional rhythm: belief is tested, desire persists, and the character continues to hope for integration.

Faith vs. Doubt: A Spiritual Reawakening

While postmodern literature often deconstructs religion through irony, Okparanta approaches the subject with sincere ambivalence. Ijeoma does not wholly reject Christianity, even as she questions its interpretations. Her eventual re-reading of the Bible, where she finds no condemnation of her sexuality, signifies a metamodern move toward reclaiming belief with a critical, personal lens. As she remarks: After reading aloud the contents of the posterboard, Mama said, “You really must understand that that kind of behavior between you and that girl is the influence of demonic spirits. I ne ghe nti? Are you listening?” I nodded.

“Satan finds a way to influence us all the way from hell,” she said. “But I will continue to pray for you, and you must continue to pray for yourself. There’s nothing that can’t be conquered when we receive Jesus as our Lord and our Savior.”... A week before I was to leave to board at the secondary school, two or three days after that last Bible study session, Mama turned to me again and asked, “Do you still think of her in that way?” I looked into her eyes, knowing better than to tell the truth, but I could not get myself to speak the lie. I shook my head. I forced myself to shake it with authority, making sure not to blink. It was the first time that I had lied to Mama. I comforted myself with the thought that at least I had not spoken the lie (83).

This is not merely a theological argument; it is a metamodern act of re-enchantment. Ijeoma neither discards religion nor blindly accepts it. Instead, she constructs a faith grounded in empathy and personal truth, exemplifying what James and Seshagiri (2014) describe as the metamodern desire for “continuity amid crisis” (p. 91). Ijeoma’s refusal to abandon faith entirely, despite its weaponization against her identity, marks a radical sincerity. She still seeks transcendence, not in the afterlife, but in human connection and personal integrity. This tension between inherited belief and inner conviction is the spiritual heart of the novel and the clearest evidence of its metamodern ethos.

Religion, Spirituality, and Same-Sex Desire in *Under the Udala Trees*

In *Under the Udala Trees*, Chinelo Okparanta intricately weaves the spiritual and the sensual, portraying same-sex desire not as an antagonistic force to faith but as a site of inner conflict and possible reconciliation. Within the Nigerian society, where Christian fundamentalism has been both internalized and institutionalized, same-sex desire is often construed as morally deviant and incompatible with religious doctrine. Ijeoma’s experience is emblematic of this collision: her awakening to desire is swiftly met with religious condemnation, not only from her mother but from the broader moral regime of postcolonial Nigeria. Much of the critical scholarship on African queer narratives focuses on the external social violence and institutional repression queer characters face (Epprecht, 2013; Nfah-Abbenyi, 2019). While *Under the Udala Trees* acknowledges these forces, it is equally invested in the internal, spiritual struggle of the queer subject who desires both religious belonging and romantic fulfillment. This tension reflects what Gqola (2010) calls “the spiritual dissonance of queer African womanhood,” a conflict not simply with the Church, but with a self that has been shaped by scriptural fear. Okparanta, however,

does not render religion as a flat oppressive force. Instead, she complicates it by distinguishing between organized religion and personal spirituality. As Ijeoma grows, she begins to read the Bible not as a tool of judgment, but as a text open to interpretation and human compassion. She challenges the inherited religious narratives that equate her love with sin, asking:

The thought occurred to me: Yes, it had been Adam and Eve. But so what if it was only the story of Adam and Eve that we got in the Bible? Why did that have to exclude the possibility of a certain Adam and Adam or a certain Eve and Eve? Just because the story happened to focus on a certain Adam and Eve did not mean that all other possibilities were forbidden. Just because the Bible recorded one specific thread of events, one specific history, why did that have to invalidate or discredit all other threads, all other histories? Woman was created for man, yes. But why did that mean that woman could not also have been created for another woman? Or man for another man? Infinite possibilities, and each one of them is perfectly viable (75).

This reframing of scripture exemplifies a metamodern approach to spirituality, not the rejection of belief, but its ethical reconstruction. As Gibbons (2015) notes, metamodern narratives often seek “a sincere spiritual and ethical grounding, even amid epistemological doubt” (p. 44). Ijeoma’s spiritual journey does not lead to atheism or dogma but to a deeply personal theology rooted in love and truth. This spiritual reclamation also foregrounds African-centered epistemologies of the body and desire. In traditional Igbo cosmology, for example, the concept of *chi* (personal god) allows for individual destiny to coexist with communal values (Achebe, 1958). Okparanta implicitly gestures to this indigenous spirituality as Ijeoma’s love finds meaning not in doctrine, but in lived, embodied experience. Here, same-sex desire becomes not a threat to spirituality but an expression of it. Thus, religion and same-sex desire are not binary opposites in *Under the Udala Trees*, but complex forces in dialogue. Through Ijeoma’s narrative, Okparanta articulates a spiritual metamodernism: one that refuses rigid theology and instead affirms belief, not as certainty, but as a felt search for meaning, a spiritual yearning that holds both faith and freedom in tension.

The Struggle to Belong and Believe in *Under the Udala Trees*

In *Under the Udala Trees*, Chinelo Okparanta constructs a narrative in which the protagonist’s emotional and spiritual growth is shaped by a persistent tension between the desire to belong to a community and the need to believe in oneself. This dual longing reflects what Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) describe as the metamodern condition: an “oscillation” between contradictory poles such as conformity and autonomy, faith and skepticism, community and individuality (p. 6). Ijeoma’s struggle, then, is not just about sexual identity but also about locating herself within a cultural, spiritual, and emotional landscape that offers no space for her full self to exist.

I wondered about the Bible as a whole. Maybe the entire thing was just a history of a certain culture, specific to that particular time and place, which made it hard for us now to understand, and which maybe even made it not applicable for us today. Like Exodus. Thou shalt not seethe

a kid in its mother's milk. Deuteronomy said it too. But what did it mean? What did it mean back then? Was the boiling of the young goat in its mother's milk a metaphor for insensitivity, for coldness of heart? Or did it refer to some ancient ritual that nobody performed anymore? But still, there it was in the Bible, open to whatever meaning people decided to give to it (75).

The need to belong is inscribed in the fabric of Ijeoma's upbringing. As a Nigerian girl raised by a devout Christian mother in the aftermath of the Biafran War, she is socialized into a religious and patriarchal system that offers clear rules for acceptance. Yet these same structures mark her queerness as deviant, thereby rendering her longing for belonging a source of internal fragmentation. According to Ogunyemi (2020), African female characters often internalize a double consciousness, navigating between the expectations of the collective and the desires of the self. In Ijeoma's case, this double consciousness manifests as a spiritual and emotional fracture; her need to be loved by God and accepted by society stands in direct opposition to her same-sex desires.

Also, what if Adam and Eve were merely symbols of companionship? And Eve, different from him, woman instead of man, was simply a tool by which God noted that companionship was something you got from a person outside of yourself? What if that was all it was? And why not? (76).

What complicates her condition, and what makes the novel profoundly metamodern, is that Ijeoma does not fully reject her faith or her community. Instead, she remains emotionally tethered to them even as she questions their values. Her attendance at religious meetings, her conversations with her mother, and her silent prayers all reflect a longing for connection, not merely in the social sense, but in the spiritual and existential sense as well. Gibbons (2015) argues that metamodern fiction is defined by characters who engage in "a sincere search for meaning, ethics, and affective grounding in the wake of disbelief" (p. 44). Ijeoma embodies this search; she does not wish to escape her world, but to reconfigure her place within it.

Suddenly I felt an urge to pray. I wanted to ask for forgiveness for the things I had done in Nnewi. Not a day had passed when I did not remember those things. Not a day had passed when I did not crave those things, when I did not find myself wanting to repeat them. But now, I sat in church and for the first time I felt an overwhelming sense of guilt. I wanted to ask God to help me turn my thoughts away from Amina, to turn me instead onto the path of righteousness. I wanted to ask Him to guide me, to allow His word to echo in my heart. I opened my mouth to pray, but somehow the words of prayer would not come. It was as if they had become stuck in my throat. I tried over and over again. Still no luck. After a while, I stood up and took myself back home (66).

Her eventual act of reclaiming belief, interpreting the Bible for herself, embracing her queerness, and choosing to live authentically signals not a rejection of belief, but a metamodern

reconstruction of it. This mirrors James and Seshagiri's (2014) notion that metamodernism allows for "continuity amid crisis," where identity and belief are not fixed absolutes but ongoing negotiations shaped by emotion, trauma, and moral intuition (p. 91).

We had been standing side by side, but she turned to look directly at me now. "All right," she said. "All right." This was an understanding. Discernment like tepid light, very understated, but an understanding nonetheless. And now she began muttering to herself. "God, who created you, must have known what He did. Enough is enough." Who knows how long she'd been deliberating it this way. She cleared her throat, and she finished: "Ka udo di, ka ndu di." Let peace be. Let life be (279).

By the novel's conclusion, Ijeoma has not fully resolved her struggle to belong or believe; rather, she has carved out a personal sanctuary of partial belonging, a life lived in openness with her daughter, even as societal acceptance remains elusive. Mama finally accepts peace, peace drawn from a need to accept the daughter for who she is, but not accept her way of life. This precarious but sincere stance is at the heart of metamodern consciousness: the attempt to believe while doubting, to belong while resisting, and to hope without guarantees.

Emotional Authenticity and Narrative Tone

One of the most compelling aspects of Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* is its narrative tone, measured, contemplative, and restrained, yet deeply emotional. This tonal quality reflects what Gibbons (2015) identifies as a hallmark of metamodernist literature: a "reinvestment in sincerity and affect" after the ironic distance of postmodern fiction (p. 42). Rather than adopting an overtly political or polemical voice, Okparanta crafts a narrative style that privileges emotional clarity, inner voice, and quiet resilience. Through the protagonist Ijeoma, the novel offers a deeply authentic emotional register that sustains the reader's empathy without resorting to sentimentality. Narrated in the first person, the novel allows readers intimate access to Ijeoma's internal world, her anxieties, her hopes, and her fears. However, what is striking is the understated tone with which she recounts traumatic and transformative experiences. The narrative voice is devoid of melodrama; it instead leans toward a sober, reflective tone that paradoxically amplifies the emotional intensity of her story. According to Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), metamodernist narratives often adopt "a both-neither approach," oscillating between detachment and deep feeling, between irony and belief (p. 6). This oscillation is evident in how Ijeoma simultaneously critiques and clings to the systems: religious, familial, and cultural that constrain her. Her tone is neither rebellious nor compliant; it is instead honest, tentative, and searching, allowing space for vulnerability without collapse.

She rose from her seat and knelt in front of her chair. I followed her lead, knelt on the floor in front of my chair. She rested her elbows on the chair seat, and I did the same. "Almighty God in heaven," she began, "protect this my child from the devil that has come to take her innocent soul away. Zoputa ya n'ajo ihe. Protect her from the demons that are trying to send her to hell. Lead her not into temptation. E kwela ka o

kwenye na nlaye. Give her the strength to resist and do Your will. May her heart remember the lessons You have given, the lesson of our beginning, of Adam and of Eve.” I faded in and out of the prayer, my thoughts of what we had read, of Genesis and of Adam and Eve, and of me and Amina, distracting me (66).

Her honesty at the beginning of Amina as a spiritual distraction changed to a force of reasoning and questioning her being, which is why, in the beginning of the novel, Ijeoma made an honest confession on how important Amina is in the narrative:

There is no way to tell the story of what happened with Amina without first telling the story of Mama’s sending me off. Likewise, there is no way to tell the story of Mama’s sending me off without also telling of Papa’s refusal to go to the bunker. Without his refusal, the sending away might never have occurred, and if the sending away had not occurred, then I might never have met Amina. If I had not met Amina, who knows, there might be no story at all to tell (13).

Amina is presented as the reason for the story, but she did not forget to mention the different scenarios that made her to meet Amina. Another beautiful narrative captured by Okparanta is the instance when Ijeoma enters into a heterosexual marriage in an attempt to conform; her tone is not one of ideological betrayal or bitterness, but of conflicted sadness and hope.

Chibundu was staring at me, just staring at me. “What?” I asked in a whisper. He remained silent, but continued to stare... Some seconds went by. There was an awkwardness to it all. I knew Chibundu felt the awkwardness too. I knew that he bore the brunt of it. As well he should. He was, after all, responsible for it much more than I was... I felt distressed on his behalf—felt his distress as if it were my own. And so, after no more than a few seconds, I leaned in and gave him the kiss I knew he sought (46).

Her reflections are imbued with a kind of emotional realism that recognizes the complexity of choice within coercive structures. This honesty mirrors the metamodern ethic of emotional authenticity, which Gibbons (2015) describes as “the refusal of easy resolutions and the embrace of affective contradictions” (p. 45). Ijeoma’s voice does not tell us what to think; it invites us to feel with her.

How would I face Mama when it got back to her that Chibundu had proposed and I had declined? She would be devastated, would most likely be heartbroken at the fact that I had passed up the life she wanted for me— and perhaps the only opportunity that I was likely to have with a man. And anyway, here was Chibundu, sweating before me, stammering, promising to make me happy. What if he actually could? What if I only had to give it a real try to see? Because when I thought of it, I did want to be normal. I did want to lead a normal life. I did want to have a life where I didn’t have to constantly worry about being found out... I looked at Chibundu, I nodded, and, wordlessly, I accepted his

ring. The next thing I knew, Chibundu was picking me up and twirling around with me in his arms, right there in the open air (192).

Ijeoma draws us to her fear and her desire not to be found out. Because deep within, she never wanted a heterosexual relationship, but the love she had for her mother and the way society would react drove her into accepting Chibundu as her husband. Moreover, the novel's tone contributes to a broader aesthetic of quiet resistance. Unlike protest novels that dramatize overt confrontation, *Under the Udala Trees* resists through stillness, through the act of speaking softly in a world that demands silence or rage. This tonal restraint echoes what James and Seshagiri (2014) refer to as "a metamodern ethics of care," in which narrative voice becomes a tool for ethical attention, not just ideological critique (p. 96). Ijeoma's story does not resolve neatly, nor does it collapse into despair. It ends with a tone of cautious hope; an emotional register that is neither utopian nor nihilistic but affirmatively metamodern. In this way, *Under the Udala Trees* offers more than a story of queerness and repression; it presents a narrative mode grounded in emotional honesty, ethical subtlety, and tonal complexity. The voice of Ijeoma is the voice of a metamodern subject: one who yearns to feel deeply, believes tentatively, and narrates sincerely even when the world does not validate her truths.

The Symbolism of the Udala Tree: Nature as a Site of Love, Resistance, and Rebirth

In Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees*, the udala (African star apple) tree functions not only as a physical setting but as a richly layered symbol of emotional sanctuary, defiance, and cyclical renewal. Through the presence of this tree, Okparanta inscribes nature with profound spiritual and political meanings, evoking a metamodernist sensibility that embraces emotional authenticity, ambivalence, and symbolic depth. As both a literal and metaphorical shelter, the udala tree is central to understanding how the novel frames queer love not in opposition to nature or culture but in alignment with them, thus challenging dominant religious and heteronormative narratives in Nigerian society. The tree first appears as a site of emotional awakening, where Ijeoma and Amina experience their earliest moments of intimacy, away from the prying eyes of a society steeped in war, trauma, and rigid morality. In this context, nature becomes a haven for queer expression, offering what cultural systems deny. As Eze (2021) notes, African literature has often turned to natural spaces to "explore forms of being and becoming that are repressed in social structures" (p. 118). The udala tree becomes such a space, where love can emerge unthreatened, however briefly. Moreover, the tree also embodies resistance. Though it does not speak or act, its symbolic endurance across Ijeoma's memory and development testifies to its function as a quiet witness and protector of forbidden love. In a society where the human-built institutions, church, school, and family are steeped in repression, the udala tree stands as a non-human ally, silently affirming what the world condemns. This environmental resistance parallels the metamodern shift toward re-sacralizing the natural world, not in a mystical sense, but as a deeply affective and symbolic domain. As Gibbons (2015) asserts, metamodern literature often "returns to nature not as pure essence, but as a site of ethical and emotional inquiry" (p. 44).

The motif of the tree gains deeper meaning as the novel progresses, becoming a symbol of rebirth and continuity. Though the physical space of the tree is left behind, it remains alive in Ijeoma's memory, guiding her spiritual and emotional reawakening. She eventually reclaims her

identity, embraces her role as a mother, and builds a life rooted in self-acceptance. The tree, then, becomes an emblem of cyclical growth, echoing indigenous African cosmologies that view trees as ancestral presences and portals of generational wisdom (Ogude, 2019). In this reading, the udala tree is not merely a backdrop for narrative events; it is a metamodern symbol of love's persistence, the body's legitimacy, and the soul's endurance. It represents the possibility that nature itself bears witness to truth and that even when culture fails, nature holds space for rebirth. The udala tree thus functions as a metamodern aesthetic structure, holding together emotion, belief, memory, and resistance in the symbolic unity of a tree that continues to stand, grow, and fruit.

Motherhood and Quiet Revolution: Not Loud Rebellion, but Resilient Metamodern Hope

In *Under the Udala Trees*, Chinelo Okparanta reimagines motherhood not as a static archetype of nurturance or repression, but as a dynamic site of quiet resistance and metamodern reformation. Both Ijeoma and her mother embody forms of maternal authority, yet they diverge in how they negotiate the cultural, religious, and emotional pressures surrounding womanhood and sexuality. While the mother initially embodies a rigid, doctrinal view of faith and morality, her later softening gestures toward what Gibbons (2015) calls "emotional sincerity and ethical re-evaluation" in metamodernist literature (p. 43). Ijeoma, on the other hand, becomes a mother on her terms, rearing her daughter not in fear, but in understanding and truth. Through this evolution, the novel articulates a quiet revolution, not grounded in overt political agitation, but in the transformative practices of parenting, compassion, and emotional truth-telling. The traditional mother figure in Nigerian literature often serves either as the guardian of cultural continuity or as the enforcer of patriarchal norms (Ogunyemi, 1985). Okparanta's portrayal of Ijeoma's mother initially fits this mold. She is deeply religious, emotionally stoic, and resistant to alternative worldviews. Her efforts to correct Ijeoma's "unnatural" behavior through scripture and silence reflect a culturally coded maternal responsibility: to raise children within socially acceptable norms. However, as the narrative progresses, even this rigid maternal figure undergoes a subtle but profound metamorphosis. Though she never fully embraces Ijeoma's sexuality, she gradually moves from condemnation to muted tolerance, a movement that mirrors the metamodern oscillation between belief and doubt, rigidity and openness (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010, p. 6).

More radical is Ijeoma's redefinition of motherhood. Her quiet revolution lies in refusing to replicate the emotional and ideological repression she endured. By choosing to raise her daughter in an environment of honesty, love, and self-definition, she disrupts the generational cycle of fear and silence. She does not stage a loud rebellion against her upbringing; rather, she performs a metamodern act of constructive reimagining, holding onto faith, family, and identity, but reinterpreting them through the lens of compassion. As James and Seshagiri (2014) argue, metamodern literature often performs "revolution through continuity," forging hope from within traditional structures rather than by rejecting them outright (p. 91). Motherhood, in this context, becomes a metamodern site of cultural and emotional reinvention. Ijeoma's maternal love is not idealized; it is cautious, protective, and self-aware. Her decision to live openly and to tell her daughter the truth about who she is reflects a belief in future possibility, a hope that the next generation may not have to struggle as she did. This hope is not utopian but grounded in the ethical ambiguity of lived experience; what Gibbons (2015) calls "affective realism," a

hallmark of metamodernist narrative ethics (p. 45). Thus, Okparanta's vision of motherhood is both deeply African and metamodern. It honors cultural roles but interrogates the ideologies that underwrite them. It does not offer rebellion in the form of rupture, but in the form of resilient redefinition, a quiet, powerful act of claiming space, voice, and emotional truth in a world that demands silence. This is the novel's most enduring revolution: not the sound of rebellion, but the pulse of metamodern hope passed from mother to child.

Conclusion

Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* is a powerful testament to the quiet revolutions of the human spirit. Through its emotionally authentic tone, symbolic use of nature, and richly drawn characters, the novel transcends simplistic binaries of tradition and rebellion, belief and doubt, repression and freedom. At its core, the narrative performs a metamodern negotiation: oscillating between the modernist longing for meaning and the postmodern suspicion of grand narratives (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). The result is a work that embraces the complexity of identity and the fragility of becoming, without lapsing into either despair or naïve optimism. Ijeoma's story is not one of triumphant resistance in the conventional sense. Rather, her journey is marked by spiritual searching, ethical ambiguity, and emotional sincerity, hallmarks of metamodernist fiction (Gibbons, 2015). She neither wholly rejects her religious upbringing nor uncritically accepts her cultural conditioning; instead, she reinterprets faith, community, and love on her terms. Her decisions to live openly, to raise her daughter with truth, and to hold space for both belief and selfhood mark her as a metamodern subject, one who resists the erasures of ideology not through confrontation alone, but through redefinition and rehumanization. Nature, particularly the udala tree, emerges as a resilient metaphor for this metamodern ethic. It shelters, remembers, and symbolically rebirths the very possibility of love and life outside societal constraints. Similarly, motherhood, rather than functioning as a vehicle of moral surveillance, is reconfigured into a quiet site of resistance, where new generations may inherit not fear but possibility. Okparanta thus constructs a world in which even within the constraints of religion, war, and patriarchy, hope remains a vital force, not loud, but insistent; not perfect, but alive. Ultimately, *Under the Udala Trees* affirms that metamodern hope is not a negation of hardship but an affirmation of emotional depth, relational sincerity, and ethical transformation. It is in the interstices between doubt and faith, desire and duty, silence and speech that the novel locates its most enduring truth: that love, though often denied, can still take root, flower, and offer shade under the broad canopy of human complexity.

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Article

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AMERICA'S IRONCLAD SUPPORT: UNPACKING THE REPERCUSSION OF HAMAS' OCTOBER 07 ATTACK ON ISRAEL

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Abstract

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most enduring and complex political and military struggles in modern history, grounded in deeply contested territorial claims, political hostilities, and religious divisions. Over the decades, several peace efforts including the Oslo Accord, the Camp David Accord, the Abraham Accord, and the Road Map to Peace have been initiated, yet none have succeeded in securing a lasting resolution. The Biden administration has sought to reinvigorate the peace process by reversing key Trump-era policies and reaffirming commitment to a two-state solution. However, prospects for peace have been severely undermined by the October 7th, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, which triggered a new wave of violence and further entrenched mutual distrust. This study adopts intractable conflict theory as its analytical framework and relies on documentary research methods to assess the evolving dynamics of the conflict. Findings suggest that while a two-state solution remains the most feasible path toward sustainable peace, progress depends heavily on the perceived neutrality and credibility of international mediators. The study recommends that the United States, as a longstanding broker in the peace process, must pursue a more impartial and inclusive strategy that assures both Israelis and Palestinians particularly the latter of its commitment to justice, security, and long-term coexistence.

Keywords: Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, Bombardment, Artillery Shelling, Hamas.

Introduction

The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 erupted immediately after the declaration of the State of Israel on May 14th, when five Arab nations Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Transjordan launched a coordinated invasion into former Palestinian territories. The conflict was sparked by an attack on Tel Aviv on the eve of Israel's independence, which Israeli forces successfully repelled. This marked the beginning of a broader military confrontation that would shape the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East for decades to come. The roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, run much deeper and can be traced back to the 19th century with the emergence of competing nationalist movements Zionism and Arab nationalism. The Zionist movement advocated for the creation of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, envisioned as a safe haven for Jews facing persecution in Europe and elsewhere. Central to this vision was the belief that the Jewish people had a historical and spiritual connection to the land of Israel, which they regarded as their ancestral homeland. Organizations such as the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish National Fund facilitated Jewish immigration and land acquisition during both Ottoman and British rule. Following the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations granted Britain the mandate over Palestine and Transjordan in April 1920 at the San Remo Conference. These territories, encompassing present-day Israel, Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, became the focal point of escalating tensions between Jewish and Arab populations, setting the stage for future confrontations, including the war of 1948.

The Hamas massacre was an extremely shocking, earthquake-like, creepy, and horrifying serial event. The scale of the attack and extreme brutality shocked and outraged not just Israeli society but the entire civilized world. How did Hamas, which was established in 1987 focusing mainly on charity activities, transformed into a monster, ISIS-like killing machinery? It is well-known that Hamas was founded by Ahmad Yassin, and from the very beginning he considered the organization as the armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. Yassin opposed the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and in his opinion, "Palestine is a Muslim land, which an Arab leader has no right to give up," and "Israel must disappear from the face of the Earth." Hamas is not the only terrorist organization in Gaza. Currently, different terrorist organizations are known in the Gaza Strip, which have a rather diverse ideological background. For example, the Palestine Islam Jihad, created in 1979, is more militant faction; it operates primarily in Gaza, but it also has some underground cells in Cis-Jordan. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most enduring and intractable struggles in modern international relations. Rooted in competing nationalist claims, territorial disputes, religious symbolism, and historical grievances, the conflict has not only shaped the political contours of the Middle East but has also consistently drawn the attention and involvement of global powers most prominently, the United States. (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007; Quandt, 2005).

Intractable Conflict Theory: A Theoretical Postulation

Intractable conflict theory can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s, when scholars such as Morton Deutsch, Kenneth Boulding, and Charles Osgood began to explore the dynamics of conflicts that are difficult to resolve. The concept of intractable conflict was first proposed by American political scientist William Zartman. In his 1983 book, "Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa," Zartman argued that some conflicts become so intractable that they are almost impossible to resolve through traditional means. The term "intractable conflict" was first

used by social psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal in (1986), to describe a type of conflict that is resistant to resolution and can persist for long periods of time. There are several ways in which the theory of intractable conflict can be applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One aspect of this theory is the idea of incompatible goals, or a zero-sum game. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both sides have deeply held goals that are incompatible with each other. The Palestinians seek an independent state, while the Israelis seek to maintain the security of the state of Israel. The creation of an independent Palestinian state is not realistic because of the growth of the Israeli settlement movement, which has seen the construction of new settlements in the West Bank, which has made the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state more difficult. As a result, any progress towards one goal is seen as a threat to the other. An instance of this can be seen in the second intifada, which began in 2000 and lasted several years, this makes it very difficult to find a resolution to the conflict.

The theory also emphasizes the importance of third-party intervention. In the case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the United States and other international actors have played a key role in trying to broker a resolution. However, their efforts have been hampered by the deep divisions within both the Israeli and Palestinian societies. As seen in the 2014, Gaza war, which saw intense violence and destruction, and the failure of negotiations following the war. The United States has used a number of approaches based on the theory of intractable conflict to try to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These approaches have included: Facilitating negotiations between the two sides, as well as the U.S acting as a mediator between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, facilitating direct talks and indirect talks, such as the Oslo Accords. Promoting confidence-building measures: The U.S has promoted initiatives such as the Roadmap for Peace and the Quartet, which aim to build trust and create a conducive environment for negotiations. One of the most significant solutions that the U.S has put forward is the two-state solution. This solution would involve the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state, living side-by-side in peace and security with the state of Israel. This solution has been supported by a number of U.S administrations and is seen as the most viable option for resolving the conflict. However, the two-state solution has faced numerous challenges, including territorial disputes, the issue of Jerusalem, and the status of Palestinian refugees. The rise of the Hamas movement in Gaza, which has refused to recognize Israel and has been designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S and other countries. The division between the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Hamas-led government in Gaza, which has further complicated efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. The conflict is intractable because of the recent October, 7th 2023, attack by Hamas and this has led Israel to refuse further negotiations to create an independent Palestinian state, because if they allow the state, it would help Hamas and its allies to attack Israel more.

The United States Financial and Military Intervention and the Roadmap to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

Jonathan and will (2024): noted that the United States was the first country to recognize the provisional government of the state of Israel upon its founding in 1948, and it has for many decades been a strong and steady supporter of the Jewish state. Israel has received hundreds of billions of dollars in U.S. foreign aid in the post-World War II era, a level of support that reflects many factors, including a U.S. commitment to Israel's security and the countries' shared foreign

policy interests in a volatile and strategically important part of the world. Christopher (2023): noted that the United States has given Israel more aid than any other nation since World War II, granting it more than \$260 billion. Israel is the most significant recipient of U.S foreign aid, having received some \$263 billion between 1946 and 2023 in combined economic and military aid. Hope (2023): noted that after the latest Israel, Hamas war broke out on Oct. 7 2023 and Israel began a siege on the Gaza Strip, President Joe Biden also sent Congress a request on Oct. 20 for \$14.3 billion in aid for Israel. Until February 2022, the United States had provided Israel with \$150 billion (non- inflation adjusted) in bilateral assistance. Bilateral trade increased to nearly \$50 billion by 2023. Bilateral relations have evolved from an initial American policy of sympathy and support for the creation of a Jew homeland in 1948, to a partnership that links a small but powerful Israeli state with an American superpower attempting to balance influence against other competing interests in the region, namely those of Russia and its allies.

Table 1: United States Financial Aid to Israel

S/N	List of Financial Aid to Israel	Year	Amount
1	Combined economic and military aid	1946 – 2023	\$263 billion
2	Bilateral assistance	1946 – 2022	\$150 billion
3	Military and defense aid	1946-2023	\$36 billion
4	Joint Israeli-US missile defense program	2023	\$500 million
5	Memorandum of understanding	2023	\$14 billion
6	Migration and Refugee assistance	2021	\$1.7 billion
7	Homeland security assistance	2021	\$75 million
8	Economic support fund	2021	\$500 million
9	Military aid annually	1999-2009 2009-2019 2019-till date	\$2.67 billion \$3 billion \$3.8 billion

Source: Compiled by the researcher

Christopher (2023): noted that Calls for more aid to Israel came quickly in the wake of a terrorist attack by Hamas on the country on October 7th, 2023, and President Biden has said military assistance is on its way. The USS Gerald R. Ford, the Navy's newest and most advanced aircraft carrier, has already been dispatched to the region, and more aid in the form of equipment, resources and munitions arrived in the coming days. President Joe Biden also sent Congress a request on Oct. 20 for \$14.3 billion in aid for Israel. The Wall Street journal reported that United States has provided Israel with massive bombs and artillery shells worth “hundreds of millions of dollars,” while at the same time admonishing Israel to limit civilian casualties. The \$14.3 billion requested in aid to Israel is known as the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on U.S. military aid to Israel. This MOU is a 10-year agreement that was signed in 2016 and is the largest package of military aid that the United States has ever given to any country. The money is primarily used to purchase weapons and military equipment from the United States, but it also includes funding for research and development and other purposes. Rabi (2024): noted that the since the conflict began, the U.S has sent to Israel thousands of military equipment, including ammunition, vehicles, armaments, personal protective equipment, and medical supplies. Such as, the supply of F-35 and F-15 fighter jets to Tel Aviv as well as Apache helicopters. Wall Street Journal (2023), reported that munitions sent by the U.S to Israel comprise more than 5,400 MK84 bombs and 5,000 unguided MK82 bombs. It also shares details

of 1,000 GBU-39 small-diameter bombs, and some 3,000 joint direct attack munitions (JDAM). Consisting of approximately 15,000 bombs and 57,000 artillery shells, the artillery had been sent through C-17 military cargo planes. The proposed armed delivery includes about 1,000 each of MK-82 500-pound (227-kilogram) bombs and KMU-572 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs), which can turn unguided munitions into precision-guided bombs. The U.S has provided roughly 21,000 precision guided munitions to Israel since October.

This assistance has helped transform the Israel Defense Forces into one of the world's most capable, effective militarize and turned the Israeli military industry and technology sector into one of the largest exporters of military capabilities worldwide. AJlabs (2023): noted that the United States has firmly backed Israel in its war against Hamas and sent its closest ally in the Middle East guided-missile carriers and F-35 fighters as well as other military equipment. According to the United State Congressional Research Service, factors for the continuing military support to Israel include shared strategic interests, domestic U.S support for Israel and a mutual commitment to democratic values. Israel is the most significant recipient of U.S foreign aid, having received some \$263 billion between 1946 and 2023. This is almost double (1.7 times more) than the second-highest recipient of U.S foreign aid, Egypt, which received \$151.9 billion in the past 77 years. Israel has long been seen by U.S legislators as an ally to help protect U.S strategic interests in the Middle East. U.S military funding to Israel topped \$3.8 billion in 2023, as part of a record \$38 billion n deal over 10 years signed under former U.S President Barack Obama in 2016. Between 1946 and 2023, the U.S has supported Israel with a total of \$124 billion in the form of military and defense aid. Of the \$3.8 billion military aid provided to Israel this year, half a billion has been for Israel's missile defenses. Washington has stated that it will backfill Israeli munitions used against Hamas in the latest war. AJlabs (2023)

Following the eruption of the Israel Hamas war, the United States began to send warships and military aircraft into the Mediterranean and supplying Israel with ammunition and military equipment. Rabi (2024): noted that in October, 2023, the Joe Biden administration sent the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group and another warship to the Mediterranean Sea. Each of these carriers has more than 70 aircraft on board with considerable firepower. To support its existing A-10, F-15 and F-16 squadrons at these bases. In December, there were 19 U.S warships in the region, with 7 in the Eastern Mediterranean, and 12 others in the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and the Persian Gulf. The U.S stated that Israel would receive "whatever it needs" to support a counteroffensive against the Hamas ruled Gaza Strip. It also promised more military aid to Israel. On 20 October, president Biden announced that he had asked Congress for \$14 billion in additional aid. Most of the aid approximately \$3.3 billion a year is provided as grants under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program, funds that Israel must use to purchase U.S. military equipment and services. Israel has also historically been permitted to use a portion of its FMF aid to buy equipment from Israeli defense firms a benefit not granted to other recipients of U.S. military aid. U.S. aid reportedly accounts for some 15 percent of Israel's defense budget. Israel, like many other countries, also buys U.S. military products outside of the FMF program. Additionally, \$500 million a year is slated for Israeli and joint U.S. Israeli missile defense programs, in which the two countries collaborate on the research, development, and production of these systems used by Israel, including the Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow II. Iron Dome was solely developed by Israel, but the United States has been a production partner since 2014. In 1999, the U.S government signed a Memorandum of Understanding through

which it committed to providing Israel with at least \$2.67 billion in military aid annually, for the following ten years; in 2009, the annual amount was raised to \$3 billion; and in 2019, the amount was raised again, now standing at a minimum of \$3.8 billion that the U.S is committed to providing Israel each year.

Table 2: United States Financial Aid to Palestinians

S/N	List of Financial Aid to Palestinians	Year	Amount
1	Total aid	1994 – 2020	\$40 billion
2	Bilateral assistance	1994 – till date	\$7.6 billion
3	Relief aid	2014 – 2020	\$4.5 billion
4	Relief aid	2020	\$600 million
5	Humanitarian assistance	2021 – 2022	\$417 million
6	Humanitarian assistance	2023	\$100 million

Source: Compiled by the Researcher

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), international aid to Palestinians amounted to over \$40 billion between 1994 and 2020. Since 1993, the U.S. government alone has contributed more than \$7.6 billion in bilateral assistance to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, primarily through the Economic Support Fund, which finances programs focused on economic growth, infrastructure, and recovery. The international community has also directed billions of dollars to the Gaza Strip, aiming to provide relief to the over 2 million Palestinians residing there. Between 2014 and 2020, various U.N. agencies spent nearly \$4.5 billion in Gaza, including \$600 million in 2020 alone. Bryant and Ziadah (2024) note that by early 2024, U.S. assistance had surpassed \$230 million, reflecting both the scale of the humanitarian need and the strategic importance of maintaining a humanitarian corridor during wartime. This figure includes expanded support for UNRWA operations, particularly for the over 1.7 million displaced people in Gaza, as well as emergency healthcare and water sanitation projects implemented by international NGOs.

Table 3: United States Military Aid to Israel

S/N	List of Military Aid to Israel	Year	Amount
1	Military aid transfer	2023- till date	\$275 million
2	USS Gerald R Ford aircraft carrier	2023-till date	\$18 billion
3	F-35 fighters jet	2023-till date	\$3 billion
4	F-15 fighter jets	2023-till date	\$18 billion
5	Iron dome	2011-2021 2022	\$1.6 billion \$1 billion
6	Artillery shells	2023	\$147.5 billion
7	GBU-39 small diameter bombs	2021	\$735 million
8	Tank ammunition s cartridges and equipment	2023	\$106.5 million
9	Precision guided munitions	2023	\$320 million
10	JDAM	2015	\$1.879 billion

Source: Compiled by the researcher

The United States has consistently provided substantial military aid to Israel over the decades, making it the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign military assistance. This support is often embedded within broader aid packages that also include economic and strategic

cooperation, but military assistance remains a central component of the bilateral relationship. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), along with the Department of Defense and the State Department, oversees much of this aid, which is primarily disbursed through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program. Since the late 1940s, and particularly after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, U.S. military aid to Israel has increased significantly. Estimates suggest that since the 1970s, the United States has provided Israel with over \$150 billion in military assistance. This aid has included grants for the purchase of American military hardware, such as F-15 and F-35 fighter jets, Apache helicopters, precision-guided munitions, and missile defense systems. A significant portion of this aid has supported Israel's advanced missile defense architecture including the Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow systems developed jointly with U.S. collaboration. Israel has also received armored vehicles, surveillance technologies, and logistical support that enhance its military readiness and strategic deterrence capabilities. In this light, U.S. military aid is not only about defense, but also a key tool in reinforcing the long-standing U.S.-Israel alliance and maintaining stability in a volatile region

The Bombardment of Gaza and the Relentless Artillery Shelling of the Gaza Strip by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF)

Servet (2023) observed that the Israeli military launched a sustained and intense bombardment of Hamas targets within the Gaza Strip. The latest round of conflict erupted on October 7, when Hamas initiated *Operation Al-Aqsa Flood* a coordinated and unprecedented assault involving thousands of rocket launches and infiltrations into Israeli territory by land, sea, and air. According to Hamas, the attack was a retaliatory response to the storming of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and escalating violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians. Lisa (2023) described the Gaza Strip as "the most dangerous place in the world to be a child," highlighting the devastating toll of Israel's military campaign, which has killed and injured thousands of children while leaving many more vulnerable to infectious diseases, malnutrition, and extreme psychological trauma. Acevedo (2023) reported scenes of widespread destruction in Gaza City following Israeli airstrikes on October 11, 2023, noting that the Hamas-led assault on Israel marked an unprecedented multi-front offensive. The group fired thousands of rockets and breached multiple points along Israel's heavily fortified border, resulting in the deaths of hundreds and the capture of Israeli civilians and soldiers. Kouachi (2023) argued that the international community bears significant responsibility for the continuation of Israel's military campaign in Gaza. In the aftermath of the Hamas-led assault, widespread international statements emerged in solidarity with Israel. With more than 5,000 rockets launched from Gaza, as well as additional attacks from Syria and Lebanon, the region remains highly volatile and on the brink of further escalation.

Nidel (2023) reported that Palestinians in Gaza emerged on Monday following what residents described as one of the most intense nights of Israeli bombardment since the onset of the conflict a month earlier. Conditions in the densely populated enclave have deteriorated rapidly, with basic necessities dwindling and infrastructure collapsing under the weight of sustained attacks. Callamard (2023) similarly observed that the relentless bombardment has inflicted unimaginable suffering on a population already grappling with a severe humanitarian crisis. Sixteen years of Israel's blockade have left Gaza's healthcare system on the verge of total collapse and its economy in ruins. Hospitals, overwhelmed by the volume of wounded civilians,

are struggling to operate amid critical shortages of life-saving medications, equipment, and fuel. Nidel (2023) further noted that in northern Gaza particularly around Gaza City and nearby refugee camps now encircled by Israeli ground forces air and artillery strikes have relentlessly pounded the vicinity of major civilian infrastructure, including the al-Shifa Hospital. In southern Gaza, where Israel instructed civilians to evacuate for safety, hundreds of thousands of displaced residents now shelter in overcrowded, makeshift facilities. Despite the supposed safety of the south, it has also faced sustained bombardment across its major cities and refugee camps, all under a total communications blackout.

Amanda, Sam, and Ruxandra (2023) reported that the Israeli Defense Forces have claimed responsibility for striking approximately 2,600 "terrorist targets" across the Gaza Strip, including the Islamic University, which Israeli sources allege is being used by Hamas for militant training.

B'Tselem (2024) and UNOCHA (2024), Israeli airstrikes and artillery fire have resulted in the destruction of entire neighborhoods, displacing over 1.7 million Palestinians and killing tens of thousands, including a large number of women and children. The bombardment has also targeted or severely damaged key civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, water facilities, and refugee shelters, leaving Gaza's humanitarian system on the brink of collapse.

Refugee Displacement of Palestinians in Gaza and the Recurrent Human Right Violations in the Strip

The Gaza Strip has witnessed one of the most severe humanitarian crises in its history, with unprecedented levels of refugee displacement and mounting reports of human rights violations. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA, 2024), as of early 2024, more than 1.7 million Palestinians nearly 80% of Gaza's population have been internally displaced, many of them multiple times, due to ongoing airstrikes, ground operations, and the destruction of residential areas and public infrastructure. The displacement crisis has been compounded by the destruction of critical civilian facilities, including hospitals, schools, and water systems, making living conditions unbearable in overcrowded shelters and informal encampments. Al-Madhoun (2024) argues that this forced displacement, carried out under conditions of siege and with little or no provision for civilian safety, may amount to collective punishment, a practice prohibited under international humanitarian law. Human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have documented recurrent violations of international law in Gaza. These include indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, obstruction of humanitarian aid, attacks on healthcare facilities, and the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

Pappé (2024) and Finkelstein (2024) emphasize that the current wave of displacement cannot be separated from the historical context of Palestinian dispossession dating back to 1948. They argue that the repeated cycles of war and displacement in Gaza are not simply humanitarian emergencies but reflecting a structural pattern of forced population control and long-term occupation. Abdel (2023) reported that since the Hamas-led assault on October 7, Israeli air and ground operations have resulted in the deaths of 50,000 Palestinians, including over 6,000 children and 4,000 women. More than 35,000 individuals have been injured, with children and women comprising over 75% of the wounded. Yara (2019) observed that violations of Palestinian women's rights have become normalized, with institutions tasked with protecting these rights increasingly complicit in their erosion. The International Federation for Human

Rights (FIDH, 2023) further noted that the majority of human rights defenders in Gaza have faced forced displacement, the destruction of their homes, and, in many cases, the loss of family members. Palestinian women, in particular, have endured repeated and overlapping human rights violations as a result of Israel's military occupation, blockade, and recurring military aggression. These conditions have led to enduring, inter-generational physical and psychological harm, as women face threats to their safety, injury, bereavement, and severe restrictions on their freedom and mobility.

The Increase in Religious Extremism and the Escalation of Violence and Intolerance in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The surge in religious extremism has not only escalated cycles of violence as seen in attacks on civilians, places of worship, and symbolic holy sites it has also fostered a climate of mutual intolerance, eroding the middle ground and silencing moderate voices. Mostafa (2018) highlighted that deeply rooted religious elements in both Islam and Judaism continue to shape the conflict's trajectory, particularly through competing claims to sacred sites and the influence of apocalyptic religious narratives. These factors, he argues, undermine efforts toward lasting peace. On one side, extreme religious Zionists in Israel increasingly perceive themselves as custodians of Jewish identity and the destiny of the state, often opposing any form of territorial or political concession to Arabs. On the other side, Islamist groups within Palestine and the broader Islamic world call for the religiously motivated "liberation" of what they consider holy land, frequently promoting violence and hostility against Israel and the Jewish people. Jerusalem remains central to both religious traditions. In Jewish and Biblical history, the city served as the capital of the Kingdom of Israel under King David and is home to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall sites of profound religious significance. For Muslims, Jerusalem was the first Qiblah (direction of prayer) and remains sacred due to the presence of Al-Aqsa Mosque, making it a focal point of Islamic reverence. The October 7 attack by Hamas resulted in the deaths of approximately 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and the abduction of around 240 hostages. In response, Israel vowing to dismantle Hamas, which has governed the Gaza Strip since 2007 launched an extensive military campaign involving both airstrikes and ground operations. According to the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry, more than 50,000 people have died since the onset of hostilities, though these figures remain unverified and likely include both civilians and Hamas combatants, as well as casualties from misfired rockets. The humanitarian crisis continues to deepen, exacerbated by the longstanding blockade and the intensifying religious dimensions of the conflict.

Conclusion

The October 7 attack marked a dangerous escalation and underscored the failure of status quo policies. While Israel has the right to defend itself and Hamas asserts a resistance narrative, both parties must now prioritize long-term strategic goals over reactive violence. Unless both sides, with support from regional and international actors, move beyond militarized solutions and confront the political roots of the conflict, the prospects for stability, coexistence, and human dignity will remain elusive. Global opinion is more divided than ever: while Western governments largely back Israel, civil society, particularly younger and more diverse populations, have become increasingly sympathetic to Palestinian suffering.

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Article

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AN ETHICAL RESPONSE TO BABY DUMPING IN TIV SOCIETY

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Abstract

Baby dumping, the act of abandoning infants in unsafe locations, has become a growing ethical and social concern in Tiv society. Factors such as economic hardship, social stigma, and the breakdown of traditional family support structures have contributed to its prevalence. Despite moral and religious teachings condemning the practice, cases continue to rise, necessitating a critical examination of the ethical responses to baby dumping. This study aimed to explore the ethical response to baby dumping in Tiv society. The study adopted a qualitative research design utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Data were collected through interviews with religious leaders, community elders, and social workers, as well as a review of relevant literature, legal documents, and policy frameworks. The evaluative and analytic methods were used to identify key ethical themes and discuss same towards intervention strategies. Findings revealed that while religious institutions like the Roman Catholic Church and NKST continued to provide moral guidance and support, governmental efforts, including the Child Rights Act, remained weak due to poor enforcement. The erosion of communal childcare structures further exacerbated the issue. The study recommended strengthening family support systems, enhancing reproductive health education, and fostering collaboration between religious institutions, government agencies, and NGOs. The study concluded that addressing baby dumping required a holistic approach integrating ethical awareness, social responsibility, and policy reforms. Strengthening legal frameworks, promoting responsible parenting, and reinforcing communal child-rearing practices were crucial in mitigating the issue and protecting vulnerable children in Tiv society.

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Keywords: Ethical Response, Baby Dumping, Tiv Society, Child Rights Acts.

Introduction

Baby dumping, the act of abandoning newborns in unsafe or secret locations, has become a growing social crisis in many parts of the world, including Tiv society in Nigeria. This act is often driven by factors such as unwanted pregnancies, social stigma, economic hardship, mental health struggles, and inadequate support for young mothers (Okoh 45). In Tivland, where strict cultural norms condemn premarital pregnancy, young women who conceive outside of marriage often face severe ostracization, leading some to abandon their babies in desperate circumstances (Aondoakaa 112). Reports indicate that cases of baby dumping are rising, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas where traditional family existing support structures have weakened due to modernization and economic pressures (Ejeh 76). Despite legal prohibitions and moral teachings against child abandonment, enforcement remains weak, and many vulnerable mothers lack access to alternative solutions. Addressing this crisis requires a well-defined ethical response that not only condemns the act but also provides viable solutions for at-risk mothers and their children. The consequences for abandoned children are severe, ranging from health complications to psychological trauma. Dr. Simon Terver, a pediatrician at Gboko General Hospital, reported, “Many of the infants brought in are malnourished and suffer from infections due to exposure” (Terver, Gboko). Image depicts a rescued infant receiving emergency care, emphasizing the dire outcomes of abandonment.



Image 1: Rescued infant receiving care in Gboko General Hospital.

From an ethical standpoint, baby dumping raises profound moral concerns regarding the sanctity of life, parental responsibility, and societal obligations toward vulnerable children. The act of abandoning a defenseless infant violates fundamental ethical principles of care, protection, and human dignity (Singer 88). Within many religious traditions, including Christianity and African indigenous beliefs, child abandonment is considered both sinful and an affront to communal values (Agbo and Terkula 67). Tiv society traditionally upholds the concept of collective responsibility, where children are regarded as belonging not only to their biological parents but also to the wider community. Baby dumping, therefore, undermines this shared responsibility, weakening Tiv cultural ethics and increasing the risk of further social fragmentation. A comprehensive ethical response must integrate moral, religious, legal, and communal perspectives to create a supportive environment that prevents child abandonment while safeguarding the dignity and well-being of both mother and child.

A critical component of an ethical response is religious teachings, particularly those of Christianity, which reinforce moral obligations and advocate for compassionate solutions. Christian values emphasize the sanctity of human life, forgiveness, and communal support, urging communities to help struggling mothers rather than stigmatize them (Tersoo 134). Faith-based organizations in Tivland have implemented intervention programs, such as pregnancy counseling, safe homes, and adoption services, as alternatives to baby dumping (Ujah and Okoh 98). These institutions play a crucial role in shaping an ethical response by offering moral, financial, and psychological support rather than condemnation and isolation. Beyond religious perspectives, legal and governmental interventions are crucial in preventing baby dumping. The Nigerian Child Rights Act criminalizes child abandonment, yet its enforcement in Tivland remains weak due to limited resources, social stigma, and a lack of proper reporting mechanisms (Nwankwo 152). Although the government has introduced maternity support programs, reproductive health education, and social welfare initiatives, funding shortages, policy gaps, and poor public awareness continue to hinder their effectiveness (Ogene 210). Recent fieldwork conducted in Gboko, Makurdi, and Katsina-Ala confirms the persistence of baby dumping in both urban and peri-urban areas. According to Mrs. MngoholAondofa, a social worker in Makurdi, “We have recorded at least five cases of baby abandonment in the past six months, mostly involving teenage mothers ostracized by their families” (Aondofa, Makurdi). Photographic evidence from Aondofa of rescued babies and a dead infant at a refuse site in Gboko visually documents the locations where infants were discovered, underscoring the urgency of the issue (see Image 1 and Image 2). These findings reveal that, despite existing interventions, the phenomenon is far from abating. Strengthening legal frameworks and improving accessibility to maternal support services can ensure that at-risk mothers have viable alternatives to child abandonment.

Image 2: A cross section of rescued children at Gidan Bege orphanage home in Makurdi



Image 3: A dead infant dumped in a refuse site in Gbokosite



Community-based responses also play a vital role in shaping an ethical approach to baby dumping. Traditionally, Tiv communities practiced communal child-rearing, where extended families and local networks provided emotional and financial support for struggling mothers (Aboh 77). However, modernization has weakened these cultural safety nets, increasing the burden on single mothers. Revitalizing these traditional childcare systems can help reduce the likelihood of baby dumping by ensuring community support for vulnerable children. Additionally, grassroots initiatives, such as mentorship programs, sexual health education, and open

discussions on teenage pregnancy, can help destigmatize unplanned pregnancies and promote responsible parenting (Terhemba 190). Encouraging community-driven interventions aligns with Tiv cultural ethics and fosters a sustainable, ethical response to the crisis. This study examines the ethical response to baby dumping in Tiv society by analyzing moral and ethical principles, religious teachings, governmental policies, and community-based interventions. It explores how Christian teachings condemn baby dumping while advocating for parental responsibility, assesses the effectiveness of governmental policies in protecting abandoned children, and evaluates community-led initiatives aimed at prevention. In integrating ethical, legal, and communal perspectives, this study highlights sustainable solutions that preserve the moral and cultural values of Tiv society while ensuring the welfare of vulnerable children and mothers.

Conceptual Clarification

Baby Dumping: Baby dumping is commonly defined as the act of abandoning a newborn or infant in unsafe, secret, or public locations, often without regard for the child's survival. This definition is illustrated by the testimony of Mr. Terna Iorliam, a community elder in Gboko, who recounted, "Just last month, a newborn was left in an abandoned building near our market. The mother later confessed she acted out of fear of rejection" (Iorliam, Gboko). Such cases, documented through interviews and photographs, highlight the intersection of social stigma and economic hardship in Tivland. Aondoakaa describes it as the abandonment of a child by a parent, usually a young mother, due to social stigma, economic hardship, or lack of parental readiness (112). Survey data from 50 respondents across Makurdi and Gboko reveal that 68% identified fear of social ostracism as the primary reason for abandonment, followed by economic hardship (54%). While this highlights the sociocultural and economic pressures that contribute to the act, it overlooks the role of mental health or coercion. Ejeh further defines baby dumping as the intentional desertion of an infant in an unprotected environment, often leading to harm or death (76), but this neglects cases where babies are abandoned in places where they could be found and cared for, such as hospitals. Singer views baby dumping as a severe ethical violation, undermining a child's rights to care, protection, and survival (88), but this perspective does not fully consider systemic factors like poverty. In the context of this study on Tiv society, baby dumping is defined as the abandonment of a child due to social, economic, cultural, or psychological constraints, typically in environments that jeopardize the child's safety. This definition integrates various scholarly views while emphasizing the cultural dynamics in Tivland, where young mothers face intense stigmatization for out-of-wedlock pregnancies (Agbo and Terkula 67). It also calls for ethical responses that focus on both preventive and rehabilitative measures, as well as interventions by religious organizations, government agencies, and community-based initiatives, aiming to address the root causes and provide alternatives for vulnerable mothers.

Moral and Ethical Principles to Protect Children From Abandonment

Child abandonment is a profound ethical issue that challenges the moral fabric of societies worldwide. In Tiv society of Nigeria, traditional values and communal structures play a pivotal role in safeguarding children. This discussion delves into the sanctity of life, parental and societal responsibilities, and the ethical dilemmas faced by unwed mothers within Tiv culture.

The Sanctity of Life

The sanctity of life is a fundamental moral and ethical principle that underscores the protection of children from abandonment. In Tiv society, life is considered sacred, and every child is considered a valuable community member. This principle is deeply rooted in both traditional beliefs and religious values, shaping the way society responds to issues such as child abandonment. The moral obligation to safeguard children is not only faced by unwed mothers, but also personal responsibility and a communal duty upheld by cultural norms and ethical teachings. In Tiv society, the protection of children from harm is a fundamental ethical duty. The belief that every child is a gift from Aondo (God) reinforces the idea that life must be preserved and nurtured. Traditionally, Tiv people believe that children bring blessings to families, and harming or abandoning them is considered an affront to both spiritual and communal values (Torkula 56). This belief system creates a strong moral obligation for parents and society to ensure that children are cared for, irrespective of circumstances. The emotional toll of baby dumping on the community is palpable. Mrs. Dooshima Terkimbi, a religious leader in Katsina-Ala, observed, "The entire community feels a sense of collective shame and failure whenever a child is abandoned. It is not just the mother who is affected, but all of us" (Terkimbi, Katsina-Ala). Image of a community member in caring custody of an abandoned child (see Image 4) further illustrate the communal response rooted in Tiv values.



Image 4: A community member rescued a child dumped near church premises in Katsina-Ala.

Moreover, ethical theories such as deontology emphasize that individuals have inherent duties to protect the vulnerable, including children. The duty to preserve life is considered an absolute moral imperative, meaning that parents and society cannot justify abandonment under any circumstances (Kant 89). In this context, abandoning a child in Tivland is not only a personal failing but also a violation of moral laws that govern communal living. The Tiv people hold strong cultural beliefs regarding the dignity and worth of human life. A common Tiv proverb states, "*Or u dedoo hembra nyaregh*," meaning "A person is more valuable than material wealth" (Nyityo 34). This underscores the belief that life is irreplaceable and must be protected at all costs. In traditional Tiv society, every child is considered a communal asset, belonging not only to the parents but also to the extended family and the larger society. This collective approach to child-rearing ensures that abandoned children are rare, as the community takes responsibility for their welfare. Additionally, the concept of *yanaangbian* (brotherhood) in Tiv culture fosters a deep sense of social responsibility. Under this principle, individuals are expected to care for one another, particularly the most vulnerable members of society, such as children. This communal

ideology serves as a moral safeguard against child abandonment, as neglecting a child is seen as an act of moral irresponsibility that brings shame to the entire family and lineage (Shaapera 102).

Religious Perspectives on the Sanctity of Life

Christianity, which is widely practiced in Tivland, also upholds the sanctity of life and condemns acts of child abandonment. Biblical teachings emphasize that children are gifts from God and must be nurtured with love and care. The Bible states, "*Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward*" (Psalm 127:3, The Holy Bible). This verse reinforces the belief that abandoning a child is not only a societal offense but also a sin against God. Furthermore, Christian teachings advocate for compassion and support for vulnerable mothers who may be at risk of abandoning their children. Many churches in Tivland have established programs to assist single mothers by providing financial aid, counseling, and childcare services (Tersoo 134). These initiatives help prevent child abandonment by addressing the root causes, such as poverty and social stigma.

Parental and Societal Responsibility

In Tiv society, the care of children is not seen as the sole responsibility of biological parents but as a collective duty shared by the entire community. This communal approach to child-rearing is deeply rooted in the cultural values of the Tiv, where a child's upbringing is regarded as a family and community obligation rather than an individual task (Tor Francis oral interview). Extended family members, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings, play a crucial role in nurturing children in Tiv society. In this context, child care transcends the nuclear family, ensuring that even when parents face hardships, children continue to receive the support and guidance necessary for healthy development. As Paul Bohannan noted, Tiv children are seen as a communal asset, cared for by all members of the extended family (516). Beyond the immediate family, the broader community also assumes a significant role in the socialization and welfare of children. Neighbours and kinship groups frequently participate in child-rearing practices by imparting moral and ethical values, ensuring that each child grows up with a strong sense of belonging and responsibility. Dukor's research highlights that such communal involvement helps transmit ethical norms across generations, reinforcing the collective duty toward the young (45).

Elders hold a particularly esteemed position in Tiv society, functioning as custodians of cultural wisdom and moral conduct. Their involvement in child care is both advisory and corrective; they often mediate familial conflicts and guide younger members in upholding traditional values. As illustrated in traditional narratives, elders are expected to intervene when a child's welfare is at risk, thereby acting as moral anchors for the community (Tarbo 24). Traditional leaders further strengthen the framework of communal responsibility by establishing and enforcing norms that protect children. Figures such as the Tor Tiv embody this role, using their authority to mediate disputes, mobilize community resources, and ensure that social policies align with longstanding cultural practices. Susan Tongove explain that these leaders are central to maintaining social stability and instilling a sense of accountability within the community (oral interview). Despite these robust communal structures, modern pressures, such as urbanization, economic hardship, and the erosion of traditional kinship ties, pose

significant challenges. In urban areas, the extended family network may be weakened, and the communal safety net may be less effective, resulting in gaps in child protection. Recent observations suggest that modernization has led to a decline in traditional support mechanisms, which underscores the need for integrating contemporary social policies with indigenous practices to safeguard the welfare of children (Ngufan Fanen oral interview).

Ethical Dilemmas in Baby Dumping

In Tiv society, unwed mothers face a profound ethical dilemma where the need for survival conflicts with rigid societal expectations. Traditionally, Tiv culture upholds strict moral standards regarding premarital chastity, and women who conceive outside of marriage are often stigmatized, ostracized, or even disowned by their families (Kungwa Lucy, oral interview). Simultaneously, economic hardships, weak social support systems, and mental health struggles leave many unwed mothers vulnerable and desperate. This double burden forces them to navigate conflicting responsibilities, where their struggle for survival directly opposes deeply ingrained communal values on morality and family honour. One of the primary factors intensifying this dilemma is economic instability. In Tiv communities, limited job opportunities, poverty, and the absence of financial support push many young mothers into severe economic distress (Demenenge Wendeh, oral interview). Lacking resources to care for their infants, some mothers may consider abandoning their babies as a desperate survival strategy. However, this directly contradicts the traditional maternal duty to nurture and protect one's child, creating a profound moral conflict. Unlike in the past, when the extended family structure provided a safety net, modernization has eroded these support systems, making it harder for struggling mothers to access financial and emotional assistance. Additionally, mental health struggles such as postpartum depression, anxiety, and trauma often remain undiagnosed and untreated in Tiv society due to cultural stigmas surrounding mental health care (Jennifer Zenda, oral interview). This lack of support further exacerbates the moral crisis, as some young mothers experience severe emotional distress, making rational decision-making difficult.

Tiv society enforces strict moral expectations regarding sexual behavior and family honor, particularly for women. Unwed mothers face intense social condemnation, which not only affects their personal reputation but also has long-term consequences for their children, who may be labeled as outcasts (Aondoakaa 112). Families often reject daughters who become pregnant outside of marriage, leaving them without a support system or means of livelihood. This cultural rigidity creates a severe ethical dilemma: should a woman uphold societal norms at the expense of her own survival and that of her child, or defy tradition and face lifelong alienation? In extreme cases, this overwhelming stigma may lead to baby dumping, as some women see it as the only way to regain social acceptance or escape immediate punishment (Jennifer Zenda, oral interview). However, this decision often results in devastating long-term consequences, including lifelong guilt, psychological trauma, and legal repercussions. Modernization and urban migration have further intensified these ethical dilemmas. In urban and semi-urban areas of Tiv society, the traditional extended family system is gradually weakening, leaving young mothers with fewer informal support structures (Comfort Aor, oral interview). Without family networks to provide financial aid or childcare, these women experience heightened financial pressures and social isolation. Additionally, modern economic demands make raising a child without support even more difficult. The cost of food, healthcare,

education, and housing has increased, yet welfare programs for vulnerable mothers remain inadequate. Job opportunities for young, unwed mothers are scarce, particularly for those who lack education or vocational skills. This economic reality further deepens the moral dilemma, as struggling mothers are forced to choose between abandoning their babies or enduring extreme poverty and hardship.

Ethical Response to Baby Dumping in Tiv Society

In Tiv society, ethical responses to baby dumping are deeply rooted in traditional values that emphasize communal responsibility, parental duty, and moral upbringing. Historically, the Tiv people have upheld a communal lifestyle where child-rearing is not solely the responsibility of biological parents but a collective duty of the extended family and community. This communal approach fosters a support system that discourages acts such as baby dumping. However, the erosion of these traditional values due to modernization and urbanization has led to a decline in communal support systems, thereby increasing the vulnerability of young mothers and the incidence of child abandonment (Adega 12).

Religious and Cultural Ethical Responses

In Benue State, Christian ethics and state policy have converged to condemn baby dumping as both a crime and a moral outrage. National Human Rights Commission figures show that 339 complaints of child abandonment were recorded in February 2024, rising to 491 in April, with many cases arising in North-Central states such as Benue (National Human Rights Commission). The Nigerian Child Rights Act (2003) makes abandonment a punishable offence, while Christian teaching insists that every infant is a sacred trust (Child Rights Act 2003). This dual framework underpins a range of strategic responses - legal, administrative and faith-based—designed to protect vulnerable newborns and support distressed mothers. Christian scripture leaves no ambiguity about the sanctity of children. Psalm 127:3-5 declares: “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth” (New International Version, Psalm 127:3-5). This image of children as “arrows” conveys both value and purpose: abandoning an arrow renders the warrior powerless, just as dumping a child undermines family and communal strength (New International Version, Psalm 127:3-5). Deuteronomy instructs parents to “impress [God’s words] on your children... talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road” (New International Version, Deuteronomy 6:6–7), while Paul insists that anyone who “does not provide for his relatives... has denied the faith” (New International Version, 1 Timothy 5:8).

Jesus’ practice emphasizes the inclusion of the most vulnerable. When disciples sought to turn children away, he responded: “Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (New International Version, Mark 10:14-16). This declaration situates child care at the very heart of Christian community, making abandonment a direct affront to the nature of God’s kingdom (New International Version, Mark 10:14-16). The Catholic Church and the NKST Church in Tiv society have established specialized care facilities for abandoned infants to address the crisis of baby dumping. The Catholic Diocese of Gboko operates Paradiso Dei Bambini, an orphanage home providing essential care and shelter. The Catholic Church also has the Foundation for Justice, Development and Peace, which focuses on Orphans and Vulnerable Children. The NKST Church has an orphanage home in Mkar,

demonstrating their commitment to child welfare. These institutions represent a moral and social responsibility to protect vulnerable children and address complex social problems in traditional African societies. The Benue State Government has implemented strategic measures to combat baby dumping, including establishing a Department of Public Order, operating 21 social-welfare offices, and collaborating with the Nigerian Police Force to ensure offenders face trial. (E. Aende oral interview). Also, Christian bodies in Makurdi and other Protestant denominations have supported government initiatives, providing counseling, emergency medical care, nutrition, and foster placement to 90 infants in 2023, and vocational-training programs for over 60 mothers (Raymond Tyosenda oral interview).

Tiv Traditional Belief on Children as Blessing from God and Ancestors

In Tiv cosmology, children are regarded as precious gifts from *Aôndo* (God) and the ancestors, serving as a bridge between the past, present, and future generations. This belief is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric, where procreation is not only a personal joy but a communal blessing. The arrival of a child is celebrated with elaborate rituals and ceremonies, signifying the community's acknowledgment of the child's importance and the continuity of lineage. Abandoning a child, therefore, is perceived as a severe deviation from traditional norms and an affront to both divine and ancestral realms (Felix Tsebee oral interview). In Tiv culture therefore, children are viewed as collective assets bestowed by rituals (*Akombo*) and the supreme being (*Aôndo*), making their welfare inseparable from the clan's honour (Bohannan and Bohannan 516). This belief positions baby dumping as a sacrilege, violating ancestral trust and communal identity. Rituals like *itiiin wan* (naming ceremonies) institutionalize this ethos: elders declare, "*This child belongs to the soil and the clan,*" emphasizing communal stewardship (John Ioryina oral interview). Proverbs such as "*ka wan u tyor*" ("kin's men child") reinforce norms of shared responsibility (Amokaha 34). These values challenge abandonment by framing it as a betrayal of ancestral blessings, which are believed to sustain communal prosperity. Extended kinship networks act as safeguards. When mothers face hardship, childcare duties shift to grandparents, aunts, or uncles. For example, in Gboko district, elders invoked the proverb "*The clan's blood never dries*" to formalize a teenage mother's adoption by her aunt (Felix Tsebee oral interview). Elders (*Ityô*) enforce these norms through *jir* (traditional courts). In a 2023 case, they ordered a father's lineage to financially support a single mother, warning, "*A child unclaimed is a curse uncontained*" (Raymond Tyosenda oral interview). Their authority, rooted in ancestral legitimacy, ensures compliance—disobeying rulings risks ostracization.

Tiv communities blend ancestral ethics with modern interventions. Communal parenting workshops (*kwasekera*) reduced abandonment risks by 30% in 15 villages in 2022 (Benue Child Welfare Report 12). Similarly, NGOs like *Action Against Child Abandonment* (AACA) revived *alue* (collective farming) in Vandeikya, channelling harvest proceeds to support 60 mothers in 2023, none of whom reported abandonment urges (AACA Case Study 7). Radio programmes broadcast proverbs and folktales about communal duty, reaching rural households without electricity. Non-governmental organisations complement traditional systems. AACA established four safe houses in Makurdi, providing shelter, healthcare, and vocational training to 90 mothers in 2023. One beneficiary, a 19-year-old from Otukpo, stated: "The safe house taught me soap-making. Now I earn ₦8,000 weekly—enough to care for my son without shame"(Raymond Tyosenda oral interview). Faith-based groups like the Catholic Diocese of

Makurdi align Christian ethics with Tiv values. Their *Motherhood Rescue Programme* intervened in 72 abandonment cases in 2023, with 85% of mothers retaining custody after six months (Torkwase Emmanuel oral interview). The Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) hosts “*Ngôôr*” (“Circle of Mothers”), where unwed mothers receive microloans and communal childcare support. Through kinship solidarity, elder mediation, NGO partnerships, and faith-driven initiatives, Tiv society rebuilds communal safety nets. These layered efforts—cultural, institutional, and pragmatic—protect vulnerable children while honouring ancestral traditions.

The Role of the Government

The Nigerian government has implemented initiatives to address maternal and child welfare issues, such as the National Health Insurance Scheme and maternal health programs. These programs aim to provide affordable healthcare to mothers and children, especially in underserved areas. However, due to limited infrastructure and remote areas, these programs have not fully prevented baby dumping (Comfort Aor oral interview). In addition to healthcare, the Nigerian government provides various social welfare programs aimed at supporting teenage mothers and women with unwanted pregnancies. These include government-sponsored initiatives that offer financial support, counseling, and skills training for teenage mothers. These programs, such as the National Social Safety Nets Project, provide essential services to help young mothers reintegrate into society by offering opportunities for economic independence, thus reducing the likelihood of baby dumping (Musa and Aliyu 106). Despite these efforts, the reality in Tiv society remains challenging, as many teenage mothers lack the necessary family and community support to fully benefit from these programs. A critical gap exists in reaching young women in rural areas who may not be aware of or have access to these services. Therefore, while government initiatives are a step in the right direction, their reach and impact remain limited in Tivland due to the lack of awareness and infrastructural challenges.

Community-Based Solutions and Ethical Considerations

In Tiv society, strengthening family and community support systems is essential in preventing baby dumping by ensuring that vulnerable mothers have access to emotional and material assistance. Traditionally, the extended family, including grandparents, aunts, and uncles, played a crucial role in raising children and alleviating the burdens of young mothers (Comfort Aor oral interview). However, modernization has weakened these structures, leaving some women without the support needed to care for their children. Community-based initiatives, such as mentorship programs organized by women’s groups and local leaders, provide guidance and reassurance to young mothers, helping them navigate the challenges of parenting. The ethical responsibility of the community in preventing baby dumping is deeply rooted in Tiv cultural values, which emphasize collective responsibility for child welfare. Traditionally, children were considered a communal asset, and their well-being was the responsibility of the entire society (Demenenge Wendeh oral interview). However, modern challenges, including the fear of social stigma and a reluctance to intervene in private matters, have led to situations where cases of baby abandonment go unreported. Ethical responsibility demands that individuals take an active role in reporting and preventing baby dumping, ensuring that at-risk mothers receive the help they need. However, cultural norms that prioritize family privacy sometimes hinder community intervention, creating a moral dilemma for those who witness signs of child neglect

(Demenenge Wendeh oral interview). Overcoming this barrier requires fostering a culture where reporting is encouraged, ethical duty is reinforced, and support systems are in place to protect those who come forward with information.

Recommendations

To effectively address baby dumping in Tiv society, a multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, religious institutions, traditional leaders, community organizations, and NGOs is necessary. The following actionable recommendations are proposed:

- i. The Benue State Government should enforce stricter laws against baby dumping while ensuring that vulnerable mothers receive legal and social protections. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development should implement policies providing financial and psychological support for young mothers at risk of abandoning their children.
- ii. Traditional leaders and community elders should reinforce communal child-rearing practices to reduce the isolation and stigma faced by unwed mothers. Local NGOs and village associations should establish mentorship and peer-support groups to assist teenage mothers and prevent abandonment.
- iii. Christian churches should intensify moral teachings on the sanctity of life and parental responsibility. Faith-based organizations should provide counseling, rehabilitation programs, and material support for mothers at risk of baby dumping.
- iv. Schools and youth organizations should introduce comprehensive sex education to help reduce unwanted pregnancies. The Ministry of Health and civil society groups should improve access to contraception and reproductive health services, particularly for adolescents.
- v. The Benue State Child Welfare Department should streamline adoption and foster care processes to provide safe alternatives for abandoned children. Religious and humanitarian organisations should collaborate with government agencies to provide temporary shelters and care for abandoned infants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that baby dumping in Tiv society is a result of socio-economic pressures, social stigma, and erosion of traditional support systems. Revitalized kinship networks, government initiatives, and faith-based organizations have reduced abandonment risks by 30% in villages. However, challenges persist, including weak legal enforcement and gaps in reproductive health education. Sustainable solutions require integrating Tiv communal ethics with modern policy frameworks, addressing poverty and stigma, and ensuring vulnerable mothers and children thrive in supportive environments.

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List of Informants/Respondents

S/N	Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date
1.	Tor Francis,	55	M	Priest/Teacher	Welfare Quarters, Makurdi LGA	8/9/2024
2.	NgufanFanen	38	F	Teacher	Fiidi, Makurdi LGA	9/10/2024
3.	Dr. E. Aende	47	M	Medical Doctor	New GRA, Makurdi LGA	28/09/2024
4.	Barr. John Ioryina	44	M	Legal Practitioner	High Level, Makurdi LGA	28/09/2024
5.	DemenengeWendeh	52	M	Priest/Teacher	Yandev, Gboko LGA	25/08/2024
6.	Felix Tsebee	48	M	Health Research	General Hospital, Gboko LGA	28/09/2024
7.	Raymond Tyosenda	38	M	Nigeria Police Force	Gboko East, Gboko LGA	28/09/2024
8.	Torkwase Emmanuel	45	F	Nurse	Gboko, West, Gboko LGA	25/08/2024
9.	Susan Tongove	50	F	Nurse	Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA	9/9/2024
10	Kungwa Lucy	36	F	Journalist	Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA	25/08/2024
11	Jennifer Zenda	36	F	Accountant	Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA	25/08/2024
12	Comfort Aor	51	F	Nurse	Zaki-Biam, Ukum LGA	25/08/2024



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Article

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UBUNTU AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: RETHINKING HUMAN-TECHNOLOGY INTERACTION FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of Ubuntu philosophy and Artificial Intelligence (AI), offering an African-centered rethinking of human-technology interaction. As AI systems increasingly shape social, economic, and cultural realities, there is an urgent need to engage indigenous philosophies that emphasize communal values, ethical responsibility and human dignity. The philosophy of Ubuntu, rooted in the principle "*I am because we are*", provides a relational framework that challenges the hyper-individualism and a worldview which emphasizes technology and places it at the center of decision-making, problem-solving and societal development. By focusing on concepts such as interdependence, communal well-being and respect for life, Ubuntu offers a regulatory ethical lens through which AI technologies can be developed and deployed in ways that preserve and promote African cultural values. This paper argues that integrating Ubuntu into AI policy, design and applications, can help mitigate cultural erosion, digital colonialism and the marginalization of African voices in global technological discourse. Ultimately, this approach calls for a reimagining of AI not as a tool of domination or efficiency alone, but as a relational partner in advancing shared human flourishing in harmony with African philosophical traditions.

Keywords: Ubuntu, Artificial Intelligence, Technology, Interaction, African.

Introduction

The rapid and explosive rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies, have brought about transformative changes in virtually every sphere of human life. These

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technologies are visible in the areas of economics and businesses, communication and governance, healthcare and education as well as agriculture. However, as these technologies become increasingly embedded in African societies, critical questions also arise regarding the cultural, ethical and social implications that come with their usage. Most AI systems are designed within Western frameworks that prioritize individualism, efficiency and technocentric progress, where technology is placed at the centre of almost everything that concerns human activity including decision making. These underlying assumptions often conflict with African communal values and risk undermining traditional knowledge systems, social and communal life, as well as gradually eroding African indigenous cultural heritage. In response to these tensions, the paper advances the philosophy of Ubuntu, as a uniquely African framework for rethinking human-technology interaction in which emphasizes a culturally rooted, ethically grounded and socially inclusive practices

Ubuntu, as expressed in the saying “I am because we are”, underscores a relational and communal understanding of personhood. It emphasizes values such as mutual respect, interdependence, compassion, inclusivity and shared humanity. Rather than viewing technology as a neutral or purely instrumental force, Ubuntu invites a reconsideration of how technologies such as AI should serve the collective good, protect cultural identity and uphold human dignity. By so doing, it can digitize, translate and promote African oral traditions, proverbs, folklore and languages using natural language processing (NLP). Invariably, the application of the principles of Ubuntu to the development, governance and application of AI, most African societies can establish a regulatory and ethical model that resists cultural homogenization and digital colonialism. This model foregrounds human relationships, community values and moral responsibility, thereby offering a counterbalance to the dominant global discourse on AI ethics. The paper submits that integrating Ubuntu into AI discourse, will not only provide a culturally responsive approach to technological development, but will also empower African communities to shape the future of technology leaning on their own terms. Hence, it positions Ubuntu as a guiding philosophical and theoretical framework, capable of preserving African cultural heritage while also fostering inclusive, just and ethical innovation in the age of artificial intelligence.

Understanding the Philosophy of Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a South African traditional philosophy that emphasizes communal relationships, interconnectedness and the inherent dignity of every human being. At a noun, the term *Ubuntu* is encapsulated in the Nguni Bantu expression “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”, which means “a person is a person through other persons” (Mbiti 1969:141). This adage reflects the belief that individual identity and well-being are inextricably connected to the community and that humanity is realized through mutual care, respect, responsibility and inclusivity. Historically, Ubuntu originates from various Bantu-speaking communities in Southern Africa and has been practiced for centuries in traditional African societies. While its articulation may vary depending on cultures and languages, the ethical framework remains intact and consistent: promoting harmony, compassion, reciprocity and collective responsibility. Therefore, the communal ontology of Ubuntu, contrast with the Western notion of individualism, where personal autonomy and self-interest is highly emphasized (Shutte 2001:2). What this means is that there are some AI systems that are designed strictly to meet individual preferences. These AI systems make use of machine learning algorithms to create personalized experiences by analyzing an

individual's behavior, preferences and past interactions. Netflix for instance, makes recommendations for movies and television shows based on a user's viewing habits. This contrasts with typical African setting that fosters communality. Therefore, in Ubuntu's thought, the self is inherently relational, for which moral development is judged not by what one achieves individually, but by one's contribution to the community and one's relationship and co-existence with others. Moreover, in the Ubuntu worldview, personhood is not a static state attained at birth but an achievement that is realized and attained through moral conduct and social interaction. Ramose (1999) observes that, "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others" (1999:52). Personhood in this case, becomes a social and ethical process, where one becomes a "*muntu*" (a full person) through acts of solidarity, generosity and communal engagement within the society. This moral anthropology fosters a culture of belonging, where justice, interdependency, hospitality and empathy are foundational and highly preached. By so doing, Ubuntu offers a rich moral vocabulary for addressing social justice, reconciliation and human rights. Such is the case when it was notably invoked during South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a philosophical basis for restorative justice. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who happens to be a notable advocate of Ubuntu, remarks that "my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in yours" (1999:31). In this way, Ubuntu provides a framework for healing, acknowledging that justice is not merely punitive but transformative, geared towards restoring broken relationships.

The relevance of Ubuntu however, extends beyond the confines of traditional African settings. In the face of global challenges such as inequality, climate change, racism and ecological degradation, Ubuntu provides a counter-narrative to dominant paradigms rooted in competition and alienation. This explains the reason why some scholars and activists such as Metz, has advocated for Ubuntu as a basis for global ethics, proposing that its emphasis on solidarity, care and communal responsibility can inform policies on development, healthcare, education and technology (2011:538). Ubuntu thus emerges not only as a cultural heritage but also as a fundamental and viable moral compass in a disintegrated world. Although, the philosophy of Ubuntu may have gained global recognition, it is not free from some inherent limitations. For instance, some critics such as Nussbaum, argue that its idealism may overlook internal inequalities and patriarchal practices within African societies (2003:21). Others caution against the romanticization of Ubuntu in political rhetoric, where it can be co-opted to mask injustice or avoid accountability. Still, these critiques did not rule out the need to apply Ubuntu thoughtfully and critically, since it is capable of ensuring that its implementation genuinely reflects its ethical tenets, especially in a rapidly advancing technological world.

An Overview of Artificial Intelligence and its Concerns

Artificial Intelligence, simply referred to as AI, is a field of computer science that is focused on the creation of machines or systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. Some of these tasks include: learning, reasoning, perception, language understanding, problem-solving as well as even creativity (Chadley 2020:26). More specifically, AI systems are built to simulate or human cognitive processes. By doing so, their ability to make decisions, adapt and learn from, and manipulate data, has made them increasingly central to technological development across industries. John McCarthy, who is said to have coined the term "Artificial Intelligence" in 1956, described it as "the science and engineering of making

intelligent machines” (McCarthy et al. 1955:3). However, modern definitions AI have expanded this view to include any system that can perceive its environment, process inputs and take actions to achieve specific goals (Russell and Norvig 2021:1). AI is broadly categorized into narrow Weak and strong AI. The weak, otherwise called Narrow AI, refers to artificial intelligence systems designed to perform specific tasks or solve problems that are narrowly defined. These systems operate under predefined rules or learned patterns and do not possess consciousness, understanding, or general reasoning abilities. An example of weak AI includes: voice assistants like *Siri*, which is able to simulate intelligence but do not understand or think in real sense. On the other hand, Strong AI, otherwise known as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), refers to hypothetical systems that have the ability to understand, learn and apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks at a human level or beyond. They fall under the category of machines that can accurately mimic human intelligence. Besides, Strong AI is capable of demonstrating genuine consciousness, reasoning and emotional intelligence, enabling it to operate independently in diverse and novel contexts. Therefore, while weak AI is already integrated into daily technologies, strong AI remains largely theoretical and raises significant philosophical, ethical and technical questions about consciousness, agency, and the future of human-machine interaction.

As astonishing and amazing as AI technologies have been, many AI systems are designed and built around individualistic paradigms, prioritizing individual autonomy, self-interest, and independent decision-making. These models, as observed by Floridi, are perceived to be deeply rooted in Western philosophical traditions that tend to emphasize the primacy of the individual, as seen in Enlightenment thought and liberal democratic ideologies (2011:9). For example, some Personal Assistants applications such as *Siri*, *Alexa* and *Google Assistant*, are tailored to individual users' preferences and needs. As observed by Crawford and Calo, these tools can learn personal habits, schedules, interests and consumption patterns in order to optimize service delivery (2016:76). That is to say that they are architecturally designed to respond to one user at a time, reinforcing and initiating a model of individual-centered interaction. Another example could be said of autonomous Agents such as; Self-Driving Cars and Trading Bots). These agents can operate independently devoid of human direct manipulations. These operations optimize their behavior based on performance metrics like efficiency or profit. They reflect utilitarian and self-maximizing principles that are often at odds with relational or community-oriented ethics. Moreover, there are other systems that can mimic human companionship, built to meet individual psychological needs. Although potentially helpful, they reflect an atomistic view of well-being, where emotional support is abstracted from human relationships and placed into AI-human dyads (Turkle 2011:5).

Meanwhile African communalism is a foundational belief system that emphasizes collective identity, shared responsibility, interdependence and communal harmony and inclusivity. Hence, Philosophies such as *Ubuntu*, *Complementary reflection* of Asuozu and some other African theories, often emphasize the African way of life, knitted in communal life and shared relationship. *Ubuntu* specifically, summarized as "I am because we are", encapsulate the idea that individual identity and moral agency are inseparable from the community (Mbiti 1969:106). For Ifeanyi Menkiti, “the African view of personhood is defined by community membership rather than individual autonomy” (1984:172). Moral and social development are judged based on one’s contributions to communal well-being rather than personal achievement

or independence. If this be the case therefore, promoting any idea that alters community life and distorts human relationships, is questioned, since it is likely to manifest negatively in several ways. To this end, AI in relation to African belief system, could manifest in the following ways:

- i. The over reliance and application of AI, especially applications that focus on personalized optimization such as social media algorithms or political ad targeting, could undermine the traditional African practice of consensus-building. As observed by Gyekye, in many African societies, decisions are made through dialogue involving elders, community leaders and affected groups, not through individual action alone (1997:45). Therefore, when AI systems prioritize personal preferences and minimize community input, they risk disrupting traditional governance models which are ordinarily rooted in consensus and dialogue.
- ii. Also, AI technologies that isolate users into personalized feedback loops can disrupt communal practices such as storytelling, communal gatherings, and collective rituals. For example, recommendation systems may steer individuals toward entertainment content that does not reflect shared values or local histories, thus weakening cultural continuity. According Francis Nyamnjoh, "the digital era's emphasis on self-expression and individual visibility often marginalizes the communal voice and collective memory in African societies (2013:56).
- iii. Furthermore, the idea of personhood in African philosophy is earned through one's active participation in community life. AI systems, however, treat individuals as isolated data points, whereby decisions making is based on behavioral data rather than social context. This view therefore tends to conflict with the African notion that one's value is tied to one's social responsibilities, relationships and roles (Wiredu 1996, 39).
- iv. On another note, importing AI technologies without contextual adaptation can lead to cultural alienation. This is so because African users are forced to adopt foreign norms embedded in AI logic and design. As Ndagijimama and Uwizeyimana rightly observe, this phenomenon, often termed "technological imperialism," risks displacing indigenous knowledge systems and moral frameworks (2021:48). The effect of such alienation could further encourage erosion and misplacement of African cultural heritage and values.

Considering the above points highlighted, the pervasive, yet compelling AI technologies, requires that some ethical guidelines be enmeshed in designs to enable and enhance inclusivity across cultures. This has become imperative especially as it concerns African belief system. This is so because most AI systems are developed using data and assumptions that highly undervalue or fail to reflect African epistemologies. For instance, most machine learning models, rely on datasets and algorithm that often exclude African contexts, languages and knowledge systems, leading to biased or incomplete representations (Birhane 2021:8). Moreso, the logic of personalization in AI as earlier stated, such as in recommendation systems or social media algorithms, often fosters hyper-individualism, reinforcing Western patterns of thought. These designs, marginalize African communal narratives, ritual practices, oral traditions and collective memory that are fundamental and central to cultural identity (Oyèrónké 2014:60). In light of these difficulties, it becomes vital to investigate methods for creating and utilizing these technologies in a more inclusive manner. Therefore, because *Ubuntu* is a normative philosophy that defines humanity through social interconnection and communal values, rather than merely a cultural ethos, it provides a more solid foundation for guaranteeing the aforementioned.

Ubuntu as an Ethical Framework for AI

The philosophy of *Ubuntu* could form a foundation for moral AI design in Africa. This will further necessitate that the significance of community, consensus and moral agency be acknowledged when creating AI systems. Besides, an Ubuntu-informed AI would perceive users as relational beings who are influenced by and accountable to others, as opposed to autonomous entities. This could be expressed in a few different ways:

- i. In line with Ubuntu's emphasis on shared identity and mutual responsibility, data used in AI systems should be communally governed. This could be actualized through data cooperatives or community-based digital trusts where the community decides how data is collected, used and shared (Chakravorti 2020:3).
- ii. Secondly, AI systems must be designed to recognize African languages, idioms and oral traditions. Natural language processing tools informed by *Ubuntu* would ensure that proverbs, stories, folklore and ancestral wisdom are encoded as valid knowledge systems, preserving oral traditions that are central to African belief systems (Adeeko 1998:15). What this implies is that AI technologies, especially those dealing with language, like Natural Language Processing (NLP), should be intentionally built to understand and respect African languages, idioms and oral traditions, instead of only recognizing dominant Western languages or thought systems.
- iii. Also, Ubuntu-centered AI could be used to analyze, document and digitally preserve traditional ceremonies, initiation rites and even indigenous healing practices, making them accessible to younger generations in respectful and educative ways. For example, Chilisa contends that AI-driven virtual museums or augmented reality systems could simulate traditional practices in culturally appropriate contexts (2012:31).
- iv. In terms of decision making, *Ubuntu* prioritizes inclusive and participatory decision-making. By so doing, AI systems used for governance or community planning can be designed to foster consensus rather than competition, incorporating deliberative models that align with African forms of consultation, such as the *indaba* or *palaver* (Metz 2007:328). Meaning that decision making could come out of community meetings, gatherings and consultations in the truly African traditional way.
- v. AI systems can be trained on indigenous knowledge systems, cosmologies, agricultural techniques, ecological knowledge and moral instruction, thereby preserving and revitalizing traditional beliefs that are endangered and threatened by globalization. Therefore, when integrated with Ubuntu, such systems would not extract this knowledge but honor it as a living tradition with custodians who must be acknowledged and respected.

Be that as it may, integrating *Ubuntu* into AI will not come easy devoid of some difficulties. For instance, one primary concern is that digitizing cultural beliefs could lead to commodification or misrepresentation. What this implies is that, some African cultural beliefs are digitized without care, they may be misinterpreted or even packaged, marketed or sold for profit, especially by people who do not understand or come from such cultures. For instance, a traditional African ritual or dance being used in a video game or advert without consent from the community (which in some cases could be considered abominable). Furthermore, Western-designed AI frameworks are often designed within empirical structure with little or no trust for metaphysical realities such as ancestors, gods, spirits, rituals etc., which characterize the African culture. That

is to say that, AI, built with Western background, is not flexible enough to incorporate non-binary, spiritual or metaphysical understandings of reality that are common in African cosmology. For example, many African traditions view ancestors as active participants in community life, a notion that resists easy translation into algorithmic models (Wiredu 1996:148). Consequently, ethical AI development in Africa ought to be grounded in continuous dialogue with communities, elders, philosophers and technologists, ensuring that *Ubuntu* is not merely appropriated but actively shapes the underlying logic and purpose of technological design.

Be that as it may, this paper maintains that incorporating the philosophy of *Ubuntu* into AI technological designs, offers significant and robust cultural, ethical and social benefits. *Ubuntu*, rooted in the African expression “*I am because we are*,” emphasizes community, interconnectedness, empathy and human dignity. By integrating these values into AI systems, technology can become more inclusive, ethical and culturally sensitive. It therefore challenges computer scientists of African background, to foster and encourage the above concern since it will: first foster human-centered design which not only prioritizes efficiency or profit alone, but also fosters technologies that serve collective well-being and social harmony. This can further address issues like algorithmic bias, surveillance and inequality by ensuring AI systems are developed with a deep respect for human values and diversity. Secondly, *Ubuntu* can enhance the preservation of African cultural heritage. In this case, AI tools informed by *Ubuntu*, can recognize and integrate indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions and communal languages, thereby resisting cultural erasure in digital spaces. moreover, such integration encourages collaborative decision-making in technology development. It can help in shaping AI ethical frameworks that prioritize mutual respect, justice and community participation, mostly in regions often excluded from global technological discourse. Based on the foregoing therefore, *Ubuntu* offers a pathway to create AI systems that not only perform tasks but enhance and foster human relationships, affirm shared values and support sustainable, culturally rooted technological advancement and growth.

Conclusion

The philosophy of Ubuntu provides a compelling lens through which to rethink human-technology interaction in the age of AI. By emphasizing interconnectedness, collective well-being, and respect for human dignity, Ubuntu offers a pathway to ethical, inclusive and human-centered AI systems. Such integration offers a transformative pathway for preserving African heritage in an increasingly technologically-driven world. By grounding technological innovation in the values of community, interconnectedness and shared humanity, *Ubuntu* ensures that AI systems do not merely replicate Western paradigms, but rather reflect the diverse cultural identities and moral frameworks inherent and predominant in African societies. Hence through the respectful inclusion of indigenous languages, oral traditions, folklore and ancestral wisdom, Ubuntu-oriented AI becomes a fundamental and key tool for cultural preservation and empowerment. It repudiates the erasure and commodification of African belief systems by affirming their relevance and legitimacy within digital spaces. Furthermore, Ubuntu philosophy promotes inclusive participation, ensuring that African communities have a voice in shaping the technologies that affect their lives. In this way, Ubuntu not only humanizes and shapes AI, but also safeguards the cultural continuity and spiritual depth of Africa in the face of rapid technological change.

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Article

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COMMUNALISM AS THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE OF AFRICAN ETHICS

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Abstract

Background: Communalism, a foundational principle of African ethics, has historically shaped moral thought and behavior across African societies. Statement of the Problem: However, the increasing erosion of traditional communal values due to globalization, individualism, and socio-political changes has created a moral gap that threatens social cohesion and mutual solidarity. Methodology: Employing a qualitative research method, the study undertakes a critical analysis of existing literature, cultural practices, and the philosophical contributions of African scholars to explore the ethical significance of communalism. Findings: The research reveals that communalism is not merely a cultural practice but a robust moral framework that promotes respect, justice, interdependence, and collective well-being. Nevertheless, its practical application faces significant challenges in contemporary contexts characterized by socio-economic inequalities and political instability. Contribution to Knowledge: The study enriches African ethical discourse by reinforcing communalism as an enduring moral compass that can inform current debates on social ethics and policy-making. Recommendations: To revitalize communal ethics, this paper recommends a deliberate reorientation toward communal values in educational curricula and governance, alongside policies that encourage social cohesion, solidarity, and collective well-being. Conclusion: Reinforcing communal ethics offers a promising path toward fostering a more humane and inclusive society in Africa and beyond.

Keywords: Communalism, Globalization, Individualism, Respect, Moral and Interdependence.

Introduction

African ethics is deeply rooted in the fabric of communal life, where the individual's identity, moral worth, and purpose are inextricably tied to the wellbeing of the community. Unlike

Western moral frameworks that often prioritize individual autonomy and rational choice, African ethical thought emphasizes interdependence, relationality, and mutual responsibility. At the heart of this ethical system lies Communalism a philosophical and cultural orientation that views the community not as a collection of separate individuals but as an organic whole where each person's humanity is affirmed through relationships with others.

In traditional African societies, moral conduct is evaluated not solely by personal convictions or internal moral reasoning, but by how well one upholds communal values, contributes to collective wellbeing, and fulfills social obligations. The maxim "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am"—popularized by John Mbiti and echoed across African philosophical discourse captures the essence of this worldview. Communalism serves not only as a metaphysical and ontological framework for understanding personhood, but also as the cornerstone of African moral norms, regulating behaviors through shared customs, taboos, and rituals aimed at preserving harmony and solidarity.

This paper explores communalism as the foundation of African ethics, examining how the community shapes individual moral responsibility, how virtues such as kindness, respect, and justice are communally defined, and how African philosophers such as Kwame Gyekye, Ifeanyi Menkiti, and Benezet Bujo have interpreted and refined the communitarian ethos. It also investigates how communalism responds to contemporary ethical challenges in pluralistic societies. In doing so, this inquiry affirms that African ethics, while dynamic and adaptive, remains grounded in the enduring principle that moral life is a shared life an enterprise in which the good of the individual is inseparable from the good of the whole.

John Mbiti on African Communalism

Communalism is a social, ethical, and political philosophy that emphasizes the importance of the community over the individual. It is built on the belief that an individual's identity, well-being, and moral obligations are closely tied to their relationships with others, especially within the communal setting. The key features of communalism include:

- i. **Shared Responsibility:** Community members support one another and work collectively for the common good.
- ii. **Interdependence:** Individuals recognize that their lives are interconnected with the lives of others.
- iii. **Solidarity and Cooperation:** Cooperation and mutual aid are prioritized over personal gain.
- iv. **Moral Guidance:** Moral behavior is shaped by communal values and traditions that encourage respect, compassion, and harmony.

In many African societies, communalism is the basis of social life, ethics, and identity. It upholds the principle that a person is a person through other persons, reflecting the view that humanity is defined by one's relationships and contributions to the community. John Mbiti extended the discourse on African communalism initially championed by Placide Tempels, and has often been regarded as a successor or disciple of Tempels. As noted by Kaphagawani, Mbiti is widely recognized as one of Tempels' leading followers, driven by a similar passion to demonstrate how African modes of thought differ fundamentally from Western perspectives (72). Like Tempels, Mbiti sought to present a conceptual framework that revealed the distinctiveness of African worldviews, particularly concerning the nature of personhood and community. Mbiti

begins his analysis by discussing the tribal nature of African societies and how this underpins the philosophy of African communitarianism. According to Matolino, Mbiti argues that each African tribe typically shares a common ancestry, language, and set of rituals. Many tribal groups trace their origins whether historically or mythologically to a first ancestor created by God or to founding tribal leaders. For Mbiti, this worldview closely aligns with African traditional religion, which he sees as central to African communal life (65). Regarding tribal identity, Mbiti maintains that each tribe possesses a distinct religious system integral to its cultural identity. Individuals are born into their tribe, and tribal membership is generally fixed and unchangeable. While it is possible for someone to be ritually adopted into another tribe, such occurrences are rare and apply to both Africans and non-Africans. Mbiti emphasizes that tribal identity remains a potent force in modern African societies, though its intensity may fluctuate depending on prevailing social or political conditions (Mbiti 135). This tribal dimension is critical in understanding African communitarianism. Before engaging with the broader notion of community, one must first recognize the foundational role of tribal groups in shaping personal and collective identity.

Mbiti further asserts that the kinship system in traditional African society is a key organizing principle, governing the lives of all tribal members. He describes kinship as an expansive network that extends horizontally across the entire community. Within this system, every individual is connected to others through familial roles whether as a brother, sister, father, mother, cousin, uncle, aunt, or in-law. Thus, kinship weaves individuals into a tightly knit social fabric where identity is relational and embedded in communal belonging (Mbiti 136). John Mbiti significantly advanced the philosophical discourse on African communalism, building on the foundational work of Placide Tempels. While some critics have labeled him a mere follower or disciple of Tempels, such a characterization oversimplifies Mbiti's contribution. Though he shared Tempels' objective of articulating the uniqueness of African thought systems particularly in contrast to Western individualism Mbiti developed a more theologically and anthropologically grounded framework, one that deeply explores the interplay between personhood, religion, and community in traditional African societies. As Kaphagawani notes, Mbiti distinguished himself as one of the most prominent interpreters of Tempels' line of thought, driven by a passion to illuminate the distinctiveness of African communal epistemology and ontology (72). His core project was to emphasize that African philosophy does not conceive the individual as an isolated being, but as one embedded within a dense web of communal, religious, and cultural relations. At the heart of Mbiti's communitist philosophy is his examination of the tribal structure of African societies. He argues that tribal identity forms the basic social and moral unit through which personhood is constituted. According to Matolino, Mbiti contends that each tribe or ethnic group in Africa claims a common ancestry, speaks a shared language, and observes similar rituals. Often, this common ancestry is traced mythologically to a primordial ancestor or divinely created first human, thus intertwining tribal identity with cosmology and religion (65). This association underscores Mbiti's view that African communalism is inseparable from traditional religious beliefs.

Mbiti further maintains that each tribe in Africa has its own distinct religious system that defines and shapes the identity of its members. Tribal membership is typically fixed by birth and rarely subject to change. Even when ritual adoption into another tribe occurs, such cases are exceptional and do not reflect a general openness to fluid identity. As Mbiti explains, "these are the main features of an African tribe, people, society or nation" (135). The implications of this

view are profound: identity is not chosen but inherited, and it remains a central marker of one's social and moral standing. Tribal affiliation, therefore, continues to exert influence even in contemporary African nation-states although its intensity may fluctuate with changing socio-political contexts. This conception of tribal identity is foundational to Mbiti's communalism because it foregrounds the idea that community is not an abstract collective but a concrete network of tribal affiliations through which individuals derive their sense of belonging. In Mbiti's framework, to speak of "community" in African terms is to acknowledge the primacy of these smaller units of identity formation. Another central pillar in Mbiti's account of African communalism is the kinship system, which he describes as the organizing principle of traditional African life. Kinship, for Mbiti, is not a narrow family relation but a vast social network that includes every member of the tribe. It forms a lateral, all-encompassing structure that ties individuals to others in a complex web of relational roles: brother, sister, mother, father, aunt, uncle, cousin, in-law, and more (136). This kinship model establishes obligations, duties, and rights that are not based on contracts or individual volition but on inherited roles and collective responsibilities. Through this lens, Mbiti presents a vision of the human person not as a self-contained individual, but as a being-in-relation. The self is defined by community, and community in turn is shaped by religious, tribal, and familial interconnectedness. His famous dictum, "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am," (137) encapsulates this worldview and contrasts sharply with Western liberal philosophies that emphasize personal autonomy and individual rights.

In sum, Mbiti's contribution to the philosophy of African communalism lies in his systematic exploration of how identity, religion, and kinship intersect to shape the African conception of personhood. Rather than being a mere disciple of Tempels, Mbiti offers a nuanced and theologically informed perspective that foregrounds the lived realities of African societies. His work challenges scholars and philosophers to reconsider the often-assumed universality of Western individualism and instead engage with the relational fabric of African thought. The view properly situates Mbiti within a lineage of African philosophy, identifying him as an important successor to Placide Tempels. It acknowledges Tempels' influence but also emphasizes Mbiti's originality. This is valuable because it prevents an overly simplistic reading of Mbiti as merely an imitator, recognizing his more nuanced and developed articulation of African communalism. Mbiti's position is largely uncontested. Other African scholars like Kwame Gyekye, Paulin Hountondji, and V.Y. Mudimbe have critically examined African communalism, challenging Mbiti's emphasis on communalism as absolute and fixed.

Ifeanyi Menkiti and the Communitarian Conception of Personhood in African Thought

Ifeanyi Menkiti stands as one of the foremost contributors to the philosophical discourse on personhood within traditional African thought, particularly in contrast to Western individualist paradigms. Menkiti's work offers a critical evaluation of the ontological and moral foundations of African communalism, especially regarding how identity is constituted. Menkiti begins his analysis by emphasizing the stark divergence between Western and African conceptions of the person. According to him, Western philosophical traditions often isolate specific traits whether rationality, consciousness, or autonomy as defining features of personhood. These traits are abstracted from the individual and held up as universal criteria for being considered a person. In contrast, Menkiti asserts that the African worldview fundamentally rejects this atomistic model.

He argues, “The African view of the person is decidedly sociocentric. It denies that persons can be defined by focusing on this or that physical or psychological characteristic of the lone individual. Rather, a person is defined by the surrounding community” (Menkiti 171). Personhood, therefore, is not an intrinsic property but a relational achievement a status granted and recognized within the communal context. Further reinforcing this position, Menkiti posits that it is the community not abstract reason or biological birth that determines when a person can be regarded as such. He writes, “This is a matter best decided by the community, since the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be” (171). In other words, the community serves as both the moral compass and existential anchor through which individuals come to acquire personhood. Identity, for Menkiti, is a becoming that unfolds within the normative framework of the communal order.

Supporting Menkiti’s communitarian thesis, the Nigerian philosopher Godwin Sogolo adds that the African conception of a person is grounded in the observable practices, norms, and lived realities of a people. He maintains that “the African conception of a human person refers to a set of beliefs or a picture of a person in the form of empirical generalization” (90). Sogolo is critical of attempts to universalize the concept of personhood through abstract theorization divorced from real-life experiences. For him, personhood must be understood within the cultural and existential frameworks of specific communities. Theories that are not reflective of communal experience, he argues, may hold academic value but lack existential significance. This pragmatic orientation reveals an important feature of African communitarianism: what matters is not hypothetical capacities or philosophical constructs, but the actualization of one’s humanity through communal participation. In this view, personhood is dynamic, contingent upon moral behavior, social responsibility, and reciprocal engagement. As Sogolo rightly notes it is not enough to theorize what a person is capable of; what truly matters is how those capacities are realized within the society (90). Menkiti’s thought is further echoed by Bernard Matolino, who affirms that “Menkiti contends that the individual comes to be aware of herself through the community (71). At the heart of Menkiti’s position is the rejection of Western philosophical tendencies that define a person based on isolated, intrinsic attributes such as rationality or memory. In his words, “in the African view, it is the community which defines the person, and not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory” (172). This philosophical stance underscores that identity is relational and developmental, not fixed or innate. The individual attains full personhood only by maturing into the communal values and completing the rites that mark social and moral milestones.

Menkiti draws on the concept of *muntu* in African traditional thought, which implies that to be considered a full person is to exhibit a “plenitude of force” a term closely tied to one’s ability to fulfill moral and social expectations. He asserts that “the attainment of such a status is based on the belief that the concept of *muntu* in Africa includes an idea of excellence or plenitude of force at maturation” (173). Those who fail to develop this fullness of being—whether through neglect of social obligations or lack of moral integrity—may be regarded as non-persons. Menkiti illustrates this with the phrase *ke muntu po* (translated as “this is not a person”), referencing individuals who fall short of the required communal standards of moral completeness (173). This philosophical anthropology challenges the Western notion that simply being born human guarantees personhood. Menkiti insists that “it is not enough to understand a person as a biological organism with certain psychological traits”. Instead, one must undergo a

gradual and sustained process of socialization and ritual transformation to reach the ideal of personhood (174). These transformations are not possible in isolation. The individual must be nurtured and morally cultivated by the community, for “without other members of the community one cannot go through social transformation” (174). Thus, the community is both the arena and the agent of personal development. The Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu supports this line of thought, stating that “the concept of a person is a social concept before it is anything else. Personhood is not an automatic quality of the human individual; it is something to be achieved” (15). Menkiti further emphasizes that the community not only nurtures the individual but also sets the normative standards to which the individual must conform. He asserts that individuals are expected to internalize and uphold these societal prescriptions if they are to be recognized as full persons. As he puts it, “personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be incompetent or ineffective, better or worse” (173). This means that personhood is not just a static status, but an evaluative achievement, constantly assessed by how well one embodies communal values. Rituals of incorporation and mastery of communal ethics are therefore crucial for transforming a biologically born human into a socially complete person.

The text clearly outlines Menkiti’s core argument that African thought regards personhood as a social and moral achievement rather than an inherent, fixed attribute. It emphasizes the contrast between Western individualism and African sociocentrism, making Menkiti’s position lucid. The inclusion of Godwin Sogolo and Bernard Matolino enhances the discussion by showing that Menkiti’s ideas reflect a broader African philosophical tradition. Citing Sogolo’s emphasis on practical, communal experiences as the basis for personhood strengthens Menkiti’s claims. The view skillfully integrates Menkiti’s words especially his famous argument that “the community defines the person” which keeps the discussion grounded in primary sources and Menkiti’s intended meaning. The text successfully establishes the contrast between Western individualism (focused on autonomy and rationality) and the African communitarian paradigm, helping readers appreciate the cultural and epistemological differences that shape conceptions of personhood. The assessment could benefit from acknowledging scholars like Kwame Gyekye who argue for a moderate communitarianism, which allows some room for individual rights and autonomy. Without this counterpoint, the view remains one-sided and does not fully address ongoing debates in African philosophy. The discussion would be richer if it included real-life examples or social practices demonstrating how communal validation of personhood operates in African societies. This would help bridge the gap between Menkiti’s theory and its practical application. The view, like Menkiti’s theory, could be critiqued for neglecting personal dissent and alternative identities. If community validation is paramount, what happens to those who hold beliefs or make choices outside communal norms? A more nuanced discussion could explore the tension between individual self-expression and communal expectations. The view implies that Menkiti’s framework applies across all African societies equally. However, it would be valuable to consider contemporary urban African settings, where globalizing influences, migration, and technology may lead to more individualistic notions of identity that complicate Menkiti’s classic communitarianism. The text accurately captures Gyekye’s middle-ground position. Unlike Menkiti’s and Mbiti’s more radical communalism, Gyekye acknowledges the importance of community in shaping identity, while also protecting the individual’s moral autonomy and critical reason. Gyekye’s critique is

convincingly presented — especially his rejection of Menkiti's view that personhood is a graduated status achieved mostly in old age. The text highlights Gyekye's concern that this implies a troubling hierarchy of moral worth based on age or communal recognition. The view underscores Gyekye's emphasis on the intrinsic capacity of each individual for reason, choice, and self-reflection, distinguishing him from more radical communitarians.

Kwame Gyekye's Moderated View of African Communitarianism

Kwame Gyekye, a prominent voice in African philosophy, critically interrogates the perspectives advanced by thinkers such as John Mbiti and Ifeanyi Menkiti regarding African communitarianism. While acknowledging the centrality of community in traditional African thought, Gyekye is particularly concerned with what he terms the exaggerated communalism promoted by these thinkers. He critiques their versions of communitarianism as radical and philosophically untenable, arguing that their insistence on the community's ontological and epistemic primacy over the individual undermines the moral and rational agency of persons (39). A major contention Gyekye raises against Menkiti is the notion that personhood is not inherent but acquired through one's increasing integration into communal life, typically over an extended period and ideally in old age. Gyekye finds this claim deeply problematic, especially Menkiti's use of terms such as "full person" or "more of a person," which he considers logically incoherent and philosophically awkward. He questions the criteria for such moral graduation, asking what specific excellences qualify older individuals to possess personhood to a greater degree than the young (39). Beyond the issue of moral maturation, Gyekye strongly objects to the lack of recognition for individual autonomy in Mbiti and Menkiti's frameworks. As Matolino explains, Gyekye contends that while human beings are inherently social and shaped by their communities, they are not reducible to those social contexts. Gyekye emphasizes individual capacities such as moral reasoning, virtue, and the ability to make independent decisions—traits which, he argues, play a crucial role in shaping personal identity and moral responsibility (77). According to Gyekye, even within a communitarian structure, individuals possess what he describes as "mental features" that allow them to critically engage with their cultural norms. He writes, "In light of the autonomous or near-autonomous character of its activities, the communitarian self cannot be held as a shackled self, responding robotically to the ways and demands of the communal structure" (55). He insists that the communitarian self is not intellectually passive or morally enslaved to societal dictates; rather, it maintains the ability to step back, evaluate, and even revise the communal values it inherits.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores communalism as a vital ethical foundation that continues to hold profound relevance for African societies. Despite the increasing erosion of traditional communal values due to globalization, individualism, and socio-political disruptions, communalism remains a robust moral framework that promotes respect, solidarity, justice, and the common good. The findings demonstrate that its core principles can help bridge moral gaps, foster social cohesion, and inspire inclusive and humane policymaking in contemporary contexts. To realize this potential, there is a need for a deliberate and sustained reorientation toward communal ethics in education, governance, and society at large. By reviving and integrating these communal values into daily practice and policy, African societies can cultivate lasting

solidarity and mutual well-being, ensuring that communalism continues to guide and enrich ethical discourse and social life across generations.

The African moral worldview is distinctively communal and behavior-oriented. John S. Mbiti underscores this by asserting that African morality is fundamentally societal rather than spiritual, emphasizing conduct over essence. For Mbiti, morality in African societies is dynamic, meaning it is evaluated based on actions rather than abstract attributes. Acts of kindness or generosity become virtuous only when performed; similarly, murder becomes morally reprehensible only when committed within the societal framework (Mbiti qtd. in Murove 31). In this context, moral identity is enacted rather than simply possessed. Ifeanyi Menkiti takes this argument further by insisting that morality is a prerequisite for personhood in African traditional thought. A person who exhibits moral virtue through generosity, selflessness, and community service is recognized as a “full person,” while those who act immorally or selfishly are not regarded as true persons in the philosophical sense. Menkiti argues that the community has no place for individuals who do not contribute to the collective well-being, thereby excluding immoral individuals from full personhood (Menkiti 173).

This perspective is echoed by Peter Paris, who notes that moral development in African societies is a lifelong process, shaped by the individual's constant interaction with societal norms and communal expectations. According to Paris, the cultural institutions and rituals of the community play a formative role in shaping the moral life of the individual, a process that is never complete until death (Paris 42). Thus, moral identity is not a static attribute but an evolving communal construct. Building on these insights, Kwame Gyekye proposes a moderate communitarianism, which centers on the idea of a community of mutuality. For Gyekye, whether in traditional mono-cultural settings or in modern multi-ethnic political spaces, a community is understood as a network of individuals who are connected through interpersonal relationships and shared values. Such a community is characterized not by rigid collectivism, but by cooperative interdependence and mutual respect (Gyekye 35). Within this model, individuals are seen as social beings embedded within a web of moral obligations, but still capable of autonomous thought and action.

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Article

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BLUE ECONOMY IN NIGERIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The over-dependent of the Nigerian economy on oil has posed a serious threat to the country's economic and development prospects. Agriculture was the mainstay of the Nigerian economy prior to the discovery of oil. However, shortly after the discovery of oil, the agricultural sector was gradually abandoned, especially following the oil boom period of the 1970s. The fall in the price of oil in the international oil market has impacted negatively on Nigeria's revenue profile. There has been a persistent call for the diversification of the economy to other sectors, with the blue economy emerging as a potential economic prospect. This paper, therefore, assesses the potentials of blue economy in Nigeria as well as the challenges in driving opportunities in the sector. Methodologically, qualitative approach was used. Extant literature was conceptually and empirically reviewed. Findings reveal that the blue economy contributes to employment generation, generation of Hydro-Electricity, boost of tourism and recreation, serves as veritable source of medicine while also addressing challenges of food security. The paper outlines threats to sustainable blue economy such as unfair trade policy, eutrophication, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) activities as well as anthropogenic factors such as pollution. The survival and sustainability of the blue economy is predicated on addressing these threats. To address these challenges, the paper recommends, amongst other things, sound legal framework to regulate every activity in the blue economy sector, diversification of the economy and meticulous planning. Furthermore, it recommends interagency collaboration among agencies in the maritime subsector.

Keywords: Economy, Blue Economy and Opportunities.

Introduction

The ocean and its resources are increasingly accepted widely as a viable alternative resource to meet the needs of the rising global population amidst Earth's dwindling land resources. It is projected that with a substantial expansion of many of the current ocean-based economic activities, food, jobs, energy and raw materials to cater for the needs of the projected population level of 9-10 billion people would become readily available by the year 2030. At the heart of these activities must however remain the health of the ocean ecosystem by preventing its over-exploitation, pollution, biodiversity loss and the negative effects of climate change associated with the expansion. Dealing with these problems, therefore, it is essential to develop of innovative strategies to address the changes that would unfold with the broadening of the ocean waterscape. One of such innovative strategies was the concept of a 'blue economy'. The concept was developed to underscore the importance of the health of the ocean ecosystem considered as pivotal to the sustainability of any economic policy initiative centred on the use of ocean resources. It consists of strategies designed to ensure the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and job creation whilst preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem.

The most important source of human sustenance is the earth's water body which makes up around 70% of the earth's surface, including the ocean, seas, rivers, streams, and lakes (Allison *et al.* 2020). According to Sandifer and Sutton-Grier (2014), the ocean contributes to global wealth by supplying food, clean water, jobs, and clean air, regulating climate, treating waste, supporting biodiversity, and keeping coastal and marine ecosystems healthy. The ocean food industry can provide protein for over 3 billion people and create over 260 million jobs globally, Teh and Sumaila (2011). Globally, the maritime environment's annual worth is \$2.5 trillion HoeghGuldberg *et al.* (2015), With the world economy relying on the ocean for approximately 25% of its contribution to the global GDP, estimated at \$97 trillion by 2025, this figure is projected to grow further through enhanced conservation of critical marine ecosystems - potentially adding an additional \$3 trillion to the global economy (Brito, 2021). The Nigeria economy until the late 1960s relied on agricultural products for its foreign exchange alongside a few solid minerals. However, with the discovery of oil in abundance and following the boom in the oil industry in the 1970s, the other sectors that were predominant in economy notably; agriculture (blue economy) was abandoned (Adeyemi and Abiodun, 2013).

Origin and Concept of Blue Economy

The concept of the Blue Economy as an economic philosophy was first introduced by Gunter Pauli in 1994, following a request by the United Nations to explore sustainable business models for the future, in preparation for COP3 in Japan, where the Kyoto Protocol was later adopted (Pauli, 2010). The term "Blue Economy" gained further international recognition during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, where the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) presented it as an extension of the Green Economy concept, applied to the marine and coastal environment. The blue economy emphasizes improving human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and promoting efficient resource use in the ocean sector (UNEP, 2013). The Blue Economy concept grew out of the dissatisfaction of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and coastal nations throughout the preparatory process for Rio +20. These countries sought to extend the

green economy concept to be more applicable to their circumstances and stressed a focus on the “Blue Economy”. The differences can, for example, be found in the importance of agriculture versus fisheries in the green economy. SIDS and some coastal States, in addition, are unable to make proper use of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) programmes, but they nonetheless enjoy the potentials for renewable and non-renewable energy in coastal and offshore areas.

The blue economy recognizes the ocean realm as a newly integrated platform for both ocean-based development and governance. The idea mirrors the dragging line between socioeconomic development and reckless environmental degradation. The term blue economy has been utilized in various ways. However, it is understood to comprise a variety of economic sectors and connected policies that together confirm whether or not the utilization of oceanic resources is sustainable. The blue economy idea seeks to market economic process, social inclusion, and therefore the preservation or improvement of livelihoods while simultaneously guaranteeing the environmental property of the oceans and coastal areas. It's considered the decoupling of socio-economic activities and development from environmental degradation and optimizing the advantages which can be derived from marine resources (Wairimu and Khainga, 2017). The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) defines the blue economy as a subset of the ocean economy that encompasses all direct and indirect ocean-related activities and economic sectors. These activities must function sustainably, ensuring minimal environmental damage and avoiding ecological imbalance while exploring ocean resources for human use (Voyer et al., 2020). Colgan (2003) explains that the ocean economy consists of all economic activities which acquire all or part of its inputs from the ocean or Great Lakes. And the coastal economy which is the second subset of the ocean economy consists of all economic activity in the coastal region and is thus the sum of employment, wages, and output in the region. Some of the coastal economies are the ocean economy, but the coastal economy incorporates a broader set of economic activity (Colgan, 2003).

According to the World Bank (2016), the blue economy is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs whereas protecting the health of ocean scheme. European Commission defines the blue economy as all economic activities associated with oceans, seas, and coasts. It covers a large vary of interlinked established and rising sectors. The Commonwealth of Nations considers it as a rising idea that inspires a higher situation of our ocean or 'blue' resources. The blue economy integrates an innovative approach to the economic exploitation of the resources of oceans, lakes, rivers and different bodies of water. Blue economy activities can be classified into ocean-based activities (those that are undertaken in the ocean such as fisheries, aquaculture, etc.) and ocean related activities (those that use the products from seafood processing, marine biotechnology, chemicals among others to manufacture products and services for the ocean and ocean-based activities) (UNDP, 2018). Attri (2016) explains that ocean-based economic activities are rapidly expanding, driven by factors such as global population growth, technological advancement, climate change, economic development, and increasing trade. By 2030, it is projected that several ocean-related industries could outpace the growth of the global economy. Blue economy activities are far from being fully harnessed in Nigeria and they are classified into established (shipping, ports, fishing, and marine minerals mainly oil and gas) and emerging (aquaculture, mariculture, biotechnology, and

marine renewable energy) activities (NIMASA, 2018). The blue economy in Nigeria can help prepare her for growth without oil (Ekemeabasi, 2020).

Potentials and Opportunities of Blue Economy in Nigeria

Of the estimated 47,000 kilometers of coastline in Africa, Nigeria makes up about 853km. This coastline and a 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone make up Nigeria's coastline in the Gulf of Guinea. The coastline equals a maritime area of 290 square kilometers or almost one-third of the nation's land area of 924 square kilometres (Braimah, 2023). Beyond its strategic significance, 80 per cent of Nigeria's coastline is made up of the oil and biodiversity-rich Niger Delta. Nigeria has one of the largest wetlands in the world with its coastal and marine ecosystems covering a total of 70,000 square kilometers. These ecosystems are abundant in fish, forests, aquatic plants, coral reefs and aquatic birds, among other types of flora and fauna. Nigeria is classified as a mixed economy, with the maritime sector constituting a significant component, largely due to the country's position as a major oil-producing and exporting nation. Beyond hydrocarbons, Nigeria possesses substantial blue economy potential, encompassing sectors such as fisheries, maritime transport, coastal tourism, offshore renewable energy, and marine biotechnology. According to estimates by the African Blue Economy Alliance, based on data from the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), the value of Nigeria's untapped blue economy is projected at approximately \$296 billion. This figure highlights the considerable opportunities for economic diversification and sustainable development, particularly if strategic investments and regulatory frameworks are implemented to unlock these marine-based resources. Both traditional and emerging industries/sectors of the blue economy can lead to job creation, improved food security, tourism and infrastructure development, green energy, smart cities and ports among others when properly harnessed through enabling policy frameworks. These opportunities are thematically discussed:

- i. **Employment:** As noted earlier, the blue economy generates employment possibilities in a variety of industries and contributes more than \$1.5tn to the global economy. Elisha (2019) opines that with over half of the population under the age of 20, Nigeria is rife with human capital that, if adequately trained and integrated, may change the nation to sustainably reap the benefits of the blue economy through the production of jobs and riches. Moreover, in the world's fisheries industry, women make up 50 per cent of the workforce. If given access to modern technology, affordable funding, and market access, Nigerian women may be able to create a multibillion dollar blue economy that would help to eradicate poverty.
- ii. **Source of Tourism and Recreation:** The blue economy also contributes to national development by serving as a source of tourism and recreational. Coastal tourism is a very important sector to the Nigerian economy and many developing countries. Tourism and recreation is a major global industry that not only brings revenue to the nation but also serves as a catalyst to that that attracts investors into the country. Tourism has been a major support of global jobs and has generated trillion of dollars to the participants.
- iii. **Sustainable Energy:** The blue economy is being leveraged to create reasonable, sustainable and reliable energy as well as meet mineral resource demands through insights into renewable energy sources and sustainable harvesting of natural resources. The blue economy has enormous potential for renewable energy from wind, tides, waves, biomass sources, and salinity gradients, all of which require technology to capture sustainably.

- iv. **Serves as a Source of Food and Medicine:** The blue economy is a source of food and medicine for the people at the seaside. Fish accounts for about 16% of the animal protein consumed globally. Even though human activities have directly and evidently reduced ocean productivity, the blue economy continues to feed the entire nation unequivocally with its various gifts of fishes. The reduction of ocean productivity may also be due to climate change increasing ocean stratification and reducing nutrient mixing in the open seas.
- v. **Generation of Hydro-Electricity:** The blue economy presents a viable avenue for enhancing electricity generation across Nigeria's littoral states. However, the country continues to face persistent challenges in power generation, transmission, and, most critically, distribution (Manohar & Adeyanju, 2009). More than a decade later, these structural inefficiencies remain largely unresolved. Sharma and Sharma (2021) lament the underdevelopment of Nigeria's hydroelectric potential, despite the country's considerable natural endowments. Major hydroelectric power stations such as Kainji, Jebba, and Shiroro contribute to national power supply, while gas-fired plants—including Sapele, Egbin, Afam, and Ughelli—operate under their respective generation companies (GenCos). Nigeria is endowed with an abundance of rivers, lakes, and dams that remain underutilized for energy production. Harnessing these water resources through strategic investment and policy reform could significantly expand the nation's electricity generation capacity.

Challenges to Blue Economy Activities in Nigeria

The entire Gulf of Guinea in which Nigeria's coast lies, have been experiencing high numbers of piracy and armed robbery incidents which has become a growing concern to the maritime industry and heavily jeopardizing the activities of the blue economy in the region (NIMASA, 2018). These acts have significant implications within all the sectors of the blue economy by hampering the growth and disrupting the business of the maritime industry as a whole. African states possess meagre infrastructure and proficiencies to assure maritime security and coastal protection in which both are indispensable for establishing a viable blue economy (Rustomjee, 2018). Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is also one of the greatest threats affecting blue economy activities in which almost one-fifth (1/5) of the global fisheries capture is estimated to derive from (Rustomjee, 2018). IUU fishing is so rampant along the all Africa's coastline and especially more on the western coast of Africa where Nigeria's coastline is situated (Rustomjee, 2018). Nigeria and other countries in the region are losing \$1.3 billion annually to the IUU fishing as a result of overexploitation of fish stocks, particularly the operation of the unlicensed foreign industrial (Rustomjee, 2016). The blue economy activities have been suffering or threatening by the consequences of climate change as a result of a continual increase in atmospheric carbon emissions cause significant ocean warming. An increase in ocean temperature which is the most common in Nigeria, can lead to the changes in the physical properties of the sea, cause stratification, sea-level rise and changes in the ocean currents then end up generating cumulative impacts to the marine natural resources.

The anthropogenic factors such as pollution from the land-based sources and marine operations, unsustainable exploitation of resources, destruction and alteration of the marine and coastal habitats as a result of coastal development activities and invasive species to mention but few, not all, are the most intense in threatening the activities of blue economy in Nigeria and in Africa as a whole (Ibrahim, 2018). Oil spillage as a result of oil industries activities

is also one of the biggest threats affecting the blue economy activities in Nigeria causing a negative impact to the marine environment of the oil producing areas by destructing the ecosystem as a whole (Kadafa, 2012). Eutrophication is also another threat to the blue economy activities caused by an accumulation of nutrients and moves to the sea from industries, agriculture, and sewage discharge. Eutrophication can lead to the formation of algae bloom which change the turbidity of the seawater and reduce the intensity of the light penetrating into the deeper layers of the water causing a lot of temporary and permanent damage to the marine natural resources, indirectly affecting the blue economy activities as a whole (Visbeck *et al.* 2014).

Regulatory Framework for Nigeria's Blue Economy

Nigeria's maritime sector income is mainly focused on shipping and fisheries. While blue economy presents economic development and opportunities that transcend these traditional established practices to Nigeria, it also places an obligation on Nigeria to implement measures that will protect its aquatic ecosystem for the sustainability of the blue economy. The emerging areas of interest in blue economy include tourism, ocean bottom extractive activities, sea-bed explorations, blue energy, marine biotechnology, and bioprospecting. Presently, there is no comprehensive policy or harmonised law for the implementation of blue economy in Nigeria. South Africa, which is one of the champions of the blue economy, has enacted an Ocean Act and implemented an integrated ocean governance regime to actualise her blue economy policy.¹⁹ Nigeria has set up the ECSBEN and has established a Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy but is yet to have a dedicated or harmonised policy or legislation that will cater to its blue economy vision. Nigeria has different legislations that deal with activities on its aquatic ecosystem. Some of these laws have become obsolete and require amendments to reflect the emerging areas of maritime interest. For instance, the Sea Fisheries Act 1992 does not have a provision for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUUF) and other evolving fisheries sustainability principles which were not considered at the time of its enactment. Sustainable fisheries is an essential component of a prosperous blue economy, with marine fisheries contributing more than US\$270 billion annually to global GDP.

The Nigerian Coastal and Inland Shipping (Cabotage) Act ("Cabotage Act") has come into effect to ensure that only indigenous vessels and persons can conduct trade of any kind on Nigerian waters. It should be noted that indigenous vessels have also been implicated in IUUF on Nigerian waters. So, there is also the need to license and monitor them just like their foreign counterparts. Some of the legislations that regulate maritime activities in Nigeria are; 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency Act 2007 ("NIMASA Act"), Merchant Shipping Act 2007 ("MSA"), the Coastal and Inland Shipping (Cabotage) Act and the Admiralty Jurisdiction Act ("AJA"), National Inland Waterways Authority Act, Territorial Waters Act 1967, Territorial Waters (Amendment) Act 1998, Exclusive Economic Zone Act 1978, Continental Shelf Act 2012, MARPOL and United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea 1982 ("UNCLOS"), It has been noted that the effective implementation of the UNCLOS is necessary for the successful actualization of the blue economy concept.

Theoretical Review

The paper is guided by Institutional Theory. The institutional theory focuses on how organizational behavior and practices are influenced by formal and informal institutions. It goes deeper into the various structures of the society and sees how rules, norms and values become the pathway for social behaviour. Institutional theory focuses on institutions and how they matter in policymaking, so the most general way of explaining how institutions affect policy output is by seeing how the institutions (explained through various trends) empower and constrain actors in policymaking (March and Olsen, 2008). Institutional theory claims that institutions matter in policy process as policymaking process is almost inherently invaded in the institutional framework of a state which is why institutional theory can be best considered as the best theoretical understanding to be applied in policymaking process. This theory emphasizes how cultural norms, governmental policies, and regulatory frameworks all play a part in influencing entrepreneurial activity in the context of Blue Economy in Nigeria. By fostering an enabling or constrictive atmosphere, institutions can either support or obstruct policy making. Policymakers in Nigeria's blue economy encounter obstacles brought on by bureaucratic red tape, complex regulatory requirements, and overlapping jurisdictions. They can spot chances for policy advocacy and regulatory reform by skillfully navigating the institutional context (Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The ocean economy has the prospect of contributing immensely to Nigeria's economy engendering economic diversification, promoting food security, facilitating job creation, ensuring technological innovation and supporting environmental conservation. However, it requires meticulous planning, diligent investment, sincere political will and sound legal framework to maximize its positive impact and ensure long-term sustainability. There is also the need for inter-agency collaboration within the maritime subsector in order to realize the potentials of the blue economy. Additionally, international synergy should be fostered between Nigeria and other countries of the world. This will enable them to understudy strategies, concepts and framework put in place to boost blue economy sector.

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Article

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THE ELEME-OKRIKA BOUNDARY CONFLICT: CHALLENGES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract

The Eleme and Okrika boundary conflict in Rivers State, Nigeria, has remained a prolonged communal dispute with far-reaching effects on peace, development, and social cohesion in the Niger Delta. This paper examines the major challenges and the community engagement strategies adopted over time to manage the conflict. Using the lens of the Corporate Social Responsibility theory, the study explores how peace committees, mediation efforts, youth programmes, and locally led dialogue forums have been used to address the root causes of tension. Drawing on qualitative insights from secondary sources, the study shows that mistrust between communities, political interference, elite domination, and weak institutional frameworks have seriously limited the success of these strategies. It also finds that although some community structures exist, they are often sidelined or manipulated by dominant interests. The study argues that meaningful peacebuilding will depend on inclusive, community driven strategies that are consistently supported, legally protected, and rooted in the lived realities of the people involved.

Keywords: Boundary Conflict, Community Engagement, Conflict Management, Peacebuilding, Eleme, Okrika.

Introduction

The Eleme-Okirika boundary conflict has been a protracted and persistent communal conflict, for several years resulting in tensions, violence and loss of lives, properties, numerous casualties, displacement of families and exacerbating existing social and economic challenges, which have led to a significant negative impact on the affected communities. The conflict revolves around claims to land, resources and cultural Identities, which are deeply rooted in historical and socio-political factors. The historical context includes colonial legacies, such as the demarcation of boundaries by colonial powers, which led to disputes and competition over land. The socio-political factors such as population growth, urbanization and resource scarcity, have exacerbated the conflicts, creating increasingly volatile conditions. The emergence of the colonial administration and the division of the territories into administrative units complicated the existing tensions between the Okirika and the Eleme. In 1936, there were so many distorted movements that were made by the colonial administration, for instance, the Eleme citizens were moved from the Ahoada division of Owerri Province into the Opobo division in Calabar province, at the same time, some Okirika villages in the mainland were also transferred to Calabar province, from the Degema division. Since both Parties moved to the Calabar Province in 1937, the Eleme Citizens demanded rent from those mainland Okirika, now placed under Calabar Province, the Okirikans rejected the demands on the ground that, they have lived on that Land time immemorial and they cannot just be displaced like that, whereas, the Elemes claimed that, the relationship between the Okirikans and the Elemes was originally based on trade which led the Elemes to invite the Okirikas to occupy their land along the Coastal Areas, now they want to overrule them and take their possession, noting that, what really catapulted the conflict is the entrance of the Multinational Shell BP (as it was then) into the area, from 1959 to early 1960s, when the Nigerian Government decision about managing the downstream sector of the petroleum industry was to site its first refinery in the Okirika-Alesa (Eleme).

The refinery was built through the joint efforts of the Nigerian Government and Shell BP, based on the certificate of title, and at its inception, the project was called the Alesa–Okirika Refinery (jointly named after the two host communities), and the required documents were also jointly signed by the two communities as the host. As alluded to by Nwokeji (2007) in 1969, the Nigerian Government inaugurated the Petroleum Act, which provides that, “only Nigerian citizens or companies incorporated in Nigeria may be granted exploration, prospecting and mining licences, which also provided a joint partnership with the Government on all fresh concessions. Before the Petroleum Act, Oil Corporations operated as private corporations and merely paid tax and statutory revenues to the Government, but all these changed as the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was established in collaboration with the joint partners (Nwokeji, 2007). With this new development, the Alesa-Okirika refinery became an asset to the government-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Discrepancies in methods of mapping and lack of clarity or understanding of available legal documentation are the major causes, which led to a series of inter-communal crises, with the intervention of respected and reputable Individuals, corporate organizations, traditional rulers, and different regimes of the government of Rivers State have tried various forms of resolution principles but to no avail.

For instance, in 1937, the Commissioner of the colonial administration was a mediator between the Okirika and the Elemes in the settling of their boundary dispute, but neither of the

communities were satisfied with the outcome. None of the communities was satisfied with the outcome of the commissioner's intervention, and tension remained high until in 1946, both communities had violent confrontations destroying lives and property, which led to the deployment of security agents in the area by the colonial administrator to restore peace, law and order. Also, after the inauguration of the Petroleum Act and the naming of the refinery in 1969, which signifies that, the Alesa- Okirika Refinery became an asset to the Government owned NNPC, with this new development, the government re-opened old wounds between the Eleme and Okirika "who owned the refinery"? Even though both communities signed documents to establish the refinery as the legitimate stakeholders, to this day, its owners remain disputed.

Again, the military administrator (Colonel Dauda Komo) during his administration in 1993, Eleme won a court case and insisted they be sole beneficiary of oil profit and also the sole that the name of the refinery be changed to Eleme refinery; the change was effected and the decision led to a bloody, deadly, and property destructive clash. Through the Act of mediation, the military administrator, Colonel Dauda Komo constituted committee in the bid to find a lasting solution to this protracted and persistent crisis, by inviting the two committees for dialogue, each community was mandated to nominate a lawyer as their representative, but due to lack of cooperation on the part of the community representatives and the lackadaisical attitude (half-hearted effort) by the government towards Committee Process, destabilized the whole effort of finding a lasting solution of the Peace making process. Rivers State Deputy Governor and chairman of the state boundary commission, in 2010, during the regime of Rt. Hon. Chibuike Ameachi, the Deputy Governor, Engr. Tele Ikuru assured that the present government would proffer a lasting solution to the lingering boundary problems between Eleme, Okirika and Ogu-Bolo Local Government Area. Engr. Ikuru gave this assurance while Ona boundary demarcation enlightenment/sensitization visit to Eleme Local Government Area. The Deputy Governor, who spoke through the director of conflict resolution and boundaries, Barrister ThankGod Ekine, urged the chiefs, elders and other stakeholders of the area to educate the people on the need to remain peaceful when the forthcoming boundary demarcation exercise begins. He disclosed that a team of boundary experts would soon be doing survey work on the boundary lines between the three local government areas and warned the youths and other categories of persons to desist from doing anything along the boundary lines. Allaying the fears of the people, he explained that the boundary demarcation exercise would be based on the Supreme Court judgment and Charles Granville's committee report on the issue, but all these forms of mediation failed.

Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict: Conflict is an integral part and aspect of human life, unavoidable as far as interactions exist; thus, conflict is an inevitable aspect of existence, and its occurrence is found in almost every nook and cranny of the world. Conflict is dynamic, and so also are the ways by which human beings tackle conflict. According to Michael and Ikiabo (2022), conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction and the concomitant of choices and decisions. Similarly, according to Iroye and Ajeh (2020), conflict refers to a Universal phenomenon existing in all Human Societies resulting from their interactions and relationships, which may be positive or negative. Lamorde and Ibebunjo (2022) perceive conflict as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving these goals. To

buttress this point, Putra (2023) states that conflict occurs when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which opponents aim to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. As described by Omah (2012) states that, conflict is inevitable in human society because, when two or more converge, they must interact to meet certain needs, and in the process of interactions, conflict usually emerges.

Conflict means an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and misunderstanding. Adewale (2015) notes, conflict occurs when their interactions between at least two individuals or groups whose objectives differ. But Anyanwu (2017) positively took at the concept of conflict as a natural phenomenon which challenges individuals or groups in a community to strive to manage their disagreements, Differences, Goals and Interests by transforming their Communities into fairer and more just places to live. According to Devona (2021), Conflict is as old as the creation of the earliest men, it has a multi-dimensional nature, underlying causes, manifestations, and profound impacts on individuals, relationships, communities and societies. It can manifest in various forms, ranging from subtle disagreements to overt hostility, affecting personal, professional, and societal realms. The complex nature of conflict encompasses psychological, emotional, cultural, and structural dimensions, each contributing to its unique dynamics (Britten, (2021). As described by Adeyemi (2022), conflicts are etymological and may be classified as either “actor-oriented” or “system oriented”. Adeyemi perceives conflict as an actor or system where one may be motivated to embrace conflict as an essential part of human interaction, or a problem which needs to be addressed or resolved. He added that, due to the destructive effects of wars and other forms of violent conflict on political order, it is viewed as a dangerous idea.

Conflict Management

Conflict management is the use of processes, tools and skills to find creative and respectful ways to manage disagreements and disputes; this includes the ability to resolve conflict collaboratively through effective communication Skills, such as active listening and assertive speaking. Conflict management allows parties to continue to work together, even in the face of conflict. Various Scholars have defined Conflict management differently, but all end up aiming and pointing in similar directions. Thus, Conflict management is the process of controlling the destructive consequences of conflict, bringing disputants to the table to appreciate these Conflict implications & to forestall future re-emergence. Oyeboode (2012) simply describes Conflict management as “the way man handles or tackles conflict, this implies that there could be good or bad management, depending on how well-thought-out and executed the mechanism or skills employed can achieve desirable outcomes. Conflict management is the method by which conflicts are resolved, where negative outcomes are minimized and positive results are prioritized (Yoromes, 2017). Best (2006) asserts that conflict management “covers the entire areas of handling conflicts positively at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent the Conflict by being proactive” Best (2007) also alluded to the fact that, conflict management entails the process of reducing the destructive capacity of conflict through several measures and approaches by engaging with the parties involved in that conflict. Sometimes, conflict management is often used in conjunction with “conflict regulation” which covers issues of handling conflicts at different stages and the efforts made to prevent the conflict through proactive community engagement strategies.

Community Engagement Strategies

Community engagement strategy is a strategic process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographical location, special interest, or affiliation, to identify and address issues affecting their well-being. Community engagement strategy is a step-by-step plan that details how to involve a community in bringing about Social change. Community engagement strategy can create, enhance and sustain social ties among the community. Community engagement strategy is all about creating a consistent set of processes to nurture members of the communities to invest in their personal development and include them to participate in the resolution of the conflict. The study will highlight various community engagement strategies that will be used to address the management of the Eleme-Okirika boundary conflict, and the strategies include:

- i. **Mediation:** Mediation is a process where a neutral third party facilitates a conversation between two or more parties in conflict to help them reach a mutually acceptable agreement mediation is a voluntary, confidential and structured process for resolving disputes, in which a neutral and impartial third party assist the disputing parties in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement. As noted by Anyanwu (2017), it is an Informal process in which disputing parties discuss their situation, intending to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement or gain new perceptions about a situation, with the help of a neutral third party who serves as an intermediary to assist the disputing parties to reach their agreement or resolution. Mediation involves the intervention, the mediator is an opener of the communication channel, trainer, resource expander, legitimizer, and a process facilitator also, a good mediator will be guided by principles such as-; the principles of impartiality which signifies that the mediator is a neutral facilitator who does not take sides, self-determination, confidentiality indicates that all the proceedings remains confidential, voluntariness in the wiliness participation of the parties and can withdraw at any given time and finally, empowerment and education. The management of the Eleme-Okirika boundary conflict involves the facilitation of structured dialogue sessions between representatives of the conflicting parties, aiming to promote understanding, negotiation and the development of agreements towards conflict resolution. The mediation process has been implemented by independent mediators, who are experts, professionals and individuals who are versatile and knowledgeable in their various fields, who are neutral individuals or groups/organizations and do not have an interest in the issue of the conflict, and they include governmental agencies, non- governmental organizations (NGOs) and community leaders, it provides the disputing communities opportunity to engage in constructive communication, express their concerns, and work towards peaceful coexistence. The mediation of the Eleme-Okirika started during the colonial period, for instance, in 1937, the commissioner of the colonial administration was a mediator between the Okirika and the Eleme in the settling of their boundary dispute, but neither community were satisfied with the outcome. Again, during the military administration of Colonel Dauda Komo, through the act of mediation, constituted committee in the bid to find a lasting solution to this protracted and persistent crisis, by inviting the two committees for dialogue, each community was mandated to nominate a lawyer as their representative, but due to lack of cooperation on the part of the community Representatives and the lackadaisical attitude

(half-hearted effort) by the government towards committee process, destabilized the whole effort of finding a lasting solution of the peace making process.

Community-Led Peace Committees

One prominent community engagement strategy is the community - led peace committees, which utilize an inclusive approach which contributes to the development of sustainable and locally owned solutions to the conflict. These are members of the conflicting communities that establish local peace committees that empower community members to actively participate in managing the conflict. They are generally referred to as the community development committee (CDC) in most LGAs in Rivers State. The community development committee (CDC) is composed of vibrant youths, having chairmen, vice chairmen, secretaries, protocol officers, treasurer and other vital positions. The community development committee (CDC) represent the voice of the community and ensures that every segment of the community is well represented. The main objective is to monitor the conflict situation and intervene in the minor disputes, mediating and promoting community cohesion, before they escalate into larger conflicts. To buttress this point, Kumar (2006) states that the peace committee acts as a neutral facilitator, promoting dialogue and understanding among conflicting parties. These committees provide grassroots representation and decision-making, ensuring that the voices of the community members are heard/ considered and decisions are made collectively. Kumar (2006) asserts that, by involving community members, these strategies create a sense of ownership and responsibility, which contributes to the sustainability of the peace-building effort.

Capacity Building Programs

Capacity building programs are conducted to empower community members with skills, knowledge and resources which are necessary to effectively resolve the conflict and also contribute to long-term peace-building efforts. One major aspect of capacity building is to provide training and education on conflict resolution and long-term peace-building, thus equipping the members with tools to peacefully resolve conflict and promote self-sufficiency to empower local communities, enhance the conflict resolution skills of the committee members, including conflict analysis, negotiation, mediation and communication skills. These programs are usually led by experts in the field or facilitated by local community leaders who have undergone such specific training. These programs also promote confidence and empowerment among community members, allowing them to take leadership roles in resolving conflict (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). Some organizations with a capacity building mentality, like the Refinery in 2014, created an avenue for some youths to be trained in some skills acquisition, the then Active General Executive director services of the company, Sir. Ralph Ugwu declares that the youths will receive training in welding and fabrication, carpentry and woodwork, plumbing and pipe fitting, plaster of Paris (POP), fashion designing, GSM repairs, catering services, poultry and fisheries productions, among others. (The Nation, Jan 2014)

Conflict Transformation Workshop

These are workshops that are organized by stakeholders to create an avenue for bringing the representatives of the Conflicting parties from both Communities, which aims to build Conflict Transformation skills among Community members. The workshop allows participants to express their grievances through structured discussions, in which participants are encouraged to actively

engage in problem-solving rather than having the mindset of WIN-LOSE. Conflict Transformation Workshop utilizes various forms of Conflict Transformation techniques and tools such as active listening exercises, mediation activities and group discussion. These tools are to facilitate effective communication and problem-solving. In the Conflict Transformation process, apart from participants learning and practice skills related to a deeper understanding of the roots of Conflicts, identifying their own and others' emotions, interests, and positions and facilitating collaborative problem-solving.

Theoretical Framework

The Corporate Social Responsibility Theory (CSR): The Corporate Social Responsibility theory (CSR) is an automated business model that helps a company to be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders and the public. The proponent of this theory is Howard Bowen, an American economist and Grinnell College president. He is often cited as the “Father of corporate social responsibility.” He connected the responsibility of corporations to society and published a book in 1953 that advocated for business ethics and responsiveness to societal stakeholders. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) means that entrepreneurs take resources from society and are supposed to return them in the condition they were taken for running their business. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a self-built and self-regulating mechanism where a business is supposed to ensure its compliance with law, international law, with ethical standards of business. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) theory emphasizes both the responsibility to make money and the responsibility to interact ethically with the surrounding community welfare.

Application of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Theory to this Study

The corporate social responsibility (CSR) provisions apply to a company registered for a charitable purpose under section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013. Section 135 (1) of the Act states that every company having the specified net worth, turnover, and net profits must establish a CSR community. As for the Eleme-Okirika, some of the organizations like the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) use corporate social responsibility (CSR) to address various issues like education, health, safety and empowerment programs. For instance, the (M.D) managing director of Port Harcourt refining company, Mr Ian Udoh, speaking during the official flag off ceremony of the programme on 31st January 2014, informed both the Eleme and the Okirika youths to take the programme seriously and make good use of the opportunities, as the scheme was part of the corporate social responsibilities of the company pay to its host communities, which is a critical component of economic development that will reduce the unemployment rate and will improve human capacity for sustainable development. The Ag executive director of services of the company, Sir. Ralph Ugwu declares that the youths will receive training in welding and fabrication, carpentry and woodwork, plumbing and pipe fitting, plaster of Paris (POP), fashion designing, GSM repairs, catering services, and poultry and fisheries productions, among others. (The Nation, Jan 2014), but the issue of sustainability is questionable because organizations need to adopt sustainable practices that will have a positive impact on the environment they operate. Apart from NNPC, which operates within the Eleme-Okirika boundary conflict, there are lots of organizations, both multinational and local firms that show no concerns about CSR in the area they operate, this might be due to some challenges

such as lack of stakeholder awareness, lack of information, organizational culture and financial constraints.

Some of the solutions to these numerous challenges, is by engaging and involving the stakeholders, and effective communication between the conflicting parties and the organizations, even when the organizations are willing to assist and involve in the affairs of CSR, they might not be communicating with the right set of the community members, also, on the other hand, the community might not gain access to the top management and unknowingly dealing with those who are not the actual personnel in charge of such duties, also, most organizations do not have department in-charge of community relations, even the end of the year party that most meaningful organizations do offer to their host communities, to integrate properly with them is been slide-lined. The multinational oil companies (MNOCs) and the multinational corporations (MNCs) use the principle of "Divide and Rule "to manipulate members of the communities, to buttress this point, Adunbi (2015) notes that the multinational oil companies (MNOCs) approach encourages and generates conflict among individuals and groups "Pitting Father against children "as a way to defect from their exploitation of the environment. This process ensures that the communities will remain divided which will not promote collective and mutual interest. These two antagonistic approaches will ensure that the multinational oil companies will not be questioned about the atrocities / ill activities towards the two host communities, with the aid of "Divide and Rule Principle". These oil companies are not helping issues as they maintain control of the people through manipulation, by supporting one or more Chiefs from both communities that are in constant opposition to one another (Ikelegbe, 2013).

Challenges /Barriers of the Community Engagement Strategies (CES)

There are several challenges, barriers and limitations to the Community Engagement Strategies (CES) in the Management of the Eleme-Okirika Boundary Conflict, which can hinder the successful implementation of (CES) and addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves a range of Stakeholders, Traditional / Community Leaders, Government Agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and external independent mediators These Challenges include:

- i. **Political Dynamics:** Political Interference may create divisions in the Communities that will inhibit the resolution process, influential personalities in any administration, want to be involved to favor their community, to buttress this point, Emenike (2010) notes that, the Eleme-Okirika Boundary conflict are not solely community-based, but has also been influenced by political dynamics at local, regional and national levels. Political interference is not advisable as it may fuel more problems for the already existing ones and may also create division and disunity within the communities.
- ii. **Lack of Trust:** Building Trust becomes very difficult since the conflict is protracted and persistent. In the Eleme- Okirika boundary conflict, historical grievances and acts of violence have been deep-seated and mistrust between the communities; this lack of trust can be strong enough to bring both conflicting parties together for dialogue and peaceful resolution. Akintola (2015) states that building trust among community members, especially in the context of longstanding conflict, can be a challenging and time-consuming process.

- iii. **Resource Limitation:** Limited Resources such as finance, personnel and infrastructure can be a huge hindrance or challenge in the management of the Eleme-Okirika boundary conflict. Insufficient fund imposes a lot of challenges in the implementation of major activities such as training programs –capacity building programs (CBP) and conflict transformation workshop (CTW), also a lack of competent personnel (facilitators and mediators) can hinder the process. Samuel (2016) asserts that insufficient funding for programs and initiatives can hamper the implementation of Conflict Resolution activities, training programs and Capacity Building efforts.
- iv. **External Influences:** External influences can come in various dimensions; some may have a vested interest in perpetuating the Conflict, or they may seek to manipulate the situation to serve their agenda. Drawing from Okafor & Adeyemo (2014), external influence, such as the involvement of Non-State armed groups or political actors, can complicate Community Engagement Strategies (CES).
- v. **Boundary Conflict:** Geographical Boundaries are man’s creation in space due to agitation by individuals, groups, or communities for self-actualization, especially in terms of resource control. (Mgborukor, 2021). Before the colonial era, Nigeria had been battling with many communal, tribal, and political crises that emanated as a result of disagreements over properties such as land ownership and resource control or varied attempts to take over territories, as well as religious beliefs like the Uthman Dan Fodio jihad (Egunjobi, 2015). Boundary conflict refers to conflict over the division of land or water bodies among two or more interdependent countries. This may arise due to cultural or historical claims or competition from resource exploitation. In Nigeria, the causes of boundaries could be colonial-related, geographical, socio-political, economic or governmental factors and physical boundaries, which are naturally occurring barriers between two areas, and the boundaries could be in the form of rivers, oceans, or mountain Ranges. One of the notable natures of conflicts was land disputes, when the economy and land began to appreciate, disputes over ownership became frequent in Nigeria. According to Olabode and Ajibade (2010), the disputes continued to generate tensions and, in some cases, led to the loss of lives and properties in many communities in Nigeria. All these conflicts before and during the post-colonial period were managed and resolved amicably with the aid of ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution). Boundary conflict has one exclusive nature, which is basically inter-communal conflicts that ensure the disagreement between two or more groups clashing due to originality or Indigene-ship Interest.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the Eleme Okrika boundary conflict through the lens of community engagement strategies reveals a complex intersection of historical grievances, political manipulation, elite interests, and institutional weaknesses. While the conflict may appear rooted in land ownership, its persistence points to deeper social, political, and economic undercurrents. This section discusses the key findings of the research, drawing connections between the empirical realities on the ground and the theoretical insights offered by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) theory and community-based peacebuilding frameworks:

- i. **Historical Grievances as Active Conflict Triggers:** One of the most persistent themes is the role of unresolved historical grievances in fuelling distrust and shaping present-day

community relations. The colonial boundary rearrangements of the 1930s, which moved both Eleme and Okrika communities into the Calabar Province without addressing their existing territorial arrangements, created long-term confusion. Emenike (2010) argued that “the colonial administrators failed to recognize the emotional and territorial attachments of local communities, leading to layered misunderstandings” (p. 100). The fact that this administrative reshuffling was never revisited or clarified by subsequent governments meant that each community interpreted the boundary issue through its own historical lens. What is striking is how both communities continue to narrate their histories in ways that affirm their legitimacy while rejecting the other’s claims. These narratives are reinforced through local institutions, oral histories, and even religious platforms. In this environment, historical grievances are not just remembered; they are rehearsed and revived. They become rallying points for youth mobilization and community resistance. As such, no community engagement strategy can succeed without addressing this deeper emotional landscape.

- ii. **Mistrust and Poor Follow-Up:** Another key finding is that most formal mediation attempts have failed because they did not inspire trust or produce enforceable outcomes. In 1993, Colonel Dauda Komo initiated a mediation process that involved legal representatives from both communities. However, the outcome was never implemented due to weak political will and growing distrust between the parties. Samuel (2016) pointed out that “the state’s half-hearted mediation created more suspicion than hope, as both sides felt the process had been compromised” (p. 75). Trust is the currency of mediation. Without it, even the most neutral facilitators cannot sustain dialogue. In the Eleme Okrika case, community representatives often arrived at mediation meetings with pre-formed conclusions, refusing to consider compromise. The absence of post-dialogue follow-up mechanisms further weakened the process. Agreements were made without timelines, documentation was poor, and there were no enforcement mechanisms. The communities returned home more aggrieved than they were before the sessions began. This points to a critical gap in the design of conflict resolution processes. Mediation cannot be a one-time event; it must be part of a longer journey that includes capacity building, communication, and continuous engagement. More importantly, facilitators must have legitimacy not just in law but in the eyes of the people they serve.
- iii. **Community Engagement Structures Non-Empowerment:** Both Eleme and Okrika have structures that, in theory, could facilitate peacebuilding. These include community development committees (CDCs), youth associations, traditional councils, and religious leaders. However, the research finds that these structures are often weakened by internal rivalries, poor coordination, and lack of institutional support. Kumar (2006) suggested that “peace committees can only function effectively when they have the backing of community consensus and the support of institutional frameworks” (p. 77). In Eleme and Okrika, peace committees were sometimes seen as tools of local elites or proxies for political actors. Their composition lacked diversity, and their procedures were not transparent. For instance, women and young people were rarely represented, and most decisions were taken by a few individuals claiming to speak for the whole community. This lack of inclusivity undermines the legitimacy of community engagement platforms. In contexts where every group feels entitled to be heard, any appearance of exclusion is quickly translated into grievance.

Therefore, strengthening these structures requires more than just creating them; it involves reforming them to reflect the community's diversity and ensuring they are empowered to act.

- iv. **CSR Initiatives Poor Execution:** One of the more surprising findings is that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, especially those led by oil companies, have not delivered the expected peace dividends. The 2014 youth training scheme by the Port Harcourt Refining Company is a case in point. While the programme covered valuable skills like welding, tailoring, and GSM repairs, it failed to provide post-training support. Trainees were left without equipment, business grants, or market access. Adunbi (2015) observed that many CSR programmes in the Niger Delta are “designed to calm tension rather than to build sustainable peace” (p. 165). This statement is reflected in the Eleme Okrika experience. Instead of building trust, CSR initiatives often fuel suspicion. Communities argue over who benefits more, who was consulted, and how funds were used. The absence of transparency and independent monitoring reduces the credibility of these programmes. Furthermore, CSR tends to focus on short-term deliverables—workshops, grants, and training without embedding those activities in a broader development framework. There are few efforts to integrate community feedback, build local ownership, or evaluate impact. The result is that CSR becomes a box-ticking exercise for companies rather than a meaningful contribution to peace.
- v. **Peace Process Manipulation:** Another finding is that political actors have consistently used the conflict for personal and strategic gain. Politicians often intervene not to solve the conflict but to build loyalty within their constituencies. In doing so, they take sides, offer biased interpretations of historical claims, and fund selected groups within the communities. Emenike (2010) noted that “politicians see communal disputes as opportunities to assert dominance, reward supporters, and control resources” (p. 105). This has been evident in how boundary demarcation efforts are announced with fanfare and then quietly abandoned. Similarly, peace panels are formed just before elections and dissolved afterwards. This politicization of conflict reduces the space for genuine community engagement. Once a peace process is seen as a political tool, it loses its credibility. Community members begin to withdraw, assuming that decisions have already been made. Those who participate are often stigmatized as political collaborators rather than peacebuilders. The implication is that CES strategies must be insulated from political cycles and influence. They should be driven by neutral institutions and supported by legal frameworks that protect their independence.
- vi. **Poorly Integrated Youth Engagement:** Young people are both actors in and victims of the Eleme Okrika conflict. They have been used to enforce territorial claims, defend community honor, and resist perceived marginalization. At the same time, they suffer the most from economic exclusion, educational disruption, and violence. Yet most community engagement strategies have treated youth as beneficiaries rather than as partners. Workshops and training schemes have targeted youth, but without involving them in the design and planning. As a result, many programmes have failed to address the real needs of young people. Anyanwu (2017) argued that “youth must be seen not just as targets of intervention but as agents of transformation” (p. 59). When youth are invited into decision-making spaces, they bring energy, creativity, and local legitimacy. In Eleme and Okrika,

several youth-led initiatives have emerged spontaneously, including peace marches, social media campaigns, and informal mediation. However, these efforts are rarely recognised or supported by formal institutions. There is a gap between grassroots innovation and institutional planning. To close this gap, CES strategies must build stronger bridges with youth platforms. This includes involving youth leaders in planning, funding youth-led projects, and creating mentorship opportunities. Without youth integration, peacebuilding remains incomplete.

- vii. **Absence of Inter-Community Engagement:** Most CES efforts in the Eleme Okrika conflict have been implemented within individual communities rather than between them. While both Eleme and Okrika have organised peace events, trained youth, and formed committees, there have been few joint activities. The result is that each side strengthens its internal structure without building bridges across the divide. Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007) emphasised that “peace is not the absence of war but the presence of relationships that foster coexistence” (p. 90). In the absence of inter-community interaction, misconceptions grow, and stereotypes harden. This is especially problematic for young people who have never interacted with peers from the other side. Joint programmes, whether in sports, education, business, or agriculture are essential to breaking down barriers. When communities work together, they build empathy and discover common interests. Unfortunately, such initiatives are rare in Eleme and Okrika due to fear, logistical challenges, and political resistance. One exception was the cultural festival held in 2008 that featured participants from both communities. It provided a rare moment of shared celebration. However, it was not sustained. There was no institutional support to turn it into a recurring event. This underlines the need for CES strategies to include regular, structured inter-community engagements that promote dialogue and healing.
- viii. **Institutions Lack the Capacity Coordination of CES:** The final key finding is that institutions responsible for managing community relations lack the capacity, coordination, and independence to carry out their mandate effectively. The State Boundary Commission, local government councils, and the Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs are either underfunded, politicized, or absent from the conflict zone. Best (2006) stated that “institutions are the pillars of sustainable peace because they ensure continuity, legitimacy, and accountability” (p. 112). Without strong institutions, community engagement becomes vulnerable to disruption. Initiatives depend on personal goodwill rather than policy, and once individuals leave office, the process collapses. In Eleme and Okrika, no standing committee to monitor the conflict, no public database of grievances, and no office where citizens can report violations. Most decisions are taken informally, based on who has access to power at any given time. This institutional vacuum explains why peace agreements are rarely implemented. Even when well-meaning officers emerge, they lack the tools and authority to make lasting changes. Therefore, CES must be embedded within a framework of institutional reform. Without this, peace remains fragile and short-lived.

Conclusion

The participatory, collaborative and inclusive approach is very vital in community engagement strategies that, is rooted in transparency, equity and mutual respect, which can significantly contribute to the boundary conflict, with the aid of community development committee (CDC)

the voices of the people were been heard in a way of expressing grievances and participating in decision-making. Again, sincere dialogue, negotiation and mediation will ensure that, the relevant stakeholder through mediators in both communities to dialogue openly, about the grievances, concerns and the interest of their communities. The importance of traditional method of conflict resolution through mediation by respected traditional leaders/elders which will assist in bridging the gap between the modern justice system and the traditional approach; this process is referred to as community-based conflict resolution approach. Also, the interventions and cooperation among the stakeholders, government agencies and the traditional institutions will produce long-term peace sustainability. Capacity building of the community members is very important as it strengthens the conflict resolution skills and the sustainability of peace in long-term.

Recommendations

In order to promote peaceful co-existence in the Eleme-Okirika boundary conflict, effective community engagement strategies should be recommended to include: The community engagement strategies should be well-funded by the relevant stakeholders, which includes the federal government, which can be in the form of budgetary allocation for specific projects and support from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Boundary Commission (NBC) to provide technical and financial assistance for conflict resolution efforts and peace-building initiatives. The Rivers State government, which is directly involved in addressing the conflict, should ensure that the funds released are properly monitored and judiciously utilized for the right purpose. The local government areas (LGAs) are not left out, they may support the funding of community meetings and allocating resources for projects, international NGOs such as the United State Institute for peace (USIP) and other well-known International NGOs have been involved in the funding of conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives in Nigeria especially in the Niger delta region. Both local NGOs and private sector funding, such as the multinational oil companies (MNOCs), multinational corporations (MNCs) and other organizations may contribute to conflict resolution and community development initiatives as part of their corporate social responsibilities (CSR) program. Government should ensure an inclusive, participatory and collaborative approach by involving community member in the decision-making process, to express their grievances, needs and appreciation to the organizations that have genuinely come to their aid. Capacity building should be encouraged by empowering the community members, especially the youths, since the youths are always at the forefront of the conflict. Thus, the training programme on negotiation, mediation, problem solving, leadership development, cross-cultural exchange programs, communication, decision-making skills, conflict resolution mechanisms, peace-building initiatives and reconciliation. Capacity building fosters collaboration between the communities that can address the underlying causes of the conflict and promote peace and development in the area.

Organizing regular meetings of the community members, incorporating both communities, should be encouraged in an inclusive manner. Their voices have to be heard in terms of their grievances, opinions, interest, and in the decision-making processes, via constructive and structured dialogue. There should be appropriate formal negotiation terms from both conflicting parties, with the objectives of the terms clearly stated, and at the end of the process agreement will be reached. There should be engagement of respected neutral third

party through the assistance of trained mediators, preferably independent mediators who are experts in such field, to help both parties in agreeable solution. Implementation of important events such as cultural festivals and sports, for instance football can create unity within both communities. The relevant stakeholders should also implement joint economic empowerment development projects such as roads and transportation networks which connects the two conflicting communities, building of schools, health facilities, the development of a marketplace for both communities in a neutral location that is acceptable to both communities and the allocation of the stalls and trading spaces to both members of all communities ensuring that, it will be properly allocated to avert more crisis. Involvement of the traditional rulers and the community elders in traditional conflict resolution mechanism, this can be effective in handling minor disputes and grievances, the mechanism involves mediation, dialogue, negotiation and arbitration where panels of elders or experts hears evidence from both side and make binding decisions. According to Amodu (2019b) Traditional rulers have been an important part of Nigeria's governing structure for generations, even predating the British colonial era. The traditional ruler's role in conflict resolution was based on their extensive knowledge of their communities, their ability to mediate disagreements and their authority to enforce ruling.

To ensure that the strategies outlined above do not remain on paper, their implementation must be properly structured, time-bound, and supported by the right institutions. In the short term, within the first six months, the Rivers State government should immediately initiate a community engagement planning session involving representatives from both Eleme and Okrika. This forum must be open, inclusive, and locally driven, with support from neutral peacebuilding institutions. At the same time, the existing peace committees in both communities should be restructured and given fresh mandates to operate with renewed legitimacy, especially at the ward level. These committees can begin facilitating initial dialogue meetings, hosting small-scale peace events, and collecting community opinions on shared concerns. This should coincide with financial mobilization from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Boundary Commission to support logistics, venue costs, and technical facilitation. From the seventh month up to the eighteenth month, more substantive activities should commence. These include the construction of shared community development projects, like a neutral market, jointly managed roads, and inter-community boreholes. The implementation of these projects should involve joint monitoring teams from both communities to build trust and ensure transparency. At the same time, youth-focused programmes such as leadership workshops, negotiation skills, and small business support schemes should be launched in partnership with NGOs and local training institutes. These can be coordinated with the help of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), whose community development service groups can offer technical assistance. Sports and cultural events should also be institutionalized during this period to create routine, safe, and informal spaces for interaction. Football tournaments, dance festivals, and oral storytelling sessions can go a long way in reshaping perceptions and softening hardened positions.

In the longer term, between eighteen and thirty-six months, attention should shift to legal and structural reform. A participatory boundary clarification exercise should be initiated with the full involvement of community elders, surveyors, and legal experts. This process should not only map physical boundaries but also create mutually accepted frameworks for managing shared land and public spaces. The outcome of this exercise must be gazetted and protected by

law. Alongside this, a proposal for a state-level peace-building bill should be introduced in the Rivers State House of Assembly to give legal backing to CES structures, regulate peace committees, and ensure sustainable funding. Finally, by the end of the third year, an independent assessment should be carried out to review the impact of all community engagement initiatives. This review, to be conducted by a neutral academic or research institution, would help identify what has worked, what needs improvement, and what should be phased out or expanded. Through this time-sensitive and layered approach, CES efforts can move from short-term gestures to long-lasting solutions that rebuild trust, create joint value, and reduce the risk of future violence between Eleme and Okirika.

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Article

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CULTURAL INHIBITIONS IN THE FACE OF CONTEMPORARY GENDER ISSUES IN IKOT ABASI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract

This study examines the persistence of cultural norms that inhibit gender equality in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria. Cultural inhibition remains a significant barrier to addressing contemporary gender issues in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area. Deep-rooted traditional norms and patriarchal values often restrict gender equality, limiting women's participation in socio-economic and political spheres. The study adopted a historical and survey research methods, while data were collected from primary and secondary sources, interviews and focus group discussion were also used. The study revealed that religious and community institutions often uphold doctrines that promote male dominance over women. The social problem which is endemic in nature calls for a critical approach to socio-religious background empowered by holistic education. It is observed that the women have great potentials that will impact positively on the society when it is properly harnessed in relation to that of the men. It is therefore submitted that when an equal opportunity is created for both male and female, the society will benefit as well as develop because every segment will be contributing to its welfare. The study concluded that all forms of inhuman cultural practices, discrimination and gender issues perpetuated must be challenged if the society must protect the status of women for their contribution to the development of Ikot Abasi LGA.

Keywords: Cultural Inhibition, Contemporary Gender Issues, Ikot Abasi Local Government Area, Gender Equality.

Introduction

Ikot Abasi is a patriarchal society. That is, males hold primary power; and dominate in roles of political leadership, primary authority and control of property. Even in many families, males hold authority over the females. In fact, Ikot Abasi society happens to be a place where most decisions are made by the males. Womens actions and inactions are constantly under scrutiny by people especially her male counterparts. The present researcher, as a minister of the gospel who has served for many years in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area and other areas became interested in the topic after critical observation of how the status and privileges of women were undermined, how she was subjugated, denied the rights to inheritance, and property acquisition. Esen (1982) rightly confirmed this in the assertion that: Ikot Abasi society is a male society, created by man for the men, and dominated almost entirely by male interests. Women are seen mostly as appendages with clearly circumscribed roles, which are merely calculated to advance the pervasive interests of the males. More often than not culture is usually the justification wielded for the denial of womens right and the perpetuation of gender inequality in Ikot Abasi. Some of these harmful cultural practices pervasively promote the crimes against the women which includes: female genital mutilation (FGM), domestic violence, child brides or early marriages, rape, denial of inheritance, domestic violence against women, discriminatory Laws against women, legislatives intervention, violent against person, gender inequality, (Mukumu, 2015).

In todays society like Ikot Abasi Local Government Area, the power relations between men and women still undermines womens role in politics, their socio-economic and diplomatic values due to the cultural consideration of women as only relevant to the social side of life, and the cultural composition of the society that perpetuates these gender roles. Notwithstanding, the role of women in the Ikot Abasi Local Government Area has continued to attract the international feminist audience and has been at the centre of discourse for decades. This has been heralded by increased international awareness and legislation on women's right and working modules and resolutions in some places issued by the UN and other international multi-lateral organisations, which Nigeria is a member and has officially adopted. Culture is supposed to be an accepted way of life by a group of people living within the same geographical area. However, this has ironically been used as an instrument of inhibition and oppression against the female gender. Moreover, it is observed that culture ought to be dynamic based on the realities of events occurring in human society but is most of the time arbitrarily applied in its rawness without consideration to the feelings of some members and changes or development taking place globally. Realistically, one expects that culture should be flexible as well as adaptable to the aspirations of its adherents to instill in them a sense of freedom and cohesion which will galvanize them into positive action for the benefit of their society. So, culture should basically serve as a point of solidarity to bring men and women of goodwill together but it is unfortunately misapplied by some people as a weapon to cause division among members of the same family, village, town, and country which eventually breeds hate. In all the situations where culture has been misapplied or abused, the women are usually the victims which place limitations on them. It is based on the above cultural practices which are known to have been used to inhibit the advancement of women generally that prompted this writing. The hope is that, a suitable dynamic cultural setting operational on equitable basis should be created for both genders, to enable them advance and realize their aspirations within the society

Statement of the Research Problem

In all societies there are existing traditional practices and cultures. In terms of birth and lineage, there exist matriarchal and patriarchal cultures. The patriarchal world view is a belief that women are subordinate to men in the workplaces and in the society at large. On the contrary the Matriarchal system is a form of social organization in which the family is headed by a woman. The patriarchal system is one that encloses all right and duties in the agnatic line, men and male, children have control in the lineage. In some countries with matrilineal ideology, for instance, the nuer and Bantu people in central Africa, descent is traced through the female line but the authority is vested on the men because of patriarchal system postulated by culture, women are seen to be priced for and are subjected to marriage and widow inheritance. In Ikot Abasi for instance, the belief and traditional practices and norms of subjecting and seeing them as a mere decoration have been challenged as evidenced in the elevation of the status of women and involvement through education, favorable government policies for the women, entry of women into politics and through the activities of women advocacy groups. But, in spite of the advocacy, not much change has been witnessed in the attitude of the people towards women. This is based on the peoples belief that women are subordinate to men in the society. The cultural bias in favour of men in Ikot Abasi robs the women of confidence in their own abilities and limits their accomplishments despite the great works and contributions of great women in the study area. However, some women have achieved comparatively high statuses to their male counter parts from the family setting to government positions. Despite these, it has been observed that a majority of women in Ikot Abasi are still suffering under patriarchal structure and harmful cultural practice in this contemporary time. The male child is preferred, celebrated and natured as the custodian of the family lineage, while women are valued as disposable property that would only contribute to family through her spouse. Women because of gender issues posed by this culture are denied the right to family property but are compelled to perform all rites as freeborn. Some people consider having a female child as having none, because she will eventually marry out. Widows are required to live a secluded life but widowers can remarry without hitch. It is this gap created through cultural inhibitions that this paper seeks to address.

Objectives of the Study

Cultural inhibitions has generated gender issues in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area and in view of these anomalies, the objectives of this study are to:

- i. critically analyze the Cultural Inhibitions in the face of Contemporary Gender Issues in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area?
- ii. identify factors Inhibiting Gender Issues (Gender inequality) in the Ikot Abasi Local Government Area?
- iii. examine the effects of Cultural beliefs and practices in the face of Contemporary Gender Issues in Ikot Abasi LGA?
- iv. evaluate those Cultural practices or belief that promotes Gender issues in Ikot Abasi LGA?
- v. Determine what are possible solutions to this Cultural Inhibitions in the face of Contemporary Issues in Ikot Abasi LGA; and
- vi. make recommendations for better understanding of Cultural Inhibitions in the face contemporary Gender Issues Ikot Abasi LGA.

Clarification of Terms

Meaning of Culture: “The totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours”, Linton (1945). From the above, it is seen that culture is meant to bring order and meaning to the people living within a particular area. It is clear that culture is designed to assist those living in a society to realize their collective aspirations as well as potentials for the benefit of every member. In a functional society which has regard for its culture every member contributes to its welfare and development as no section is marginalized or looked down on as the inferior that should not be given the chance to express opinion on matters affecting their lives. Another aspect of culture is explored by Meads (1982) who observes that “Culture is an abstraction from the body of learned behavior which a group of people who share the same tradition transmits to their children and in part to adult immigrants who become members of the society. It covers not only the art and sciences, religious and philosophies... but also the system of technology, the political practices, the small intimate habits of daily life cited in Agunloye (2003). The above further buttresses the fact that culture is not static or rubber stamped by the ancestors but an experience that is learned and shared by a group of people who live together. It could be changed or influenced by the events which take place in neighboring communities or by immigrants. The fundamental aspect of culture is its formulation and acceptance by the people through constant practice. It is not meant to be foisted or imposed on the people but emanates through gradual process before being taken as a way of life. Culture is designed to benefit the society and as such should not be used as instrument of intimidation or subjugation or even humiliation as it is being practiced today in some parts of the world where women are oppressed.

Gender: The World Women Development (2012) defines gender as socially and culturally constructed norms and ideologies which determine the behaviour, actions of men and women. For instance, gender roles of men as owners of property, decision makers and heads of household are socially, historically and culturally constructed and have nothing to do with biological differences. “It is important to note the difference between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological differences between male and female while gender refers to social identity and roles. Understanding gender relation and the power dynamics behind them is a prerequisite for understanding individuals asset to and distribution of resources, the ability to make decision and the ways in which women and men, boys and girls are affected by political process and development.

Inhibitions: According Merriam Webster dictionary Inhibition is defined as inner impediment to free activity, expressions, or functioning, something that forbids, restricts.

Research Method

This study adopted both historical and descriptive methods to examine the cultural Inhibitions in the face of contemporary gender issues. This method is fundamental because of its inherent ability to determine the interrelatedness between variables. Conscious of the fact that some values cannot all be tested by the research instrument of social sciences, oral interview, and focus group discussion was also conducted.

Brief Background Information on Ikot Abasi Local Government Area

Ikot Abasi is located in the south west corner of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It is bounded by Oruk Anam Local Government Area in the north, Mkpato Enin and Eastern Obolo Local Government Areas in the east and the Atlantic Ocean in the southern border separating it from Rivers State on the Ikot Abasi River. The Imo River forms the natural boundary in the west separating it from Rivers State. It has present population of 167,966 and occupies a land mass of 334,719km. Ikot Abasi people are part of the Ibibio tribe living in and controlling the southern areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It is a trading centre for the yam tubers, cassava, fish, palm produce and maize. Ikot Abasi is also called Opobo, formerly known as Egwanga or port town in Akwa Ibom State lies near the mouth of the Imo (Opobo) River and is situated at a creek in the mangrove swamps and rain forest of the eastern Niger River.

Theoretical Framework

Social Theories of Gender Relations:

- i. **The Structural-Functional Theory:** It sees role of women in the family as expressive-providing warmth, security, emotional support and stabilization of male adult personalities. They need to take care of children and generally care for the members of the family. To Partson (1955), gender differences help to integrate the society. This is accomplished through the complementarity of roles in family units. Distinctive socialization is therefore required for the two sexes to stamp appropriate gender identity and impart skills needed for adult life. These differences are polar opposite adjectives. They consider male as heirs of the family and female as appendages to be married out. Freud (1973) for instance, saw women as men without penises who envied men for possessing one. Cixous (1981) has described this as phallogocentric or male-dominated language. She maintains that women must rise up to assert themselves in learning and discoveries so as to unblock in society a sexuality that is just as much feminine as masculine. Oakley (1972) berates Talcott notion of the "expression role of women" as an example of intrusion of western male-dominance ideology into scientific analysis.
- ii. **The Conflict Theory:** It holds that gender implies not only how people think and act, but also inequalities in the distribution of wealth, power and privilege between the two sexes. Engels (1972) in his *Origin of the Family* traced the origin of sexual partners, establishment of monogamous marriage and the institutionalization of patriarchal family.
- iii. **The Postmodernists:** This theory contends that women subordination results from the cultural construction of who a man or woman is. They argue that the use of word and language affect our psyche on the definition of men and women. They point to the effectiveness of the capacity of language to shape our thoughts and desires. Postmodernist conceptions of why women are oppressed has been criticized for neglecting the social context of power relations and failing to recognize the systematic oppressions of gender, class and race (Walby,1992). All these theories point to the fact gender roles are specified by culture despite some infiltration from the western education or modernization. These Inhibitions created are still potent in the face of contemporary gender issues. In addition, Meads (1982) who carried out a breaking research on gender. Travelling west to the Tchambuli discovered a culture that, like our own, defined females and males differently.that gender rests on culture".

Some Cultural Inhibitions in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area

Some societies in Ikot Abasi still uphold harmful traditional practices and norms, which portray women as a weaker group and relegate them to inferior positions, without regards to their mental capacity and educational competencies. Evidently, Ikot Abasi women are not only increasingly being marginalised from advancing in their career life but recent studies have shown that they are excluded from having a political career and inheritance rights, which has a significant importance to their economic advancement and sustainability. Although there is no constitutional barrier to the increased participation of women, however, there exist societal and cultural barriers that frustrate participation of women. Etuk (2002) affirms that since we are in a patriarchal society there are cultural Inhibitions that caused gender issues for instance in terms of roles both in the family, Church, society thereby limiting them on what to do. More so, in line with the basic principles of humanity, the rights of women have remained largely a textual postulation in legal documents, with no direct positive impact on the living conditions of the average Nigerian woman.

Going forward in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area gender role is the cultural stereotype of what is masculine and feminine. Their roles vary greatly in different societies, cultures and historical periods, and they depend also on socio-economic factors, age, education, ethnicity and religion. Although deeply rooted in cultural norms, gender roles can be changed over time, since social values and norms are not static. Example of sex roles is that only women can give birth and breastfeed. Examples of gender roles are the expectation of men to be economic providers of the family, and for women to be caregivers in many cultural contexts. However, women prove able to do traditional male jobs as well as men (for example men and women can do housework; men and women can be leaders and managers). Gender role is often abbreviated to gender in literature, without leading to any ambiguity in that context. Most societies have only two distinct gender roles -male and female -and these correspond with biological sexes. Contemporary sociological reference to male and female gender roles typically uses masculinities and femininities in the plural rather than singular, suggesting diversity both within cultures as well as across them. In a personal interview (April, 2024) gave affirmation on the essential point on the issue of birth, the difference between boys and girls is their sex; as they grow up, society gives them different roles, attributes, opportunities, privileges and rights that in the end create the social differences between men and women. Common gender stereotypes and norms include the following examples:

- i. A man is socially superior to the woman.
- ii. A man has the right to assert power over a woman, A man has the right to correct or discipline female behaviour. A woman's freedom should be restricted.
- iii. Physical violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts within an inter-gender relationship. A woman is responsible for making a marriage work. Intimate partner violence is a taboo subject and reporting abuse is forbidden.

It is noteworthy that women who do not conform to gender roles are often considered harsh, controlling or manly even in the place of work. Men also have strict gender stereotypes that typically enforce the idea that men do not have any feminine qualities. Essentially, this means that it is culturally unacceptable for men to display qualities of being emotional, weak, caring or nurturing. This leaves the male stereotypical qualities of athleticism, loudness, strength,

dominance and being in complete control of emotions. While this can negatively affect men's mental and emotional growth, it also encourages men to excel in active sports and in the place of work for fear of being considered feminine or weak. Financially, gender stereotyping seems to affect men positively, but tends to restrict men's creativity and emotional growth.

Male stereotyping promotes masculine norms and principles. These include statements such as: Take it like a man. Be a man about it. These imply "do not display emotions, Be strong willed. In other words, men should be tough in both body and spirit. Physical toughness means never shirking from the threat of physical harm; while displaying emotional toughness requires that men conceal such emotions as fear, sadness, nervousness, and uncertainty. Outward displays of anger, confidence, or stoicism are considered to be far more socially acceptable for men. Men gain the approval of others when they make their careers a priority and pursue occupational fields such as corporate management and politics, which offer opportunities to increase their social and economic status. Finally, Be a man, which is also implies being one of the boys, as a rule of masculinity calls on men to win the respect and admiration of other men and to appear to enjoy a special sense of camaraderie with male peers. Being a man means visibly complying with all masculine norms. Men who are creative and emotional, who don't meet the stereotype, tend to be seen in a negative light. Male gender stereotype results in dilemma and crises for the male.

Factors Inhibiting Gender Issues (Gender Inequality) in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area (LGA)

Discriminatory Culture and Norms: Agbalajobi (2010), postulates that the cultures of many societies are based of subjugating women to men, and undermining their self-esteem. Women are typically associated with domesticity according to Abiola in Lanre (2003), Gender inequality remains pervasive in many dimensions of life, the nature and extent of the discrimination very considerably in Ikot Abasi. Females are discriminated against, even in their own families. Most men are trained not to partake in most domestic chores such as cooking, sweeping, fetching water and firewood; these chores are exclusively left for women. In favor of this, Ihimodu (1995) agrees that women were relegated to the domestic sphere.

- i. **Educational Factors:** Another constraint that hampers women from equal access and counters their quest to participate actively in the society is education. Afolabi (2003) specifiable sates that most women in Nigeria are illiterate, despite the facts that they constitute half of the countrys population. Regardless, of the vital roles they perform in the society; mother, producer, home manager, community organizer, social-cultural and political activities. Anifowose (2004) postulates that most families prefer to send their male child to school, irrespective of the fact that female children also need education.
- ii. **Economic Factors:** Lack of economic incentives is one of the factors preventing women from participating to active politics in Nigeria. Historically, women experience discrimination that put them at a disadvantage economically. Agbalajobi (2009) emphasis that lack of finance brings hindrance to effective female participation in Nigerian Politics. Similarly, a large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterpart. Political campaigns are expensive and require solid financial backing for success. Only a few affluent women have the financial economic power to enroll in political campaigns. Discrimination plays out in the preferential treatment within the job economy.

- iii. **Political Factors and Rule of Law:** According to Anifowose (2004), the perception that democracy would automatically boast gender equality in political participation has not been vindicated after years of return to civilian rule in Nigeria. Specifically Kira (2003) infers that women are unjustifiably discriminated against irrespective of the fact that in the world over today; democracy has become a vital tool for attaining sustainable development. The constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria states that human beings are equal and women possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life. In Ikot Abasi, women are supposed to inherit their late husbands property. Often, these rights are being violated due to one reason or the other. In the same bid, Ogwu (1996) states that statutory and Islamic law provides for womens capacity to inherit assets following the husbands death.

Above all, the patriarchal society sets restrictive parameters on the women's activities, creating a social structure that promotes and condones domestic and sexual violence on women. Radical feminists support this argument and the abolishment of patriarchy Firestone (2003). "Firestone stated that the aim of the radical feminists is to overthrow the ancient and most rigid caste and class system (2003). A system, she argued, is based on gender and has been sustained for thousands of years by relegating the female societal roles through an unwarranted legitimacy and superficial permanence (2003). Broadly, most feminists consider patriarchy as an oppressive social construct that has over the decades justified the marginalisation of women in the political, education, professional, inheritance and family spheres of life Salaam (2003).

Effects of Cultural Inhibitions in the Face of Contemporary Gender Issues in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area (LGA)?

Ikot Abasi, traditionally assigns distinct roles to men and women, with men as breadwinners and decision-makers while women are primarily caregivers and house makers. These roles deeply embedded in cultural practices and inhibit gender equality by limiting womens education and equal opportunities. Some families prioritise male education over female believing that a womans ultimate role is marriage and child-rearing. Also in a typical traditional religious setting, women are not allowed to inherit houses, and lands, as it is seen as the exclusive right of the men to own land properties and houses in the Ikot Abasi LGA. Although, largely a patriarchy society, women are allowed access to communal farm lands to plant, but ownership of properties remains the exclusive right of men. Some states in the north-eastern Nigeria are kicking back against this cultural norm, however, only a scarce percent of women own lands or homes. This gender imbalance between men and women, the child-bride marriages, and the religious dogmas, has created a seemingly lower socio-economic status for women and girls, stigma that has been domesticated. More so, some researchers have outlined the child marriage as the stimulant for the lowest education level in the North as well as Ikot Abasi, adversely impacting on the literacy level of the girl child in Nigeria.

Cultural Beliefs that Promote Gender Issues in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area

At this juncture, it is important to highlight the various aspects of culture which have continued to support the subjugation of women. These include religious, economic and social observances. The understanding will enable us appreciate the seriousness of the issues at stake. Examples are taken from Africa and are applicable to Ikot Abasi Local Government Area which is used as a

case study of this presentation. In a study on Women as Sex Symbols in Nigerian Home Videos Inim (2008) aptly captures this uncomfortable life style that many women are subjected to live when she observes that: The patriarchal image of the woman transcends the cultural and even affects the religions believes of the people... As a result, the woman must live all her life in subjection to mans will". Always neither seen nor heard. To emphasize this, in Saudi Arabia, for instance, a woman is not supposed to walk the streets unaccompanied by a young male. This is supposed to show that she is responsible. The situation is so tense that the women are expected to be always conscious of their movement, dressing and the way they talk or laugh. To say the obvious, their public lives are controlled and monitored by men who are always eager to accuse them of wrong doing. Her mode of dressing which involves her covering all parts of her body serves as a means of protection for the man. It is believed that all of a womans body is specially created to lure men. Therefore, to protect him from sinning the source of temptation has to be covered, irrespective of her feeling about it. This mode of dressing is also meant to testify to her delicate, subdued and submissive nature.

From the above, one can see the difficult life style that many women are forced to live in order to be allowed to exist in their society. They move about as mere beings that have no right to express themselves in their religious and social spheres. They live to satisfy the demands placed on them by religion in order to not get into trouble with the men who determine their fate. Again, many women are used as mere objects to be discarded at any time without honours and consideration. This situation is exacerbated if/when their husband dies and they become widows. For example, the widow is required to shave her hair as a mark or sign to prove that she is mourning her dead husband. However, interviewed (April, 2024) conducted revealed that humiliation and controversies which accompany this shaving rite is better imagined than witnessed. The focus group discussion lends credence to the above fact that: This is the moment dreaded by every Ikot Abasi woman, the moment when she sacrifices her possessions (as gifts to her in-laws), her personality, her dignity. If she expresses any uneasiness she is labeled a witch and may even be accused of being responsible for the death of the husband. This will in turn prompt yet another purification rite to prove her innocence. Again, Etuk (2002) reiterated a similar event that took place in one the clans in Ikot Abasi, about two widows, Agnes and Beatrice who were isolated in a tent to discourage them from direct link or interaction with their sympathizers. Beatrice describes their ordeal and the humiliation they were subjected to when their husbands died, Our sisters-in-laws undo our hair.

Possible Solutions to these Cultural Inhibitions in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area

Women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, companions to be flattered or calmed with promises. Women are the nations primary, fundamental root from which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country. From the above experience, many have come to the realization that the contributions of the women to the development of the family and nation can no longer be ignored but should be recognized and celebrated. Democracy anywhere in the world is the prerogative of the people. This is because sovereignty they said belongs to the people (women inclusive). It is therefore important that the act of Governance should be diversified to capture the interest of women through adequate representation. First of all, the United Nations General Assembly should reaffirm its convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against

Women (CEDAW) thereby making it compulsory for all nations of the world to adopt as cardinal objectives of its constitutions. Violation of this convention in any form should be meted with strident sanctions. Again, relevant clauses of the Beijing Conference should be reactivated giving specific rights to women. This way, the personality and character of women will be respected. Second, Societal obstacles of religion, tradition and other obnoxious beliefs must be broken, women should not be domesticated, they have to enjoy right to work and associated benefits as men. They along with men have to have access to free and functional education and health care, electoral process and contest must not be a preserve of the rich. All these are parts of what can create level playing ground for both men and women. However, the reality is that those stated preconditions could only ultimately be secured when patriarchy is challenged.

Conclusion

This paper mainly points out some of the cultural practices which inhibit the advancement of most women in their struggles and sufferings to live a better life. It is also based on the imbalance found in the relationships between men and women which usually results in the domination of the female gender through cultural practices initiated by men and imposed on the women as a means of subjugating them. It is observed that culture which ought to be used for social harmony is twisted in favour of the men at the detriment of the women and this brings about ill feelings and misunderstanding in the society. It is clear that men have continued to feel that it is their birthright to rule and dominate the women in every sphere of human endeavours. In many parts of the world especially Nigeria, women are subjugated as well as manipulated in the guise of cultural observances which usually discomfort them. They are relegated to the background without being given the opportunity to express opinion in matters concerning them. Our cultural paradigm seems to place limit on the female gender and suggests that no matter how a woman is highly favored she cannot aspire to be a King, Emir, Oba, Imam or even a Priest because culture forbids her from making such an attempt without consideration to her feelings.

Recommendations

- i. There should be serious efforts for women advocacy in Government through policy and education on combating Cultural practices, that oppresses and Inhibit women, and such cultural taboos should be challenged and discouraged.
- ii. Parents must let the girl-child understand the importance of education.
- iii. Traditional Rulers/Leaders should carry out more teachings and campaigns against obnoxious cultural practices that discriminates women in the society and also from inheriting properties of their deceased husbands.
- iv. Religious Institutions should educate the society the implications of the harmful cultural practices on gender issues.
- v. Women should be encouraged to join cooperative societies that provide financial aid to small business women. Education of girl child should be promoted.
- vi. Government/Pressure groups/Media should intensify their efforts to reduce patriarchal tendencies on women by implementing in all honesty the 35% affirmative order of women's inclusion in the affairs of government.

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Article

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EXPLORING PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AN AFRICAN BURIAL TRADITION

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Abstract

The paper sets out to illustrate the role that anthropology can play in intervening development crises in Africa. It does so by taking on an aspect of anthropology known as philosophical anthropology, a philosophical investigation that combines the practical study of man with the theoretical (conceptual study) to provide enduring insights into the human mode of being. The paper suggests that this study is relevant to understanding the dominant passions that determine and define the quality of the growth of the African person. In particular, the work takes on cultural expressions in Africa and examines how and why particular forms of cultural expressions have found a space in modern traditions while others have not. It uses the example of the burial tradition in the Benin culture of Edo State, Nigeria, to illustrate. Textual reviews and interviews were employed to collect the data for the study. The study concludes with the view that philosophical anthropology can provide valuable insights into human advancement in Africa and the quality of the growth of the human person in Africa and proposes more research in this direction.

Keywords: Philosophy, Anthropology; Development; Culture, Burial tradition

Introduction

Over time, development in Africa has been interpreted from various points of view - economic, political, cultural, etc. Within the different disciplines that define these interpretations, two schools of thought can be delineated. The first school of thought holds that development in

Africa is a form of underdevelopment that is externally caused. For this school of thought, the problem of development which is upheld as a form of underdevelopment in Africa arises from the fact that Africa has been “invented” (Mudimbe,1988) and re-designed by the western world, who, since the advent of modernity in their culture have wanted to make Africa an appendage in world history. This position is held by African scholars such as Walter Rodney (1973), Chinweizu (1978) and Samir Amin (1975;1976;1977;1998). For these scholars, Africa’s problem of underdevelopment is externally induced, and the notion and goal of development is externally derived and is principally geared towards the benefit of metropolitan economies of the imperial north. As a result of this, Africa’s attempt at development as has been held by these scholars as a project in service and support of imperialism and “peripherization of the so-called Third World” (C.O. Uroh,1998). They suggest that the first step towards directing the course of development to an African advantage is to redefine development within the demands of African culture and modernity through a form of decolonization (mental or structural), decentralization and de-westernization.

The second major school of thought that attempts to characterize African underdevelopment holds the view that Africa’s development amounts to underdevelopment and that this is because ideas, ideals, capitals and structures through which Africans conceptualize development are not homegrown enough and for this reason do not fall within the cultural potentials and prisms of the African world. The view here, somehow also enshrouded in the first school of thought, is that Africa’s problem of underdevelopment is not as a result of the hegemony of the world order by the North but the failure of African people to evolve and negotiate development within the cultural resources of African society. This idea of development is what is represented by the call for indigenous formulas to development in Africa. Champions of this school of thought include notable African scholars such as: Paulin Hountondji (1997) and Joseph Ki-Zerbro (1984;1995). Although Hountondji subscribes to this school of thought, it must be noted that his emphasis amounts to what he called an African critical science of thought in relation to development in Africa. This author has also advertised the view that, endogenous development is relevant as it relates to corruption and underdevelopment, with the view that ideas and strategies that are employed to promote a corrupt-free African society are not indigenous enough and as such cannot be expected to yield outstanding political dividends (Ugwuanyi, 2009), hence, he has recommended an African solution to the problem of corruption.

This work is not tailored towards addressing the debate on development. The focus of the work is to provide a fresh insight on development in Africa by looking at the dynamics of human nature and the extent to which human desires, tendencies, tastes, dispositions, culture, values and priorities influence the choice around which development is conceived and in which direction decisions and options are explored. The aim of the work is that by looking at the inner human desires that influence development options in Africa, an insight into the cause of development can be gained. To achieve this, the instance of a modernized tradition of burial in Edo state, Nigeria was applied in the work. The work does not claim that this is the only part of Nigeria/Africa where this is obtainable but holds that it a plausible example to engage a form of tradition that has been considerably modernized and developed. To this end, will the work (i) articulate the meaning of philosophical anthropology of development? It then proceeds to discuss (ii) the meaning of development and discusses how it is basically human and arises from

human drives and passions. Next, the work will (iii) illustrate its claims through the burial tradition in Benin-Nigerian Culture. It will (iv) proceed to discuss the burial tradition in Benin as an illustration of modern economic status and (v) engage in some philosophical reflections on these as an example of philosophical anthropology of development.

What is Philosophical Anthropology of Development?

A cogent way to begin this work is to engage the idea of philosophical anthropology of development by articulating (a) the idea of philosophical anthropology (b) the idea of anthropology of development and then (c) proceed to articulate the meaning of philosophical anthropology of development. (a) Philosophical anthropology is the study that applies philosophical reflection on the human phenomenon by way of translating or transferring the empirical outcomes of thoughts on the human idea to theoretical outcomes. According to Battista (1985:11) philosophical anthropology proceeds “from the phenomena to the causes”. The implication of this is that philosophical anthropology seeks to engage the human nature by studying the manifestations of human nature and how this induces some valuable meaning about the human phenomenon. This method of studying the human phenomenon is not new to scholarship, although it did not acquire such a name from the onset. In the modern era of western scholarship and learning, a host of thinkers made the human species the desideratum for interpreting the world whose influence persists till today, and this meant an effort to understand the human phenomenon that appeals to a form of philosophical anthropology. For instance, in the western tradition of thought, Hume wanted to provide what he called the “science of man” (cited in S.E. Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 1989:281) to provide a view of what ways man could be best interpreted. In Kant, the idea of anthropology blossomed, and this method of investigating man achieved its greatest contribution. This is arising from the fact that Kant introduced specific questions around which these attempts could be weighed and determined. In his work *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1778), Kant advanced four questions in terms of which the idea, meaning and value of an enquiry into man could be determined: (i) what can I know? (ii) what must I do? (iii) what can I hope for? (iv) what is man? (cited in Battista Mondin, p.18). Among these questions, what appears most valuable for our attempt to establish a philosophical anthropology of development is the question, *what can I hope for?* Applied within the context of the cultural tradition the following questions could be formulated in favour of philosophical anthropology: what can I, by approving one idea of development over and above the other, hope for? What can I, by defining life as celebrating the dead, hope (or not hope) for?

(b) Anthropology of development seeks to engage development through anthropological perspectives. Its focus is on how development is understood by different human communities. It then applies this to question the assumptions behind these development models. The University of Melbourne handbook on Anthropology of development (<https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au/2019/subjects/devt90056> accessed July 2025) states that anthropology of development comprises “anthropological critiques of Development culture, assumptions, models and policies; the efforts of anthropologists to place the experiences and viewpoints of ordinary people in sites of Development at the centre of Development research and practice; and key ideas in the Anthropology of Development—from the ‘sub-culture of poverty’ thesis to economic substantivism to Dependency and World Systems Theory, and to

Post-structuralist approaches to understanding Development”. From the foregoing, it can be upheld that anthropology of development arises from and keys into the Western paradigm of development. Though it is not the mission of this work to debate this model of development, it is important to note that the western model of development is not the only plausible model of development. Development should involve the values and ideals of a given society in so far as this promotes the human idea in a positive direction.

(c) What then is philosophical anthropology of development? It is common to read about Philosophical Anthropology, but it is not common to read about Philosophical Anthropology of Development. Thus, this work claims to be the first to advance thoughts in philosophical anthropology in this direction. By philosophical anthropology of development is meant a unitive account of human nature to locate and reflect on the direction in which it is advancing. It is the application of anthropological data to interpret human passions, desires, aspirations, values and principles to read the forms of thought around which human development and advancement is upheld. Philosophical anthropology of development engages the human idea from the inner structures and properties of consciousness - the wills, the intellect, the passions, the emotions, to see how growth and development are influenced and how and why development choices and options are made in one direction and not in another. It addresses such questions as why a given culture is attracted to one form of advancement more than the other and the role of human will and choice for this.

Often, the interplay between human nature and the environment in the formulation of culture and the place of same in the construction of significant social ideals around which development is conceived and promoted is often under-discussed in development debates in Africa. This option often ignores the fact that development is principally human and that human development stands at the heart of what other aspects of development - social, economic, political, etc. are conceived. This work seeks to fill this gap by providing views that illustrate the influence of culture and tradition on development desires in Africa. It does this through the African tradition of burial ceremony in a given cultural unit of Africa. The argument is that by looking at development in these terms, we could create a role for philosophical anthropology in Africa - that is, a study that locates the relevance of philosophical anthropology in the study of development in Africa. The work, therefore, is not a project in cultural or social anthropology but an exercise in philosophical anthropology - that is one which attempts to study man from his natural givens or the basics of his nature and applies this to determine the passions that influence development drives. What is implied here is a study which by examining a people's form of life - cultures, values, dispositions, and ideals will be able to provide a clue to the dominant passion that defines their culture and worldview and suggest the way this passion can be influenced to yield greater developmental benefits. To this, I apply the instance of burial in Benin culture of Nigeria.

To achieve the goals of this study then, the work (i) discusses development as a cultural/human drive that defines the worth and relevance of the human person and has achieved a form of modernity in African culture and analyze how and why this is the case. Here, I shall cite the instance of burial ceremony among the Benin - a prominent cultural group in Nigeria and demonstrate how it plays this role. Thereafter, I shall (ii) provide an interpretation of this culture with a critical appraisal and the passion which, in my view, it represents and what it suggests to the anthropology of development. In doing this, I shall (iii) demonstrate how such

a study should lead to philosophical anthropology of development. I shall be faithful to the method of philosophical anthropology by proceeding “from the phenomena to the causes” (Battista Mondin, 1985:11) and by so doing locate the dominant passions and desires that define the human nature in the African world. My claim is that if we can understand how inner passions influence developmental choices, we can more reliably chart development strategies suited to Africa.

Development as Human Desire and Drive

The first position around which one can advance a thesis on development is that development is basically a human drive that seeks to express human dreams and passions in a chosen direction. By development is implied a qualitative increase and growth of an item. By development is also implied the wider dimensions of development such as political, economic, social and moral dimensions of the term. Because it arises from some human drive, development in the final analysis is directed at man and aims at advancing the human personality. For this reason, development must be seen and judged according to how or whether it has addressed the need for improved quality of the human person. It is perhaps for this reason that Ade Ajayi (1999) states that “development is about the people” and Joseph Ki Zerbro (2007) suggests that “to develop is to multiply one’s possibilities of liberating choices”. The views expressed here imply that development is basically human and for human ends. This position appears to have the best expression in the views of Julius Nyerere. According to Nyerere (1974):

Roads, buildings, the increase of the crop output, and other things of this nature are not development: they are tools of development. A new road extends a man’s freedom if he travels upon it. An increase in the number of school buildings can be and are being used, to develop the minds and the understanding of the people. An increase in the output of wheat, maize or beans is only development if it leads to the better nutrition of the people. An expansion of the cotton, coffee or sisal crop is development only if these things can be sold, and the money used for other things which improve the health, comfort and understanding of the people. Development which is not development of the people may be of interest to historians in the year 3,000: it is relevant to the future which is being created (Nyerere cited in Oladipo, 2009:96).

Following these submissions, it can be argued that development must be that which is done in defense of or for the promotion of human nature in a positive direction, and that it must advance human culture and values since cultures and values themselves are the expression of the desires that are dominant passions in man. To seek to achieve development must amount to form qualitative growth and amount to “growth plus change” (United Nations, 1962 cited in Ibanga Ikpe, 1999). This amounts to saying that development must lead to human growth and advancement or the growth of an item. But how can inner passions and desires which are the engine of development and development choices be known and/or measured? Development desires are often known through items of culture that grow, emphasized and modernized by a given culture. In the next part of this work, I will illustrate this with the burial tradition among

the Benin - an Edo culture of Nigeria. I do not imply that they are the only people with such culture, but I used them as an illustrative case for reasons explained elsewhere in this work.

Development as Modernization of Culture: An Illustration through Burial Tradition in Benin - Nigerian Culture

In the Benin culture of modern Nigeria, burial ceremonies advertise wealth and fulfillment, such that they have become a measure of participation in the modernization of culture and its associated values. This scholar observed this trend during the three years he lived in Benin City (2003-2006) and carried out some participant observation study of the tradition. Hence this work has applied it to demonstrate the example of a traditional culture that has found a place in modernity. This work does not claim that this is the only place where this culture obtains. In other African ethnic groups in Nigeria and Ghana, etc., it is common to see elaborate cultural burials sometimes advertised through billboards and radio advertisements. In discussing burial in the Benin tradition, we shall also look at the event within two periods of Benin history: the ancient period or what Uyi Eweka calls “the unadulterated original version” and the modern period or what we can call the adulterated version. We shall also limit our expository analysis to the burial of elderly people or aged parents since this is the burial celebrated by tradition. This is because burial in Benin tradition is in different forms. The burials of the young people do not demand the same rites and rituals as the burials of the aged people. As R.E. Bradbury aptly puts it:

Edo attitudes to death depend upon the degree to which the deceased has fulfilled his social destiny. The older a man is, the more descendants he has, the higher his rank and prestige, the more acceptable does his death become. (Bradbury 1973:213).

We may also add that, according to the Benins (Benins are also known as Edos as applied by Bradbury above) the wealthier the dead person was during his or her lifetime, the merrier the burial rites. In the light of the above, it can then be safe to argue that the acceptable death in Benin culture is the death of an elder “whether or not,” as Ademole Iyi-Eweka says “the deceased had children” (Edo Anthropology, www.raceandhistory.com).

In the original pattern of burial, what Ademola Iyi-Eweka calls the “unadulterated original versions” (Edo Anthropology, *ibid*), the first aspect of the burial (or interment rites) of an elder as documented by R.E. Bradbury (1973), a pioneer researcher on Benin culture begins with washing the corpse. The dead body is laid on a mat, and the siblings are asked to sprinkle the corpse with a sponge (or bundle of fibre). After this, the fingernails of the dead are cut, and the head is shaved. The hair and the bits of nails, together with “lineages with the bowl and sponge” (Bradbury p.217) are then handed to the eldest son. Thereafter, the eldest son provides a goat which is killed to honour the deceased. A soup is then made from the goat to be eaten by all. Thereafter, the *ibhi-orinhbin* (interpreted to mean key agents of the burial ceremony) come to greet the corpse with their gifts in the order of seniority, presenting a piece of cloth and token of money as offering. The next stage of the interment is grave digging. An elder in the lineage selects a portion and the eldest son strikes the spot seven times with a hoe signifying a journey to the beyond. Thereafter, the corpse is buried with the legs pointing to the west. This is followed by a prayer said by the eldest man or woman of the lineage. Thereafter,

the children led by the eldest son, throw native chalk and cowries into the grave, praying for the deceased. This is followed by uncontrollable cries and wails. But the eldest son may not weep after all. He will exude pride and arrogance saying "Behold what I am doing for my father! May my son do same for me" (Bradbury P. 220). This is a common fashion of burial in Benin, "common to all Edo clans" (Ademola-Eweka *ibid*).

In summary, this is the interment rite. This is followed by the second burial or what is known as funeral ceremony. But before we discuss this, it is pertinent to clarify certain items that form part of the interment rites. This is because they provide insight on the idea behind the second burial or funeral rites. These items include: (i) Killing of a goat (ii) Use of white cloth (iii) Laying of the corpse with legs pointing to the west (iv) the involvement of *Igele* age grade and why they bury the dead. The killing of a goat is to pacify the dead man. It is meant to pacify the dead man and give him a place among the ancestors. By killing a goat, it is believed that his spirit would be pleased enough and would not wander around looking for souls to devour by way of inviting more deaths on the family. The goat is also believed to honour the deceased's waist or his reproductive ability through which he begot his children. In the same vein, the use of white cloth in interment is meant to symbolize "ritual purity and peace" (Bradbury p. 218). It is also believed that by this process, a peaceful re-union would be achieved between the dead and the ancestors, as this will ensure that the dead man when he ascends the revered position of an ancestor treats the children with peace and fatherly care and concern. We can also interpret this to mean: "new cloth, new role, new plain of relationship" (Bradbury p. 218). That the corpse is lowered with legs pointing to the west is a physical demonstration of a belief in the sea as the route to the land of the spirit. The west leads to *Ughoton*, a popular port in Benin. Just as any journey is defined by a beginning, embarking on the journey through this port defines a journey to the sacred land of the ancestors.

Finally, the *Igele* age grade is the group that inters the dead. They are believed to be linked with *Ighele-Erinbhin* spirit who "hinders the deceased's journey...to the land of the spirits" (Bradbury p.218). They are believed to be "the spirits of men who died in their prime and have not received proper burial" (Bradbury, p. 218), so their role in the internment of the dead arises from their perceived ability to clear the path to a peaceful journey to the land of the spirit for the dead. From the foregoing, it can then be seen that the rigours of burial in Benin tradition is one that defines the expectations of the dead. It is one that invites the ancestors to clear and safeguard the path of the dead to the ancestral home beyond. This, again, defines the second burial rites in Benin also known as funeral rites. We shall now turn to this: The second aspect of burial in Benin tradition is a symbolic extension of the first. According to Bradbury, this aspect is made of different rites. The first aspect is the killing of the goat near the grave of the dead. This is a way of celebrating his safe passage to the land of the ancestors. It may also be interpreted to mean a festival that welcomes the dead elder back to the land of the dead as an ancestor. The second phase is known as *Izakhwe*. This ceremony signifies "the incorporation of the deceased into the collectivity of the dead lineage elders" (Bradbury, p.222) and the formal approval of the ascension of his son to the throne of his father. It is for this reason that the right arm of the slaughtered animal (goat or cow, if the man is titled) is given to the first son.

The third phase is a dancing procession round the town in distinct groups, in fanciful batches led by the first son. During this event a young boy carries the *Okun*, a box containing carved images, beads, mirrors and other objects. This event suggests that the dead elder has

crossed the world of spirits to other side where he is already wealthy. At the end of this phase, the bowl containing the hair and nail parings of the dead man (covered with a white cloth) is buried. This is followed by *Asha* and *Isumerhanfua*. This is the wake keep which lasts till the following dawn. A relation or son of the dead man is made to sit down, well dressed and adored. He sits representing the dead man. He is greeted with gifts, and he returns their gesture with anything that suggests blessing, goodwill and farewell, as he goes to *Erinbhin* or land of the spirit to rest. The last event in the funeral rites is the praying session around the *ukhuhe* (a carved piece of wood). During this session, a carved stave is placed upright on the floor on which the people pay their homage and prayers. It is meant to represent the dead man whom they now bid farewell. The above rites which can be conveniently described as a traditional pattern of the burial in Benin however have been modernized considerably. Like all cultural variables that have come under the influence of modernity, it has come to be associated with modern instruments, be they scientific, social or otherwise. It is for this reason that it has come to stand and serve as a symbol of wealth and development around modernity in Benin. Apart from the use of modern mortuaries, there is overwhelming emphasis on the social weight of the event as the hallmark of proper burials.

Burial Tradition in Benin as an illustration of Modern Economic Status

In its modernized version, burial ceremonies in Benin have become important items that define faithfulness to tradition, economic status, social strength, and relevance. The burial of a loved one, particularly, an aged parent (grandparent or great grandparent) serves as reliable evidence of wealth and economic advancement. This is particularly the case among indigenes of Benin ethnic group in the Diaspora. The modern trends in burial ceremonies in Benin are characterized by mortuary services, employment of undertakers, media advertisements, hiring of recognized artists and comedians, etc., and other cultural variables that define it as evidence of wealth and economic status. Burial ceremonies in Benin, now, function as carnivals to the extent that some exceptionally rich sons of Benin keep their dead relatives in mortuaries for up to three months in preparation for the events. In some instances, wealthy sons of Benin are known to have erected houses afresh or renovated old ones in preparation for burials. This is notwithstanding the penury that may have characterized the life of the dead elder while alive. This modern tradition is not restricted to the wealthy but to the aged in general. As a result, an extended relation of a dead elder may be tempted to intervene to ensure that he or she gets a befitting burial rite. The mere fact of attaining an old age is a strong social force that attracts an adequate basis for elaborate burial.

The other motivating factor is the assurance that proper burial of an elder gives them a peaceful abode in the spirit world; hence, it prevents their spirits from wandering in this physical world causing havoc among the living. In 2006, it was widely reported in the local media in Benin City, where this researcher lived at the time, of a prominent Benin chief also known as Bob Izua who traveled to the United States of America to purchase an ambulance estimated to have cost N20,000,000 naira (\$133,333) for the burial of his aged mother. In addition to this, he is known to have built a mausoleum with as much as N10, 000,000 naira for the same burial, just as he donated a bus worth N20,000,000 to a student-based organization in a higher institution to mark the same event. The hordes of artists at this event are estimated to have charged over N5,000,000. The result is that a total estimate of what it cost him to bury his

aged mother stood around N55,000,000. (\$366,666). Some of these claims were made by the chief in the electronic media as witnessed by the researcher. Although the chief who conducted this burial is based in Benin, his business partners and associates are widely believed to be Benins in Diaspora who, as is believed among the residents of Benin, give him links and connections for his business. Such lavish spending on burials is common in Benin and much more the case when it involves a Benin in Diaspora that is, an indigene of Benin living and working outside Nigeria. The above instance is just one out of many lavish spendings that define burial ceremony in Benin. It would almost contradict the ethics of Benin culture now for one to celebrate the burial of an aged parent with modest spending.

This extravagant display of wealth spans nearly through all the rites of burial in Benin. In an interview with Samson Omokaro of Sam Home Video Recording Ventures along Jesus Christ Road, Upper Sakpomba Road, Benin City, the video expert volunteered that at least two burial ceremonies attract his coverage every weekend and for each burial, he charges up to N10,000. When the burial involves wealthy sons of Benin, the charge is often as high as N20,000. When the burial involves emigrant Benin sons in diaspora the charge is up to N40,000.

Other important revelations from the video expert indicate that burial ceremonies organized by Benin sons and daughters in diaspora are more expensive than those conducted by home-based Benins. This is because Benins in diaspora often come with their colleagues who display wealth during the event. In some instances, dollars (up to \$10) are used to spray on performers at intervals during the ceremony and this is definitely more rewarding than the local currency of twenty naira (N20) or fifty Naira (N50) or even N100.00 (Hundred Naira) that are sprayed during burials sponsored and funded by local Benin indigenes, that is those living and working within Benin or in Nigeria. This is given the fact that \$10 is about N1500 at the moment. With the exchange rate of N150 to a dollar, a performer who is lucky to have been sprayed on up to \$200 would have earned N30,000 just for performing in a burial ceremony. This is far from the meagre sum of N4,000 he would possibly earn for the same event when organized by a Benin indigene based in Nigeria. Apart from this instant display of wealth during the dancing period, the quality of entertainment which reveals itself in the kind of foods and drinks served during funeral ceremonies all serve to distinguish a burial conducted by a foreign-based Benin from one conducted by Benin-based indigenes.

Dr. Sunday Elusoji, owner and proprietor of Our Hospital Ikpoba Hill Benin City, also provides additional information that justifies the claim that gives insight to the high cost of burials in Benin at the moment. In an interview with this author, he volunteered that corpses of elderly people are often kept for about one month on the average in addition to an embalment fee of six thousand naira and a mortuary fee of two hundred naira per day. His charge is also similar to those of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital and Central Hospital Benin City which charge six thousand naira and a mortuary fee of two hundred naira per day and six thousand naira and a mortuary fee of one hundred naira respectively. Further studies show that while Benins who earn their wealth within the Nigerian economic space may only preserve corpses in the mortuary for a month, Benins in diaspora sometimes exceed this just to emphasize their economic privilege. This is also evident in the quality of media coverage that precedes such events. For instance, while a few minutes obituary announcement may serve for a home-based Benin, that of a Benin in diaspora may take as much as ten minutes.

Similarly, burials in Benin at the moment involve the services of professional undertakers. At burial scenes in Benin, it is customary to see undertakers handle the various functions that relate to interment. They would often carry the coffin and dance to the excitement of the people before laying the corpse to rest. They are often many with a single dressing code that suggests that they operate more or less like a club of undertakers. Although this data were gathered over a decade ago, the culture of burial ceremony is still growing. In a recent interview with Ernest Ejiade-a sociologist who lives in Benin city on the state of burial ceremony popularly called *Obeto* in Benin, I posed the following questions:

(1) Does *Obeto* still hold in Benin. (2) Do people still apply the main roads or streets and close roads when they are doing *Obeto* or is *Obeto* restricted to people's compound now? (3) What is the average cost of videoing *Obeto* in Benin at the moment? (4) Do people still spray moment on dancers and what currency do they use? Do they spray in dollars or naira and what unit N1000, N500, N200, etc.

He responded:

(1) *Obeto* still holds in Benin., (2) they do, some use public school, block roads, personal compound. (3) around N250,000, though some spend millions of naira on just the video (4) they still spray money on dancers. They spray both in naira, dollars, and pounds, the least denomination you can spray in *Obeto* is N100 to N1000. With this era of internet fraud (Yahoo Yahoo), some of these boys buy flashy cars for their parents' burial, you see them with convoy, with even soldiers guiding them, some with police, or Edo security network.

The above details suggest the influence of modernity and modernization on burial tradition in Benin. They also suggest that migration to advanced economies of the world is a factor that has radically influenced burial traditions in Benin and provide insights on how the values are favoured by modernity in Benin culture.

Engaging the Burial Tradition in Benin through Philosophical Anthropology of Development

Arising from the above study, one could argue that burial ceremonies in Benin evidence economic weight and social advancement. The modern components of burial in Benin - including mortuary and embalment services, media advertisements of burial ceremonies, employment of undertakers, and use of foreign currencies as discussed earlier justify this claim. This ethic of grandeur as a measure of advertising wealth and economic growth is not peculiar to the Benin society as much as it reflects the culture of entire modern Nigerian society. Among the Igbos, a neighboring ethnic group in Nigeria, a similar trend exists in marriage ceremonies where wealth and grandeur are prominently displayed. In modern Nigeria, economic well-being is often judged by one's ability to display wealth - through lavish marriage ceremonies, generous donations at events, purchasing luxury homes and vehicles, and using wealth to acquire political influence. However, Benin culture differs in that it is organized around the ritual honoring of the dead. For example, among the people of Benin, high importance is attached to wearing beads - even by non-titled community members (a culture that has also been adopted by other neighbouring cultural groups who are historically linked to them such as Esans). Among the

people of Benin, beads serve as a customary dress code and symbol of honour and royalty. While other cultural segments of Nigerian society such as the Igbos and the Yorubas reserve beads for a class of the society, it is common to see youths wear beads in Benin. Although beads were not originally worn by all, the ethic of grandeur has modernized this cultural practice. Although beads originally were not meant to be a dressing outfit for all, the ethic of grandeur has in modern times adapted this culture. In 2006, a media report on the Independent Television Station in Benin reported that the king of Benin had issued a warning against the wearing of beads by youths (perhaps in reaction to the dressing code of a young man had featured for a programme at the *Independent Television Station* a few days earlier). However, despite this official decree, bead wearing remains a popular practice among the Edo people. It follows that one of Benin's most enduring traditions is the burial of an aged parent. This custom even permits individuals to block major streets in Benin for up to three days or more to host funeral guests. This conventional privilege is unique to funerals and is not granted to organizers of other public events such as religious ceremonies or political rallies.

From this exploration of Benin burial traditions and the implied philosophy of grandeur, several key questions arise: (i) What does this suggest in the attempt to apply anthropology to the study of development through the Benin cultural context? (ii) Can we, through this knowledge, foster an anthropological framework that intervenes in African epistemology and accounts for cultural evolution? (iii) Why is one aspect of cultural tradition more emphasized than others despite the adverse effect it may have on development? These issues give valid insight into the fluidity of the human phenomenon and specifics of the human species. By fluidity of the human phenomenon, I refer to the ways in which human capacities - such as emotion, desire, and feeling - are cultivated and expressed. By the specifics of the human species, I refer to those fundamental aspects of human nature - such as will, soul, and spirit - that are persistent across contexts. Put bluntly, the need to apply philosophical anthropology in the study of the cultural traditions of Africa, especially in relation to development, is to engage in a firmer and more reliable project of studying the human nature; to see in what terms the inner human spirit is realized in Africa *and why* it is the case. It is to attempt to determine the ideals that define and direct the growth of the human phenomenon in Africa and to see in what terms the idea of development is conceived, firstly, as it relates to the human person and secondly, as it relates to the state or society which inhabits the individual and the further demands that may be implied by the project. Assuming that Africans define fulfillment by the number of children they can father (such as is the case at the moment) and not in terms of the wider, universal or global relevance the children should give to his or her name it becomes important to attempt to probe the underlying human passions that stand at the background to this idea of life and other factors that co-operate to sustain this idea of life and how it is valued within an African context.

Conversely, this work leads us to ask: What are the specific and dominant passions in humans that stimulate the will to celebrate the dead, and how can understanding their origins in the African context direct thought to a more developmental dividend? Is it part of the evolution of human nature in African world because of which now it has been so quickly adapted to modernity comparatively better than what is the case with other values and ideals such as quality life, and demand on human rights the absence of which has fueled issues such as poverty, child labour, etc? The claim of this work is that there is the need to locate the inner

passions and choices that has found a space in the development ethics of African life as way of advancing the anthropology of development through the African world. I do not mean that this may not be the case elsewhere, but I suggest that some social traditions may have been advanced more than others in the African world, and this advocates for a philosophical anthropology of development that probes this. For example, comparatively speaking, it can be held that African societies have produced very great individuals by many good measures within the context of modernity. It can also be held that African societies have produced very great families in terms of applying the family ethics to advance the society positively. But this cannot be said of African nation states. The quality of advancement in these areas is still weak, at least within the threshold of modernity. This makes it urgent to locate the lack of connectivity in development and advancement and why the passion to advance civic life appears to have been mainstreamed into modernity in Africa comparatively more than civil life at least drawing from the instance applied for this study.

Conclusion

This work sets out to demonstrate the role anthropology can play in addressing development crises in Africa. It did so by engaging in an aspect of anthropology known as philosophical anthropology, and by discussing the specific role it can play in this context. Our study has demonstrated why and how philosophical anthropology can - and should - find a space in the developmental aspirations and institutional systems of modern Africa. Using the instance of burial traditions in Benin culture of Nigeria - where burial ceremonies have become significant makers of cultural fidelity, high economic status and social relevance, the study has shown how and why particular forms of cultural expressions have secured a space in modern traditions. The paper interrogated the dominant passions underpinning these cultural expressions and examined the extent to which such passions shape the developmental imperatives of the African. The paper recommends applying philosophical anthropology to analyze the prevailing desires, the cultural traditions that shape the interests of the modern African and to evaluate the extent to which this such desires would promote the course of development. This effort promises important results. First it locates the quality of the human project in Africa and the quality of the growth of the human person in Africa. Second, it interrogates the extent to which the African could be said to be investing his or her energy in the right direction; that is in the way it would yield greater dividend to African society. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it opens a new trajectory for applying anthropological studies to guide development discourse. It is common to encounter works in philosophical anthropology or in the philosophy of development. However, what has not received substantial scholarly attention is the application of philosophical anthropology to development studies. It is by this attempt that we believe we are making a novel contribution to knowledge.

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Article

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IMPACT OF AI-DRIVEN ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies has redefined administrative processes across organizations globally, with growing interest in its application within developing countries such as Nigeria. This study investigated the impact of AI-driven administrative technology on organizational performance in Nigeria. Four research objectives guided the study. Correspondingly, four research questions and three null hypotheses were formulated. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 200 administrative staff from 10 organizations across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled *AI-Driven Administrative Technology Impact Questionnaire (AIDATIQ)*, which was validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.86$). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions, while regression analysis tested the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level using SPSS version 25. Findings revealed that AI technologies were moderately adopted, primarily for internal operations such as document management and attendance tracking. AI was found to significantly enhance administrative efficiency by reducing task completion time, minimizing human error, and improving scalability. AI also positively influenced decision-making, especially in providing real-time insights and forecasting, though some areas like risk assessment showed lower trust. Additionally, challenges such as poor infrastructure, high implementation costs, low technical capacity, and internet limitations were found to significantly hinder AI implementation. Based on these findings, it was concluded that while AI held substantial potential to improve administrative performance in Nigerian organizations, its full benefits are limited by contextual challenges. It

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was recommended that investments in digital infrastructure, staff training, progressive integration of AI systems, and the development of clear policy frameworks to guide ethical and effective implementation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Administrative System, Organizational Performance, AI Adoption, Decision-Making, Administrative Efficiency.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the ability of machines and computer systems to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and language understanding (Russell & Norvig, 2016). AI systems are designed to analyze data, recognize patterns, and make autonomous decisions with minimal human intervention. The integration of AI into organizational systems has introduced transformative capabilities across various sectors, enabling more efficient, accurate, and intelligent operations. Administrative technology, on the other hand, encompasses digital tools, systems, and platforms used to support and enhance administrative tasks such as scheduling, data entry, communication, document management, and performance tracking. These technologies aim to streamline workflow processes, reduce redundancy, and enhance the accuracy and speed of administrative functions (Laudon & Laudon, 2020). When AI is embedded into administrative technology - resulting in AI-driven administrative systems—the outcomes can include automated email responses, intelligent document classification, predictive scheduling, and virtual assistants that manage day-to-day administrative functions.

Globally, AI-driven administrative processes are gaining momentum, especially as organizations seek to optimize operational efficiency and adapt to digital transformation. According to McKinsey Global Institute (2018), AI is projected to contribute up to \$13 trillion to the global economy by 2030, with significant impacts expected in organizational productivity and decision-making. For instance, many multinational firms are already using AI-powered enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, customer service bots, and HR automation tools to improve operational agility and reduce costs (Bughin et al., 2018). Moreover, trends show a growing shift towards cognitive automation, where AI systems not only process data but also provide insights and recommendations to support strategic decision-making (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). This trend is especially evident in sectors like banking, healthcare, and education, where AI tools handle routine administrative tasks such as appointment scheduling, record keeping, and compliance monitoring freeing human staff for more value-driven activities. As AI technology becomes more accessible and adaptable, its application in administrative functions continues to evolve, setting new standards for organizational performance and competitive advantage worldwide. This global shift underscores the necessity of understanding how such innovations are being implemented and the outcomes they generate in various national contexts, including Nigeria.

The emergence of AI in organizational administration marks a pivotal transformation in how modern institutions operate, manage resources, and make decisions. AI is no longer limited to high-end research or futuristic applications; it has become a practical tool for streamlining routine administrative operations in both public and private sectors. Its relevance in today's organizational landscape lies in its capacity to automate repetitive tasks, improve data handling,

and support real-time decision-making processes that enhance overall performance and productivity (Dwivedi et al., 2021). AI plays a crucial role in streamlining administrative tasks that traditionally required significant human effort and time. Functions such as scheduling meetings, managing emails, processing payrolls, updating records, and handling routine customer service queries can now be managed by AI-driven systems. These systems not only reduce administrative workload but also minimize human error and free up staff to focus on strategic and creative aspects of their jobs (Chui, Manyika, & Miremadi, 2016). In the context of administrative operations, AI contributes to operational speed, accuracy, and consistency, which are key indicators of organizational efficiency. Various AI tools have been adopted across organizations to support administrative efficiency. Chatbots are now commonly deployed in customer service and human resource departments to handle inquiries and provide instant responses to frequently asked questions. Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is used to automate repetitive data-entry tasks across multiple platforms without the need for human intervention. Data analytics and machine learning algorithms assist administrators in identifying patterns in employee performance, financial records, or client behavior, which can guide policy and operational adjustments. Predictive systems use historical data to forecast outcomes such as employee turnover, financial trends, or operational risks, thereby enabling proactive management decisions (Pan et al., 2019).

Organizational performance refers to how effectively an organization achieves its goals and objectives, particularly in terms of productivity, efficiency, quality of service, innovation, and financial results. It encompasses both tangible outputs and intangible factors like employee satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and organizational adaptability (Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1986). Performance is often assessed by examining how well an organization uses its resources to deliver value to stakeholders, while also maintaining sustainability and competitiveness. The components of organizational performance typically include financial performance (e.g., profitability, return on investment), operational performance (e.g., production output, turnaround time), and administrative performance, which focuses on internal efficiency, documentation processes, and decision-making accuracy. Administrative performance is critical in shaping the broader organizational culture and service quality (Richard et al., 2009). Key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to administrative functions include employee productivity, service delivery speed, response time to inquiries, accuracy in record-keeping, and resource utilization efficiency. When these indicators are monitored and improved through technological interventions like AI, organizations can better align internal processes with strategic goals, ultimately enhancing overall performance (Kaplan & Norton, 2004).

In Nigeria, the integration of AI-driven technology into administrative processes is gaining traction across both public and private sectors. This shift is fueled by the need to improve service delivery, reduce inefficiencies, and cope with increasing demands in a digitally evolving world. According to Olayemi and Ogunleye (2020), Nigerian firms are gradually adopting AI to streamline business operations, particularly in areas like document automation, customer engagement, and data analytics. In the banking sector, institutions such as Access Bank and Zenith Bank have adopted chatbots and automated teller systems to enhance customer interactions and reduce service delays. AI tools assist in fraud detection, credit risk analysis, and customer service (Adebayo & Oluwafemi, 2021). In the education sector, AI is used in digital learning platforms, intelligent student assessment systems, and administrative

software that tracks academic performance and attendance (Okonkwo & Obeta, 2021). The healthcare sector has seen the rise of AI-based diagnostics, patient record systems, and scheduling tools to improve service efficiency in hospitals and clinics (Oladele et al., 2022). Even government agencies are now experimenting with AI for identity management, e-governance platforms, and public service automation.

Despite these positive developments, the adoption of AI in Nigeria remains uneven and limited to a few well-resourced organizations. Much of the public sector and many SMEs still operate using manual or semi-automated systems, thereby missing the full benefits of AI in administration. While the potential of AI in transforming administrative systems is significant, its adoption in Nigeria is hindered by several key challenges. Technological and infrastructural limitations remain a major obstacle. Many organizations operate in environments with unreliable electricity supply, poor internet connectivity, and outdated hardware—conditions that severely constrain the use of AI systems (Adeoye & Olaoye, 2021).

These challenges highlight the need for strategic planning, capacity building, and policy development to support the responsible and effective deployment of AI-driven administrative technologies across Nigerian organizations. It is against this backdrop that this study assessed the impact of AI-driven administrative technology on organizational performance in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the global shift towards digital transformation, many Nigerian organizations continue to struggle with inefficient administrative systems characterized by delays, inaccuracies, and poor service delivery. While Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven administrative technologies have proven effective in enhancing organizational performance in developed countries—through automation, data analytics, and smart decision-making—adoption in Nigeria remains limited and uneven. Factors such as inadequate infrastructure, high implementation costs, limited technical expertise, and resistance to change hinder the full integration of AI in administrative processes. Moreover, there is a dearth of empirical evidence on the actual impact of AI-driven administrative tools on organizational performance within the Nigerian context. This gap makes it difficult for decision-makers to justify investment in AI technologies or develop appropriate policies for digital transformation. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of AI-driven administrative technology on organizational performance in Nigeria, with a view to understanding its benefits, challenges, and implications for effective and sustainable organizational management.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to:

- i. Examine the extent to which AI-driven administrative technologies are adopted in Nigerian organizations.
- ii. Determine the impact of AI-driven administrative tools on administrative efficiency in Nigerian organizations.
- iii. Assess how AI influences decision-making in organizational management in Nigeria.
- iv. Identify the key challenges facing the implementation of AI-driven administrative technologies in Nigeria.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent are AI-driven administrative technologies adopted in Nigerian organizations?
- ii. What is the impact of AI-driven administrative tools on administrative efficiency in Nigerian organizations?
- iii. How does the use of AI influence decision-making in organizational management in Nigeria?
- iv. What are the key challenges facing the implementation of AI-driven administrative technologies in Nigerian organizations?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

- i. AI adoption has no significant effect administrative efficiency in Nigerian organizations.
- ii. AI-driven administrative technologies have no significant effect on decision-making in Nigerian organizations.
- iii. Challenges do not significantly affect the implementation of AI-driven administrative technologies in Nigerian organizations.

Methodology

Research Design: This study employed the survey research design, which is appropriate for gathering detailed information about the current state of AI-driven administrative technology adoption and its perceived effects on organizational performance in Nigeria. The design allows for the collection of both quantitative data from a cross-section of organizations, enabling the researcher to describe trends, relationships, and challenges without manipulating any variables.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised a total of 7,809 administrative and managerial staff working in both public and private organizations across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. These staff members are drawn from various sectors, including banking institutions, educational organizations, healthcare facilities, government ministries, and selected large-scale manufacturing companies. The personnel targeted are specifically those serving in four key administrative departments: Human Resources, Finance, Operations, and ICT. These departments were chosen due to their central role in the planning, execution, and management of organizational processes, as well as their increasing interaction with artificial intelligence (AI) tools in administrative settings. The distribution of the population across the zones is as follows: North Central accounts for 1,210 staff members from institutions such as the Federal Ministry of Education in Abuja and the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital. In the North East, 980 staff are drawn from organizations like the Central Bank of Nigeria, Gombe branch, and Modibbo Adama University, Yola. North West includes 1,350 staff working with organizations such as Dangote Group, Kano, and Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital. South East consists of 1,100 personnel from institutions like Innoson Motors in Nnewi and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The South South region has 1,080 administrative staff sourced from institutions like Shell Petroleum Development Company in Port Harcourt and the University of Calabar. Lastly, the South West, which hosts the highest number of staff at 2,089, includes institutions such as First Bank Headquarters in Lagos and the University of Lagos. These figures demonstrate a balanced representation of administrative staff across Nigeria's diverse regions and sectors.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of the population. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select a total of 12 organizations, comprising two from each of the six geopolitical zones. The organizations were selected based on their ongoing or advanced implementation of AI-driven technologies in their administrative operations. In the second stage, within each selected organization, four administrative departments - Human Resources, Finance, Operations, and ICT - were purposively identified. These departments were considered critical to the study because of their significant involvement in administrative processes and their exposure to AI technologies. In the third and final stage, simple random sampling was applied to select five staff members from each of the four departments, resulting in 20 respondents per organization. This sampling process yielded a total sample size of 200 respondents (12 organizations × 4 departments × 5 respondents). The multi-stage approach ensured that the sample was diverse and inclusive of various sectors, regions, and administrative roles, thus enhancing the validity and generalizability of the research findings.

Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire titled “AI-Driven Administrative Technology and Organizational Performance Questionnaire (AIATOPQ)” was used as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was carefully designed and divided into four major sections to address the key variables of the study. Section A focused on demographic information such as age, gender, years of service, and type of organization, and was administered to all categories of respondents. Section B assessed the extent of AI adoption by measuring the types and frequency of use of AI-driven tools like chatbots, automation software, and predictive analytics. Section C captured respondents’ perceptions of the impact of AI on administrative efficiency and decision-making within their organizations. Section D explored the challenges associated with AI implementation, including issues related to infrastructure, cost, technical skills, and ethical concerns. The instrument comprised structured rating-scale items measured on a five-point scale, such as Very High Extent (5) to Very Low Extent (1) for AI adoption, Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1) for perceived impacts, and implementation barriers. The questionnaire was designed to generate quantitative data suitable for statistical analysis and interpretation.

Reliability

A pilot test was conducted with 20 respondents drawn from two organizations that were not included in the main sample. *Cronbach’s alpha* was calculated for each sub-scale of the questionnaire to determine the internal consistency of the items and 0.87 was obtained. A threshold value of 0.70 was set as the minimum acceptable level, and all sub-scales met or exceeded this benchmark, indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection.

Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining ethical clearance and organizational consent, the questionnaires were administered both in person and online, depending on the respondents’ preference. A two-week window was provided for completion, and follow-up reminders were sent at one-week intervals to maximize the response rate.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' demographic information, levels of AI adoption, and perceived impacts on administrative functions. Inferential analysis was conducted using regression analysis to test the hypotheses and determine the strength and significance of relationships among variables. All statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS (Version 27), with the level of significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent are AI-driven administrative technologies adopted in Nigerian organizations?

Table 1: Extent of Adoption of AI-driven Administrative Technologies in Nigerian Organizations

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	AI tools (e.g., chatbots) are used for customer service interactions.	3.10	1.12	Low Extent
2	Automated AI systems handle payroll processing.	2.95	1.05	Low Extent
3	AI-driven software manages employee attendance tracking.	3.65	0.89	High Extent
4	AI is used for data entry and document digitization.	3.72	0.78	High Extent
5	AI algorithms optimize inventory management.	2.88	1.20	Low Extent
6	Predictive analytics (AI) forecast organizational resource needs.	3.45	0.95	Low Extent
7	Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools automate report generation.	3.68	0.82	High Extent
8	AI-driven platforms manage recruitment/shortlisting.	3.52	0.87	High Extent
9	AI tools analyze financial transactions for fraud detection.	3.30	1.10	Low Extent
10	Cloud-based AI systems integrate with existing administrative workflows.	3.15	1.18	Low Extent

Table 1 reveals that the adoption of AI-driven administrative technologies in Nigerian organizations is generally low. Out of the ten items, only four - statements 3, 4, 7, and 8 - recorded mean scores above 3.50, indicating a high extent of adoption. These areas include employee attendance tracking, document digitization, automated report generation, and AI-assisted recruitment. The remaining six items had mean scores below 3.50, reflecting a low extent of adoption in functions such as customer service, payroll, inventory management, financial analysis, and cloud-based integration. This suggests that while some progress has been made in adopting AI for internal administrative efficiency, the overall level of adoption remains limited in scope and inconsistent across key administrative functions.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of AI-driven administrative tools on administrative efficiency in Nigerian organizations?

Table 2: Impact of AI-driven Administrative Tools on Administrative Efficiency

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	AI tools reduce time spent on routine tasks (e.g., data entry).	4.05	0.75	High Impact
2	AI minimizes human errors in record-keeping.	3.92	0.80	High Impact
3	AI accelerates report generation and data retrieval.	4.10	0.68	High Impact
4	AI optimizes resource allocation (e.g., budgeting, staffing).	3.40	1.05	Low Impact
5	AI enhances accuracy of payroll processing.	3.78	0.85	High Impact
6	AI improves compliance with regulatory requirements.	3.25	1.12	Low Impact
7	AI-driven analytics support timely strategic decisions.	3.45	0.98	Low Impact

8	Automation reduces operational costs.	3.62	0.92	High Impact
9	AI streamlines communication between departments.	3.30	1.15	Low Impact
10	AI tools enhance scalability of administrative operations.	3.85	0.78	High Impact

Table 2 shows that AI-driven administrative tools have a high impact on certain aspects of administrative efficiency in Nigerian organizations. Specifically, six items—Statements 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 10—had mean scores above 3.50, indicating high impact in reducing routine task time, minimizing errors, speeding up report generation, enhancing payroll accuracy, lowering operational costs, and improving scalability. However, four items—Statements 4, 6, 7, and 9—recorded mean scores below 3.50, indicating low impact in areas such as resource allocation, regulatory compliance, strategic decision-making, and interdepartmental communication. This suggests that while AI tools significantly improve basic efficiency tasks, their impact is still limited in more complex or strategic administrative functions.

Research Question 3: How does the use of AI influence decision-making in organizational management in Nigeria?

Table 3: Influence of AI on Decision-making in Organizational Management

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	AI provides real-time insights for managerial decisions.	3.75	0.85	Agreed
2	Predictive analytics improve forecasting accuracy (e.g., sales, demand).	3.60	0.90	Agreed
3	AI identifies trends/patterns from historical data to guide strategy.	3.82	0.79	Agreed
4	AI-driven risk assessment tools enhance crisis management.	3.25	1.10	Disagreed
5	AI recommendations are prioritized over human intuition in critical decisions.	2.95	1.22	Disagreed
6	AI fosters data-driven culture across management levels.	3.45	0.95	Disagreed
7	AI tools improve transparency in decision-making processes.	3.68	0.88	Agreed
8	AI enables proactive rather than reactive management.	3.78	0.82	Agreed
9	Managers trust AI-generated reports for performance evaluation.	3.50	0.92	Agreed
10	AI integrates cross-departmental data for holistic decisions.	3.30	1.05	Disagreed

Table 3 reveals that respondents generally agree that AI influences decision-making in organizational management in Nigeria. Specifically, six statements - items 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9 - had mean scores of 3.50 and above, indicating agreement that AI enhances real-time insights, forecasting accuracy, strategic planning, transparency, proactive management, and performance evaluation. However, four items - statements 4, 5, 6, and 10 - had mean scores below 3.50, indicating disagreement on the role of AI in areas such as risk management, replacing human judgment, fostering a data-driven culture, and integrating cross-departmental data. This suggests that while AI contributes positively to certain decision-making functions, its influence is not yet fully established in more complex or strategic aspects of organizational management.

Research Question 4: What are the key challenges facing the implementation of AI-driven administrative technologies in Nigerian organizations?

Table 4: Key Challenges Facing AI Implementation in Nigerian Organizations

S/N	Questionnaire Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	High costs of AI infrastructure hinder adoption.	4.20	0.70	Agreed
2	Poor internet connectivity disrupts AI tool functionality.	4.15	0.75	Agreed

3	Lack of technical skills to operate/maintain AI systems.	4.05	0.82	Agreed
4	Resistance from employees fearing job displacement.	3.90	0.85	Agreed
5	Inconsistent power supply affects AI deployment.	4.25	0.65	Agreed
6	Data privacy/security concerns limit AI integration.	3.85	0.92	Agreed
7	Management hesitates to invest in AI due to unclear ROI.	3.75	0.95	Agreed
8	Limited customization of AI tools to local administrative needs.	3.65	1.00	Agreed
9	Regulatory uncertainty complicates AI compliance.	3.45	1.08	Disagreed
10	Inadequate data quality (e.g., incomplete records) undermines AI effectiveness.	3.92	0.87	Agreed

Table 4 shows that respondents agreed with 9 out of 10 identified challenges facing AI implementation in Nigerian organizations. The highest-rated challenges were inconsistent power supply ($\bar{x} = 4.25$), high infrastructure costs ($\bar{x} = 4.20$), and poor internet connectivity ($\bar{x} = 4.15$). Other major concerns included lack of technical skills, fear of job loss, data privacy issues, and poor data quality. Only one item—*regulatory uncertainty* ($\bar{x} = 3.45$)—recorded a mean score below 3.50, indicating it was not strongly agreed upon as a major challenge. This suggests that technical, infrastructural, and workforce-related issues are the most pressing barriers to AI adoption in administrative processes.

Hypothesis 1 Testing: AI adoption has no significant effect on administrative efficiency in Nigerian organizations.

Table 5a: Regression Model Summary for AI Adoption → Administrative Efficiency

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.78	.61	.605	0.342

The model summary shows a strong positive relationship between AI adoption and administrative efficiency, with a correlation coefficient of $R = 0.78$ and a coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.61$. This means that 61% of the variation in administrative efficiency can be explained by the extent of AI adoption, which indicates a substantial predictive power of the model.

Table 5b: ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	42.75	1	42.75	365.18	.000
Residual	27.43	258	0.12		
Total	70.18	259			

The ANOVA table reveals that the regression model is statistically significant with $F(1, 258) = 365.18$, $p < 0.001$. This result indicates that the relationship between AI adoption and administrative efficiency is not due to chance, and therefore provides a valid model fit for the data.

Table 5c: Coefficients Analysis

Variable	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.24	0.18	-	6.89	.000
AI Adoption	0.68	0.04	.78	19.11	.000

The coefficient table shows that AI adoption significantly predicts administrative efficiency, with a standardized beta (β) = 0.78, $t = 19.11$, and $p < 0.001$. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.68$) implies that for every 1-unit increase in AI adoption, administrative efficiency is expected to increase by 0.68 units. The constant value of 1.24 indicates the baseline level of efficiency when AI adoption is zero. Since the regression result is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and explains a large portion of the variance in administrative efficiency ($R^2 = 0.61$), the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that AI adoption has a significant and positive effect on administrative efficiency in Nigerian organizations.

Hypothesis 2 Testing: AI-driven administrative technologies have no significant effect on decision-making.

Table 6a: Regression Model Summary for AI Adoption → Decision-making

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.72	.52	.517	0.391

The model shows a strong positive correlation between AI adoption and decision-making, with $R = 0.72$ and $R^2 = 0.52$. This indicates that 52% of the variance in decision-making is explained by the level of AI adoption, which demonstrates a substantial predictive influence.

Table 6b: ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	38.91	1	38.91	254.73	.000
Residual	35.92	258	0.15		
Total	74.83	259			

The ANOVA table reveals that the regression model is statistically significant, with $F(1, 258) = 254.73$ and $p < 0.001$. This result confirms that the model provides a good fit and that the relationship between AI adoption and decision-making is not due to random chance.

Table 6c: Coefficients Analysis

Variable	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.57	0.21	-	7.48	.000
AI Adoption	0.59	0.04	.72	15.96	.000

The coefficients table shows that AI adoption has a significant positive effect on decision-making, with a standardized beta (β) = 0.72, $t = 15.96$, and $p < 0.001$. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.59$) indicates that for every 1-unit increase in AI adoption, decision-making is expected to increase by 0.59 units. The constant (1.57) reflects the baseline level of decision-making when AI is not adopted. Given the statistically significant results and strong predictive power of the model, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that AI-driven administrative technologies significantly improve decision-making in Nigerian organizations.

Hypothesis 3 Testing: Challenges do not significantly affect AI implementation in Nigerian organizations.

Table 7a: Regression Model Summary for Challenges → AI Implementation

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.85	.72	.718	0.297

The model shows a very strong negative relationship between challenges and AI implementation, with $R = 0.85$ and $R^2 = 0.72$. This indicates that 72% of the variance in AI implementation is explained by the presence of challenges, suggesting a strong impact.

Table 7b: ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	50.62	1	50.62	573.64	.000
Residual	19.51	258	0.09		
Total	70.13	259			

The ANOVA output indicates that the regression model is highly significant, with $F(1, 258) = 573.64$ and $p < 0.001$. This result confirms that challenges significantly affect AI implementation and that the relationship is statistically valid.

Table 7c: Coefficients Analysis

Variable	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	4.15	0.14	-	29.64	.000
Challenges	-0.81	0.03	-.85	-23.95	.000

The coefficients table shows a significant negative effect of challenges on AI implementation. The standardized beta value is $\beta = -0.85$, with a t-value of -23.95 and $p < 0.001$, indicating that as challenges increase, AI implementation decreases. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = -0.81$) means that for every 1-unit increase in challenges, the level of AI implementation decreases by 0.81 units. Given the strong statistical significance and large effect size, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This confirms that challenges significantly impede the implementation of AI-driven technologies in Nigerian organizations.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that Nigerian organizations adopt AI-driven technologies more in internal routine operations such as document digitization, employee tracking, and report automation, while areas like customer service, inventory, and fraud detection remain less utilized. This finding is in agreement with Nwankwo and Adebayo (2021), who reported that most Nigerian firms primarily integrate AI into basic tasks that improve internal workflow and data management. Similarly, Ogunleye et al. (2022) noted that AI adoption in Nigeria is still at an early stage, with organizations focusing on simpler applications due to infrastructural and skill limitations. In addition, Okafor and Bello (2020) confirmed that although AI tools are increasingly recognized, their deployment remains limited to low-complexity administrative functions due to fear of disruption and cost. The study found that AI significantly enhances task efficiency, reduces processing time and errors, and improves accuracy and scalability of administrative functions in Nigerian organizations. This result aligns with Chukwu and Edet (2020), who observed that AI-based automation improves timeliness and reduces errors in routine tasks, leading to greater administrative efficiency. Likewise, Afolabi et al. (2021) emphasized that AI technologies like machine learning and process automation have

significantly optimized operational workflows in administrative departments. Adeola and Musa (2023) also found that administrative units using AI tools reported measurable gains in speed, consistency, and output accuracy compared to traditional methods.

The findings of the study indicated that AI plays a meaningful role in improving decision-making in organizations by providing real-time insights, enhancing forecasting, and promoting transparency, although it is less trusted for risk and cross-functional decisions. The finding is in agreement with Eze and Ajayi (2019), who posited that AI enhances strategic thinking by delivering data-driven insights that inform managerial planning and forecasting. Abubakar and Mohammed (2021) also confirmed that real-time analytics from AI systems aid Nigerian managers in making more confident and timely decisions. Additionally, Oladimeji and Ibrahim (2022) found that although managers value AI inputs, full dependence is limited due to uncertainty around risk modeling and cross-functional data integration. The study showed that power instability, high infrastructure cost, limited technical expertise, and poor internet connectivity are the key barriers to AI implementation in Nigerian organizations. This supports the findings of Okeke and Oladipo (2020), who stated that the lack of basic digital infrastructure, particularly electricity and broadband access, hampers the scalability of AI systems in the Nigerian public and private sectors. Akanbi and Yusuf (2021) also highlighted that a shortage of skilled AI professionals, combined with resistance from existing staff, limits implementation success. Furthermore, Ibrahim and Lawal (2022) revealed that many organizations avoid AI investments due to unclear returns on investment, cultural resistance, and ethical uncertainties.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of AI-driven administrative technology on organizational performance in Nigeria. The findings revealed that while AI adoption is evident in specific internal functions such as attendance tracking, document digitization, and report generation, its use remains limited in areas like customer service, inventory control, and financial analysis. The study further established that AI technologies significantly enhance administrative efficiency by reducing task completion time, minimizing human errors, and improving scalability. It also showed that AI contributes meaningfully to data-driven decision-making, though its influence is less pronounced in areas requiring cross-functional or high-stakes judgment. Importantly, the study confirmed that infrastructural deficiencies, high implementation costs, poor internet connectivity, and skill gaps significantly hinder the full-scale deployment of AI technologies in Nigerian organizations. In conclusion, the integration of AI in administration holds strong potential for improving organizational efficiency and decision-making in Nigeria. However, to maximize these benefits, there is a need to address critical implementation challenges through investment in digital infrastructure, capacity building, and policy support.

Recommendations

- i. Government and organizations should prioritize investments in stable electricity and high-speed internet to support effective AI system deployment, especially in public sector institutions.
- ii. Regular training and upskilling programs should be organized to equip administrative staff with the technical skills required to operate, manage, and adapt to AI technologies.

- iii. Organizations should begin AI implementation with less complex administrative tasks and scale progressively as staff competence and infrastructure improve, reducing resistance and transition shock.
- iv. Policymakers should create guidelines that address data privacy, ethical AI use, and regulatory standards to ensure responsible and sustainable AI integration in administrative processes.

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Article

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RORTY'S THESIS OF RELIGION AS A CONVERSATION STOPPER: A METAPHYSICAL PARADIGM

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Abstract

Religion as a concept has generated divergent perspectives, interpretations and approaches among scholars. While some speak in favour of it, others see it as problematic. Richard Rorty, for instance, heavily criticized religion as a practice that lays its foundation on a supernatural being that lacks rational and empirical evidence. He describes religion as a "conversation-stopper," contending that it creates unnecessary formidable hurdles for human peaceful existence. Religion, he strongly believes, closes down rather than expands debates that is not subsumed within its doctrines. It halts democratic deliberations and creates barriers to an all-inclusive dialogue he argues. As a result, Rorty sanctions the privatization of religion in support of his pragmatic philosophy which gives primacy to practicality and inter-subjectivity. It is on the strength of this that the work engages in critical method and argues that, Rorty's approach towards religion was aimed at fostering inclusivity while neutralizing conflicts. It nevertheless, suffocates the contrasting views and lays a controversial foundation that impedes harmonious synthesis of faith and reason.

Keywords: Rorty, Religion, Conversation-Stopper, Democratic Deliberation, Metaphysical Paradigm.

Introduction

Religion has been a crucial aspect of human civilization, shaping human life, promoting cultural norms, encouraging social interactions and facilitating socialization and most time championing good governance. It has always played a very vital role in public relations, shaping the moral stance of individuals and communities, this however, has not been a smooth ride especially

among philosophers. Interestingly, though, religion is such a striking phenomenon in human life that it cannot be ignored by the skeptics, agnostics or even the atheists. So the nature of religion has always been an issue of intense concern for every rational person since it attempts to address or perhaps offer answers to the fundamental questions of human existence. In fact, no society that wants any meaningful development that can downplay the role of religion since it always guides, forms and directs the behavior of people and their personal relationship with God. In recent times, however, as remarked by Alo Franklin Chibuzor, “secularist often thinks that humanity has finally come of age that they no longer have any use for religion; yet most humans still engrossed themselves with the questions and issues raised by the various religions of the world” (Frank, 2020). Richard Rorty, one of the modern American Philosophers and a secularist, thinks that religion suppresses the power of reason by intentionally not allowing human reason to be the arbiter of life affairs. Rorty is of the view that the excessive reliance on religion in public and political discourse in solving human problems hinders rational discourses in a pluralistic society, due to its inherent absolutist bent. Rorty is not alone as other intellectuals have also shared similar views. While some, hold skeptical stand on the grounds that religion should not dominate and dictate the decision-making processes of any heterogenous society, Others like Jean Jacques Rousseau, attempt to highlight the seemingly endless tension and tussle between public reason and religion.

According to Rousseau, “it is impossible to live at peace with people whom we believe to be damned; to love them would be to hate God who punishes them” (Rousseau, 2002). His statement portrays clearly a basic divisive nature between the absolutism of religion and an all-inclusive dialogue in a heterogenous society. His thought agrees with Rorty’s claim that religion undermines social cohesion in a democratic society, while rigidly fostering exclusivity and discrimination. Rousseau however added that “whatever that destroys social unity is good for nothing; all institutions which put a man in contradiction with himself are worthless” (Rousseau, 2002) and religion possesses this inherent trait. The attack launched on religion by Rousseau was more profound when he remarked that “Christianity preaches servitude and independence. Its spirit is too favourable for tyranny....true Christians are made to be slaves; they know it and are hardly aroused by it. This short life has too little value in their eyes” (Rousseau, 2002) But his submission is that there should be no any exclusive national religion and we should always strive to tolerate others so far as their dogmas have nothing contrary to the duties of a citizen. He warns that “whosoever dares to say that outside the church no salvation ought to be driven from the state, unless the state be the church and the prince be the pontiff” (Rousseau, 2002). Such dogma according to Rousseau is only suitable and appropriate in a theocratic government but in any other government, it is pernicious. More so, Karl Marx expresses similar feelings and frowns at religion and criticizes it for its adverse role in social development. His famous assertion that “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions, the opium of the people” (Marx, 1970) shows an unfavourable perception towards religion. For Marx, religion serves as a form of solace for the oppressed and inadvertently a tool for perpetuating subjugation and discrimination in the society. This dual role of religion complicates its ability and utility in bringing about social progress and collective wellbeing that leads to development in the society. Though Rorty does not directly link his religious stance to economic development specifically, however, his view also augments his pragmatist bent in solving social issues and enhancing liberty in a free society.

J. S Mill's thesis on religion also notes the adverse effects of religion on society. Religion according to him places constraints on intellectual freedom. "The worth of a state in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it, and a state which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished" (Mill, 1978). Although, Mill does not exclusively target religion, his view, is on every dogmatic system or pattern that stifles and suppresses individual rational freedom and growth which aligns with Rorty's call for a secular public sphere that is devoid of harmful beliefs, particularly religious beliefs. Although Rorty's position on religion is rooted in his pragmatic philosophy which places priority on consensus and practical outcomes over metaphysical absolute, his view reflects a broader critique of metaphysics as hindrance to social cohesion and growth. It is within the above background that this work sets to respond to Rorty's approach to religion as a "conversation-stopper" with the intension of objectively countering his claim using a metaphysical curve. Although Rorty's philosophy clings towards democratic philosophy where people come to participate in conversation with the hope of finding alternative metaphors not dominated by modern metaphors of objectivity and rationality. But the distress question is: what would be the fate of man in the world devoid of rationality within which religion lays its foundation? The answer to the above question is what this work intends to address.

Rorty's Approach to Religion

Rorty criticizes the role of religion in public discourse in his essay "Religion as a Conversation-Stopper" to be resistant to rational deliberation which is a fundamental requirements for pluralistic societies to thrive. He rather places or demotes religion to a private sphere where it will be useful in inspiring an individual's moral action and personal ethos but should not dominate nor dictate public or unanimous decision-making in any given society. When it comes to religion, Rorty thinks that it is a matter of "cultural politics", that is, instead of trying to find some rational basis for religion, we should ask whether religious beliefs and practices are conducive to human flourishing or not in any given culture. It is up to particular communities or cultures to make their case that their religion facilitates social and political goals. That is, a matter of cultural politics, as opposed to philosophizing about supernatural entities, if any, exist. Having relaxed evidentialist restrictions against religious beliefs, Rorty insists that religious beliefs are best when they are private and subjective. Religion is like poetry, which can be intensely meaningful for individual lives, and it should be assessed as such. Indeed, he endorses a spirituality of sorts, along these lines. But when religious beliefs are brought into public discourse to support or oppose a policy or a law, they stop conversation short. Ultimately, Rorty acknowledges that we should not prohibit such appeals to religion, but we should discourage and oppose them when they support oppression and inequality.

Rorty argues that religious beliefs and their nature often inhibit conversational dialogue because they rely on certain absolute beliefs that are not evenly and universally shared. His view of religious commitment as leading to unproductive conversation informs his assertion that, "Religion is a conversation-stopper- a conversation that are harmful or discourages inclusivity and liberal dialogue. If somebody says, 'I would never do that because I'm a Christian,' or 'because I'm a Jew,' or because I'm a Muslim,' that is supposed to be a sufficient reason for doing or not doing something. But this is not a reason that secularists can accept"

(Rorty, 1999). This assertion shows that when framing moral or political decisions in a way that is explicitly religious, a common ground is not found with those who do not share similar or same belief. By this, individuals foreclose the possibility of social cohesion within a heterogeneous society. This view serves to buttress his commitment of secularism as a way of fostering and enhancing inclusivity and democratic dialogue. Rorty further remarks that “Religion does not offer a common vocabulary for negotiating differences, instead, it asserts finality, claiming a divine sanction that forecloses discussions” (Rorty, 1994). So the absolutist nature and commitments of religious beliefs impedes freedom of rational and flexible conversation without giving room for dialogue. He holds that religious framework is intrinsically problematic in any given public discourse. This of course led to his critic on religion as relying solely on divine authority which cannot be verified in secular principles. He contends that, “When a religious speaker takes part in a conversation, he claims to be able to back up whatever he is saying by something that is not a topic of conversation-“God’s words”. This makes conversation impossible” (Rorty, 2005). For Rorty, human experience and contingent truths should be the guide and prerequisite for public discourse and not metaphysical appeals which alienate those outside the religious circle or tradition.

Rorty argues that religion often relies on faith base claims that are difficult to debate or reconcile with secular reasoning” (Rorty, 2005). In his view, Rorty thinks that invoking religious beliefs in discussions about morality or even politics tends to halt productive dialogue and resist critical scrutiny. Rorty suggests that for democratic deliberation to succeed, or flourish, conversations should at least, prioritize rational arguments over religious assertions that may not be universally debatable. This clearly demonstrates Rorty’s understanding of religion and where it should be relegated to in the society. Rorty admits that “In the privatized domain of individual conscience, religious belief can be a valuable source of comfort and moral inspiration” (Rorty, 2005). But Rorty did not call for the total abolition of religion in the society but rather advocates for its relegation to the private sphere. This shows that he acknowledges the individual personal value, hence religious beliefs should not however intrude nor interfere with the public space which places priority on shared secular vocabularies for negotiation and reaching a far better consensus for the progress of the human society. Rorty draws a distinction between religion being a basis for public policy and a private moral compass. He writes, “A liberal society is one which has come to terms with the fact that it is a community of communities. It has learned to subordinate the claims of faith to the interest of civic peace” (Rorty, 1991). Rorty insists that an ideal society requires a secular public sphere in which individuals from divergent backgrounds are able to relate and deliberate on issues without invoking stiff and unbendable religious authorities.

What then is the Place of Religion in Human Development?

Indeed, democratic societies where most religions are practised, encourage open-ended dialogues that fosters the progress and development of such societies. However, religion, Rorty queries, often obstructs this kind of open-ended conversation which is one of the basic requirements of the free society. Rorty observes that, “The problem with religious beliefs is not its falsehood, but its function in discouraging discussion by creating finality where none should exist” (Rorty, 1991). The inherent “conversation-stopping” of religion as Rorty asserts, undermines the cooperative and collective problem-solving dexterity which is very essential for

addressing challenges that confronts every society. This basic quality of religion is antagonistic to human development, slowing progress and advancement in the society. But then, religion has played key roles for the success and development of humanity especially in Europe that pulled ahead of the rest of the world. The most common explanation is the fact that faith anchored on reason or rooted strongly in christianity's commitment to rational but rigid theology, made the development of the West possible. It is on the strength of this that Rodney advanced a revolutionary yet controversial idea that "Christianity and its related institutions are, in fact, directly responsible for the most significant intellectual, political, scientific and economic breakthroughs of the past millennium". In Rodney's *Victory of Reason*, he argues that "what has propelled the West is not the tension between secular and nonsecular society, nor the pitting of science and humanities against religious belief. Christian theology, Rodney asserts is the very font of reason: While the world's other great systems emphasized mystery, obedience, or introspection, Christianity alone embraced logic and reason as the path toward enlightenment, freedom and progress. That is what made all the difference" Rodney, 2006.

In Rorty's view, for human development to thrive, it demands a conducive environment, an intellectually free environment where mutual respect is valued above certain absolutism and dogmas. These among others are requirements for secular public discourse to thrive. Appealing to religious authority for Rorty, marginalizes those who do not share the same faith and beliefs, creating a divisive mindset in the society and advancing exclusivity rather than fostering inclusiveness. Hence he thinks that, "a society in which religion dictates public policy is one where people with no access to the particular faith are excluded from participation" (Rorty, 1991). This exclusionary dynamic for Rorty, hampers the collective and broad-based collaboration vital for advancing different aspects of the society like science, education, agriculture, healthcare and other essential sectors which form the pillars of human development. But is religion resistant to change? According to Rorty, religious institutions resist progressive reforms and play the role of perpetuating hierarchies in the society especially and particularly in areas such as gender equality, and scientific innovation. He remarks that, "Religious doctrines by their very nature tend to prioritize timeless truths over the needs of the present, thereby slowing the march for progress" (Rorty, 1991). In this regard, Rorty sees religion as a conservative force that stops or hinders the realization of human potentials by giving primacy to the adherence of established doctrines over adaptive and forward-thinking solutions to emerging problems. The disturbing questions is: does religion really impede scientific and technological advancements? Are there countries and societies with firm religious beliefs that yet experience development? Rorty states that, "Religion, when confined to the private sphere can serve as a source of comfort and moral inspiration without interfering with the collective pursuit of human development" (Rorty, 1991). His view suggests that religion hinders collaboration in the society for human development. Religion being important to individuals for their ethical lives translates to the inculcation of values that treat others with courtesy and respect which are crucial ingredients for any form of development in human society. Many religious values and beliefs are vital for any human development and they are first imbibed by individuals before they are transferred to the society and translated into visible developmental strides. The sum total of what can be termed collective human development is only a product of individual beliefs and values which is most often largely influenced by religion.

But do Religious Dogmas Impede the Growth of Knowledge?

Religious dogmas are fundamental beliefs and convictions held by religious traditions. They are often regarded as truths that are unquestionable and sometimes draconian. Various religious thinkers and scholars have put forward contrasting definitions of dogmas. Karl Rahner defines dogma as “a proposition formally revealed by God and proclaimed as such by the church authority that is binding for all believers” (Rahner, 1969). In the same vein, Avery Dulles defines dogma as “symbolic expression of faith, safeguarded by religious authority that guides believers in their understanding of divine truth” (Dulles, 1983). On the other hand, Bertrand Russell defines dogma as “an unquestioned set of beliefs that resists scrutiny and inhibit the pursuit of objective knowledge” (Russell, 1957). This is similar to Ludwig Feuerbach who thinks that dogma is “human projections of ultimate concerns, codified into rigid beliefs that can obstruct intellectual freedom.” What constitutes epistemological orientation and inclination as Agbakoba noted “is the choice of the source(s) of knowledge that is based on one’s methodic approach or/and the final epistemic authority in a community. Reason, Sensory perception and Intuition were in ancient times the sources of knowledge but intuition –not in the Cartesian intellectualist sense but rather a tilt towards divination and séance, fell out of favour as a source of knowledge by an act of legislation that was ‘suggested’ by Plato, “Indeed, Plato seeing the credulity of ordinary folks before the practitioners of magic suggested against sorcery, he recommended the death sentence of a prophet or a diviner who brings mischief on a citizen through sorcery, and a penalty or fine (to be determined by a court) in the case of laymen” (Plato). This implies the potency of power and legislation in determining acceptable and unacceptable sources of knowledge and their methodic approaches’ Agbakoba, 2019. However, it is pertinent to keep in mind that Plato only ‘suggested’ and did not out-rightly propose or legislate for a dualistic view of knowledge in an official sense as was later blatantly pronounced and propagated by the Church.

The judgment concerning the sources of knowledge that is a common epistemic discourse known to be rationalism and empiricism, was not made by Plato or the Greeks and neither can it be said that it was made by any other ancient culture or tradition in the then world but rather by the Judeo-Christian culture. This epistemic legislation was Mosaic in framework and outlook. As a result of the church dominance in Western Europe –Roman Empire, her scholarships, education and her Universities became mediums for the application and propagation of its epistemic stance through her philosophical books and became virtually influential, unhindered and penetrative. This also led to the firm dualistic outlook concerning the sources of knowledge as we prominently have today. So, the development and advancement of modern science (which combines rational and sensory sources) arose largely because of the orientation, legislation and epistemic outlook of Christianity –inherited from Judaism. This is also why there were such people as Ockham and Roscelinus who inclined towards empirical source of knowledge; St Anselm and Thomas Aquinas leaning towards a rational bent. These philosophers laid the foundation of systematic and rigorous dualism of epistemological root –empiricism and rationalism, which is a common epistemic discussion among the Western world today. By this, the rationalist philosophers, empiricists and most modern philosophers and scientist like Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant e.t.c, who had strongly contributed to epistemological advancement in the world must give credit to the church for laying the foundation upon which their philosophical contemplations and ideas were built and

thrived even to the advent of science. This basically shows and accentuates the profound and staunch influence of religion underpinning the growth and development of knowledge. The fusion of the methods of facilitating reason and facilitating observation went hand in hand with a conception of nature. Indeed Galileo's method was meant to account for the motion of natural bodies conceived in a secular dualist if not materialist and non-vitalist manner. This was possible as Agbakoba, 2006 argues" because of the dualistic conception of reality in Christian thought- which Descartes, apparently unintentionally, pushed to its starkest philosophical limits with his methodic doubt and rationalism.

Logically, religious dogma is often rooted in reason which of course inspires deeper inquiry that unfolds new discoveries. In this case, religious dogmas anchored on rationality promote the growth of human knowledge by providing logical approach to understanding the world. This rational approach strongly emphasizes skepticism, evidence based logical reasoning which enable individuals to interrogate assumptions. So, rationality relies on consistent logic, universal truth, which serves as a fertile ground for knowledge to transcend personal inclinations and cultural limits. Dogmas though inherent in reason demands that ideas no matter how valid ought to be testable, and open to revision and refutation. This is clearly seen in the paradigm shift of geocentric to heliocentric models which ensure that knowledge is evolved with more provable evidence. Religious traditions especially those rooted in monotheism have as far back in history provided a worldview that sees the cosmos as governed by rational laws. This particular belief in the divine order of the universe has encouraged scholars and even scientists to seek understanding through systematic observation and experimentation of the natural world, attempting to discover and unveil the mysteries that underlay these laws of the universe. The belief by the scholastic philosophers in a rational Creator and divine wisdom inspired early scientist to systematically explore the natural world and the phenomena that exist in them accentuates rational foundation of science and this has a nexus with dogmas which are products of an intelligent and reflective thinking.

Agbakoba argues that. "The orientation of the religious ideology, Christianity, at the epistemological and ontological level was very instrumental in the emergence of the empirical science in the area dominated by the culture of the Western (Latin) church' Agbakoba, 2006. This suggests that religious beliefs have a cognitive undertone and influences humans behavior, including the pursuit of knowledge. This was why Rodney also asserts that, "the human inclination towards religious beliefs systems is not a primitive survival mechanism but a sophisticated framework that has evolved to make sense of the world" (Rodney, 2004). This framework intrinsically buttresses the systematic investigation of the universe, as underpinning scientific methodologies. This makes a case against science which takes a position that the authenticity of knowledge is only valid if it adheres to and follows the scientific method. This strictness is equivalent to that of religious dogmas that try to make arguments for absolutes. But the question is; does science really have a method? If yes, who sets that standard as a universal blueprint to acquiring authentic knowledge? Does this method not infer a sense of strictness and absoluteness to acquiring knowledge and if it does, does it not basically behave itself in the same manner as a dogma? This shows nothing but the fact that the same rationality that underpins the pursuit of knowledge in science is not far-fetched from that of religious dogmas. And from antecedents, religious dogmas holds sway to exploring the search for truth about the universe in a rational manner.

Scholastic philosophers sought to reconcile faith and reason, seeing the two as vital for the discovery of truth. This was why Aquinas as cited in Stranford Encyclopedia asserted that, “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth”. The Christian doctrine of creation may have encouraged science by assuming that creation (being the product of a designer) is both intelligent and orderly” (Stranford Encyclopedia, 2023). All these opinions demonstrate that theological and scientific pursuits, though distinct, can be mutually reinforcing, little surprise why Albert Einstein opined that, “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind” (Einstein, 1954) Though not traditionally religious, his assertion emphasizes that religious dogmas provide a scaffolding for scientific exploration by proposing a purposeful and intelligible creation. But then, Rorty’s pragmatism attempts to eschew metaphysical absolutes, however, on a deeper analysis, he owes a debt of gratitude to religious traditions. This is why Cornel West observed that, “Rorty’s pragmatic atheism cannot escape its Protestant inheritance of skepticism and dogmatism” (West, 1989). By this, the obvious necessity of religious dogmas is providing the dialectical foil for innovation in the philosophical realm.

On the Metaphysical Response to Rorty’s Postulation on Religion

My approach here is to offer counter-arguments about Rorty’s claim on Religion as conversation stopper. Metaphysics attempts to explore the fundamental nature of reality and seeks to answer profound questions about mind and matter. It also seeks to develop ideas that go beyond abstract theorization to consider the practical implications of questions about reality in a complex, interconnected and ever evolving world. It is important to recognize the fact that metaphysics is a force that tries to reveal deeper truth and the deeper meaning of reality. And in doing that, it unveils the vistas of inquiry that trigger conversation in contradistinction to Rorty’s postulation of religion as a conversation stopper. As a higher form of inquiry, it tries to address the questions about what lies beyond empirical observation, probing further into the actual nature of ultimate truth and meaning of life, while at the same time, emphasizing the need to transcend mere practicalities and engage in issues that question the ultimate origin and being of a thing. So, this sort of inquiry provides a platform for further investigation that fosters the deeper reflection which most often, fires conversation that encourages intellectual growth which usually manifests in civilization. In this light however, Soren Kierkegaard acknowledges the fact that “Faith, far from being irrational, is the highest passion of humanity, uniting the finite and the infinite” (Kierkegaard, 1985) For Kierkegaard, faith is a leap into the infinite. It demonstrates how religious creeds inspire individuals to pursue higher ideals and engage in more constructive conversations with others. This suggests that religion which is underpinned by metaphysical reasoning, enriches the lives and vocabulary of humans rather than foreclosing public discourse as Rorty would want us to believe. Take for instance, the idea of *substance* which some scholars interpreted differently, with little nuances to depict “God”, pushed David Hume, 1748 into further conversation and reflection and remarked that “all we can know is the flow of impression and as such, we have no impression of the connection between the world of experience and something outside of experience”. Hume further rejects all empirical arguments that rest on the premise that every event must have a cause, and argues that causality is just a habit of mind based on constant conjunction of a particular event in our experience. His position is that neither reason nor experience can definitely rule out either the possibility of god’s

existence. This of course, led to further conversation as his philosophical pendulum swung from rational certainty to that of skepticism which give room for further search in man's quest for knowledge.

Again, the question, *does God exist*, mostly asked in religion has triggered an interesting yet exciting conversations as against Rorty's claim and as such sparked intellectual reflections that seems to usher in a better approach that is nearer to the awareness of God. Cressy Morrison in an attempt to further enrich this conversation infers that:

So many exciting conditions are necessary for life on earth that they could not possibly exist in proper relationship by chance. The earth rotates on its axis one thousand miles per hour; if it turned at one hundred miles an hour, our days and nights would be ten times as long as now and the hot sun would then burn up our vegetation each long day, while in the long night, any surviving sprout would freeze. Again, the sun, the source of our life, has a surface temperature of 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit, and our earth is just far enough away so that this external fire warms us just enough and not too much (Morrison, 2012).

He continued that, "if the sun gave off only one half of its present radiation, we would freeze and if it gave half as much more, we would roast. Had the ocean been a few feet deeper, carbon dioxide and oxygen would have been absorbed and no vegetable life could exist. So, because of these and host of other examples. There is not one chance in millions that life on our planet is an accident" (Morrison, 2012). We can rightly say that living bodies are billions of times too complicated, too statistically improbable to have come into existence by sheer chance.

Contributing further to the above question, Plato contends that the cosmos must therefore be the work of intelligence even though he did not develop a specific theory of creation. The theory of creation holds that things are created *ex-nihilo*, that is, out of nothing. But Plato's explanation of the origin of the visible world bypasses this theory of creation. Plato notes that, "that which becomes must necessarily become through the agency of some cause" (Plato) which he referred to as *Demiurge or Divine Craftman*. The demiurge according to him does not bring new things into being rather arrange what had already exists in chaotic form, which according to him came into being through the reflection of the form. And this form, is expressed through a medium he calls *receptacle*, the nurse of all becoming. So in this sense, the history of religion represents just a large- scale dialogues where thinkers agree and disagree or what religion tends to represents, as against the claim of Rorty on religion as a conversational stopper.

Critical Remarks

Richard Rorty's view on religion raises significant philosophical considerations. His essay on "Religion as a Conversation-Stopper" firmly sees religion as an irrational activity that hinders public discourse which in turn, impedes human development. His argument has indeed been overly criticized for oversimplification without taking into cognizance that the multifaceted nature of religion has some prospects that merit careful considerations. Considering Rorty's claim on religion through an objective lens seems to holds some prospects that cannot be easily ignored but must be analyzed within the ambit of human society and its development. One of

the prominent strengths of Richard Rorty's position lies in its pragmatic emphasis on fostering inclusive dialogue in diverse societies. This cannot be overlooked especially in our modern society. Rorty argues that religion, when it is invoked as a source of authority within the public sphere creates barricades to consensus. Rorty feels that, "Religious claims functions as conversation-stopper, cutting short the back-and-forth reasoning required in democratic societies" (Rorty, 1999). His argument here is particularly relevant in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society like Nigeria where competing ideological views hinder cooperation among individuals with diverse backgrounds. His advocacy for the privatization of religion, seeks to create an atmosphere where all people and participants rely solely on right rational and private principles accessible to everyone, regardless of their religious inclinations and commitments.

The prospect of this approach has the potential to resolve conflict within a pluralistic society, as conflict can easily ensue when people with different religious beliefs try to enforce and instill their beliefs on others. Where religious and cultural diversity is the norm, privileging one religious claim over another risks suppressing dissenting voices which brews unhealthy relationship within the society. Rorty's position therefore, aligns nicely with the principles of liberal democracy, which prioritize fairness, equity, equality and mutual respect. His insistence on religion being kept private intends to neutralize its negative divisive potency that hinders freedom and a healthy dialogue. More so, Rorty sees religion's excessive indulgence on immutable doctrines as inherently conservative, hindering the versatility, adaptability and flexibility needed to respond to contemporary challenges that confront humanity. Rorty's opinion is that, "Progress is not about discovering eternal truths but about solving present-day problems. Religion, by its very nature, is often at odds with this endeavor" (Rorty, 1991). There is the potential for societies to achieve collective progress unburdened by theological constraints and dogmas. Issues in the world today, such as climate change, social justice and public health are solved through evidence-based research rather than appeals to ineffective divine authority. His approach of course, facilitates collective collaboration of participants in conversation and empirical evidence for collective productive action.

Rorty's thesis no doubt has potentials to strengthen democratic institutions as democracy itself thrives on open-ended conversations where participants negotiate their differences through dialogue. His position on religion as a 'conversation-stopper' is important with regards to enhancing common and equal footing discussions among the members of the society, free from unnecessary hierarchies and abstract contemplations, often imposed on the minds of individuals by religion, which of course, impede free rational discourse. This view nevertheless dovetails with John Rawls' idea of an overlapping consensus, where individuals with diverse worldviews agree on shared principles of justice. This is why he notes that, "In a pluralistic society, the exercise of political power must be guided by public reason, which excludes doctrines that cannot be reasonably accepted by all citizens" (Rawls, 1993). Taking on a different view, conflict is not only a result of differences in religious beliefs, hence, Rorty opines that religion fosters conflict in the society. Conflict is basically a disagreement, a product of differences in ideologies, beliefs and orientations. Every idea has a source and a man is the product of his ideology and acts basically from that worldview. Some may get theirs from their religious nurturing, others may be through parental inculcations, others may be from wide studies which inform and shape their belief systems and some from experiences of life. There are cases of conflicts that have occurred in most secular nations and societies. The question

remains, if religion fosters conflict, then what triggers such conflicts in such society where religion is greatly minimized in practice? This means that religion may not necessarily be a conflict-trigger as proposed by Rorty because ultimately, there may be other factors that trigger conflict within the society even when there seems to be near absence of religion.

Every society that has thrived has been founded on certain solid moral values which have served as a vehicle of development and progress in the society. Every society whether secular or sacred needs justice to thrive. Every society needs ethical values to enhance cooperation and collaboration. Most of these values are the core tenets of religion and the gospel they preach. When a society lacks these values, development would be a mirage and anarchy and doom will be the destiny of such society. It remains a case therefore, that, the values a secular society needs to attain human development are the basic values religious beliefs initiated and tends to propagate. This means that religion inadvertently fosters right moral formation that usher in human development and of course, not a conversation stopper as advanced by Rorty. Besides, Rorty's attempt to remove metaphysical truth as a foundation and replace with dialogue among equals is inconsistent with his idea of pluralism and solidarity.

Conclusion

Rorty's secular thesis of religion as a conversation stopper, resonates profoundly among the postmodernists, even as Rorty fails to understand that Christianity's commitment to rational theology triggered further rational discussions that propelled or was directly responsible for the success of all round developments especially in Europe. In this case however, there is need for a balance in both secularist and religious spheres that should engender healthy conversations and mutual respect devoid of ideological blackmail. This balance, I think, would nevertheless facilitate a more inclusive approach that would enable religion and secular society to co-exist constructively without obstructing or undermining conversations in a liberal society.

More so, Rorty's approach to Religion sought to reconcile the classical metaphysical realism posed by idealism, empiricism and postmodernism. Even as his ideas on religion though persuasive, but it is, as well, deeply rooted in relativism and skepticism and of course, lacks a clear direction for a harmonious synthesis of reason and faith.

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Article

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ETHNICITY AND RELIGION IN AFRICAN POLITICS: INSTRUMENTS FOR POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND CONFLICT

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Abstract

Ethnicity and religion are essential part of people's socio-cultural environment that form part of the social determinants which shape nations towards the path to democratic advancement and development. However, in Africa, religion and ethnicity are playing destructive as opposed to constructive roles in the development of the democracy as they give birth to various categories of conflicts. It is based on this that this study seeks to examine the role played by ethnicity and religion in political mobilization of people and how it culminates into various degrees of conflicts that undermine the economic and political development in the continent. To achieve this, the study utilizes the Elite Theory based on the perception of Robert Michel; and employs a content analysis method of collecting data by relying upon the existing documents containing data related to the study in question. The findings of the study indicated that African leaders are fond of using ethnicity and religion as instruments at their disposal for gaining or retaining their positions of power, which greatly hampers the development of the continent. It is based on the findings that this study recommends among others that more inclusive governance approach that could allay the fears of the various groups along best practices that guarantee equality, justice and fairness in resources/value mobilization and allocation be ensured in Africa.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Religion, Politics, Political Mobilization, Conflicts.

Introduction

Group diversity in ethnic, religious, racial or economic nature is a prominent initiator of political differences in plural societies, which results in opposing interests divided by social fractures that

give birth to political competition (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2020). Perceptions and attachment to social diversities like ethnicity played a critical role in fuelling World War II at the global stage. Similar sentiments mixed with religion in the 1990s divided the former state of Yugoslavia among the Balkans. Also in the African continent, the 1994 ethnic cleansing in Rwanda (Tutsi and Hutus), and Apartheid in South Africa are adept cases in focus. Tensions associated with social diversity are common across continents (developed and developing) but some countries have managed theirs better as can be seen in the United States of America and Modern Germany (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2020).

Ethnicity and religion have made a positive contribution to many post-independent African countries in that they have managed to serve both state and civil society to some degree. Even in the most repressive of African countries, state elites were forced to acknowledge ethno-regional power (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2019). Although these leaders gave scant public recognition to this rival source of political strength considering the fact that it grated against the official nationalist credo and their own elite interests, tacit concessions were however consistently made to sub-state groups. Cabinets, for instance, were often a fine balancing act as most ethnic and religious groups had their own representative within this state institution. The failure to include leading members of each ethnic and religious group within the executive would risk provoking a challenge to the regime from each absent party. Similarly, ethnic and religious quotas were also exercised in bureaucratic appointments such as in the military, civil service, police, and public agencies, as well as in the allocation of local budgets, and the allotment of state resources in general (Eze & Karibi-Botoye, 2024). Of course, there was not automatically an equal distribution of these resources, but the state elite knew that they would have to pay a political price if any group perceived itself to have been left out of these ethnic and religious calculations.

However, ethnic and religious politics are among the various phenomena hindering the success of democracy in Africa. Africa, politically and structurally, seems to be formed and patterned on religious and ethnic differences (Kpodee & Peters, 2024). Kpodee and Peters further emphasized that ethnicity and religion are essential parts of people's social-cultural environment that form part of the social determinants which shape notable nations towards the path to democratic advancement and development. However, in Africa, religion and ethnicity are playing destructive as opposed to constructive roles in the development of democracy (Kpodee & Peters, 2024). Thomson (2004) observed that ethnicity and religion invariably portrayed as having been a barrier to Africa's economic and political development in the post-independence period. He noted that, even though ethnicity and religion when operated in the right political environment can be as progressive a force as any type of social organization, in the harsh arena of Africa's authorian-like one-party governments, religion and ethnicity provide a rare extent of pluralism and representation (Thomson, 2004). Eze and Karibi-Botoye (2024) believe that elections in post-independent Africa have always generated tensions, anxieties and controversies, especially among the electorates. This is connected to the fact that electioneering periods are characterized by hate speeches which in most cases have an ethnic and religious undertone. According to them, the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria was a typical example as it generated more tension and controversies. Prior to the election, religion and ethnicity played a dominant role as the fielding of the same faith ticket (Muslim-Muslim) by the ruling party All Progressive Congress (APC) generated so much tension in the polity as many Christian

saw that arrangement as a ploy to Islamize the country. Similarly, the nomination of Atiku Abubakar as the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) generated tension as those from southern region believed such a move was a ploy for the northern region to dominate the southern region considering the fact that a northerner in the person of Late Muhammadu Buhari was about to complete his two terms of office (Eze & Karibi-Botoye, 2024).

Religious ethnicity gets into politics not just for cultural, spiritual, or moral reasons; often there are instrumental imperatives as well. Political, economic and social conditions affect the decision of anyone who decides to challenge the state using justifications of faith and culture (Kalu, 2016). One can certainly characterize an Islamist militant fighting in Algeria as a devout believer who is willing to lay down their life to wrestle the state from infidels. Yet, just as with the Rwandan genocide case, to leave this as the sole explanation of the Algerian conflict tends to mislead. One should acknowledge the fact that the military has always stymied political representation in Algeria, as well as the fact that the timing of Islamist popularity coincided with chronic economic problems, and the stalling of the whole (secular) nation-building project (Thomson, 2004). It is this extreme extent of religion and ethnicity in Africa as indicated by Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2020) that create an opening for the African leaders to use the situation to their advantage by arousing the people's sympathy into voting for them because of their ethnicity or religious affiliations. Wherever they realize they cannot win an election, they use these two social phenomena (religion and ethnicity) to raise tension in that area so that the election will not hold. It is based on this that the study aimed at examining the role played by ethnicity and religion in African politics as they are used as tools of mobilizing people as well as initiating conflict in Africa.

Conceptual Clarifications

Various scholars have offered a variety of definitions of the concept of ethnicity; nonetheless, most of the definitions differ only in terms of wording rather than context. According to Kpodee and Peters (2024), ethnicity is the consciousness of somebody, relative to the norms and the values of his or her culture, of which other peoples' socio-cultural background may be deemed to be inferior. They noted that ethnicity is likened to a hydra-headed monster which breeds social chaos, and has had a pervasive influence on every aspect of people's life and which calls for a multifaceted attack from all and sundry to combat it. Offiong (2001) cited in Kpodee and Peter (2024) also stated that ethnicity is a condition in which people of a given territory share a common belief, religion, culture, language, dressing, historical background, which may be different from others. He specifically indicates that if people accept the expressions of ethnic, religious and cultural preferences are a natural phenomenon and consistent with expression of individual liberty, then they have to realize that attempts to suppress such preferences are futile and cannot lead to peaceful coexistence. Eze and Karibi-Botoye (2024) view ethnicity as a person's sense of belonging to a group if it influences his political behaviour. Ethnicity is stated to be immersed both in physiological givens and in social roles, and it has common attributes of commitment to a cause, love and trust for and emotional tie to a group, and more importantly, the obligations and duties it confer on membership of a group to which one identifies with. In the view of Thomson (2004), ethnicity is found in a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language. This

means that ethnicity focuses more on sentiments of descent and origin instead of the geographical consideration of a nation.

Religion as perceived by Karl Marx is the opium of the people which when lacerated creates an unbelievable level of consciousness and sentiments that see fanatics fighting without ascertaining the actual cause of their action (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2020). This means that religion is a socio-political, cultural and spiritual phenomenon with overriding influence in individual and community life of most members of the society, and has been often suspected and accused of anti-social activities. According to Geertz (2016), religion is a practice tied to conceptions of a general order of existence that is something whose existence is fundamental, all-pervading, or unconditioned. The practices that are distinctly religious for Geertz are those tied to a culture's metaphysics or worldview, their conception of the overall shape of reality. To Geertz religions are not only the forms of life based on the theistic and polytheistic (or, more broadly, animist or spiritualist) beliefs that Herbert and Tylor recognized, but also those based on belief in the involuntary, spontaneous, or natural operations of the law of karma, the Dao in Daoism, the Principle in Neo-Confucianism, and the Logos in Stoicism (Geertz, 2016). To Apuwabi (2018), religion is the set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that define the relations between human beings and sacred or divinity. Kpodee and Peters (2024) elaborated on the concept by stating that religion is a system of social unity commonly understood as a group of beliefs or attitudes concerning an object, person, unseen or imaginary being, or system of thought considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine or highest truth, and the moral codes, practices, values, institutions, and rituals associated with such belief or system of thought. This means that it is a structure within which specific theological doctrines and practices are advocated and pursued; usually among a community of like-minded believers. Therefore, religion, based on this perception, comes to give answer to emotional tension created by puzzling and mystifying environments (Kpodee & Peters, 2024).

The concept of politics has varied interpretation and connotations, and the reason being that it is an issue, concept and phenomenon that basically invokes many variegated sentiments and opinions. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle who is widely regarded as the father of the term politics said that man is a political animal. According to him, the essence of social existence is politics and that where two or more men are interacting with each other or one another respectively, they are invariably involved in a political relationship, and this is a natural and inevitable predisposition among men. As men seek to define their positions in society, as they attempt to wring personal security from available resources and as they try to influence others to accept their points of view, they find themselves engaging in politics (cited in Ayuba & Ismaila, 2018). According to Eze and Karibi-Botoye (2024), politics is a universal phenomenon and an inescapable fact of human existence. To them, politics refers to the conscious or unconscious struggle for domination, advantage and interest actualization by man in society. Hence, this is an emphasis of the definition of the concept by Lasswell who defined the concept as who gets what, when and how. To Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2019), politics is an activity in which differing interests within a territory are conciliated. This means that politics is not only an activity to struggle for scarce resources, but also to make decisions and resolve conflicts in society. For the purpose of this study, however, politics is an organized dispute about power and its use, involving choice among disputing values, ideas, persons, interests and demands. It is the manner in which power is obtained, exercised and controlled, the purpose for which it is

used, the manner in which decisions are made, the factors which influence the making of those decisions and the context in which those decisions take place.

Theoretical Framework

This study makes use of Elite theory as perceived by Robert Michel, which postulates that power in any state or organization is controlled and exercised by few individuals or groups that are called elites. The proponents of the theory include Robert Michel, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Harold Lasswell. In the view of Michel, the ultimate fate of all nations is to be controlled by a small group of people (minority) or plural elites (Eze & Karibi-Botoye, 2024). The basic assumptions of the Elite theory based on Robert Michel's perceptions are:

- i. Society is closed, pyramidal, and unresponsive and composed of the few who rule and the many who are ruled.
- ii. The large mass of the people are ignoble, not cohesive and not organized and so are not competent or capable to exercise political power.
- iii. Therefore, political power is entrusted to elites who are cohesive, organized and so competent or capable to exercise political power.

Relating and applying the elite theory in understanding the influence of ethnicity and religion in African politics, it becomes imperative to state that politics in Africa is being exploited by ethno-religious chauvinists in African government and politics. Most political elites in the continent depend upon ethnicity and religion as a tool to actualize their political goal. The political elite have enormous resources at their disposal with which they can manipulate the electorates. Also because of incentives attached to public offices in Africa, politics become a means to an end; to actualize the economic goal of the political elite. It is these onerous and multifarious resources at the display of the state that the elite struggle to control and in such struggle employ the instruments of ethnic and religious sentiments for personal aggrandizement. Where these tools (ethnicity and religion) would not favour them, they use the resources at their disposal to disrupt the area so that their opponent would not benefit from the situation.

Origin and Evolution of Ethnic and Religious Politics in Africa

Politics in Africa often follows either ethno-linguistic or religious lines. South Sudan's civil unrest is regularly described in Dinka-Nuer terms. In the Central African Republic, power struggles morphed into fears of ethnic cleansing against the Muslim community. Periodic civil unrest in Nigeria takes on an ethnic label in some instances and a religious one in others. Indeed, data indicates that over three-quarters of conflicts in the continent are coded as either ethnic or religious (McCauley, 2016). Kpodee and Peters (2024) observed that the present continent called Africa is ideologically, deliberately patterned and arranged along ethnic and religious divides. And it is this political construct, as evidenced in the history of the continent's politics can be traced back to the countries' pre-independence days. These two phenomena (ethnicity and religion) have continued to be the basis upon which African politics is determined. In agreement with this assertion, Udoidem in his observation argues that since the creation of the present African State which was selfishly conceived and brought to limelight in an unholy way by the colonial imperialist, African unity only exists on ethnic and religious bigotries. He strongly affirms his position and argument that the ideology upon which Africa was contracted was

based on deception and deliberate disregard for genuine unity of all parties involved (Kpodee & Peters, 2024).

According to Nwagwu (2018), although the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts have been linked to colonialism and cold war, conservative scholars argue that ethnic and religious conflicts are most rooted in bad governance, politicization of ethnic and religious identities, and the unhealthy competition for power by those whose self-centered course is rooted in parochial ideologies. Owutu (2013) identified factors that politicized ethnicity and religion in Africa to include the existence of two or more ethnic and religious groups with numerical strengths that can significantly affect the outcome and direction of a democratic political process; the instrumentalization of ethnicity and religion as legitimizing tool of hegemony in instances when the interest of the political class is under threat; when there is an ascendant radical thinking within a politically significant ethnic or religious group capable of upstaging hegemony; and when the society is characterized by political, social or economic hardships that can cause alliances along ethnic and religious fault-lines. According to Nwagwu (2018), fragility of the state institutions in terms of their ability and capacity to manage diversity, corruption, rising inequality, gross violation of human rights, environmental degradation, boundary disputes and other conflict related issues have also been identified as some of the underlying causes of violent-conflicts in Africa. The situation is further compounded due to the failure of the state to be responsive to its primary responsibility of providing security for lives and properties. African democracy, with its feeble institutional framework, seems to have failed to guarantee peaceful resolution or positive and effective management of ethnic and religious conflicts as the state is enmeshed in the entire mess. Where ethno-religious identities are so strong and national identity so weak, the population would pay strong allegiance to their ethnic authority or religion. Such adherents would be willing tools to engage the state authority in battle in defense of their ethnic and religious interests (Kwaja, 2009).

One of the major importance of ethnicity and religion to African leaders, put forward by Lajul (2024), is that they are utilized as instruments of mobilizing people to get access and control of economic and political resources. While economic resources are financial and material wealth of a country, political resources are power to make decisions, influence policies and make laws with which a country is governed. In this role, most political leaders in Africa want to control all public economic institutions, through their aides and diehard supporters who do exactly as and what they want. In this way, they often make use of their religious and ethnic identity to arouse the electorate's sympathy. Ayuba and Ismaila (2018) adds that these leaders while looting public resources and amassing obscene amounts of wealth for themselves often go to their ethnic and religious communities and feed them with a falsehood that it is time for their community to eat. Indeed, while individual members of the ethnic and religious community may personally benefit in this process of accessing wealth, the majority of their members remain psychologically content and proud, but with nothing to show for it. Therefore, while the leaders get wealthy by grabbing land, houses and minerals like in the case of Mobutu, most members of their ethnic groups have nothing to show (Lajul, 2024). Similarly, Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2020) asserted that ethnicity and religion is used to create a support base of their political power. In line with this, McCauley (2016) argued that politicians politicize ethnicity in an effort to build their support base from specific ethnic groups and to distribute resources they accessed through political position to those ethnic groups. He indicated that the ethnic

group that forms the support base must, therefore, be large enough to constitute a winning majority. In fact, where such ethnic groups do not make a winning majority, most politicians take salvation into religion. The former president of Uganda Idi Amin Dada (who ruled from 1971-1979), came from Kakwa, a very small ethnic community, so could not rely on that ethnic group for political support, but had to resort to the support of the members of his religion, Islam. Milton Obote, who ruled Uganda twice (from 1962-1971 and 1980-1985), resorted to his religious community, the Church of Ugandan's community, instead of his smaller ethnic community, the Langi (McCauley, 2016).

Uwaifo (2016) maintained that the origin of ethnicity in Nigeria is traceable to the nation's colonial experience, particularly the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914. To him, the act of amalgamation was not a federal idea. Lugard did not conceive a federal state for Nigeria. In the statement of the colonial office when Lugard submitted his proposals on 9 May, 1913, it was stated that Sir Lugard's proposals contemplate a state which is impossible to classify (Uwaifo, 2016). This is because, according to Kpodee and Peters (2024), the colonial masters felt it was grossly impossible to administer such a state that was large and mixed with diverse ethnic groups. So for the purposes of administrative convenience, in order to control such people, therefore, the British colonial master hurriedly came up with amalgamation of the different ethnic nationalities without considering the imminent and undeniable difference in culture, religion, character and socio-political traditions of these ethnic groupings. Uwaifo (2016) further identified that in the pre-colonial era and since the independence of Nigeria, ethnicity played and still playing manifest and latent roles in the body politics of Nigeria. In their research, Eghosa and Rotimi cited in Kpodee and Peters (2024) similarly submitted that like ethno-religious violence, recent inter-ethnic clashes in Nigeria have also been particularly combustible especially when they have involved relatively large groups like the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Urhobo or Ijaw.

Ethno-Religious Politics as an Instrument of Political Mobilization and Conflict in Africa

Ethnicity and religious politics in Africa has been a significant cause of political mobilization as it in most cases gives birth to the mobilization of ethnic and religious groups for political action. These political actions can manifest in various forms, including protests, violent confrontation, and demonstration. Political mobilization is driven by the desire for national unity and the need to tackle problems that affect the collective interests of the people. Nonetheless, this mobilization can at the same time give birth to conflict as it often involves competing interests and rivalries among different ethnic and religious groups (Ayuba & Ismaila, 2018). The inability of the African political elite to implement effective governance, enhance national cohesion, and stimulate economic development through well-conceived policies has culminated in substantial unemployment rates. This phenomenon has consequently precipitated the emergence of communal, ethnic, and religious challenges that define the political landscape in Africa. Given that poverty and unemployment have increasingly become entrenched factors contributing to various ethno-religious conflicts within the nation, a growing population of impoverished individuals frequently serves as a reservoir of mercenary militants. This observation may elucidate the prevalence of a significant number of combatants typically involved in ethno-religious disputes in the continent (Samuel, 2025).

According to Samuel (2025), Nigeria is indisputably one of the most strained nations regarding ethno-religious dynamics. Atiku Abubakar, the presidential aspirant representing the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2023 electoral contest, faced significant criticism for allegedly leveraging ethnic identity. During a gathering with the Arewa Forum, Atiku articulated that an average individual from the North does not require an individual from Yoruba or Igbo descent. A Northerner necessitates this: "I present myself before you as a pan-Nigerian originating from the North." While Atiku's advocates contended that he was misrepresented, it seems that he sincerely perceived that, with President Buhari not seeking re-election in 2023, he could secure the support of the Northern electorate as the most prominent Hausa/Fulani candidate on the ballot, consciously appealing to ethnic politics. Additionally, in a recent television interview, Atiku was inquired whether he harbored concerns regarding Tinubu's selection of Kashim Shettima as his vice-presidential candidate, particularly in light of the fact that both he and Shettima hail from the North-East region. In his reply, Atiku invoked ethnic considerations, asserting: "If one examines the demographic composition of the North-East, one will note that Borno and Yobe are predominantly Kanuri states. There are an additional four states, which are primarily inhabited by Hausa/Fulani populations. Even if electoral decisions are influenced by such factors, I possess a comparatively advantageous standing within the North-East." Consequently, for the impending 2023 electoral contest, Atiku gravitated towards ethnic political dynamics (Samuel, 2025). Similarly, Bola Tinubu plays both ethnic and religious cards. His strategy is to replicate the South-West/North alliance that gave the All Progressives Congress (APC) victory in 2015 and 2019. For the Yoruba vote, he plays ethnic politics with the slogan "Yoruba loka" (meaning "It's the turn of the Yoruba"). For the Northern vote, he plays religious politics with a Muslim-Muslim ticket. Recently, in Ekiti, Tinubu told the people: "Do not vote for Peter Obi or Atiku," adding: "You do not know them" – implying that they are not Yoruba (Kpodee & Peters, 2024).

Ethnicity and religious politics in Ghana have been a significant factor in political mobilization, particularly during election periods. The country's constitution prohibits political parties based on ethnicity, and religion, but the reality is that most voters align their political choices with their ethnic or religious affiliations. This has led to a complex interplay of ethnic and religious identities in Ghanaian politics that can sometimes lead to ethnic and religious clashes (Aidoo & Botchway, 2021). Ethnicity and religion in politics is rooted in Ghana's history and predates post-independence elections. During the electoral process of 1954, political factions emerged predominantly along ethnic lines. For instance, the Northern People's Party (NPP) was established with the primary objective of safeguarding the northern regions from perceived southern hegemony while also striving to promote their political, social, and economic advancement. Similarly, the Trans-Togoland Congress (TC) and the Anlo Youth Organization (AYO) were constituted in the contemporary Volta Region to advocate for the interests of their respective ethnic groups. The politicization along ethnic and religious dimensions, coupled with underlying religious sentiments in Ghanaian politics, has frequently resulted in, and may perpetuate, ethnic and religious conflicts, particularly if politicians persist in leveraging and inflaming ethnic and religious identities. Such dynamics are not only detrimental to the health of Ghana's democratic framework; they also pose a significant risk of engendering severe ethnic violence and civil strife if not managed with due diligence (Aidoo & Botchway, 2021).

According to Thomson (2004), No African state is socially homogeneous. Social cleavage produces conflicting interests everywhere. In each country, different issues act as the primary point of mobilization. Nationalism, class, and ideology are all favoured rallying cries gathering individuals together, enabling them to make their political demands to the state, and to society as a whole. So why should not ethnicity and religion be a legitimate tool enabling groups to aggregate demands and mobilize politically? Ethnicity and religion, after all, is the most obvious social divide on the continent (Thomson, 2004). Ethnicity and religion have made a positive contribution to many post-colonial African countries in that it has managed to serve both state and civil society to some degree. Even in the most repressive of African countries, state elites were forced to acknowledge ethno-religious power. Although these leaders gave scant public recognition to this rival source of political strength (considering the fact that it grated against the official nationalist credo and their own elite interests), tacit concessions were nevertheless consistently made to sub-state groups (Apuwabi, 2018).

Nwagwu (2018) stressed on the implication of ethnicity and religion in African politics of the peaceful co-existence of people. According to the aforementioned individual, Kenya, a nation characterized by the presence of over 70 distinct ethnic groups, has experienced elections since its independence in 1963 that have been predominantly influenced by ethnic affiliations. This phenomenon has engendered a climate of exclusionism and discrimination against individuals associated with opposition factions. The Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) garnered support from the Luo, Luhya, and Kalenjin ethnic groups located in the Nyanza, Western Provinces, and Rift Valley; conversely, the Party of National Unity (PNU) received backing from the Kikuyu ethnic group situated in the Central and Eastern Provinces, as well as Nairobi, the Coast Province, and Rift Valley. In the aftermath of the presidential election in 2007, Kenya witnessed violence; President Mwai Kibaki of PNU, who is a Kikuyu, was declared the victor of a highly contested electoral process. Supporters of Raila Odinga from the ODM raised allegations of electoral irregularities, a claim that was subsequently substantiated by international observers. Kibaki was surreptitiously inaugurated at night amidst widespread protests. In response, supporters of the ODM engaged in violent acts, resulting in the fatalities of Kikuyu individuals across various regions of the nation. The police intervention and the shooting of hundreds of the protesters heightened ethnic-based killings and attacks against Kikuyus living outside their traditional settlement areas, especially in the Rift Valley Province. In an incident, over 50 unarmed Kikuyu women and children were burnt alive. The violence recorded 1,500 casualties, while 600,000 people were allegedly displaced. It was alleged the police action was government-driven against supporters of ODM (Kwaja, 2009).

In a similar vein, Rwanda experienced a catastrophic campaign of extermination against the Tutsi ethnic group in 1994, fueled by ethnic animosities. The Hutu ethnic majority perpetrated the murder of over 800,000 to 1,000,000 individuals, predominantly from the Tutsi minority. The extremist factions within the Hutu community initiated this violent insurrection in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. The genocide rapidly disseminated across the nation with alarming velocity and ferocity, as local authorities and the Hutu-dominated government incited ordinary citizens to engage in armed assaults against Tutsi individuals, their neighbors. In a comparable historical context, a Hutu revolution in 1959 compelled approximately 300,000 Tutsis to seek refuge outside of Rwanda, thereby diminishing their demographic presence. Among the victims of the genocide were Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana and her ten

Belgian bodyguards. Nevertheless, prior to the ascendance of the Tutsi-led Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) through a military offensive in early July 1994, countless Rwandans had already lost their lives, and millions had become internally displaced. The victory of RPF put more than two million Hutu-participants in the genocide on their heels to Zaire, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo as refugees. In a full-blown humanitarian crisis, thousands of them died of disease epidemics common to the squalor of refugee camps (Thomson, 2004).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The effect of ethnicity and religion is not as pronounced in the western world as it is in Africa. Ethnicity and religion are the two most important social markers in sub-Saharan Africa, suggesting that groups and leaders are engaged in perennial conflict. Both variables affect African political behavior independently and simultaneously because most Africans have both ethnic and religious identities which they consider critical in inter-group relationships. Political leaders employ ethnicity and religion interchangeably as social identifiers in inter-group relationships. Virtually all problems militating against politics and governance in Africa are directly and or indirectly related to ethnicization and religionization of politics. Political parties are formed along ethno-religious lines with the spoils of office distributed in that order. The ethnicization and religionization of politics in Africa leads to various civil unrest that contributed in no small measure to undermining the democratic development in the continent. It is based on this that this study makes the following recommendations:

- i. More inclusive governance approach that could allay the fears of the various groups along best practices that guarantee equality, justice and fairness in resources/value mobilization and allocation should be ensured in Africa.
- ii. For the African countries to establish a sound electoral democracy and strong united countries, the menace of ethnicity and ethnic bloc voting should be addressed. To achieve this, efforts should be intensified towards providing a set of principles for nation-building which should be included in the constitutions of the respective countries.
- iii. There should be commitment to an even distribution of socio-economic and infrastructural development. Uneven distribution of socio-economic and infrastructural development in the African countries breed a sense of exclusion, and the fear of domination and marginalization by the undeveloped segment of the countries.
- iv. There should be a formulation of policies and programmes to re-orientate those that are divided along ethnic and religious lines in order to promote good relations among the different ethnic and religious groups.

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Article

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ARMED BANDITRY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

Banditry has become a challenge and threat to national security. The level at which bandits operate within the landscape of Northern Nigeria has led to violent crimes such as kidnapping, raping, maiming, killing and destruction of properties and farmlands. It has also brought disruptions of socio- economic activities and uncertainty, a situation that has become worrisome to the government and the citizenry. This paper therefore examines the causes and implications of banditry in the Northern region, which has emerged as a threat to national security. The paper adopted descriptive methodse, with the use of secondary source of data while the Situational Action Theory (SAT) was employed as a theoretical framework. This paper posited that the factors which drive the accelerating banditry in Northern Nigeria are high level of unemployment with its attendant poverty, a weak security system and arms proliferation . The paper concludes by recommending a combination of strengthened security measures, economic empowerment, border control, efficient disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program, community- base moral and civic education to mitigate the phenomenon.

Keywords: Armed Banditry, National Security, Conflict Drivers, Poverty, Violence, Northern Nigeria.

Introduction

In Nigeria, banditry has emerged as a contemporary threat to national security. This threat which has enveloped the Northwest and North central region of Nigeria has become worrisome to national security experts and the public at large. Bandits engages in widespread attacks,

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kidnapping, killing, destruction of properties, looting, and disrupting of farm activities, which have affected the nation's agricultural output. The activities of these bandits have displaced thousands of people, communities and creating a growing number of widows, widowers and orphans, who now reside in internally displaced persons' (IDP) camp. The Northern Regions of Nigeria encompasses seven states namely Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi. Five of these states, which are Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi have been mostly affected by this scourge of banditry. Of these five states, Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara have been the most critical. It is however, pertinent to note that the incidences of banditry are not limited to Northwest Nigeria. In fact, it is also prevalent in some parts of North-central region, in states like Niger, Nasarawa, Benue and Plateau which are equally regarded as hotbeds (Kuna & Jibrin 2016).

Scholars like Gaye (2018), Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016), Suleiman (2017) and Mustapha (2019) have advanced several factors as the cause and prevalence of banditry in Nigeria. Some of the factors they argued include the fragility of Nigerian state, weak state institutions, especially the security agencies, availability of grossly ungoverned spaces, porosity of Nigeria's borders with its neighboring countries, arms proliferation, weak leadership, corruption, unemployment and mass poverty. There is no gainsaying the fact that banditry poses a serious challenge not only to the security of Northwest states but to the country at large in view of its ever increasing impacts and implications. The level at which bandits operate within the northwest region calls for attention from both the states and the Federal governments, more especially, since the latter controls the state security apparatuses. Against this backdrop of the upsurge in incidences of banditry in recent times, this paper examines the phenomenon of banditry; its cause and implications to the security of the Northern Regions and Nigeria at large. For the purpose of analytical progression, this paper is divided into five sections apart from the introductory section which is considered the first, the second section deals with the conceptual clarifications while the third section extensively discusses the causes of banditry. The fourth discusses its implications to Nigeria national security. The fifth section enlightens on ways to prevent and checkmate the activities of bandits while the last section is the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptualizing Banditry

Conceptually, banditry is a derivation of the term bandit meaning an unlawful armed group terrorizing people and confiscating their properties. Banditry also leads to the existence of constant fear of attack, which takes away human dignity and people's ability to organize, seek and engage in livelihood. By so doing the bandits have trampled on the people's fundamentals human rights and economic development within the region. It involves the use of force and threat to that effect to intimidate a person or group with the intent to rob or kill (Tahir and Usman 2021). Banditry stands against the government, which affects the life of citizens since the government exists for the betterment of the citizens. However, where the term banditry is connected to the rural areas, it then implies a group of rural outlaws involved in illicit activities such as raiding of villages, kidnappings and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, bandits are gang groups terrorizing and dispossessing local people or travelers of their valuable items or properties such as merchandise, money, cattle, camel, and sheep, among others. They operate within and along rural borders with the assistance of their local

collaborators including in some cases, state agents deployed to work for the safety and security of the people (Abdullahi, 2019).

Banditry can be classified in different types such as social banditry which (warto, 2011) argued is a criminal act committed either by the residents of a village or people in the low economic and social strata in order to fulfill their desire needs. In this sense, (Rife 2011) opines that social banditry flaunt authority, live with reckless abandon and champion the causes of the masses against elite oppression. It could however be argued that instead of championing the causes of the poor, men are more likely to turn to banditry out of desperation and hard economic realities than vague notion of righting a wrong. Consequently, (Sullivan 2022) observed that contemporary banditry has changed in scope, nature and extent from historic antecedents. He maintains that modern day bandits are criminally inclined insurgents and conventional terrorists. He argued plausibly that these groups are a cog in the wheel of democratic governance and free market economy. To Sullivan (1998), bandits are 'gangs, criminal enterprises, insurgents or warlords who dominate social life and erode the bonds of effective security and the rule of law'. In congruent to this assertions, (Williams 1998) conceived bandits as transnational gangs and criminals who extend their reach and influence by co-opting individuals and organizations through bribery, coercion and intimidation; they do so in order to facilitate, enhance or protect their own activities. Thus banditry in the context of this paper is defined as the criminal action of groups or individuals, disrupting and infringing on peoples fundamental human right and inflicting pain on them such as killing, kidnappings, reaping and disrupting the economic activities of the region or state.

Causes of Banditry in Northern Nigeria

Several interrelated factors account for the rise and persistence of banditry in Northern Nigeria. In Northern Nigeria, widespread poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education weaken the socialization processes that would typically discourage crime. The Northern Region of Nigeria has the highest poverty rate in the country, with a percentage of the population, particularly the youths lacking access to gainful employment. This lead the Young people, particularly in rural areas, to have a propensity toward banditry as a rational means of survival, driven by economic desperation. (Mikail, Ayuba, Zubairu and Bala 2025) agreed that economic hardship pushes individuals toward criminal livelihood such as banditry. Youth unemployment is especially high, and for many young men, therefore banditry is a rational mean of survival. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the poverty index in the northern Nigeria stood at 65% (NBS 2024 report). The anxiety from Nigerian graduates which often turn to frustration, and then to aggression on the government is what has fueled the emergence of most of these bandit attacks and security threats in the country (Suleiman, 2017; Mustapha, 2019) The lack of alternative livelihoods pushes individuals toward criminal activities like cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, and armed robbery. Northern Nigeria, particularly the rural areas suffers from extreme poverty, with limited access to basic services like electricity, clean water, education, healthcare and employment opportunities.

In Northern Nigeria, the lack of government presence, ineffective law enforcement, and porous borders create a " criminogenic environment, " where crime can flourish with minimal resistance. Bandits operate in remote areas where state control is weak, and communities under-policed. In the case of Northern Nigeria, individuals who might not inherently be inclined

toward criminality are pushed into banditry due to the combination of socio-economic hardship and the availability of opportunities for illegal gain (such as cattle rustling, kidnapping, and ransom activities). The weak legal framework and socio-economic conditions provide situational contexts that make banditry a feasible option for many. Again, inadequate security in many parts of Northern Nigeria, especially in rural and remote areas and the government's inability to provide security agents and law enforcement allows banditry to flourish. Where and when security agents are available, the vastness of the region, coupled with difficult terrain makes it difficult to police. There has also being allegations of corruption in the form of bribery and collusion with criminals and poor discipline within the police and military. All these makes it challenging for security forces to maintain control. There is no gain saying the fact that weak security system complements the alarming rate of banditry in the northwest region of Nigeria. Also the influx of small arms and light weapons, facilitated by porous borders with neighboring countries like Niger, Mail, Chad, and Cameroon, lead to the presence of transnational criminals network and inflow of weapons to the bandit group thereby equipping them with firearms and enhancing their capability to carry out sophisticated and violent operation, making it difficult for local security to fight them.

Northern Nigeria has been severely impacted by climate change, particularly desertification, shrinking water resources, and declining agricultural yields. The loss of fertile land and pasture due to desertification has heightened competition for scarce resources, particularly between farming and herding communities. This competition often turns violent, with bandit groups taking advantage of the situation to escalate conflicts and loot resources. This clashes often evolved into violent banditry. There is also the ethnic and religious tension between the predominantly Muslim fulnia herders and the Christian farming communities, exacerbated by competition for land resources. This too contributes to the violence in Northern Nigeria, which create volatile environment where banditry thrives. In the past, Northern Nigeria relied heavily on traditional rulers and local leaders to mediate conflict and maintain order. Unfortunately the authorities of traditional rulers have been dismissed in the face of modern governance structures thereby weakening the traditional conflict resolution mechanism and thus allowing banditry to thrive. Banditry has further eroded community structures, as people lose faith in both traditional and formal governance systems. Communities that once relied on collective security and mutual support have been destabilized, leaving them vulnerable to bandit attacks.

Moreover Some politicians in Northern Nigeria have been accused of using armed groups, including bandits, for political purposes which makes them to enjoy a degree of immunity from prosecution. They are hired to intimidate opponents and suppress voters turnout in certain areas. This politicization of crime has further entrenched banditry, as armed groups are often left unchecked once they have served their political purpose and even rewarded in exchange for political favors, making it difficult to dismantle bandit network. The failure of Nigeria government disarmament and reintegration programmed where former bandits are supposed to be given opportunity to disarm and be reintegrated into society is also a causative factor in the escalation of banditry in Northern Nigeria. The program have been poorly funded and poorly managed, leading to lack of sustainable livelihood for former bandits. Without meaningful economic opportunities or rehabilitation, many disarmed bandits return or join other violent groups thereby bringing with them experiences in violent conflict and

criminality. This further strengthens bandit networks and make them more difficult to dismantle. The rise of armed banditry in Northern Nigeria, this driven by a combination of socio-economic, political, and environmental factors. These causes are interconnected, creating a fertile ground for banditry to thrive.

Implications of Banditry for National Security in Nigeria

The rise of banditry in Northern Nigeria has severe implications for the country's national security. These implications are far-reaching, affecting the socio-political stability, economic development, and overall security architecture of Nigeria. Banditry has weakened the legitimacy and authority of the Nigerian state, most especially in areas where the presence of government no longer exists. This gives bandits absolute control over the areas creating “ungoverned spaces” where state institutions have little or no influence. Furthermore, this undermines the rule of law and reduces the population’s trust in the government to provide security and basic services. In so doing the people may turn to self defense group, vigilantes or even negotiate with bandit for protection. This breakdown in trust between the government and citizens weakens national cohesion and can lead to instability. The increase of violence and insecurity particularly in the Northwest and North central region of Nigeria, where armed groups engage in attack on communities including killing, kidnapping for ransom and cattle rustling, has created climate of fear, leading to the displacement of thousands of people and the abandonment of entire village. Banditry has caused large-scale displacement of people, as thousands flee their homes to escape violence. This has led to a growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are in dire need of food, shelter, and medical care. Nigeria’s North-central and North-west zones are afflicted with a multi-dimensional crisis. Long-standing tensions between ethnic and religious groups often result in attacks and banditry. These attacks involve kidnapping and grand larceny along major highways by criminal groups. During the past years, the crisis accelerated and has resulted in widespread displacement across the North-central and North-west regions (IOM UN MIGRATION 2024 report). Their operation are been carried out due to the availability of sophisticated arms and light weapons, thereby increasing deadly attack on Communities. The proliferation of arms also poses a broader threat to national security, as these weapons can find their way into other criminal networks or insurgent groups and thereby exacerbating Nigeria's security challenges.

Again, banditry has significantly disrupted agricultural activities, which is the main source of livelihood for many people in Northern Nigeria. Farmers are often forced to abandon their lands due to the constant threat of attack, cattle rustling, or extortion by bandits. Northern Nigeria plays a vital role in the country’s agricultural output and the disruption of this role caused by banditry has ripple effects on national food supply generating hyper inflation and causing hunger in the land. This disruption of agricultural activities contributes to food insecurity and worsens poverty in affected regions, further stalling economic development and exacerbating inequality. With a lot of security crisis in Nigeria, such as Boko Haram insurgency, militancy in the Niger Delta, and separatist movements in the Southeast (unknown gunmen), with other criminal activities, the issue of banditry further strains the security forces, making it difficult for them to effectively address the wide array of security challenges across the country. The inability to respond to all these threats simultaneously has left some areas vulnerable and allowed banditry to persist. Banditry has created opportunities for collaboration with terrorist

organizations like Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), which provide them with logistics support, intelligence, and act as intermediaries in arm trafficking which poses a significant threat to national security, as it enables the expansion of terrorist activities into new areas. Banditry has fostered the growth of a criminal economy that includes kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, illegal mining, and arms smuggling. These activities are lucrative and have attracted a wide range of actors, from local criminals to international syndicates. The entrenchment of this criminal economy makes it difficult to combat banditry, as it becomes intertwined with local economies and corrupt officials. Northern Nigeria shares borders with several countries, including Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Due to lack of border control or checks, bandits move freely across them, complicating efforts to combat the problem.

Education in the country has recently come under significant threat due to increased number of mass kidnappings of students from schools. This is a new strategy adopted by terrorists and bandits groups. Kidnappings in Schools have become a great disincentive for both parents and students alike, for enrolling in schools, opting to stay at home in order to ensure their safety. Today, Nigeria has one of world's highest numbers of out-of-school children, 17.8million, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). A wave of school kidnappings has worsened the situation, with some state governments closing some schools in their states until security is guaranteed. The most affected region is the northern Nigeria with the statistics of 15.23million(UNICEF 2023)

Prevention and Checkmating the Activities of Bandits in Northern Nigeria using Situational Actions Theory (SAT)

According to SAT, an individual's propensity to commit crime is influenced by their moral values and self-control, which can be shaped through targeted interventions like investing in education, particularly moral and civic education. This can play a crucial role in shaping values that reject crime. Civic education is the act of teaching the younger ones how to be law abiding citizens, and responsible individuals in the society. Schools and community-based programs should teach conflict resolution, the importance of the rule of law, and the social costs of crime. Early interventions, such as educational campaigns in vulnerable communities, can deter young people from joining bandit groups or any form of criminal groups. There should be a provision for job creation, vocational training and entrepreneurship support which play a role in reducing individual, especially the youths, propensity to engage in crime. This economic empowerment will strengthen individuals' moral resistance to being recruited into bandit groups by offering alternative livelihoods. SAT suggests that criminal behavior can be altered by reshaping individuals' moral frameworks and providing them with new opportunities. Offering fully funded and active rehabilitation programs that include psychological counseling, skills training, and social reintegration can help former bandits reintegrate into society as law-abiding citizens. These programs should emphasize personal development and help change their perception of crime.

SAT emphasizes the importance of altering environments that foster crime, thus reducing the opportunities for banditry to occur. Banditry thrives in environments where law enforcement is weak or absent. SAT suggests that strengthening formal control mechanisms (like police presence) can reduce the opportunities for crime. This can be done by deploying more security forces in bandit-prone areas, improving police-community relations, and during

trust between the police and community. Local security groups, if properly trained and monitored, can assist in intelligence gathering and rapid response to threats. To disrupt the logistics of armed banditry, there is need for stricter controls over arms proliferation, better border management to prevent arms smuggling, and targeting of criminal networks that supply bandits. De-escalating the arms race in Northern Nigeria will make it harder for bandits to sustain violent activities. SAT indicates that improving the environment reduces the likelihood of crime. Developing rural infrastructure, improving access to schools and healthcare, and providing basic services in vulnerable areas can make communities less prone to the influence of bandit groups. With greater state presence and development, these areas will be less attractive to criminal elements.

The moral context shapes the values and behaviors of individuals and communities. In the case of Northern Nigeria, where socio-economic and cultural factors contribute to banditry, strengthening the moral framework of communities is essential. Engaging communities in dialogues and peace-building initiatives can help reinforce social norms that reject crime and violence. Traditional and religious leaders play a critical role in shaping moral values and should be actively involved in peace efforts. SAT suggests that reinforcing positive moral contexts such as cooperation, mutual respect, and social responsibility can reduce the likelihood of criminal actions. Many bandit groups exploit existing ethnic and religious divisions. SAT emphasizes the role of collective moral guidance in crime prevention. Initiatives that promote inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue, encourage cooperation between herders and farmers, and promote equitable access to resources will reduce conflicts that bandits exploit. This can be done through land reforms, conflict mediation, and joint community development projects. Public awareness campaigns highlighting the consequences of banditry on communities, families, and the nation as a whole can shape public opinion against criminal behavior. These campaigns should involve civil society, media, religious institutions, and educational organizations to spread messages about the negative impact of crime on both individuals and society. The state's ability to enforce laws and provide services significantly influences the broader environment in which crimes occur. SAT points out that weak governance creates "criminogenic environments" where crime flourishes. Corruption in law enforcement and governance fuels criminal activities by providing bandits with the opportunity to operate unchecked. Strengthening anti-corruption measures within the security sector and public administration will reduce impunity for bandit activities. When government institutions are effective and transparent, it deters individuals from engaging in criminal behavior because they know that consequences will follow. SAT emphasizes the need for an effective criminal justice system that enforces consequences for criminal actions. A judicial system that swiftly and fairly prosecutes bandits sends a strong message that crime will not be tolerated. Special courts or task forces dedicated to handling banditry cases may help expedite the prosecution process and ensure that justice is served.

Conclusion

Nations can only thrive and develop when the citizens interact in a socio-economic environment and governing entities that are peaceful, coercive, mutual and secure. The rise of banditry in Northern Nigeria poses significant challenges to national security, socio-economic development, and the cohesion of affected communities. Using Situational Action Theory (SAT) as a framework, we can better understand how individual propensities and "criminogenic

environments” converge to fueling crime. Weak governance, economic deprivation, and societal conflicts create environments conducive to banditry, while individual moral values and motivations shape the propensity to engage in criminal behavior. By addressing both the individual and environmental factors that contribute to banditry, Nigeria can mitigate this threat and restore security in the region.

Recommendations

In order to effectively deal with the menace of banditry in northwest region and Nigeria at large, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Enhance the capacity of the Nigerian police and military through better training, improved equipments, and effective intelligence gathering. Community policing initiatives should be prioritized to build trust and ensure that local knowledge is incorporated into security strategies.
- ii. Address the economic drivers of banditry by investing in job creation, particularly for youth, and revitalizing agriculture. Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and providing access to vocational training which will reduce the appeal of banditry as a livelihood.
- iii. Strengthening governance at both the local and national levels . This includes enforcing anti-corruption measures in law enforcement and public administration, ensuring accountability, and delivering basic services to rural and underserved areas.
- iv. Security reform must prioritize community based policing, improving intelligence gathering, and independent oversight mechanism. Establishing transparent monitoring framework will enhance trust between citizens and the state.
- v. Disrupting the bandit economy such as regulating cattle markets, introducing digital livestock identification system and restricting ransom payments through financial monitoring. Cracking down on illicit financial flow will weaken the economic foundation of banditry.
- vi. DDR initiative must shift from top -down government intervention to community owned framework that involve traditional ruler, youth group, and victim of violence. Reintegration should be tied to community acceptance and behavioral change rather than mere weapon surrender.
- vii. There should be sustainable livelihood programs linked to Agriculture, Agro-processing and renewable energy that employ both ex-bandit and vulnerable youths will create inclusive economic opportunities and reduce incentives for violence.
- viii. Localized communication strategies in various indigenous language should be developed, using radio, drama and respected cleric as messengers.

Through these comprehensive measures, Nigeria can begin to address the root causes of banditry and restore peace and security to affected regions.

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Article

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CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES OF HUMANITARIAN WORKERS IN DELIVERING AID AMID BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges and mitigation strategies of humanitarian workers in delivering aid amid Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria. The persistent conflict has created one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, with millions displaced and dependent on aid, while insecurity, logistical barriers, and political constraints continue to hinder effective operations. A convergent mixed-method design was employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to 327 aid workers from registered Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and key-informant interviews with heads of NGOs to triangulate perspectives. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, means, and standard deviations in Statistical Package for Social Sciences, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis in NVivo. Findings revealed that humanitarian workers face significant challenges including frequent Boko Haram attacks, risk of abduction, infrastructural destruction, restricted access to communities, poor coordination with authorities, and limited funding. To mitigate these threats, aid workers adopt strategies such as collaboration with local communities, reliance on armed escorts, use of digital communication platforms, staff training, and implementation of security protocols, though remote monitoring tools were found to be less effective. The study concluded that despite hostile conditions, humanitarian actors

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demonstrate resilience through adaptive approaches, yet their safety and effectiveness remain constrained by insurgency-related risks. It was recommended that stronger security collaboration between government, military, and humanitarian agencies be established, alongside deeper community-based protection strategies, to ensure sustainable and safe humanitarian access.

Keywords: Aid Delivery, Humanitarian Workers, Challenges, Boko Haram Insurgency, Mitigation Strategies

Introduction

Borno State, in north-east Nigeria, has been the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency since 2009. The conflict has generated one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises; by 2021 more than 2.9 million people were internally displaced in the North-East, 80 percent of them in Borno, and over 8.4 million required life-saving assistance (Eguiluz, 2020; Adebote-Adefolake, 2022). Repeated attacks on towns, villages, and military installations have devastated livelihoods, collapsed basic social services, and deepened food insecurity (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). Consequently, Borno has become a high-risk operational environment where humanitarian actors must simultaneously confront insecurity, bureaucratic impediments, and a shrinking humanitarian space. Humanitarian access is severely constrained. Military-imposed "garrison town" strategies confine civilians and therefore most humanitarian operations to fortified urban enclaves, leaving large rural areas inaccessible (Eguiluz, 2020). Roads are seeded with Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and explosive remnants of war, and convoys are frequently ambushed (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). Between 2016 and 2020 at least 37 aid workers were killed and 38 abducted in the North-East, the majority of incidents occurring in Borno (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The 2019 attack in Rann, in which three international NGO staff were executed, exemplifies the extreme physical risk faced by humanitarian personnel (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Bureaucratic and political obstacles compound security threats. Agencies report repeated delays in obtaining visas for international personnel, high customs duties on relief items, and legal ambiguity surrounding International Non-Governmental Organization registration (Adebote-Adefolake, 2022). The Federal Government's perception that some international Non-Governmental Organizations are conduits for intelligence gathering or political interference has led to temporary office closures and heightened surveillance (Eguiluz, 2020). Additionally, climate-related shocks prolonged dry spells and flash flooding exacerbate resource scarcity and heighten competition between displaced and host communities (Betancourt et al., 2015).

Funding is available but difficult to translate into field-level assistance. While donor contributions remain relatively robust, the shrinking pool of implementing partners capable of operating outside heavily militarised perimeters limits programme reach (Eguiluz, 2020). The 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan for Nigeria noted that only 46 percent of the required US\$1 billion had been mobilised by mid-year, and security restrictions forced the suspension or down-scaling of more than 30 percent of health and nutrition projects in inaccessible local government areas (Adebote-Adefolake, 2022). Consequently, critical gaps persist in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), protection, and education services, particularly for women and girls who face heightened risks of gender-based violence in crowded camps (Betancourt et al., 2015). Religious and community-based organisations have attempted to fill some of these gaps.

The Christian Association of Nigeria, for example, leverages shared faith identities to negotiate access and deliver aid, yet it also confronts security threats, discrimination from government officials, and inter-agency mistrust (Adebote-Adefolake, 2022). Meanwhile, the Civilian Joint Task Force and other local vigilante groups provide ad-hoc security escorts, although their involvement sometimes blurs civil/military boundaries and raises protection concerns for neutral humanitarian actors (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). Collectively, these realities underscore a complex humanitarian theatre in which the delivery of assistance is shaped as much by political, security, and logistical constraints as by the sheer scale of need. Understanding how humanitarian workers navigate these challenges and the mitigation strategies they employ is therefore central to improving aid effectiveness and safeguarding both beneficiaries and aid personnel in Borno State.

Statement of the Problem

Humanitarian workers play a vital role in providing life-saving assistance such as food, shelter, health care, and education support to conflict-affected communities in Borno State; however, the persistent Boko Haram insurgency has posed severe challenges to the safe and effective delivery of aid. Frequent attacks, kidnappings, ambushes, and roadblocks orchestrated by insurgents have not only endangered the lives of aid workers but also disrupted humanitarian operations, leaving many vulnerable populations without essential support. Despite the critical importance of their work, humanitarian workers continue to face daunting risks that threaten both their safety and their ability to reach those in need. While several strategies are reportedly adopted to mitigate these threats - such as community engagement, security escorts, and discreet operations - their effectiveness remains uncertain in the face of unpredictable insurgent activities. The absence of a systematic understanding of the specific challenges faced and the strategies employed to cope with these threats creates a critical knowledge gap. Addressing this gap is essential to strengthening humanitarian interventions, safeguarding aid workers, and ensuring sustainable relief delivery to conflict-ravaged communities in Borno State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the challenges and mitigation strategies of humanitarian workers in delivering aid amid Boko Haram Insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria". The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Determine the challenges faced by humanitarian workers in delivering aid in communities in Borno State.
- ii. Determine the strategies often adopted by humanitarian workers to mitigate Boko Haram attacks during aid delivery in communities in Borno State.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

- i. What are the challenges faced by humanitarian workers in delivering aid in communities in Borno State?
- ii. What are the strategies often adopted by humanitarian workers to mitigate Boko Haram attack during aid delivery in communities in Borno State?

Literature Review

Overview of the Humanitarian Crisis in Borno State: Since the escalation of the Boko Haram conflict in 2009, Borno State has experienced one of the world's most acute humanitarian emergencies. By 2023, more than 2.9 million people were internally displaced in north-east Nigeria, 80 percent of whom were concentrated in Borno, and over 8.4 million required life-saving assistance (IDMC, 2023). The protracted violence has destroyed livelihoods, collapsed public services, and generated chronic food insecurity (Eguiluz, 2020; Magrin & De Montclos, 2018). These contextual realities have positioned Borno as a high-risk environment in which humanitarian actors must simultaneously address massive needs and extreme operational constraints.

Security Challenges and Violence Against Aid Workers: Physical insecurity is the most frequently cited barrier to effective humanitarian response. Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) routinely target aid workers for abduction, ransom, or ideological reasons. Fatal incidents include the March 2018 Rann attack in which three aid workers were killed and 52 subsequently evacuated, leading to the suspension of critical nutrition and medical services (Fatokun & Olise, 2024; Held, 2018). Between 2016 and 2020 a minimum of 37 aid workers were killed and 38 abducted across the North-East, the majority of cases occurring in Borno (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The pervasive threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and explosive remnants of war on supply routes further restricts mobility and increases response times (OCHA, 2021).

Access Constraints and Militarised Humanitarian Space: The Nigerian military's "garrison town" strategy confines civilians—and hence most humanitarian operations—to fortified urban enclaves, rendering rural areas largely inaccessible (Eguiluz, 2020). Restricted security perimeters, curfews, and the requirement for military escorts create bottlenecks that delay or prevent aid delivery (Nigeria Humanitarian Response Strategy, 2018). These restrictions are compounded by bureaucratic impediments such as lengthy visa processing for international staff, high customs duties on relief commodities, and ambiguous legal frameworks governing INGO registration (McIlreavy & Schopp, 2017). Consequently, many organisations operate only within a 25–30 km radius of Maiduguri, leaving an estimated 800,000 people beyond reliable reach (OCHA, 2021).

Funding Availability and Implementing-Capacity Gaps: While donor fatigue is often assumed, available evidence indicates that funding is relatively stable, US\$1.3 billion was pledged for the 2023 Nigeria Humanitarian Response Plan (OCHA, 2023). The critical bottleneck lies in the shrinking pool of implementing partners willing or able to operate outside militarised perimeters (Eguiluz, 2020). In 2021, security constraints forced the suspension or down-scaling of over 30 percent of health and nutrition projects in inaccessible local government areas (OCHA, 2021). Moreover, escalating attacks on convoys have inflated insurance and security premiums, thereby eroding the value of received funds (Fatokun & Olise, 2024).

Logistical and Infrastructural Barriers: Logistical challenges include poor road networks, limited warehousing, and the absence of reliable cold chains for vaccines and therapeutic foods (Anjomshoae et al., 2017). Seasonal flooding and climate-induced displacement further complicate supply routes (Olojo, 2019). The destruction of the Maiduguri-Bama-Dikwa road,

once the principal supply artery, necessitates costly airlifts or cross-border trans-shipments through Cameroon and Niger, increasing both delivery time and expense (IOM, 2022).

Protection and Gender-Based Vulnerabilities: Women and girls constitute approximately 52 percent of the displaced population and face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence within camps and during firewood collection outside security perimeters (HRW, 2014; Betancourt et al., 2015). Child protection risks, including forced recruitment by armed groups, have been documented in sites lacking adequate child-friendly spaces and psychosocial support (UNICEF, 2017). The absence of protective infrastructure such as lighting, lockable latrines, and safe shelters undermines the effectiveness of otherwise well-resourced health and nutrition interventions (Betancourt et al., 2015).

Mitigation Strategies Employed by Humanitarian Workers

- i. **Negotiated Access and Acceptance Strategies:** Some agencies have successfully negotiated humanitarian pauses with non-state armed actors to facilitate immunisation campaigns and food distributions (ICRC, 2014). Community acceptance strategies engaging traditional and religious leaders to vouch for the neutrality of aid have reduced incident rates in parts of Dikwa and Monguno LGAs (Fatokun & Olise, 2024).
- ii. **Remote Management and Technology Use:** Remote management modalities, including third-party monitoring, mobile data collection, and biometric registration, enable limited programming in inaccessible areas while reducing staff exposure (OCHA, 2021). Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have been piloted for rapid needs assessment and mapping of IED contamination, although regulatory hurdles remain (IOM, 2022).
- iii. **Security Risk Management and Capacity Building:** Humanitarian organisations have invested in security risk management (SRM) systems that combine dynamic risk analysis, staff training, and the use of local security focal points (Sphere Association, 2018). Joint convoys under the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) have reduced ambush risk, though concerns persist over the neutrality implications of such partnerships (Human Rights Watch, 2020).
- iv. **Strengthening Local Partnerships:** Collaboration with national NGOs and faith-based organisations leverages local knowledge and facilitates acceptance. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) have mediated access in areas where international actors are mistrusted, while local women's groups have spearheaded protection monitoring and referral pathways (Adebote & Adefolake, 2022).

Gaps in the Literature and Research Justification

While existing studies document the breadth of challenges, few have systematically examined the effectiveness of specific mitigation strategies across different operational contexts within Borno. Most assessments are donor- or agency-driven and lack independent verification. Moreover, the perspectives of front-line national staff and local implementing partners remain under-represented. This study therefore filled these gaps by analyzing how humanitarian workers perceive, priorities, and adapt mitigation measures within the volatile environment of Borno State.

Methodology

This study adopted a convergent mixed-method design (Bryman, 2012) to concurrently collect and integrate quantitative and qualitative evidence on the challenges and mitigation strategies of humanitarian workers in Borno State. A structured questionnaire “Challenges and Mitigation Strategies of Humanitarian Workers Questionnaire (CMSHWQ)” was administered to 327 aid workers proportionally sampled from 90 registered NGOs operating across Borno’s three senatorial districts (Central = 141, Southern = 72, Northern = 114). An additional purposive sample of 10 ex-Boko Haram combatants from Madagali LGA (Adamawa) participated in Key-Informant Interviews (KII) to triangulate security perspectives. The instrument was validated by three Peace & Conflict Studies experts and achieved Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.86$ in a pilot test conducted in Adamawa. Data were collected over three weeks by trained research assistants after securing introductory letters from the university centre; ethical clearance and informed consent were obtained from all participants. Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS v.27 using frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations; a cut-off point of ≥ 3.50 on the 5-point Likert scale signified agreement. Qualitative data from the KII were imported into NVivo 14 for thematic analysis, allowing patterns on negotiated access, remote-management tactics, and community-security partnerships to emerge. The convergent design ensured that statistical findings on attack frequency and mitigation effectiveness were enriched with contextual narratives from former combatants, producing a holistic understanding of how humanitarian operations adapt amid insurgency in Borno State.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the challenges faced by humanitarian workers in delivering aid in communities in Borno State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Challenges Faced by Humanitarian Workers in Delivering Aid

S/N	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
1	Security threats from Boko Haram severely limit the ability of aid workers to reach affected communities.	94 (30.3%)	159 (51.3%)	14 (4.5%)	38 (12.3%)	5 (1.6%)	3.96	0.99	Agreed
2	Poor security measures in communities affect the effectiveness of Humanitarian workers in Borno State.	97 (31.3%)	113 (36.5%)	42 (13.5%)	54 (17.4%)	4 (1.3%)	3.79	1.11	Agreed
3	Humanitarian organizations frequently face difficulties in coordinating with local authorities due to the security situation.	114 (36.8%)	149 (48.1%)	17 (5.5%)	30 (9.7%)	-	4.12	0.89	Agreed
4	Boko Haram attacks often create barrier for humanitarian workers to have access to communities for aid delivery.	125 (40.3%)	140 (45.2%)	22 (7.1%)	23 (7.4%)	-	4.18	0.86	Agreed
5	Aid workers are at a higher risk of being targeted for kidnapping by Boko haram.	117 (37.7%)	139 (44.8%)	29 (9.4%)	14 (4.5%)	11 (3.5%)	4.09	0.98	Agreed

6	The destruction of infrastructure by Boko haram significantly affect the operation of Humanitarian workers in Borno State.	114 (36.8%)	136 (43.6%)	29 (9.4%)	31 (10%)	-	4.07	0.92	Agreed
7	Shortage of funding often prevent humanitarian operations in communities in Borno State.	94 (30.3%)	134 (43.2%)	38 (12.3%)	44 (14.2%)	-	3.90	0.99	Agreed
8	Poor military cooperation with aid workers affected productivity of humanitarian aid workers in Borno State.	117 (37.7%)	136 (43.9%)	21 (6.8%)	16 (5.2%)	20 (6.5%)	4.01	1.11	Agreed

Table 1 revealed the challenges faced by Humanitarian workers during aid delivery in communities in Borno state. From the table above, the respondents indicated that they agreed with all the items. This shows that all these items represent significant challenges faced by humanitarian ($x=3.96$) workers in delivering aid in Borno State. Specifically, security threats from Boko Haram, poor security measures in communities ($x=3.79$), difficulties in coordinating with local authorities ($x=4.12$), barriers to accessing communities ($x=4.18$), the risk of kidnapping ($x=4.09$), the destruction of infrastructure by Boko Haram ($x=4.07$), shortage of funding ($x=3.90$) and poor military cooperation ($x=4.01$) are the challenges faced by humanitarian workers during aid delivery. The overall average mean indicates that the respondents agreed with the listed items as key challenges faced by humanitarian workers in Borno State.

The researcher had an interview session with some Heads of NGOs on the challenges faced by humanitarian workers in delivering aid in communities in Borno State in which most of the interviewee report that:

- i. **Human Resource officer:** One major challenge is insecurity. The presence of Boko Haram and the risk of attacks, ambushes, or kidnappings make it extremely dangerous for humanitarian workers to access remote communities. This often limits how far and how frequently aid can be delivered.
- ii. **Compliance officer:** Another serious challenge is poor road infrastructure. Many of the roads leading to affected communities are either in bad condition or completely inaccessible, especially during the rainy season. This delays or prevents the delivery of aid.
- iii. **Program officer:** There is also the issue of limited funding. Some humanitarian organizations struggle with inadequate resources, which affects the scale and consistency of their operations in Borno State.
- iv. **Head of Operation:** Coordination among multiple humanitarian actors can be difficult too. In some areas, there is overlap or duplication of efforts, while in others, critical needs remain unmet due to lack of coordination or information sharing.
- v. **Project officer:** Community distrust and fear sometimes pose challenges as well. Some residents may fear retaliation from Boko Haram if they are seen cooperating with aid workers, making it harder for humanitarian efforts to reach those who need them most."

Research Question 2: What are the strategies often adopted by humanitarian workers to mitigate Boko Haram attack during aid delivery in communities in Borno State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Strategies Often Adopted by Humanitarian Workers to Mitigate Boko Haram Attack During Aid Delivery.

S/N	Statement Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
1	Humanitarian workers make use of armed escorts to improve the safety in insurgent areas.	97 (31.3%)	124 (40%)	41 (13.2%)	31 (10%)	17 (5.5%)	3.82	1.14	Agreed
2	Collaboration with local communities has been effective in reducing security risks for Humanitarian aid workers.	102 (32.9%)	119 (38.4%)	53 (17.1%)	36 (11.6%)	-	3.93	0.98	Agreed
3	The implementation of remote monitoring tools has enhanced the ability of Humanitarian workers to track aid distribution in conflict zones.	9 (2.9%)	138 (44.5%)	84 (27.1%)	75 (24.2%)	4 (1.3%)	3.24	0.89	Disagreed
4	The use of digital platforms for communication has facilitated better coordination among Humanitarian workers for the benefits of the communities in Borno State.	87 (28.1%)	162 (52.3%)	3 (1%)	38 (12.3%)	20 (6.5%)	3.83	1.15	Agreed
5	Training local staff has been effective in ensuring the continuity of humanitarian operations despite security challenges.	79 (25.5%)	140 (45.2%)	8 (2.6%)	64 (20.6%)	19 (6.1%)	3.63	1.23	Agreed
6	Security protocols implemented by humanitarian workers have minimized the risks faced by aid workers.	69 (22.3%)	217 (70%)	2 (0.6%)	6 (1.9%)	16 (5.2%)	4.02	0.87	Agreed

Table 2 revealed the strategies often adopted by Humanitarian aid workers to mitigate Boko Haram attacks during aid delivery in communities in Borno state. From the table above, the respondents indicated strong agreement with most the listed strategies. These results show that humanitarian workers often adopt strategies such as using armed escorts ($x=3.82$), collaborating with local communities ($x=3.93$), utilizing digital communication platforms ($x=3.83$), training local staff ($x=3.63$), and enforcing security protocols ($x=4.02$) to mitigate Boko Haram attacks during aid delivery in communities in Borno State. However the respondents disagreed with implementing remote monitoring tools ($x=3.24$) as a strategy often adopted by the aid workers.

The researcher had an interview session with some Heads of NGOs on the strategies often adopted by humanitarian workers to mitigate Boko Haram attack during aid delivery in communities in Borno State in which most of the interviewee report that:

- i. **Program Officer:** In my experience, one of the key strategies we have used is building strong relationships with community leaders. When we work closely with local elders and youth leaders, they often help us understand the safest routes and give us early

warnings about potential threats. That community involvement has saved us many times.

- ii. **Project Officer:** For us, moving with armed escorts has been necessary in some of the most dangerous areas. Although it is not ideal, we have found that having security presence reduces the chances of being targeted. It gives both the staff and the beneficiaries a bit of assurance during aid delivery.
- iii. **Head of Operation:** What we have also done is rely heavily on early warning systems. Before heading into any area, our team carries out a thorough security assessment. We constantly check updates from the security clusters and our networks to make informed decisions on where and when to deliver aid.
- iv. **Compliance Officer:** Personally, I have seen the value of keeping operations low-profile. We avoid wearing branded uniforms or using marked vehicles when going to tense areas. This approach helps us blend in and reduces the chances of attracting unwanted attention from insurgents.
- v. **Human Resource Officer:** I have been part of missions where we had to use helicopters through UNHAS to reach communities that were completely cut off due to insecurity. It is expensive, but it has allowed us to reach the most vulnerable people without risking lives on dangerous roads.

Discussion of Findings

- i. **Challenges Faced by Humanitarian Aid Workers During Operations in Communities in Borno State:** The findings with regard to research question one revealed that the challenges Humanitarian workers faced include security threats from ongoing attacks, logistical difficulties due to damaged infrastructure, limited access to some regions, scarcity of resources, bureaucratic obstacles, and community distrust fueled by fear of Boko Haram reprisals. The findings are in agreement with Faruk and Bello (2023), who observed that persistent insecurity and threats of attack have created a hostile environment for humanitarian workers, limiting their ability to operate safely and effectively in Borno State. Aliyu, Bello and Umar (2023) emphasized that many roads and infrastructure critical for aid delivery have been damaged or rendered unusable, complicating logistics and delaying response times. Similarly, Aliyu, Bello, and Umar (2023) reported that access to remote and high-risk communities remains restricted due to both physical and security-related barriers, often leaving the most vulnerable populations underserved. Musa, Idris, and Usman (2019) highlighted that beyond physical and logistical challenges, humanitarian workers also grapple with administrative hurdles, such as delayed permits and coordination issues with government agencies, as well as psychological challenges stemming from community suspicion and fear of Boko Haram retaliation. Together, these studies are in accord with the current findings by underscoring the complex and multifaceted nature of challenges faced by aid workers, which ultimately hinder effective humanitarian response in conflict-affected regions of Borno State.
- ii. **Strategies Often Adopted by Humanitarian Aid Workers to Mitigate Boko Haram Attacks During Aid Delivery in Communities in Borno State:** The findings with regard to research question two revealed that to mitigate risks, humanitarian workers adopted strategies such as collaborating with local community leaders for intelligence, using discreet and varied

delivery routes, employing armed escorts where feasible, conducting thorough risk assessments, and engaging in community sensitization to foster local support. The findings are in agreement with Eze and Nwachukwu (2022), who reported that collaboration with local community leaders plays a crucial role in providing timely intelligence and early warnings that help humanitarian workers avoid potential Boko Haram attacks. Oladipo and Akintoye (2023) emphasized the importance of using discreet and varied delivery routes to reduce predictability and enhance the safety of aid convoys. Similarly, Aminu and Yusuf (2021) found that the employment of armed escorts, where feasible, significantly increases the protection of humanitarian personnel and resources during aid delivery missions. Ahmed and Usman (2021) highlighted that conducting thorough risk assessments prior to deployment and engaging in community sensitization efforts help foster trust and local support, which in turn reduces suspicion and hostility toward humanitarian activities. Collectively, these studies are in accord with the current findings by demonstrating that a combination of strategic planning, local partnerships, and adaptive security measures are essential for mitigating the risks posed by Boko Haram attacks during aid delivery in Borno State.

Conclusion

This study concludes that humanitarian workers in Borno State operate under extremely challenging conditions due to the persistent threat of Boko Haram insurgency, which manifests in forms such as armed ambushes, kidnappings, and deliberate obstruction of aid delivery. These challenges not only endanger the lives of humanitarian workers but also undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions, leaving vulnerable populations without essential relief. However, the strategies adopted—ranging from collaboration with local communities and reliance on security escorts to adaptive operational approaches—demonstrate the resilience and commitment of aid workers in navigating hostile environments. Understanding both the challenges and the coping mechanisms provides valuable insights for policymakers, humanitarian agencies, and security stakeholders in formulating more effective support systems that enhance safety, strengthen coordination, and ensure sustainable humanitarian access. Ultimately, the findings underscore the need for a multi-stakeholder approach in addressing insurgency-related threats, thereby safeguarding humanitarian personnel and ensuring timely delivery of aid to conflict-affected communities in Borno State.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. **Enhanced Security Collaboration:** The government, security agencies, and humanitarian organizations should strengthen collaboration to provide reliable security escorts, early warning systems, and safe corridors for aid workers. This will reduce exposure to insurgent attacks and improve access to vulnerable communities.
- ii. **Community-Based Protection Strategies:** Humanitarian agencies should deepen engagement with local communities by building trust, involving community leaders, and training local volunteers as first responders. Such strategies will not only enhance intelligence gathering but also foster local ownership, thereby improving the safety and effectiveness of aid delivery.

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Article

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MARTIN BUBER'S NOTION OF EDUCATION: DIALOGUE, ENCOUNTER, AND THE FORMATION OF THE WHOLE PERSON

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Abstract

Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue offers a profound and humanistic foundation for rethinking education in both its theory and practice. Rooted in his seminal work *I and Thou* (1923), Buber challenges mechanistic and instrumental views of education by emphasizing the centrality of authentic human relationships. His concept of the *I-Thou* encounter characterized by mutual presence, openness, and ethical engagement contrasts sharply with the impersonal *I-It* orientation that often dominates contemporary educational systems. This paper explores Buber's core educational ideas, particularly the pedagogical implications of dialogue, the relational role of the educator, and the moral dimensions of teaching and learning. According to Buber, education must be more than the transmission of knowledge or preparation for the workforce; it must be an encounter that forms the whole person mind, body, and spirit. The teacher, therefore, is not merely a transmitter of information but a co-participant in the moral and existential formation of the learner. In this dialogical framework, education becomes an event of mutual transformation, demanding the ethical presence and responsibility of the teacher toward the student as a unique and irreplaceable being. This paper also examines the contemporary relevance of Buber's thought in addressing challenges such as depersonalization, alienation, and the erosion of meaningful relationships in modern classrooms. Drawing on the insights of scholars like Paulo Freire, Nel Noddings, and Parker Palmer, the study argues that Buber's dialogical philosophy remains a vital resource for creating educational environments grounded in care, mutual respect, and authentic human encounter.

Keywords: Dialogue, Encounter, Human Formation, I-Thou Relationship, Pedagogy.

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Introduction

The concept of education has long transcended the boundaries of mere instruction and technical training. While modern educational systems often emphasize measurable outcomes, standardized assessments, and cognitive efficiency, the deeper philosophical question of what it means to educate remains urgent. Education, in its fullest sense, must be understood as the process by which individuals are formed in relation to themselves, others, and the world. It is not only about knowledge acquisition but also about personal transformation, moral responsibility, and the cultivation of authentic human relationships. In this broader and more profound understanding of education, the thought of Martin Buber emerges as both foundational and transformative. Martin Buber a Jewish philosopher and theologian articulated a dialogical philosophy that reoriented the way we understand human existence and relationality. His seminal work *I and Thou (Ich und Du,)* introduced the ontological distinction between two fundamental modes of relation: the *I-It* and the *I-Thou*. The *I-It* relation treats the other whether a person, object, or idea as a thing to be used, analyzed, or categorized. In contrast, the *I-Thou* relation involves a direct, holistic, and mutual presence in which both parties engage each other as whole beings, not as means to an end (Buber, 1958). This relational framework underlies Buber's conception of education, which he viewed not merely as instruction but as encounters an existential meeting between teacher and student that allows both to be transformed.

Buber argues that genuine education is grounded in presence, mutual respect, and responsibility. The teacher, in this vision, is not merely an authority figure or transmitter of information but a *witness to becoming*, one who accompanies the student on the journey of self-realization and moral awakening (Buber, 1947). The educational process, therefore, becomes a space where the student is not an object of instruction but a subject in dialogue. This approach rejects any attempt to instrumentalize the learner or reduce education to utilitarian functions such as workforce preparation, economic productivity, or technical proficiency. Instead, it calls for a pedagogy that is relational, ethical, and rooted in the full dignity of the human person. In the context of contemporary educational challenges such as depersonalization, technological alienation, diminished student-teacher interaction, and the erosion of communal values Buber's insights provide a powerful philosophical counter-narrative. His insistence on authentic dialogue, ethical presence, and spiritual openness offers a framework for resisting the commodification of education and for recovering its deeper vocation as a transformative human encounter. This paper thus explores Buber's philosophy of education in four critical dimensions: the foundational role of the *I-Thou* relationship in pedagogy; the dialogical nature of teaching and learning; the ethical responsibility and presence of the educator; and the aim of educating the whole person intellectually, morally, and spiritually. In engaging Buber's thought, the paper draws upon complementary insights from educational philosophers such as Paulo Freire, Nel Noddings, and Parker Palmer, who have built on Buber's dialogical foundation in their own pedagogical theories. The ultimate aim is to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Buber's educational philosophy for constructing a human-centered pedagogy in an age of increasing fragmentation.

The Meaning of Education

Etymologically the word education comes from *educare*- meaning to bring up, to train, to inform to rear and *educere* meaning to lead forth, to draw out or guide away from. Literally one can therefore say that education means a process of training or development of some skills, character usually under the guidance of a person. This is affirmed in Kneller understanding of education as the process by which society through schools, college, universities and other institution deliberately transmits knowledge, value and skill from one generation to another (Okewu, 2022, p.157). From this definition a logical mind would infer that this notion simply limit the meaning of education to formal ways of acquiring knowledge. Some scholars have interpreted Education to be the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life. With this designation in mind, education is a means of opening new doors to a more prosperous, mature life. Education is constant and acquired until the day we die. Without education, where would humans find themselves? This process of acquiring general knowledge is formulated through distinct interactions between teachers and students in a school setting, as well as events in our daily lives. By critically thinking and actively learning, one can better obtain knowledge. Furthermore, education is seen and analyzed by some scholars as follows:

- i. The act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life.
- ii. Put differently the act or process of imparting or acquiring particular knowledge or skills. i.e the process of teaching, training and learning in school and college for the development of knowledge and skill so as to prepare individual to live happily in the society.
- iii. The process of transmitting societal lore, values and desirable attitudes from one generation to another.
- iv. The result produced by instruction, training, or study: to show one's education.
- v. The science or art of teaching; pedagogic

According to R. S Peters, education implies the transmission of what is worthwhile in those who become committed to it which involves knowledge and understanding and some sort of cognitive perspective which is not inert. According to the idealists, education is a systematic development of sound mind in a sound body as the perfect virtue redeems man from the cave of ignorance. This helps him to develop individual freedom, responsibility and self control. For the realists, education is a process through which man's potentialities and capacities are developed which helps and enables him to come to the knowledge of truth as it is. According to Ayo Fadahunsi, education is a method through which people are lead out of ignorance. It creates awareness of what is not previously known in the mind of people. Fasanya defined education as the art of training the intellectuality, morality and physicality of a person (Okewu, 2022).

The I-Thou Relationship and the Foundation of Education

At the heart of Martin Buber's educational philosophy lies his ontological distinction between two fundamental modes of human relation: *I-It* and *I-Thou*. This dichotomy, articulated in his seminal work *I and Thou*, constitutes not merely a linguistic contrast but an existential and phenomenological account of how human beings engage the world and each other. The *I-It*

relationship is characterized by detachment, objectification, and utilitarianism; it is the mode by which individuals relate to others as objects, instruments, or data points. In contrast, the *I-Thou* relationship embodies mutual presence, reciprocity, and openness, where the other is encountered not as a means but as a whole being, irreducible and sacred (Buber, 1958). This relational anthropology has profound implications for education. Buber's philosophy rejects any pedagogy that treats students as passive recipients, standardized products, or mere containers to be filled a critique that anticipates and parallels Paulo Freire's condemnation of the "banking model of education" (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In Freire's terms, education must be dialogical, fostering mutual humanization; Buber provides the metaphysical grounding for such dialogical engagement by insisting that genuine human development is possible only within *I-Thou* encounters. In Buber's view, education is not about manipulation or indoctrination but about relation a living meeting between teacher and student, in which both participate in a process of becoming. "Education," Buber writes, "Worthy of the name, is education of character, of the whole person" (Buber, 1947, p. 105). The foundation of this type of education lies not in curriculum, techniques, or institutional systems, but in the existential quality of the educator's relationship with the student. The teacher's capacity to see the student as a Thou a subject with agency, potential, and moral worth lays the foundation for authentic learning and personal transformation.

Other thinkers have affirmed this relational foundation of education. Emmanuel Levinas, whose philosophy of ethics is likewise rooted in encounter, argues that responsibility arises not from rational deliberation but from the face of the Other, which interrupts and commands the self (Levinas, 1969). While Levinas focuses on asymmetrical ethical obligation, Buber emphasizes mutuality and dialogical reciprocity. Together, they present a vision of education as an ethical vocation grounded in relation. Similarly, the American philosopher Nel Noddings draws from both Buber and Levinas in her theory of the "ethic of care," arguing that the teacher's responsibility involves not just intellectual but emotional and relational attentiveness to the student (Noddings, 1992). Moreover, this dialogical foundation resonates with Aristotelian notions of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), which presuppose that education involves not only the acquisition of abstract knowledge (*episteme*) but the development of character and the capacity for wise judgment in concrete, relational contexts (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a-1103a). Buber's *I-Thou* relation enables such moral cultivation by creating a space where learners are not objectified but called forth to reflect on their being and responsibility in the world. In this framework, the *I-Thou* encounter becomes not merely a pedagogical method but the ontological ground of all meaningful education. When a teacher enters into authentic relation with a student, they both inhabit a shared space of presence, vulnerability, and transformation. The student is not merely taught but *addressed*, not merely evaluated but *encountered*. This reverses the dominant logic of control and predictability that often governs modern classrooms, advocating instead for a pedagogy of openness, hospitality, and co-becoming. Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy forms the very foundation of his educational thought. It reorients pedagogy from transmission to transformation, from information to incarnation, from detachment to ethical involvement. By insisting on presence, dialogue, and mutual recognition, Buber not only redefines the teacher-student relationship but also offers a vision of education capable of resisting the dehumanizing tendencies of technocratic and commodified systems of learning.

The Dialogical Principle in Pedagogy

Central to Martin Buber's philosophy of education is the dialogical principle the conviction that genuine education unfolds in the context of authentic dialogue between teacher and student. Unlike monological forms of pedagogy that emphasize one-way communication and hierarchical dissemination of knowledge, dialogical pedagogy involves mutual presence, openness, and co-participation in meaning-making. Dialogue, for Buber, is not a method or technique but an ontological stance: a way of being-with others that respects their personhood and affirms their capacity for growth and transformation (Buber, 1947, p. 125). In his dialogical framework, Buber warns against what he calls "technical" or "manipulative" education where the teacher seeks to influence or shape the student according to predefined outcomes, treating the student as an object of instruction (*I-It*). In contrast, true education arises when the teacher relates to the student as a *Thou*, a presence to be encountered rather than a problem to be solved (Buber, 1958, pp. 6–7). This dialogical relation involves mutual trust, responsiveness, and ethical responsibility. It opens a space where both teacher and student may be transformed through the encounter. Buber's dialogical principle is echoed in the work of Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* articulates education as a liberatory process based on dialogue and conscientization. Freire asserts that education must be "an act of love and courage," where teacher and student engage in a co-investigation of reality (Freire, 1970, pp. 77–81). Both Buber and Freire oppose authoritarian and mechanistic pedagogies, insisting that dialogue is essential for freedom, critical thinking, and the affirmation of human dignity.

Moreover, Hannah Arendt, though not explicitly a Buberian, similarly defends a relational view of education in her essay "The Crisis in Education", where she argues that the educator must introduce the child to the world in a way that neither coerces nor abandons, but instead invites responsible freedom. Like Buber, she sees the educational space as a meeting ground between generations, where newness is nurtured through trust and relational accountability. Buber's dialogical pedagogy also anticipates more contemporary relational theories of education. Nel Noddings, building on Buber and feminist ethics, advocates for pedagogy of care, where the teacher's role is rooted in attentive listening and relational sensitivity. For Noddings, care is not merely affective but dialogical; it requires engagement with the other as an active moral subject. Similarly, Parker Palmer emphasizes the importance of the "subject-centered classroom," where dialogue involves not only persons but also the living presence of truth and meaning in shared inquiry (Palmer, 1993, pp. 70–75). The dialogical principle implies a profound reconfiguration of the teacher-student relationship. Rather than dominating, the teacher becomes a co-learner; rather than passively receiving, the student becomes a co-creator of meaning. This mutuality does not imply symmetry Buber acknowledges the asymmetry of responsibility in the relationship but it insists on respect and responsiveness. According to Buber "The educator must not see the pupil as a passive object in learning process, rather to see such person as a living partner in the process of education" (Buber, 1947, p. 107). In institutional settings increasingly governed by surveillance, metrics, and managerial rationality, Buber's insistence on dialogue as the ground of education is a radical and restorative vision. Dialogue, in this sense, is not peripheral but foundational; it shapes the climate of the classroom, the quality of relationships, and the moral character of learning itself. Without dialogue, education risks becoming a sterile transaction; with it, education becomes a space of genuine encounter and human flourishing.

Responsibility and Presence in Education

One of the most ethically charged dimensions of Martin Buber's philosophy of education is his emphasis on the responsibility and presence of the educator. For Buber, the pedagogical relationship is not simply a functional interaction between instructor and learner but a moral encounter that calls the teacher into an active, accountable, and attentive role. Responsibility, in this context, is not imposed by external regulations or institutional duty but arises from the inherent dignity of the *Thou* the student encountered as a full person in relation. Buber writes that "the educator is a person who must stand in a personal relation to the growing human being" and that "this relation involves responsibility for the person's becoming" (Buber, 1947, pp. 124–127). Such responsibility is dialogical and existential rather than bureaucratic; it requires that the teacher be present not merely in body or function, but in spirit, attentiveness, and moral engagement. Buber refers to this as *wirkliche Gegenwart*, or real presence - a presence that affirms the student as a unique and becoming self. In this vision, presence is not equivalent to surveillance or control. It is an ethical stance of availability, grounded in attentiveness to the student's needs, vulnerabilities, and aspirations. This is congruent with Emmanuel Levinas's notion of responsibility as arising from the face-to-face encounter with the Other, where the self is summoned by the other's vulnerability and difference (Levinas, 1969). While Buber places more emphasis on mutuality than Levinas's asymmetrical ethics, both thinkers situate responsibility as primary and relational rather than contractual. Responsibility in education, then, is deeply tied to the teacher's ability to *see* and *hear* the student beyond categories, expectations, or performance metrics. This aligns with Max van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology of pedagogy, in which pedagogical responsibility involves tact and perceptiveness the ability to respond meaningfully to the child's experience in the moment (van Manen, 1991). The educator must attend not just to curriculum but to the student's existential situation, including their struggles with identity, meaning, and belonging. Moreover, Buber's vision stands as a critique of depersonalized or instrumental models of education. In systems driven by standardized assessment, learning outcomes, and technocratic efficiency, the relational presence of the teacher is often undermined or reduced to deliverable tasks. Such models reflect the *I-It* mode, where the student becomes a case, a data point, or a problem to be solved. Against this, Buber insists that real education requires the educator to enter into the risk of relationship, where the outcome is not fully controllable and where the presence of the Other may transform both participants.

This transformation is not automatic but depends on the teacher's willingness to be vulnerable to be open to the *Thou* and to resist the temptation to instrumentalize the learner. In this sense, education becomes a sacramental act, to use theological language, in which something sacred is at stake in the everyday encounter between teacher and student. The teacher's presence serves as a kind of moral invitation to the student to become more fully human, to enter the space of dialogue and responsibility themselves.

Buber's insights here find resonance in Parker Palmer understands of "the courage to teach," which he defines as the inner integration of identity, integrity, and vocation in the act of education. Palmer argues that effective teaching flows not from technique but from the teacher's inward presence "we teach who we are" (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). Similarly, Nel Noddings emphasizes the relational ethic of care, wherein the teacher's attentive presence affirms the student's reality and offers emotional and intellectual security needed for genuine learning

(Noddings, 1992). Responsibility and presence are inseparable in Buber's educational philosophy. To educate is not only to inform but to respond to be fully present to the life and becoming of the other. It is in this responsive presence that real pedagogy begins, creating a space for transformation that transcends techniques and curriculum, and affirms the sacredness of every human encounter.

Educating the Whole Person

Martin Buber's educational vision is inseparable from his existential-dialogical anthropology, which regards the human being not as an isolated individual, but as a being-in-relation called to authenticity, moral responsibility, and community through encounter. In this view, education is not a neutral process of knowledge transfer but a profoundly moral and spiritual endeavor directed toward the formation of the whole person. It seeks to engage the learner in their totality: intellectually, emotionally, ethically, socially, and spiritually. Thus, Buber's educational philosophy resists the fragmentation of the self that characterizes many modern pedagogical systems and instead proposes an integrative model rooted in relational ontology. Buber's assertion that "the real essence of education is the educator's personal relation to the person being educated" (Buber, 1947, p. 123) articulates a foundational principle: the person cannot be educated in parts, as if the mind, body, and spirit were separable domains. Rather, the educator must encounter the learner as a unified and evolving subject, capable of truth, freedom, and moral growth. In this context, education becomes an act of affirmation, a dialogical event that calls the student to become more fully who they are, not merely to perform or conform. This holistic ideal aligns with the classical Greek notion of *paideia*, which conceived education as the formation of character and the cultivation of virtues essential to both personal flourishing (*eudaimonia*) and civic life. For Aristotle, education must aim at the development of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *aretē* (excellence of character), thereby forming persons who can live well in relation to others (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a–1103a). Buber reclaims this moral dimension of education by insisting that pedagogical work is not value-neutral but inherently ethical, involving responsibility for the student's becoming.

Similarly, Buber's approach finds resonance in John Dewey's progressive education philosophy, which sees the learner as an active, experiential participant in a social and moral community. Dewey emphasized that education is not preparation for life but life itself, and that schooling must be rooted in the lived experiences and interests of the learner (Dewey, 1938). However, where Dewey places primacy on communal inquiry and democratic participation, Buber underscores the existential depth of personhood and the transformative power of the dialogical *I-Thou* encounter. Further, Buber's holistic model of education intersects meaningfully with Parker Palmer's vision of teaching as a spiritual vocation. Palmer contends that the deepest form of education calls forth the integrity of the teacher and student alike. "Good teaching," he writes, "cannot be reduced to technique; it comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). For Buber, the teacher is not merely a conduit for knowledge but a witness to the student's becoming, someone who offers presence, challenge, and ethical recognition. This requires a pedagogy of vulnerability, where both parties risk openness to truth and transformation. Moreover, Buber's insistence on the spiritual dimensions of the person what he names the *Eternal Thou* adds a theologically rich layer to holistic education. Through every authentic *I-Thou* encounter, the person is also drawn into relation with God, the Absolute

Other who cannot be objectified. Thus, spiritual formation is not separate from educational development but embedded in the dialogical process itself. In this sense, Buber's vision aligns with the Christian humanist tradition, particularly in thinkers like Gabriel Marcel and Simone Weil, who emphasized attention, incarnation, and fidelity to the other as pathways to both moral and spiritual awakening (Marcel, 1967; Weil, 1951).

The contemporary relevance of Buber's holistic educational model is striking. In a global context marked by technological alienation, emotional fragmentation, and utilitarian models of education that prioritize employability over ethical formation, Buber's philosophy offers a counter-narrative. His framework encourages educators to see students not as economic units or cognitive machines but as beings in search of meaning, belonging, and moral identity. This vision is especially vital in addressing the epidemic of student disengagement, mental health crises, and the erosion of purpose among learners in modern schooling. Moreover, Buber's commitment to educating the whole person challenges educators to create learning environments that are relational, reflective, and inclusive of existential question spaces where students are invited to explore who they are, what they value, and how they wish to live in the world. This requires a pedagogy that is dialogical not only in method but in spirit, one that invites participation, nurtures critical consciousness, and affirms the intrinsic worth of each learner. Martin Buber's philosophy of educating the whole person articulates a rich, multidimensional view of human formation. It reclaims the moral, spiritual, and relational dimensions of education often eclipsed by technocratic paradigms. By rooting education in dialogue, presence, and ethical responsibility, Buber offers an enduring and radical vision one that affirms that to educate is to call the person to fullness of being, to relationship, and ultimately, to transcendence.

The Relevance of Buber's Educational Philosophy Today

In an era increasingly defined by technological acceleration, utilitarian goals, and depersonalized modes of learning, Martin Buber's educational philosophy stands as a necessary counterpoint. His emphasis on dialogue, relationality, and the holistic formation of the human person challenges the dominant trends that reduce education to mere technical training or economic productivity. Today's educational landscape characterized by large student-teacher ratios, digital instruction, outcome-based curricula, and widespread student disengagement often neglects the existential and ethical dimensions of learning. Buber's vision invites educators to recover education's most profound purpose: the nurturing of responsible, responsive, and relational human beings. The *I-Thou* relationship, central to Buber's philosophy, counters the *I-It* logic that permeates many educational systems today. In *I-It* education, learners become data points, performance metrics, or consumers of content, rather than subjects in development. The marketization of education often fosters this mode of relating, treating schools and universities as service providers rather than communities of formation. Against this backdrop, Buber's dialogical principle reasserts the importance of mutual presence, genuine engagement, and ethical responsiveness between teacher and student. As noted by Palmer, true teaching emerges not from mastery of content alone but from the courage to be present and authentic before learner deeply Buberian notion. Moreover, Buber's ideas resonate strongly with contemporary educational movements such as transformative learning, restorative pedagogy, and values-based education. Transformative learning theory, as developed by Jack Mezirow,

posits that authentic learning involves shifts in worldview and identity through reflective and dialogical engagement. While Mezirow's framework is rooted in adult education, its dialogical nature reflects Buber's belief in education as encounter that shapes being, not just knowing (Mezirow, 2000). Similarly, restorative pedagogy, now applied in conflict-sensitive schooling, seeks to reestablish relationship and communal belonging goals consistent with Buber's insistence on relational wholeness.

In pluralistic and multicultural societies, Buber's insistence on dialogue across difference becomes especially vital. Education in such contexts cannot succeed by enforcing conformity; it must foster respectful listening, openness to the other, and a shared commitment to coexistence. Nel Noddings' ethic of care and Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogy extend Buber's ideas into practical educational paradigms aimed at social justice and empathy. Freire (1970), for instance, critiques the "banking model" of education that views students as passive recipients, advocating instead for co-intentional learning that honors the agency of both teacher and learner. Buber's *I-Thou* ideal finds deep expression in such democratic and liberating pedagogies. Technological advancements in education such as AI, virtual classrooms, and online platforms pose both promise and peril. While they increase access to information and flexibility, they also risk detaching learning from lived, relational experiences. Buber's thought urges a cautionary approach: technology must serve the human, not substitute for genuine encounter. As educators integrate digital tools, Buber's framework reminds us to preserve space for authentic connection, emotional presence, and moral growth. In a post-pandemic world marked by social isolation, mental health struggles, and identity crises among youth, Buber's call to educate the whole person is more pressing than ever. The modern student yearns not only for skills but also for meaning, belonging, and affirmation. Buber's dialogical pedagogy offers a hopeful path forward, one that sees education as the sacred space where person meets person, where truth is born in relationship, and where freedom is nurtured through responsibility. Martin Buber's educational philosophy is not a nostalgic ideal, but a living imperative. It challenges educators, institutions, and policymakers to ask deeper questions: What kind of persons are we forming? What kinds of relationships are we modeling? What vision of the human person guides our practice? In answering these questions, Buber offers not only a philosophy but, pedagogy of hope, rooted in presence, dialogue, and the sacredness of the human encounter.

Conclusion

Martin Buber's philosophy of education, grounded in the *I-Thou* relationship and the dialogical principle, provides a compelling vision for reimagining education in the contemporary world. Across the preceding sections, we have explored how Buber's thought offers an alternative to mechanistic, depersonalized, and transactional models of teaching and learning. His vision affirms education as a deeply human, moral, and spiritual encounter, one that transcends mere transmission of knowledge to embrace the formation of the whole person in relationship with others. Central to this vision is the belief that genuine education occurs in the space between persons where teacher and student meet in mutual presence, respect, and trust. In such encounters, learners are not objectified as recipients or instruments of institutional goals, but recognized as unique subjects in the process of becoming. Buber's dialogical pedagogy affirms that education, at its best, is an act of calling forth, where the student is not shaped merely by

curriculum but awakened through relationship. This insight finds resonance in a range of contemporary educational theories from transformative learning to restorative and care-based pedagogies which increasingly recognize the importance of affective, moral, and relational dimensions of learning. In our fragmented, digitally saturated, and often alienating age, Buber's educational philosophy challenges educators to resist the reduction of education to test scores, market demands, or technical efficiency. Instead, it invites a return to presence to the sacred space where persons encounter persons, where values are transmitted not just through words but through lived example, and where education becomes a journey of mutual transformation. Looking ahead, Buber's thought offers critical guidance for educators and policymakers committed to renewing education in the face of global crises, social disintegration, cultural intolerance, mental health decline, and ecological degradation. In each of these challenges, the need for dialogical, empathetic, and ethically grounded education is urgent. Schools and universities must not only disseminate knowledge but cultivate citizens who can listen, empathize, dialogue, and act with responsibility in an interconnected world. To embrace Buber's vision is to affirm that education is not only about preparing students for the world, but about preparing the world for greater humanity. It is to reclaim the sacredness of encounter and the dignity of the learner. As we navigate the uncertainties of the 21st century, Buber's philosophy reminds us that it is not technical knowledge alone that will sustain us, but the quality of our relationships and the depth of our humanity. In the end, education as Buber saw it is the art of becoming human together.

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Article

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REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: THE CASE OF ECOWAS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract

This study examined the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in promoting regional integration and economic diversification within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The research achieved three key objectives: it evaluated AI's impact on economic diversification, assessing its role in regional integration, and identifying the risks and challenges associated with AI implementation in the region. Using a descriptive-analytical research design, the researcher comprehensively analyzed secondary data from government reports, academic journals, and industry publications. Findings indicated that AI drives economic diversification by fostering innovation, enhancing productivity, and supporting the transition to digital economies in ECOWAS. The study also contributed to long-term economic growth by improving sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services. Furthermore, AI plays a significant role in regional integration by streamlining governance processes, promoting cross-border cooperation, and enhancing resource management. However, challenges such as job displacement, the digital divide, and technological readiness pose barriers to AI's full potential. The study emphasizes the need for inclusive digital infrastructure, skill development, and ethical governance frameworks to ensure AI's successful adoption in ECOWAS. In conclusion, AI presents immense potential for socio-economic development and regional integration in West Africa. However, addressing the linked risks through policy coordination and capacity building is essential for actualizing these benefits.

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Regional Integration, Economic Diversification, ECOWAS, and Digital Transformation.

Introduction

Regional integration in Africa, particularly within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), presents a unique opportunity for economic growth, political cooperation, and social development. Over the past few decades, West African countries have pursued deeper integration to address common challenges, including political instability, economic diversification, and social cohesion. ECOWAS, with its vision of a unified West Africa, has made notable strides in fostering regional collaboration. However, the success of such integration efforts depends heavily on adopting innovative technologies that can address complex regional issues. Among these technologies, Artificial Intelligence (AI) stands out as a critical enabler of transformation across sectors, offering the potential to enhance decision-making, improve public service delivery, and stimulate economic development. The role of AI in promoting economic diversification is particularly pertinent for ECOWAS, a region that is often heavily reliant on agriculture, mining, and other primary sectors. By embracing AI-driven solutions, ECOWAS countries can shift towards more knowledge-based economies, enhancing productivity and fostering new industries. AI can also support the optimization of regional supply chains, promote innovative governance, and encourage the development of digital economies, thus facilitating sustainable growth. According to African Union's Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2024), AI has the potential to drive economic diversification, improve infrastructure, and support the creation of an inclusive digital economy. Moreover, AI holds significant promise for enhancing regional cooperation within ECOWAS by facilitating sharing knowledge, resources, and data across borders. As countries strive to harmonize policies and collaborate on regional issues, AI can provide the tools to ensure more efficient management of resources and create data-driven frameworks for policy decisions. AI technologies such as machine learning, data analytics, and AI-guided chatbots have been successfully implemented in various public sectors globally to enhance transparency, governance, and citizen engagement (Androutsopoulou et al., 2019; Aoki, 2020). In the context of ECOWAS, AI-driven governance solutions could play a pivotal role in reducing administrative bottlenecks, improving cross-border trade, and optimizing regional security operations.

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the intersection between regional integration and AI within ECOWAS. It aims to examine how AI can catalyze achieving the goals of the ECOWAS Vision 2020 and its successors, focusing on the potential benefits of AI adoption in key sectors such as governance, trade, and economic development. Additionally, this study will assess the challenges and opportunities associated with AI adoption in a region that faces both digital and infrastructural gaps and the need for regulatory frameworks to guide the responsible use of AI technologies (Dentons, 2024). By analyzing the role of AI in the context of regional integration, this study provides valuable insights into how technological advancements can reshape the future of West Africa. It will also contribute to the broader discourse on digital transformation in Africa as the continent continues to explore ways to integrate emerging technologies into its development agenda (Business Continuity Institute, 2023; Strathmore University Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law, 2023). In this way, the study highlights the relevance of AI for ECOWAS and presents a framework for

understanding its implications for regional governance, economic growth, and technological innovation across the African continent.

Statement of Research Problem

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has long desired to achieve deeper regional integration and boost economic growth among its member states. However, despite ongoing efforts, the pace of integration and economic diversification has been delayed by several factors, including limited cooperation among member states, dependence on traditional economic sectors, and a lack of technological innovation. In this context, as artificial intelligence (AI) gains global prominence, the potential for leveraging AI to address these challenges has emerged. However, despite the growing influence of AI, the specific ways AI technologies can be harnessed to enhance regional cooperation within ECOWAS remain primarily unexplored (Bassey, Etefia, & Ebong, 2024; Bala, 2017). Furthermore, while AI's transformative potential in governance, business, and public service delivery is well-documented (African Union, 2024; Aoki, 2020; Criado & Gil-Garcia, 2019), the role AI can play in driving economic diversification within ECOWAS has received minimal attention. Specifically, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how AI can promote innovation and reduce the region's reliance on traditional sectors such as agriculture and raw materials (Bjerke-Busch & Thorp, 2024; Ben Abdelaziz et al., 2022). Given ECOWAS's dependence on these sectors, it is important to investigate how AI can stimulate diversification and foster sustainable growth across a broader range of industries.

Additionally, although AI offers significant economic and social development opportunities, it also presents risks and challenges, particularly in regions like West Africa, where digital infrastructure and governance frameworks are often underdeveloped (Mahama et al., 2024; Misra et al., 2023). Issues such as data governance, infrastructure readiness, and the digital divide between member states complicate the adoption of AI technologies in the region. Consequently, there is a pressing need to explore these risks and develop strategies to mitigate the challenges associated with implementing AI in ECOWAS, ensuring that AI-driven innovations contribute positively to regional integration and development (Dentons, 2024; Nnamani, 2023). Thus, despite the promise AI holds for ECOWAS, notable research gaps must be addressed to realize its full potential. The lack of focused studies on AI's role in fostering regional integration and economic diversification, coupled with the limited analysis of the challenges of AI implementation, underscores the need for targeted research in these areas. Therefore, this study aims to (1) assess the impact of AI on regional integration efforts within ECOWAS, focusing on how AI technologies can strengthen cooperation among member states, (2) evaluate the role of AI in driving economic diversification within the ECOWAS sub-region, specifically in promoting innovation and reducing reliance on traditional economic sectors, and (3) investigate the risks and challenges associated with implementing AI in ECOWAS and propose strategies to mitigate these challenges.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review - The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Regional Integration and Economic Diversification within ECOWAS through Digital Transformation: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a crucial driver of digital transformation across the globe, significantly impacting both the public and private sectors. In the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) context, AI plays a pivotal role in advancing regional integration and economic diversification efforts. The African Union's (2024) Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy outlines the importance of AI for enhancing regional collaboration and economic growth. It emphasizes that AI-driven technologies can help streamline processes, optimize trade, and foster innovation, thus enabling ECOWAS member states to harness the power of technology to achieve their integration goals. Regional integration has been a key objective for ECOWAS, as evidenced by various frameworks like the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020-2030 (African Union, 2020). This strategy underscores the transformative potential of digital technologies, particularly AI, in facilitating cross-border trade, improving regional governance, and enhancing the competitiveness of ECOWAS economies. AI can be applied to create more intelligent and more efficient government systems, making e-procurement and cross-border trade more transparent and accessible (Brandon-Jones & Kauppi, 2018). Furthermore, integrating AI into governmental processes, such as deploying AI-guided chatbots, can improve communication between citizens and government entities, as noted by Androutsopoulou et al. (2019).

ECOWAS faces challenges related to economic diversification, with many member states relying heavily on agriculture and natural resources. AI has the potential to catalyze economic diversification by enabling new industries and improving productivity in existing sectors. Bjerke-Busch and Thorp, (2024) highlight that AI's role in overcoming the productivity paradox in the public sector is essential for achieving sustainable growth. AI-driven innovations in agriculture, manufacturing, and service industries can reduce dependency on a narrow set of resources, thereby broadening the economic base of ECOWAS countries. In terms of governance, AI can also enhance decision-making and improve efficiency in government institutions. Mahama et al., (2024) emphasize the role of AI in improving supply chain agility and decision-making, which is particularly relevant for ECOWAS countries looking to strengthen trade and logistics. By leveraging AI for data analytics and automation, governments, no doubt, can make more informed decisions, enhancing regional integration efforts and economic policies in ways that are more robust. This aligns with the work of Choi et al., (2021), who explored how AI can aid data-driven decision-making in government. However, for AI to be effectively utilized in ECOWAS, significant regulatory and policy challenges exist to address. Dentons (2024) points out the need for comprehensive AI regulation in Africa to ensure that AI systems are used ethically and responsibly. The successful integration of AI into regional and economic frameworks within ECOWAS requires a collaborative effort to create policies supporting innovation while mitigating AI risks, such as biases and data privacy concerns.

Aside all these facts, the role of AI in addressing trans-border challenges within ECOWAS is critical, and this informs Luqman et al. (2023)'s claim on the issue of cross-border crimes and how AI can enhance security and regional integration through improvement of surveillance, data sharing, and border management. Thus, AI can help ECOWAS address economic diversification and security challenges that threaten regional stability. In conclusion, AI is poised to be a game changer in advancing regional integration and economic diversification in ECOWAS. By embracing AI-driven digital transformation, member states can optimize governance, improve economic performance, and strengthen regional ties. However, this potential can only be fully realized with the proper regulatory frameworks, robust infrastructure, and a commitment to ethical AI implementation.

Empirical Reviews

A study by Androutsopoulou et al., (2019) underscores how AI-guided chatbots have transformed communication between citizens and government by enhancing public service delivery, mainly through increased efficiency and reduced human errors. Similarly, Aoki's (2020) experimental study investigates public trust in AI chatbots within the public sector, highlighting that while chatbots improve service accessibility, trust issues related to data privacy and fairness remain significant obstacles. Building on this, Criado and Gil-Garcia (2019) explore how AI technologies, alongside innovative strategies, can create public value by making public services more transparent and participatory, thereby improving decision-making processes. Moreover, Fan and Pan (2023) analyze the interaction between information technology and organizational resources, showing that AI-driven services can significantly enhance government performance, particularly in environments with high levels of uncertainty. They demonstrate that external factors, such as environmental instability, can influence the success of AI applications in public administration. In the same vein, Misra et al. (2023) provide a framework to address the challenges of adopting AI in government organizations, specifically in India, by proposing strategies like capacity building and regulatory frameworks to overcome technical and infrastructural barriers. Altogether, these studies underscore the transformative potential of AI in public service delivery while highlighting the challenges related to trust, environmental uncertainty, and adoption hurdles.

Theoretical Framework

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Fred Davis in 1989 (Davis, 1989)), serves as a key framework for understanding how individuals accept and use new technologies. Rooted in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975), TAM specifically focuses on two primary constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). These constructs aim to explain why users adopt, reject, or continue to use new technologies based on their perceived value and ease of integration into daily practices. Through his seminal work, Davis (1989) sought to simplify the complex process of understanding technology acceptance, particularly for information systems. He identified Perceived Usefulness (PU) as the degree to which a person believes that using a technology would enhance their performance and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) as the extent to which a person believes that using the system would be free from effort. These two variables, as suggested by Davis, significantly influence attitudes toward using technology and, ultimately, behavioral intentions to use technology. Over time, Venkatesh and Davis (2000) expanded upon this model by proposing additional variables, including social influence and facilitating conditions, which enhance the model's applicability across different contexts. As a result, TAM has become a widely accepted framework in technology adoption research.

Given its foundational principles, TAM is highly relevant to the study of artificial intelligence (AI) adoption in regional integration within ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). AI holds immense potential to transform public service delivery, enhance governance, and facilitate regional integration across Africa. However, the successful implementation of AI in this context is mainly contingent upon users' perceptions of its usefulness and ease of use. As such, Perceived Usefulness (PU) becomes a critical factor in understanding how stakeholders, including government officials, policymakers, and the public

within the ECOWAS region, perceive AI's ability to enhance regional integration. For instance, AI could streamline border control, strengthen trade facilitation, and improve the efficiency of public service delivery - key aspects of regional cooperation and integration. Consequently, if users within ECOWAS perceive AI to benefit from these functions, they are more likely to adopt and integrate AI technologies into regional operations. In parallel, Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) also plays a crucial role in how AI technology is perceived in terms of its implementation within West African countries' socio-political and economic landscapes. As AI systems are often complex and require technical expertise, the perceived ease of use can significantly impact whether AI is adopted. If AI systems are considered user-friendly and adaptable to existing infrastructures in ECOWAS countries, there is a higher likelihood of successful integration. Therefore, attitudes toward using AI and behavioral intentions to use AI are directly influenced by these perceptions. The Technology Acceptance Model offers an effective theoretical lens for analyzing how usefulness and ease of use factors could impact the acceptance of AI technologies in promoting regional integration within ECOWAS. With the continued growth of AI technologies in governance and public service delivery, TAM remains a critical framework for understanding user acceptance and behavior, particularly in the context of ECOWAS's efforts to foster deeper regional cooperation.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive-analytical research design to explore the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in fostering regional integration and economic diversification within the ECOWAS sub-region. Relying entirely on secondary data, it drew from various sources such as government reports, academic journals, international organizations, and industry white papers. Consequently, these sources provided thorough insights into AI's impact on regional integration, technological innovation, and economic growth. In gathering data, the study systematically reviewed literature, analyzed policy documents, and compiled quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the research objectives. As a result, this allows the research to capture existing information on AI's adoption and economic trends in the ECOWAS region. Thematic, trend, comparative, and content analysis methods are applied to analyze the data. Notably, the analysis is structured to identify key trends in AI adoption, economic integration, and the challenges associated with implementing AI-driven policies. However, the research is limited by the accuracy and timeliness of the secondary data, as some reports may not reflect the most current developments. Additionally, gaps in the data across ECOWAS member states might restrict a complete understanding of AI implementation efforts. Nevertheless, the descriptive-analytical approach broadly explores AI's role, presenting valuable insights for policymakers.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

The "Data Analysis and Interpretation of Findings" section provides a comprehensive examination of secondary data concerning the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in fostering regional integration and economic diversification within ECOWAS and assessing the impact of AI on regional integration in ECOWAS. It also explores the associated risks and challenges accompanying the adoption of AI technologies, offering insights into the region's potential impact on governance, trade, and socio-economic development.

Evaluating the Role of AI in Driving Economic Diversification within ECOWAS

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is important for economic changes in ECOWAS and helps with long-term growth in the area. AI technologies can help drive new ideas in important sectors, leading to chances for economic development beyond traditional areas. The African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020) points out that AI can help governments work better, use resources more wisely, and strengthen economic stability. By using AI tools, ECOWAS can enhance business productivity, aid in moving towards digital economies, and promote new ideas in agriculture, manufacturing, and services. AI can analyze large sets of data, improving decision-making in complicated sectors and promoting economic changes. For example, AI can help manage supply chains and improve resource planning, which is key for increasing industrial growth and supporting regional trade (Mahama et al., 2024). Moreover, AI solutions like machine learning and automation can cut costs and enhance services, creating a better environment for business and innovation in the region (Ben Abdelaziz et al., 2022). As ECOWAS aims to reduce reliance on a few sectors, AI will be essential in diversifying economies by offering tools for innovation, effective resource use, and market growth (Bassey et al., 2024). In the end, integrating AI into regional economic plans connects with wider goals to modernize industries and promote sustainable growth in ECOWAS.

Assessing the Impact of AI on Regional Integration in ECOWAS

The role of artificial intelligence (AI) in advancing regional integration within ECOWAS is significant, as it offers numerous opportunities to strengthen cooperation among member states and facilitate deeper economic and political integration. Notably, AI's application in governance, infrastructure, and technology is reshaping how countries in the region collaborate, improving and challenging their integration efforts. The African Union's Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2024) highlights AI's potential to drive economic growth, bridge infrastructural gaps, and foster cooperation across borders, contributing to regional integration. As the AU's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020) underscores, the continent's digital revolution is pivotal in aligning economic and technological progress within regional frameworks like ECOWAS. In particular, AI facilitates enhanced communication between citizens and government bodies, contributing to the delivery of services across borders. According to Androutsopoulou et al. (2019), AI-powered systems such as chatbots transform citizens' and government interaction by streamlining administrative processes, promoting transparency, and fostering efficient governance. This technological advancement supports trust in public institutions, which is crucial for facilitating smoother cross-border cooperation among ECOWAS members. Furthermore, Aoki's (2020) research into public trust in AI systems demonstrates the significance of establishing trust in these technologies, as such trust can enhance collaboration between states, driving more integrated regional governance structures. Moreover, AI can potentially reduce the complexity of transnational issues, which have traditionally hindered integration efforts in West Africa. As Nwangwu et al. (2019) note, West African countries face challenges in regional integration due to political, economic, and social divisions. AI addresses these challenges by enabling data-driven decision-making, which supports more informed policy choices. Choi et al. (2021) emphasize that AI can transform governance by identifying key issues, facilitating better resource allocation, and enhancing decision-making processes, all essential to fostering closer regional cooperation.

Similarly, the economic potential of AI in the ECOWAS region is undeniable. As Ben Abdelaziz et al. (2022) argue, AI and machine learning technologies drive innovation within businesses, improve supply chain management, and boost regional productivity. AI tools that enhance economic planning, predict market trends, and optimize resource distribution can directly contribute to the region's economic integration, ensuring that policies are both aligned and mutually beneficial. Mahama et al. (2024) further highlight how AI enhances decision-making and supply chain agility, which are key to facilitating regional trade and intergovernmental collaboration. Such developments can significantly improve the economic fabric of West Africa, enhancing trade relationships among ECOWAS states and promoting a single economic space. In addition, AI's integration into the public sector fosters improved governance across member states, thereby strengthening regional institutions. Valle-Cruz and García-Contreras (2023) demonstrate that AI-driven transformations in governance allow for more intelligent data management and increased service efficiency, aligning with the strategic objectives of ECOWAS in building a more resilient and efficient regional governance structure. Furthermore, the use of AI in public services, such as border control and customs management, as noted by Luqman et al. (2023), can help streamline cross-border processes, reduce corruption, and accelerate economic exchanges, thus reinforcing the integration process. However, while the prospects are promising, implementing AI in ECOWAS faces challenges related to technological infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and data privacy concerns. As noted by Dentons (2024), AI regulation across African nations is still in its nascent stages, which presents hurdles in harmonizing policies for AI integration. Additionally, the varying levels of technological adoption and readiness among ECOWAS states complicate the collective use of AI. De Melo and Tsikata (2015) observe that such disparities in digital infrastructure often undermine the coherence of regional integration efforts. This suggests the need for a unified approach to policy development and AI governance across member states. Despite these challenges, AI's potential to drive regional integration in ECOWAS remains substantial. Through collective efforts in policy harmonization, technological investment, and capacity building, ECOWAS member states can harness AI to strengthen cooperation, enhance economic integration, and improve governance. As highlighted by the Business Continuity Institute (2023), digital transformation through AI offers the region a path toward resilience, driving regional integration and ensuring that the ECOWAS framework adapts effectively to the challenges of the digital age.

Investigating the Risks and Challenges of Implementing AI in ECOWAS

Using artificial intelligence (AI) in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has potential to improve governance, public services, and regional cooperation. However, there are significant risks and issues related to job loss, the gap between digital access, and problems with trust and infrastructure readiness. It is important to look at these concerns and suggest ways to overcome them. A major concern is job loss. AI may automate many tasks, especially in agriculture, manufacturing, and public service areas, possibly leading to large employment disruptions, particularly among low-skilled workers. For example, the use of AI chatbots in public services, as mentioned by Androutsopoulou et al. (2019), might replace jobs in customer service and administration, which are crucial in many West African economies. This change can significantly affect the workforce, especially in countries with high unemployment. Additionally,

there is a risk of widening inequality, as certain groups may not have the skills needed for new AI-related jobs, deepening the gap between skilled and unskilled workers (Bjerke-Busch & Thorp, 2024). To tackle this issue, training and skill development programs should be a priority. According to the African Union's (2024) Continental AI Strategy, investing in educational programs focused on AI literacy and digital skills is crucial for ensuring the workforce is prepared for AI-driven changes. This can be achieved through collaborative efforts between governments, educational institutions, and the private sector to develop training programs tailored to the needs of the evolving job market. Furthermore, governments should create frameworks for social protection to support workers displaced by AI, helping them transition to new roles within the economy (Strathmore University Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law, 2023).

Another critical challenge in implementing AI in ECOWAS is the digital divide, which reflects disparities in access to digital technologies across different regions and socio-economic groups. While AI can potentially drive transformative change, its benefits may not be evenly distributed if access to the necessary infrastructure is limited. In rural areas, for example, a lack of internet connectivity and computing devices can impede the adoption of AI solutions. The African Union's (2020) Digital Transformation Strategy emphasizes the need for comprehensive digital infrastructure to support the deployment of AI across the continent, yet many West African countries still face substantial gaps in this regard. To mitigate the digital divide, ECOWAS can focus on inclusive digital infrastructure development, ensuring that urban and rural areas have the technological resources required for AI adoption. Public-private partnerships could be instrumental in extending broadband coverage and providing affordable access to digital devices. Furthermore, governments must ensure that AI policies are inclusive, addressing the needs of marginalized communities and promoting digital equity (Fan & Pan, 2023). Initiatives such as mobile-based AI solutions could help bridge the gap, enabling more widespread use of AI in sectors such as healthcare and education. Moreover, public trust in AI remains a significant challenge. In the public sector, citizens must have confidence in AI systems to accept and engage with them. Studies such as those by Aoki (2020) and Kleizen et al. (2023) highlight the importance of building trust through transparency, accountability, and ethical AI practices. In ECOWAS, where governance challenges are prevalent, AI could be viewed with skepticism if it is perceived as a tool for corruption or political manipulation. To overcome this barrier, ECOWAS governments should adopt strong AI governance frameworks that prioritize ethical considerations, transparency, and the protection of citizens' rights. As suggested by Dentons (2024), trust in AI systems can be cultivated by adhering to best practices in AI regulation and involving citizens in the decision-making process.

Finally, the technical readiness of governments in West Africa poses another challenge. Many regional public institutions lack the infrastructure, expertise, and data management systems required to implement AI successfully. To address this, governments should focus on capacity-building programs to develop public sector employees' skills in AI and data analytics. Additionally, ECOWAS could create a regional AI framework that supports cross-border collaboration in AI research and development, as advocated by Bassey et al. (2024), to promote shared knowledge and resources. In conclusion, while AI offers substantial benefits for ECOWAS countries, its implementation must be carefully managed to mitigate risks such as job displacement and the digital divide. By investing in education, infrastructure, and governance

frameworks, ECOWAS can harness AI's potential while ensuring its inclusive, ethical, and sustainable deployment. Through these strategies, AI can be a powerful tool for driving economic growth, improving public service delivery, and advancing regional integration in West Africa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings: This research examined the influence of artificial intelligence (AI) in fostering regional integration in West Africa. Three objectives were achieved. The study assessed the impact of AI on regional integration efforts within ECOWAS. It evaluated the role of AI in driving economic diversification within the ECOWAS sub-region. It investigated the risks and challenges associated with implementing AI in ECOWAS. The study used a descriptive-analytical research design, relying entirely on secondary data from various sources such as government reports, academic journals, international organizations, and industry white papers. The findings are derived from a comprehensive evaluation of AI's role in driving regional development, its impact on integration efforts, and the obstacles that must be addressed to ensure its successful deployment across member states.

Objective One: Evaluating the Role of AI in Driving Economic Diversification within ECOWAS

The study found that AI plays a critical role in diversifying the economies of ECOWAS by fostering innovation, improving resource management, and boosting business productivity. AI technologies such as machine learning, data analysis, and automation are pivotal in enhancing key sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, and services, contributing to long-term economic growth. The integration of AI facilitates the shift towards digital economies, improves industrial productivity, and enhances regional trade. This aligns with regional strategies like the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020), which underscores the transformative potential of AI in shaping modern economies. The findings highlight the ability of AI to reduce dependency on traditional sectors and support economic diversification across the region, which is crucial for sustainable growth in ECOWAS.

Objective Two: Assessing the Impact of AI on Regional Integration in ECOWAS

AI is found to be a powerful tool for advancing regional integration within ECOWAS. By improving governance, infrastructure, and communication, AI fosters cooperation among member states and facilitates deeper political and economic integration. AI enhances cross-border service delivery through tools like chatbots and data-driven governance, which streamline administrative processes and promote transparency. Furthermore, AI strengthens regional institutions by improving governance efficiency and enabling better policy formation and resource allocation decision-making. However, the study also identifies challenges, such as technological disparities and regulatory inconsistencies, that hinder the full realization of AI's potential. Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that AI can significantly enhance regional trade, improve productivity, and support closer economic collaboration among ECOWAS countries.

Objective Three: Investigating the Risks and Challenges of Implementing AI in ECOWAS

The study highlights several critical risks and challenges associated with implementing AI in ECOWAS. One primary concern is the potential for job displacement, especially in sectors reliant

on low-skilled labor, such as agriculture and public services. As AI automates tasks traditionally performed by humans, there is a risk of widening inequality between skilled and unskilled workers. The study recommends developing educational programs to enhance AI literacy and digital skills across the region, ensuring that workers are equipped to adapt to AI-driven changes. Another significant challenge is the digital divide, where unequal access to technological infrastructure impedes AI adoption, particularly in rural areas. The findings emphasize the need for inclusive digital infrastructure development to ensure equitable access to AI technologies. Furthermore, trust in AI systems remains a barrier to widespread adoption, particularly in the public sector, where transparency and ethical considerations are vital for fostering confidence. Finally, the study notes that the lack of technical readiness and expertise in public institutions across ECOWAS poses another challenge, urging the need for capacity-building programs to equip governments with the necessary skills and resources to implement AI effectively. In conclusion, while AI offers substantial economic and regional development opportunities within ECOWAS, its successful implementation requires careful management of risks and challenges. The study recommends a coordinated approach among ECOWAS member states to address infrastructure gaps, develop human capital, and establish robust governance frameworks that promote ethical AI practices and build public trust. By overcoming these obstacles, AI can become a transformative force that drives economic diversification, strengthens regional integration, and supports sustainable development across West Africa.

Policy Implications

To effectively integrate AI into ECOWAS's economic and political frameworks, policymakers should focus on several key areas:

Digital Infrastructure: Improve access to affordable internet and digital devices, especially in rural areas. **AI Education & Workforce Development:** Invest in AI literacy and skills training, focusing on retraining workers displaced by automation.

AI Governance: Create ethical AI frameworks to ensure transparency, accountability, and public trust. **Regional Collaboration:** Promote cross-border AI research, development, and innovation to boost regional integration. **Equitable Impact:** Ensure AI benefits all communities, particularly marginalized ones, and promotes social equity. **Cybersecurity & Data Privacy:** Develop robust cybersecurity and data privacy laws to protect citizens' information. **Political Leadership:** Ensure strong political will and leadership to support AI integration as part of national development strategies. In conclusion, a comprehensive, inclusive approach to AI can drive innovation, economic diversification, and regional cooperation in ECOWAS.

Conclusion

In conclusion, artificial intelligence (AI) presents significant opportunities to drive sustainable socio-economic growth and enhance regional integration within the ECOWAS sub-region. By fostering innovation, improving governance, and optimizing resource allocation, AI can diversify economies, enhance productivity, and facilitate cross-border cooperation. However, successful integration requires overcoming challenges related to infrastructure, digital divides, and public trust. Policymakers must prioritize inclusive digital infrastructure, workforce development, and robust governance frameworks to unlock AI's full potential. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of AI on employment, regional trade, and the digital economy, as well as the

ethical implications of AI deployment in governance and public services across ECOWAS member states.

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Article

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MARITAL CONFLICT FACTORS AND STUDENTS ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL IN ALIMOSHO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Generally, formal, informal, or non-formal education is adjudged to be essential for critical thinking, that is central to national development. However, children from homes facing marital crisis continue to encounter challenges that undermine their education. Both government and non-governmental organizations had taken initiatives to address marital disputes in the study area without much success. Against this backdrop, this study sought to investigate the elements that contribute to marital conflict and its impact on academic performance of students in junior high schools, Lagos State. The study covers Alimosho Local Government Area (LGA), Lagos State. Bowen Family and Structural Functionalism theories were used to explain issue under discuss. Descriptive survey research design, primary and secondary data from both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted for the study. A simple random sampling technique was utilized and the administration of 142 research questionnaire among respondents to gather data on marital conflict impact on children's academic performance. Findings showed that, marital dispute occurs in the study area, but not quite noticeable; domestic abuse, poor communication among others, were the conflict triggers. The study concluded that, victims from these homes, often had poor academic performance due to psychological problems. The study suggested provision of counselling services, establishing laws that deter marital aggression, and awareness campaign on the dangers of marital dispute on academic performance of children.

Keywords: Academic, Marital conflict, Performance, Students.

Introduction

Formal, informal, or non-formal education is essential for fostering critical thinking and reasoning abilities. The goal of whole education is to create mature, well-rounded people who can reach their full potential on all levels such as spiritual, intellectual, and physical (Olaoye & Adebayo, 2012). Because education is crucial for both economic growth and global competitiveness, the majority of countries place a high priority on it. Gaining abilities, information, values, and beliefs is the process of education. Children from conflict-ridden marriages may perform poorly in school because they are more stressed and find it harder to concentrate (Hurlock, 2011). Disagreements between persons or groups that are marked by animosity and hostility are called conflicts. In addition to disagreements, marital conflict can also result from a lack of understanding between partners, which can cause furious arguments, violence, separation, and even divorce. Margolin (2007) asserted that, education is necessary to become a better, more well-rounded individual. One of the most important parts of a student's education is their academic performance, which includes presentations, plays, and musicals. Marks, teacher evaluations, and student-and teacher-set educational goals are used to evaluate it (Narad & Abdullah, 2016). Students' emotional, psychological, and mental development can be seriously threatened by marital strife, which can have a direct or indirect effect on their academic achievement. A man and a woman enter into a legal and emotional union through marriage, sharing tasks, financial resources, and emotional and physical intimacy (Omari, 1989). Marriage and parent-child relationships instill values that permeate the community and create steadfast devotional practices to communal life (Bradford, 2002).

Conflicts in marriage can have detrimental effects on children, couples in particular; and society at large. The repercussions include dropouts, alcoholism, hooliganism, armed robbery, and juvenile delinquency. The issue of marital problems requires immediate attention because the family unit is crucial to the growth of society. Societal peace is a function of peacebuilding values inculcated from the home front (Esere & Idowu, 2000). The pursuit of social objectives including growth, justice, advancement, liberty, safety, equity, and fairness depends on peace. From domestic to international, conflict impacts all facets of social life (Best, 2000). Marriage is not an exception to the rule that conflict is unavoidable in close relationships (Defrain & Olson (2000). Aggressive arguments and cordial expression of divergent opinions are two examples of destructive and constructive conflict relations (Cummings & Faircloth, 2008). Dispute relational issues in marriage have catastrophic impacts on children, leading to feelings of guilt, sadness, depression, and low self-esteem (Siti, et al., 2013). It may be difficult for young children to comprehend the logic behind their parents' arguments (Vander, et al., 2015). Children may have a hard time feeling secure in a household where there are marital disputes because stability and goodness might crumble and leave them feeling empty (Rodman, 2010). A vital part of life is marriage, yet little is known about what constitutes a fulfilling and enduring partnership. To lessen the effect of marital disputes on junior secondary school academic achievement, both official and non-governmental organizations have undertaken initiatives. Nonetheless, there is worry in the Alimosho local government region regarding the low academic achievement of pupils from dysfunctional households or high-conflict marriages. School dropouts are a result of this serious threat to society and youth. This study seeks ways to mitigate the effects of marital

conflict factors on students' academic performance in public junior secondary schools in Alimosho Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria, including communication problems, financial difficulties, and infidelity.

Marital conflict is a serious problem in marriage since it prevents spouses from interacting smoothly because of their different worldviews and cultural backgrounds (Craft et al, 2021). Children who grow up seeing their parents as equals may be greatly impacted by this dispute. In contrast, academic success is the direct result of learning and is evaluated over time using grades and scores. In an academic context, students' proficiency in each course serves as a gauge of their academic success. There are five main categories of learning outcomes: verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, attitudes, and motor skills. Students' academic performance might be impacted by distractions from these learning objectives. On the other hand, academic performance is generally higher for married students who have a positive self-concept and a conflict-free home than for those who don't. However, the aims of academic excellence are undermined when these aspirations are tempered by familial problems. Placement, planning, and evaluation are the three main goals of academic performance assessment. In order to provide appropriate instruction and fulfill the three aforementioned goals, teachers and spouses should be aware of the spectrum of individual student performance. Theoretically, Family dynamics, including roles, communication, styles, structures, and power dynamics, are the main focus. It implies that difficulties and non-problematic conduct stem from patterns of family connection (Priest, 2021). Everyone in the system is impacted by happenings at any level, and family functions are formed through ingrained behaviors. A society's social order is explained by Emile Durkheim's structural functionalism theory, which holds that different components work together to maintain stability and accomplish shared objectives (Fasina, 2021).

Levine (2010) stated that, family factors greatly impact achievement levels in academics. These researchers suggested that achievement in school is formed through marital experience in childhood. It is commonly believed that divorce has a negative impact on children's cognitive performance. Deficits of cognitive performance have been found when children in divorced or father- absent families are compared with children from intact families particularly in quantitative performance. For given observable parental characteristics, children with divorced or separated parents tend to perform less well at school than children living with their two parents. Bulduc, et al., (2012), stated that a child from a divorce family may face more difficulty than those in intact families, due to having to cope with a familial, emotional, or residential change. They specifically examined students that had experienced parental divorce while attending college. Of the 17 interviewed, only one-fourth reported their grades suffering due to the divorce. Like the work of Bulduc, Caron, & Logue (2012), Mulholland, Watt, Philpott, & Sarlin (2011), found that school performance of both girls and boys from divorced families tend to be inferior to that of children from non-divorced families. In contrast to these findings, Ross & Wynne (2010) found no clear difference between participants that had experienced divorce and those from intact families. For those having experienced parental divorce, academic standing is a clear variable to measure for college students.

Kamau (2013) investigated the relationship between family background and academic performance of secondary school students in Siakago Division, Mbeere North District, Kenya using a descriptive research design with a target population of 1,081 students in Siakago

Division and 1,081 parents. The study used a sample of 338 students and parents which were selected by use of a proportionate stratified random sampling method. The study revealed that parental marital status, family size, parent's education level and family financial status had a positive relationship on academic performance of students. However, the findings showed that while the marital status of the parents was not significant in explaining the academic performance of students, the type of family, either cohesive or conflictive had an effect in academic performance. The findings also showed that only 7% of students' academic performance would be explained by the parents' education level. The effects of marital crises can be detrimental to spouses, their kids, and society as a whole. Once delinquent youngsters from crisis-ridden homes grow up to become irresponsible adults, social vices and crimes may become commonplace. Emotional instability throughout adolescence can result in prostitution, robbery gangs, kidnappings, and assassination squads. Additionally, high school dropouts those who leave school without earning a diploma can happen. Graduation takes place at the conclusion of obligatory schooling in the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, and Scotland (Lamb et al. 2011).

Methodology

This study examined the effect of marital conflict on academic achievement in Lagos State's Alimosho LGA using a descriptive research methodology. Teenage pupils, teachers, and married couples made up the population. From ten local government junior secondary schools, 150 respondents were chosen at random. The impact of marital conflict factors on academic performance was measured using a scale. A preliminary study was conducted to collect data, and respondents were granted permission to fill out the questionnaires. Descriptive statistics, percentage distribution, frequencies, tables, and charts were used to analyse the data gathered.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Variables of Respondents

Source: Field Report, 2024

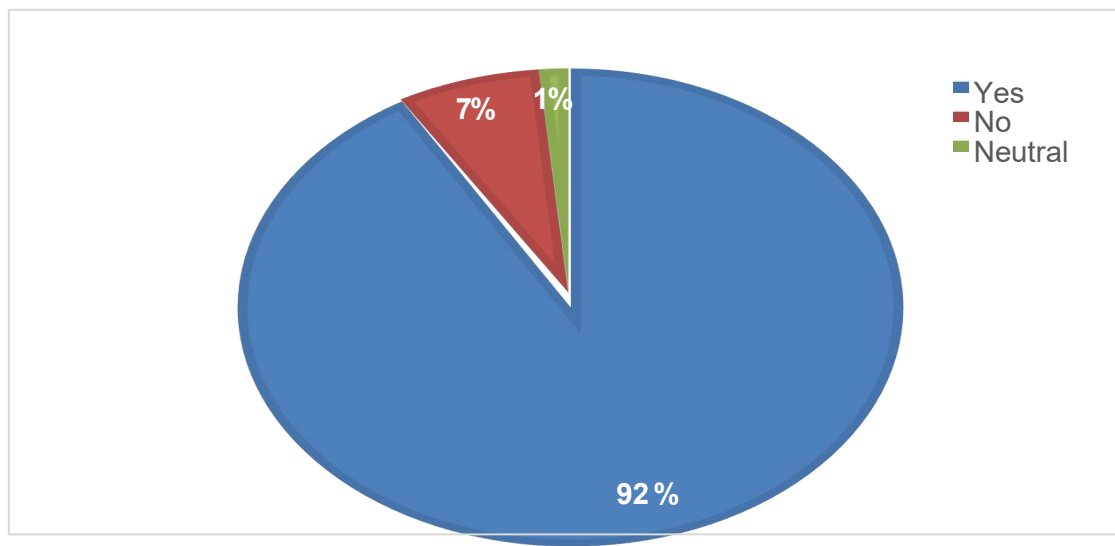
Gender of Respondents	Category	Percentage
	Male	53.5
	Female	46.5
Age	10-12 years	12.7
	13-14Years	38.7
	15-16 Years	45.8
	18 years and above	2.8
Ethnicity	Hausa/Fulani	35 (24.6%)
	Yoruba	57 (40.1%)
	Igbo	47 (33.1%)
	Idoma	1 (0.7%)
	Boki	1 (0.7%)
	Rivers	2 (1.4%)
	Others	4 (2.8%)

Educational Level	JSS1	23.9%
	JSS2	29.6%
	JSS3	45.1%
	NCE/First degree	1.4%

The respondents consisted more of males than females, with majority of them aged between 15 to 16 years of age (45.88). Yoruba dominated the ethnicity of the respondents, followed by Igbo and Hausa. Very few were Idoma and Boki. The study population is dominated by people who are in JSS3 (45.1%), followed by those in JSS 2 (29.6%), While those with NCE/first degree follow because the numbers of married couple and teacher interviewed are not much.

What is the Influence of Communication as a Marital Conflict Factor on Student's Academic Performance?

Figure 1: Impact of Communication as a Marital Conflict Factor in Alimosho LGA

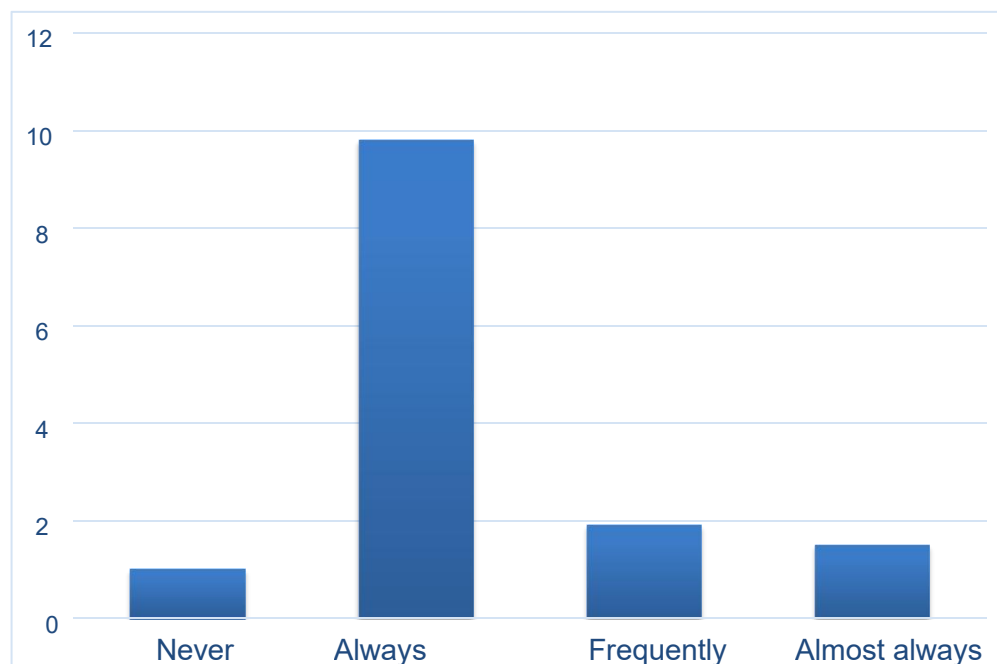


Source: Field Report, 2024

Overwhelmingly, 92% of the respondents confirmed that effective communication helps to improve academic performance of students irrespective of the school the student attend. Students who their parents have effective communication in their marriage helps to give them an edge and also helps in their development in academic performance at all levels in Alimosho LGA of Lagos State. The table also revealed the assertion of the respondents that Communication helps to improve the overall cognitive and affective performance of students in their studies. Only 7% denied such while were neutral. The result shows the inevitability of conflict between and among human beings irrespective of our ethnicity affiliation. The inevitability arises when individuals or groups interact and interest varies.

What is the Extent to Which Financial Challenges as a Marital Conflict Factor Affect Student's Academic Performance?

Figure 2:Impact of finance on students' academic



Source: Field Report, 2024

Despite the huge acknowledgment of the existence of marital conflict in most families in Alimosho LGA of Lagos State, 69% of the respondents agreed and asserted that financial is a key factor to the overall performance of students. Adequate finance also impacts students' performance in related examinations and also financial serves as a motivation for students towards learning. while 13% thought that financial challenges occur frequently despite their background. About 11% confessed that financial issues occurs almost always while 7% denied its existence.

Does Infidelity as a Marital Conflict Factor Affect Student's Academic Performance

Table 2: Impact of Infidelity as a Marital Conflict on Students' Performance

Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Does infidelity as a marital conflict factor affect student's academic performance	56	40	10	19	17
Witnessing infidelity between my parents can lead to feelings of betrayal and trust issues, which can impact my ability to concentrate on my studies.	35	57	6	20	24
Children from families affected by infidelity may seek solace in external activities or relationships, potentially diverting their attention away from academics.	10	30	12	50	40
Students from families affected by infidelity may experience psychological distress, which can hinder	102	20	1	7	12

their academic success.					
Early marriage can lead to increased responsibilities and stress, which may negatively impact a student's academic performance.	121	12	2	5	2
Role Specification from parent as result of infidelity affect the learning process of students	12	30	7	56	37
Domestic Violence and Poor Mental Health of parents as a result of infidelity affect academic performance of students	104	26	3	7	5
Family Inference usually affects the academic performance of learning	22	46	12	22	40
Cultural Practices of parents usually affect student learning process	18	11	5	38	70

Source: Field Report, 2024

There was a need to understand the causes of marital conflict within families in Alimosho LGA of Lagos State. Out of the 142 respondents, 96 affirmed that disagreement as a result of infidelity between married couples, while 36 argued against that and 10 were neutral. The number of children overwhelmingly defines the family's marital conflict as a result of infidelity in families usually will affect their learning process because of fight and quarrel in the home. This standpoint was corroborated by 122 respondents who affirmed that infidelity issues lead to marital conflicts in families. This finding aligns with Ibukun and Ogunseye's (2018) assertion that infidelity and unfaithfulness relations and result in marital conflict. Infidelity, sexual satisfaction, domestic violence, and poor mental health are other major causes of marital conflict. While 131 respondents attributed the phenomenon to infidelity and sexual satisfaction, 130 argued that domestic violence and mental health are triggers of marital conflict. This finding corroborates the arguments of Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe (2016) and Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe (2005) that physical, psychological and emotional abuse undermine marriages and healthy family lifestyles.

On the contrary, communication style, role specification and cultural practices had less impact on marital conflicts, domestic violence and financial issues. About 90 respondents failed to attribute marital conflict to communication style while 40 were affirmative and 12 were neutral. Similarly, 93 respondents disagreed on role specification as a causative factor to marital conflict while 108 respondents distanced cultural practices from the phenomena. These arguments are contrary to the findings of Adeoye & Jegede (2017) who argued that ineffective communication is precursor to marital conflict. While it can be argued that proper communication may lead to a breakdown in healthy marital relations, it does not necessarily lead to conflict especially when any of the partners understands the importance of managing high conflict personalities. Similarly, role specification is not a serious issue in Alimosho and Lagos in general as the metropolitan nature of the state compels spouses to assist each other in meeting up with family responsibilities. Therefore, it is accepted that the infidelity as a marital conflict factor play significant on student academic performance in school.

Table 3: The Impact of Early Marriage on Student's Academic Performance

Variables	Totally True (%)	True (%)	Partially True (%)	Partially Not True (%)	Not True (%)	Not True at All (%)
Students who marry early may face financial constraints that hinder their ability to pursue education and excel academically.	18.3	20.4	21.8	22.5	9.9	7
More likely to be disobedient	14.1	18.3	16.2	28.9	14.1	8.5
Exhibit anxiety about issues	18.3	22.5	17.6	22.5	13.4	5.7
Experience depression symptoms	17.6	23.2	18.3	23.9	7	9.9
Difficulty in developing good learning skills	10.6	19.7	21.1	32.4	11.3	4.9
Have low self-esteem	14.1	21.8	17.6	26.8	10.5	9.2
Poor communication pattern	26.1	14.2	13	9.2	16.7	21.8
Poor assimilation in class teachings	13.4	24.6	16.2	23.9	14.1	7.8
Exhibit empty mindedness	10.6	19.7	19.7	29.6	10.5	9.9
Exhibit a low level of concentration in class	15.5	24.6	11.5	27.5	9.6	11.3
Experience poor financial plan	12.7	14.1	16.2	23.2	21.1	12.7
Exhibit hostile behavior that negatively affects their learning process	12.7	23.9	17.6	26.1	11.3	8.5
Early marriage often results in a lack of maturity and life experience, which can affect a student's focus and commitment to their studies.	11.3	21.1	10.5	28.9	15.5	12.7
Level of trust with their spouse when they get married	14.1	25.4	15.5	25.4	7.6	12
Suspicious of their spouse when they get married	16.2	23.2	12	21.8	14.1	12.7
Early marriage often results in a lack of maturity and life experience, which can affect a student's focus and commitment to their studies.	12.7	19	17.6	23.2	12	15.5

Source: Field Report, 2024

In Alimosho LGA of Lagos State, early marriage in families causes aggressive conduct in students, which has an impact on their academic achievement. More than 60.5% of those surveyed think that early marriage affects their ability to learn and leads to aggressive behavior. Peers and classmates exhibit this behavior, particularly during social events and in schools. Additionally, according to 58.4% and 59.1% of respondents, respectively, students struggle with anxiety and sadness. These pupils frequently act aggressively because they are afraid of the unknown. The findings also align with Amato & Cheadle (2008) and Cummings & Davies (2010) reports on the

effects of marital conflicts on the societal interactions and emotional security of the student academic performance. The authors argue that students at early stage of learning exposed to marital conflict are exposed to negative social interactions and aggression. Klaus, Miczek, de Almedia, Kravitz, Rissman, de Boer and Rain (2007) referred to aggression as a manifestation of anxiety. Aggressive conduct may be a coping mechanism for insecurity, because anxiety and aggression are related. Serious marital disputes, however, might not always result in disobedience. These families may have issues with their children's IQ, self-esteem, and ability to sustain positive relationships. The information was confirmed by 51.3% of the responders. According to 53.3% of the respondents, low self-esteem impedes the development of learning skills (51.4%), assimilation (54.2%), and academic achievement (51.6%). A sizable portion of respondents say they have trouble focusing in class. All things considered, these problems may have a detrimental effect on the academic success of students. The findings support the assertions by Adebayo & Olaoye (2012) and Harold & Sellers (2018) that marital conflict leads to low grades and educational attainment in student academic performance.

Marital conflict negatively impacts the student academic performance and social interactions. About 53.3% of the respondents affirmed that such conflicts make the student exhibit social withdrawal as argued by Cummings & Davies (2010). They develop communication patterns that reflect aggression and reactivity with peers in class. They tend to be withdrawn in the classrooms especially when they are less expressive of their emotions. When grown, they exhibit hostile behaviour that negatively affects their own marital relationships as confirmed by 54.2% of the respondents. They fail to trust their spouses when married and are always suspicious of their activities. However, the girl child tends to be patient when handling relationship issues in the bid to toe a different path from their parents. About 50.7% of the respondents attested to the fact that the girl child is patient enough to manage their relationship issues.

Management of Marital Conflict and its Effects on Students' Academic Performance

Marital conflict and its effects on the student academic performance have been tackled from different dimensions by public and private institutions. Table 5 discusses the actors involved and their strategies in the management of the phenomenon.

Table 4: Management of the Effects of Marital Conflict on the Girl Child

Variables	Totally True (%)	True (%)	Partially True (%)	Partially Not True (%)	Not True (%)	Not True At All (%)
Government organizes seminars to combat marital conflict and its effects on the student academic performance	7.3	15.2	31.8	10.5	21.9	13.3
Government conducts researches on marital conflict and apply results to minimize effects on the students	10.1	18.3	14.2	18.2	24.1	15.1
Government has institution (s), Guidance and Counselling units in public institutions to combat marital conflict and its effects	33.2	22.9	18.3	5.6	13	7

families have counselling units to solve marital issues and their effects on the student academic performance	12.6	38.5	31.1	9.1	4.4	4.3
schools operate counselling and guardian for students from marital conflict homes	23.5	21.8	15.6	16.4	12.7	10
Marriage counsellors to organize mentorship sessions for victims of marital conflicts	34.1	22.2	18	10.2	5.7	9.8
Schools organize regular programs that educate parents on marital issues on student academic performance	34.4	22.4	16.2	9.9	13.1	4
CSOs and NGOs organize advocacy campaigns against marital conflict and implications on the academic performance through radio and television programs	11.5	14.7	20.2	20.6	25.5	7.5
CSOs and NGOs engage in Human rights activism to curb marital conflict and its effects on the academic performance of students	20.5	20.3	9.5	26.5	18.6	4.6

Source: Field Report, 2024

Results from Table 5 shows that the government organizes seminars to combat marital conflict and its effects on the girl child. The affirmation came from 54.3% of the respondents who agreed that the residents of Lagos State and Ikeja LGA in particular have benefited from seminars and conferences on the issue by public and private institutions, including schools and hospitals. During the seminars, parents were made to come in terms with the implications of parental conflict on their children and urged to report cases of such to the relevant authorities. However, 57.4% of the respondents disagreed that the government conducts research on marital conflict and applies results to minimize effects on the girl child. The negativity around government involvement is contrary to the assertion by Aghatise (2012) that public institutions create awareness and educate the general public on healthy relationships, management strategies and support services. Rather, the government has Guidance and Counselling units in public institutions that help victims of marital conflict, including the girl child, overcome its effects. The presence of such units in Ikeja LGA was acknowledged by 74.4% of the respondents. Counseling spouses against marital conflict is not an exclusive responsibility of the government. Churches play vital roles in the fight and engage in counseling services to mitigate its effects on the girl child. About 82.2% of the respondents attested to the involvement of churches in counseling services. Many churches have Service Units where people are supported and counseled on different issues. Dedicated members are most times paired with vulnerable persons and mandated to monitor their progress. Churches also engage in welfare services and prayer intercessions as affirmed by 60.9% and 74.3% of the respondents respectively. Findings on the involvement of public institutions and the church in the fight against marital conflict align with the studies of Okechukwu (2014), Ajayi & Asaleye (2018), Oni & Odukoya (2015) and

Omololu (2017) who argued in favour of the involvement of public institutions and the church in the fight against marital conflict. While the government and the school have been more involved in mitigating the effects of marital conflict, Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have contributed in different ways, including the provision of a network of assistance, advocacy campaigns, relationship counselling and human right activism. They organize awareness programs on the protection of the rights and privileges of the student academic performance during the International Day.

Discussion of Findings

Given that human existence involves strife, families in Lagos' Alimosho LGA were not exempt. Just 7% of those surveyed denied that marital conflict occurs in these kinds of households. These disputes, however, were irregular and were primarily brought on by arguments about money, family meddling, adultery, and domestic violence. Cultural customs, role expectations, and communication methods have minimal effect on marital disputes. Because some cultural traditions were incorporated into religious rituals and viewed as a part of life, they had less of an influence. Most Christian families in Alimosho LGA, Nigeria view weddings as divine privileges that should provide fruit. Fecundity is linked to such fruitfulness. The expectation that children's scholastic demands be neglected strains marriages and often divides nuclear families. Apart from problems with fertility, marital conflict is caused by things that have gotten worse with time. According to Vandewater and Lansford (1998), marital problems have gotten so bad that pride, stubbornness, anger, hurt, and bitterness make it difficult to communicate effectively. However, if the partners receive counseling shortly after the wedding, a complete breakdown can be prevented (Amato, 2019). For the girl child, marital dissolutions brought on by incompatibility, mistrust, childlessness, and family meddling can have major repercussions. Children who are affected frequently experience maltreatment, have limited access to school, and may be coerced into trafficking, early marriages, roadside hawking, or sexual abuse. Some, who come from a Christian family, are genitally altered to fit their parents' preferences. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations are involved in resolving marital disputes. To combat domestic abuse and assist victims of school dropouts, the Lagos State Government established the Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency and the Citizen's Mediation Center. While non-governmental organizations increase awareness about students' rights and academic achievement, schools also offer victims counseling and mentorship.

Conclusion

The study believed that parental conflict affects junior high school pupils' academic achievement Lagos State's Alimosho LGA. It also highlights the necessity of preventing marital strife, due to its effect on child's social, emotional, and psychological growth. The study asserted that, marital conflict can lead to adult relational problems, depression, aggressive behavior, and subpar academic achievement. The research maintained that, marital discord significantly affects children's educational progress in public junior secondary schools within the study area. Relatedly, the investigation concluded that, development of financial and communication skills should receive a lot of parental attention. In practice, this implies that parents should often update their children on their intentions and aspirations, their accomplishments, and their own status. It added that, parents should also help and encourage their kids to become more

knowledgeable and creative in their profession, and they should appropriately assess and reward their children's accomplishments with cash rewards, public acclaim, and other forms of recognition. The study further believed in comprehensive support systems that include communities, schools, and parents can be put in place to lessen the negative impacts of marital disputes on students' academic performance and to foster a more positive learning environment.

Recommendations

- i. Provide family therapy in schools to help parents communicate better and lessen conflict at home, as well as to assist kids who are impacted by marital disputes.
- ii. Encourage parents to participate in workshops on effective communication, stress management, and dispute resolution.
- iii. Create peer support and mentorship programs to help students deal with the psychological effects of marital disputes.
- iv. Put in place community initiatives that tackle the underlying reasons of marital discord, like financial strain and adultery, and offer tools for family assistance.
- v. To learn more about the many circumstances of marital conflict and how it affects students' performance and well-being, further research should be done on the subject.

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Article

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SDG-3: APPRAISING THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY DIRECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION ON PHYSICIANS' WELLBEING

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Abstract

It is on record that the Nigerian government has implemented various policies and interventions to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3), which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all. However, the country still faces significant health challenges, including high maternal and child mortality rates, infectious diseases, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. This called for an appraisal of the Nigerian government's policy direction, implementation and critical interventions in achieving SDG-3. The problem is that, despite efforts to improve healthcare, Nigeria's healthcare system still faces significant challenges, including inadequate funding, low manpower, poor infrastructure, and unequal access to healthcare services. The study inquired if there is any policy of the Nigerian government that will suitably aid in achieving SDG-3 especially for Physicians' duty and wellbeing? Using the qualitative method of criticism and the Health Policy Analysis Framework, this study reviewed existing literature on policy documents in Nigeria. The major findings indicated that while the Nigerian government has made frantic efforts at improving healthcare, there are significant gaps in policy implementation, funding, recruitment and access to healthcare services. The study also identified areas of strength, including the development of national health policies and programs and concluded that the Nigerian government's policy direction, implementation and critical interventions have been inadequate in achieving SDG-3 thereby, putting a strain on the physician duty and wellbeing because of inadequate healthcare Infrastructure and manpower.

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Keywords: Nigerian Government, Policy Direction, Sustainable Development Goal, Physicians Strain, Duty, Wellbeing.

Introduction

In the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3) which is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, the Nigerian government has enacted numerous health sector policies, strategic plans, and targeted interventions. Despite this policy efforts, the country's healthcare system continues to sit on a paradox which is persistent underperformance amidst proclaimed reforms. This shortcoming is particularly evident in the wellbeing of physicians, whose work environment, morale, and retention remain critically undermined by systemic failures. Nigeria remains one of the highest contributors to global maternal mortality, accounting for approximately 20% of global deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth (World Health Organization, 2023). It also struggles with extreme shortages of healthcare personnel, with physician-to-population ratios as low as 1:5,000 in some states which is far below the WHO's recommended threshold of 1:600. This scarcity not only overstretchers Nigeria's doctors but undermines their psychological, professional, and ethical stability. Thus, the question is no longer whether the Nigerian government is committed to SDG-3 in rhetoric, but whether its policies and interventions translate into working conditions that support the physicians tasked with realizing those health goals. For instance, Ogba (2024 p.3), in evaluating the implementation of the Intermittent Preventive Treatment for malaria in pregnancy (IPTp-SP) policy in Nigeria, revealed that despite policy updates and official endorsement, uptake remains abysmally low due to "poor provider knowledge and commodity shortages". Though the study focuses on malaria control in pregnant women, the implications are translatable: meaning that when policy ignores the critical infrastructure and human resource requirements necessary for implementation, the burden falls squarely on front-line workers, who must navigate policy expectations without adequate support.

Adebayo *et al.* (2018) note that the doctor-to-patient ratio in tertiary hospitals often exceeds safe limits, which directly correlates with stress, burnout, and emigration. According to the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), more than 15,000 Nigerian doctors practice abroad, mostly in the UK, US, and Canada, citing unfavourable working conditions as the primary cause (NMA, 2022). These statistics underscore the systemic neglect of physician wellbeing not as an unintended side-effect of resource constraints, but as a structurally entrenched failure in healthcare governance. Such failures pose a fundamental challenge to SDG-3. Physician wellbeing encompasses not just physical or mental health but the totality of their working conditions, professional development, compensation, autonomy, and societal respect. In Nigeria, however, these dimensions are frequently compromised by policy misalignments. Take, for example, the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), which was designed to improve healthcare access and reduce out-of-pocket spending. While the scheme has expanded coverage for certain population segments, its implementation has often left physicians disempowered. Uzochukwu *et al.* (2015 p. 417) observes that, "physicians frequently report delayed payments, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and inconsistent policy guidelines" all of which contribute to job dissatisfaction. What was intended as a policy to improve patient access also inadvertently introduced new administrative burdens on physicians without commensurate structural support. SDG-3 therefore, requires both human and institutional efforts, and Nigeria's

health policy environment reveals a troubling asymmetry between these two. While institutional targets are meticulously stated in plans and policies, the human dimensions especially those concerning health workers are treated as afterthoughts. For instance, the 2020 *Revised National Health Policy* contains extensive sections on disease prevention, maternal health, and health financing but offers only cursory attention to physician retention, mental health support, or workload management (Federal Ministry of Health, 2020). This omission illustrates a broader policy shortfall that views health workers instrumentally, not as stakeholders whose wellbeing is central to policy success and calls for an evaluation all over again.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are to:

- i. Examine the Nigerian government's policy direction in relation to SDG-3, with an emphasis on how these policies have addressed or overlooked the wellbeing of physicians.
- ii. Analyse how the implementation of health policies under SDG-3 has influenced the working conditions, motivation, and retention of physicians in Nigeria.
- iii. Identify the critical interventions introduced by the Nigerian government to improve healthcare delivery under SDG-3, and assess their direct and indirect effects on physicians' work environment.
- iv. Explore the consequences of neglecting physician wellbeing on the broader goal of achieving SDG-3 in Nigeria.
- v. Recommend actionable strategies for repositioning health policy implementation in Nigeria to centre physician wellbeing as a core component of SDG-3 success.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's consistent alignment with the global health agenda, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nigeria continues to record some of the worst health outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3) has remained largely aspirational in the Nigerian context. Key indicators such as maternal mortality, child survival rates, infectious disease prevalence, and healthcare access persist at an alarmingly low levels, with little correlation to the increasing number of policies and strategies released by the government. While much attention has been paid to infrastructure with little yield, insurance schemes, and disease control programs, there remains a critical gap in how these efforts engage with the actual wellbeing of the medical professionals expected to implement them particularly physicians. Many government initiatives fail to account for the human implications of poor funding, equipment shortages, bureaucratic overload, and absence of mental health support for physicians. Rather than operating as central stakeholders in policy design and delivery, Nigerian physicians are frequently treated as disposable cogs in a failing system. This has led to widespread professional dissatisfaction, high rates of emigration, recurrent strike actions, and in severe cases, mental health crises and loss of life. These realities raise pressing concerns. If the wellbeing of healthcare workers is continually undermined, how can any nation expect to achieve sustainable health outcomes for its citizens?

The disconnect between policy intentions and healthcare workforce realities continues to frustrate meaningful implementation. According to Ogba (2024 p.4), poor policy uptake in

areas like malaria prevention among pregnant women was directly linked to “commodity shortages and healthcare provider prescription issues” (p. 4). This failure was not due to lack of policy, but rather a lack of structured support for frontline implementers such as doctors who were expected to meet national targets without adequate tools. These micro-level failures are pointers of a broader national pattern where physicians are overburdened, under-resourced, and insufficiently consulted in the policy process. Furthermore, while national documents such as the *National Strategic Health Development Plan II* (2018–2022) identify physician training and retention as areas of concern, actual budgetary and institutional commitment to addressing these issues has been weak. Omoluabi (2020 p.49) argues that human resource provisions in Nigeria’s health policies “often lack concrete implementation frameworks or monitoring mechanisms,” which makes it difficult to hold actors accountable or measure progress. The result is a proliferation of health sector policies without an accompanying rise in physician motivation, capacity, or service quality.

In addition, government interventions like the Basic Healthcare Provision Fund (BHC PF) and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), though intended to improve healthcare access, often increase the bureaucratic burden on physicians without resolving core issues like salary delays, infrastructure deficits, or patient overload. Oladejo *et al.* (2021 p.20), in their study on healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, observed that “more than 30% of physicians in Lagos reported physical exhaustion, lack of protective equipment, and thoughts of resignation”. The problem is thus not merely about system inputs, but about the structural conditions that affect how physicians perform and survive within those systems. The summary of the central problem of the study are as follows: the persistent neglect of physician wellbeing in the policy design, implementation, and evaluation processes of SDG-3 in Nigeria, which undermines both service delivery and the attainment of national health goals. This is not a peripheral issue but a fundamental flaw that compromises Nigeria’s entire health development agenda. By failing to systemically give priority to the welfare, motivation, and engagement of physicians, the Nigerian government not only jeopardizes the implementation of health policies but also worsens workforce decline, deepens public health risks, and delays the realization of SDG-3.

Research Questions

The research questions that informs and guides the logical direction of this study are:

- i. What are the key health policy directions pursued by the Nigerian government in line with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3)?
- ii. How have these policies been implemented, and what are the practical implications of their implementation for physicians' work wellbeing?
- iii. In what ways do Nigerian physicians experience the effects of national health policies on their professional wellbeing, motivation, and retention?
- iv. What are the critical policy and structural gaps affecting physician wellbeing in Nigeria’s journey toward achieving SDG-3?
- v. What policy reforms and strategic interventions can be recommended to strengthen the wellbeing of physicians and enhance Nigeria’s progress toward SDG-3?

Literature Review

Nigeria, like many low and middle-income countries, has declared strong commitments toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3) which is not enough though because the very individuals expected to drive this goal often face persistent hardship, systemic neglect, and a declining quality of professional life. However, literature that places physicians' wellbeing at the centre of SDG-3 analysis in Nigeria remains scarce which necessitated the current study.

Since aligning with the SDGs in 2015, Nigeria has launched several major health initiatives such as the *Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHC PF)*, *National Strategic Health Development Plan II*, and the expansion of the *National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)* into the *National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA)*. These policies aim to reduce maternal mortality, improve immunisation coverage, and expand access to primary healthcare. Many scholars argue that the translation of these goals into practical realities has been irregular and under-resourced leading Abimbola *et al.* (2015 p. 3) to argue that, Nigeria's health governance system is decentralised "in a way that often fragments accountability and obscures responsibility for health outcomes". This bureaucratic fragmentation results in gaps in workforce planning, delayed policy implementation, and weak oversight. More critically, most of these policies focus predominantly on service coverage and financing while paying little attention to the wellbeing of health personnel, particularly physicians. SDG-3 emphasizes well-being for all, yet Nigerian health policy frequently interprets this as patients only, excluding providers from the wellbeing equation. Physicians in Nigeria frequently operate in extreme overburdened conditions, underpaid, and under-protected. Ogundiran *et al.* (2020 p.629) systematically reviewed physician burnout in Nigeria and found alarming levels across tertiary and secondary care facilities. The most cited causes were excessive workload, poor remuneration, and job insecurity. According to the authors, "the lack of systemic response to physician distress has made burnout appear inevitable".

Similarly, Ugochukwu *et al.* (2021 p.162), investigating the pandemic's toll on Nigerian doctors, found that over 65% of respondents reported high psychological distress, compounded by inadequate personal protective equipment and the threat of violence from patients or their families. While temporary mental health interventions were suggested, "no structured psychosocial support system existed at the institutional level". If doctors are emotionally and mentally depleted, their capacity to deliver safe and empathetic care is diminished thereby undermining the very foundation of SDG-3. Ogunsemi *et al.* (2022 p.4) further emphasise that policies crafted at the federal level often exclude the realities of clinical professionals. In their study on workforce migration, they argue that "the failure to integrate doctors into planning structures contributes significantly to the mass emigration trend". The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), though often vocal during strikes or wage negotiations, has limited influence in the day-to-day policy shaping. Instead, decisions are typically made by politicians, administrators, and foreign consultants. This exclusion creates a disconnection between policy ambition and frontline viability. Doctors are then left to implement directives without consultation, preparation, or context. Oleribe *et al.* (2019 p.6) aptly refer to this dynamic as a form of institutional detachment, where "the implementers of health interventions are rarely given a seat at the planning table". For physicians, this marginalisation breeds disillusionment fuelling internal brain drain (movement from public to private facilities) and external migration.

Corruption and weak institutional accountability have also deepened the crisis facing Nigerian doctors. Onwujekwe *et al.* (2019) expose how corrupt practices across Nigeria's health sector from procurement rackets to ghost workers divert funds meant for service improvement. They argue that systemic corruption erodes morale and efficiency, further alienating healthcare workers. Physicians who witness or experience the effects of these corrupt structures often report feelings of helplessness and disillusionment. Fagbamigbe and Akinyemi (2016 p.8) identifies significant disparities in access to basic services between urban and rural areas, stating that "doctors in underserved regions operate without functional equipment or career advancement opportunities". This contributes to the uneven distribution of physicians and the deepening of geographical health inequalities. One of the most severe consequences of neglecting physician wellbeing is the escalating wave of doctor migration. Nigeria is currently among the top exporters of physicians to countries like the UK, Canada, and Saudi Arabia. The reasons for this exodus are neither secret nor new including violence, unpaid salaries, poor working conditions, and lack of institutional recognition. Ameh *et al.* (2021 p.20) on a study on job satisfaction among Nigerian health workers found that physicians reported the lowest levels of satisfaction, with many citing unsafe environments and "the psychological toll of treating patients with limited resources and endless bureaucratic bottlenecks".

Ilesanmi *et al.* (2020) also raise the issue of security, noting that physicians deployed to rural or conflict zones are often given no hazard allowance, no personal security, and no trauma support after incidents. These stressors not only push doctors to resign or emigrate but also create a ripple effect where patients are left with fewer qualified providers, and those remaining become further overburdened. A glaring gap in Nigeria's health system is the lack of institutional structures for physician mental health. While SDG-3 includes mental health as a central component, there is no policy framework within the Ministry of Health or the NHIA that recognises physician wellbeing as a strategic objective. Ugochukwu *et al.* (2021) argues that Nigerian hospitals treat physicians' psychological distress as a personal issue, not a system-level concern. This is dangerous, especially in a context where stigma around mental health is high, and support systems are scarce. As burnout becomes normalized, the risk of errors, negligence, and even physician suicide increases threatening both health outcomes and workforce sustainability. From the studies reviewed so far, it is evident that while there is a growing body of literature on health policy, SDG-3, and system reform in Nigeria, physician wellbeing remains largely underrepresented in both policy and research. Also, most national plans assess success based on maternal mortality, immunisation, or financing and not on the condition of the health workforce. Although anecdotal evidence of stress and burnout for physicians is widespread, there is minimal policy response to these concerns. Policies are also assessed for their output, not for how they affect those implementing them. Without this, health workforce management becomes reactive rather than strategic. Policymakers often interpret it in terms of health indicators alone, ignoring the human engine behind service delivery. This study shall therefore fill these critical gaps by placing physician wellbeing at the centre of SDG-3 policy appraisal.

Theoretical Framework

Every research endeavour requires a coherent theoretical lens through which complex realities can be better understood, dissected, and explained. In examining how Nigeria's health policies specifically those tied to SDG-3 affect physician wellbeing, this study adopts the *Health Policy*

Triangle Framework (HPTF), which is a robust model that sees to the diverse interrogation of the interplay between policy content, actors, context, and processes. It was originally developed by Walt and Gilson (1994) and remains one of the most widely accepted models for health policy analysis in low and middle-income countries. It is particularly useful in understanding why well-intentioned policies often fail in practice by drawing attention not just to what a policy says (content), but who is involved (actors), where it is being implemented (context), and how it unfolds (process). Walt and Gilson (1994) notes that, policy texts often reflect political compromise rather than ground-level needs, especially in countries with centralised planning and limited accountability. In this case, Nigerian health policies routinely reflect donor priorities and technical benchmarks rather than the day-to-day realities of physicians operating in underfunded, overstretched facilities.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative and interpretive research design with the aim of critically appraising the Nigerian government's policy direction and implementation mechanisms under SDG-3, especially as they relate to the wellbeing of physicians. Recognising the policy-heavy nature of the study and the subjective dimensions of physician experience, this design was chosen to enable in-depth engagement with textual data, policy documents, and secondary literature. The choice of methodology is anchored on the understanding that numbers alone cannot capture the structural, political, and lived complexities of physician wellbeing within a fragile healthcare system like Nigeria's.

Research Design

A descriptive and critical qualitative research approach was adopted. The study utilises textual analysis and document review to assess policy content, implementation gaps, and how these elements affect physician wellbeing. The analysis was interpretive in nature, drawing insights from the Health Policy Triangle Framework (Walt & Gilson, 1994), which provides a structured way to analyse the relationship between policy actors, context, process, and content. In selecting this approach, the research leans on established studies such as Gilson *et al.* (2008 p.108), who argue that health policy analysis in LMICs must "account for contextual nuance, actor dynamics, and power asymmetries," especially where implementation differs significantly from policy ideals. This position reinforces the relevance of qualitative critique in understanding how Nigerian policies operate in reality versus how they are framed on paper.

Data Sources

This study relied on secondary data collected from publicly available and peer-reviewed academic sources, government policy documents, institutional reports, and grey literature. The following data sources were used:

- i. Policy documents such as the National Health Policy (2016), Basic Health Care Provision Fund Implementation Guidelines, and the National Strategic Health Development Plan II (2018–2022).
- ii. Academic journal articles from platforms such as ScienceDirect, BMJ Global Health, Human Resources for Health, PubMed, and Global Health Action.
- iii. Reports from international organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, and the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health.

- iv. News articles, op-eds, and verified interviews from reputable media outlets to support interpretations of real-time physician challenges.

The document review focused specifically on texts published between 2015 and 2024 except where the texts are highly relevant to the discourse on SDG-3 and physician wellbeing, aligning with Nigeria's official adoption and implementation window for the SDGs.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out in three distinct stages:

- i. Scoping Phase – A preliminary exploration was conducted using academic databases and official repositories to identify all relevant documents, especially those relating to policy implementation frameworks and physician retention strategies.
- ii. Document Selection Phase – Documents were assessed based on inclusion criteria: they had to (i) address SDG-3 or the Nigerian health policy landscape; (ii) make reference to healthcare workforce or physician wellbeing; and (iii) be either official (governmental/institutional) or peer-reviewed academic publications.
- iii. Content Extraction Phase – Selected documents were carefully read, with key data coded based on recurring themes such as “physician workload,” “policy failure,” “implementation gap,” “burnout,” and “governance issues.”

This multi-step process allowed for a structured analysis and cross-comparison of recurring issues within different documents and contexts.

Method of Data Analysis

The study employed thematic content analysis grounded in the Health Policy Triangle (HPT) framework. This entailed coding textual data into four broad categories derived from HPT: content, actors, context, and process. Sub-coding was done under each category to capture issues such as resource allocation, mental health policy, institutional culture, and migration incentives. The analysis focused not just on what policies said, but also on what they failed to address. As Gilson and Raphaely (2008 p.401) point out, “absences, silences, and omissions in policy texts are as politically meaningful as inclusions”. Accordingly, the study critically analysed both the presence and absence of physician-centric policy provisions. Manual coding was used, supported by a basic codebook designed to identify interrelated themes. Patterns were triangulated using peer-reviewed studies and international reports to ensure that interpretations were not solely subjective but reflected broader systemic concerns.

Justification for Qualitative Approach

The justification for this method is four-fold:

- i. Exploratory nature of the topic: Physician wellbeing within the framework of SDG-3 policy in Nigeria is a largely underexplored field. A qualitative approach allows for more depth and flexibility in examining complex interrelationships that may not be visible through quantitative measures.
- ii. Contextual and institutional focus: Since policies are products of socio-political contexts and bureaucratic processes, qualitative methods are best suited to unpack such dynamics in their full shade.

- iii. Text-rich data: The study deals primarily with documents such as policy texts, reports, academic articles which lend themselves naturally to content analysis.
- iv. Policy evaluation and critique: The Health Policy Triangle, as a critical policy analysis tool, requires a qualitative reading of actor interactions, political motivations, and institutional gaps with factors that cannot be captured through surveys or statistics alone.

Scope and Delimitation

This study is restricted to Nigeria's health policy environment between 2015 and 2024. It does not cover informal health worker categories such as traditional healers or community health volunteers. While other healthcare cadres (e.g., nurses, pharmacists) also face wellbeing issues, the study focuses exclusively on physicians (i.e., licensed medical doctors) due to their central role in clinical governance, public health strategy, and policy execution. Additionally, the study does not include primary data collection such as interviews or surveys due to time and access constraints. Instead, it synthesises existing knowledge to provide a grounded critique of Nigeria's policy posture toward physicians under SDG-3.

Ethical Considerations

Because this study relied on secondary sources that are publicly available, no formal ethical clearance was required. However, academic integrity and responsible citation practices were strictly observed. All authors, documents, and data sets referenced in this study are duly credited in accordance with APA 7th edition style. Moreover, care was taken to present data and analysis in a manner that is respectful, accurate, and free of political or institutional bias. While the critique is firm, it is guided by the aim of contributing meaningfully to ongoing debates about health system reforms in Nigeria.

Findings

The study examined the Nigerian government's policy direction, implementation practice, and intervention outcomes with respect to SDG-3, while paying particular attention to how these dynamics affect physician wellbeing while drawing its analysis from the study's research questions. Using the Health Policy Triangle Framework, data was analysed through four key lenses which are: policy content, implementation, actor involvement, and the broader socio-political context. The findings reflect both system-wide structural barriers and targeted issues facing doctors on the frontlines of care.

- i. **Policy Content:** The content analysis of Nigeria's major health policies revealed a consistent omission: which is that physician wellbeing is not meaningfully addressed or defined as a policy objective. Even in flagship documents such as the *National Strategic Health Development Plan II (2018–2022)* and the *National Health Policy (2016)*, healthcare workers are framed as instruments of delivery rather than as individuals requiring structural support or protection. This omission is not just a technical oversight but carries practical consequences. Physicians across federal and state institutions work without any mental health support systems, burnout monitoring frameworks, or risk protections for medical emergencies. In Onwujekwe *et al* (2019 p.6) policy analysis, it was stated that “despite multiple references to service coverage, there is no structural mechanism for ensuring provider wellbeing”. In other words, the Nigerian health policy structure assumes the continuous availability and efficiency of physicians without embedding safeguards to

sustain their ability to function. The only indirect references to workforce wellbeing were located within the *Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF)* implementation guidelines, which mention performance-based financing and capacity-building workshops. However, these are primarily administrative and training functions as they do not directly address chronic issues like physician overwork, psychosocial stress, or job satisfaction. This disconnect points to a deeper structural issue such as the wellbeing of physicians which is often treated as a private concern, not a state obligation. By failing to institutionalise it within policy goals, government strategies have created a silent vacuum in which doctor welfare depends largely on informal coping mechanisms or self-initiated adjustments.

- ii. **Implementation Gaps:** While policies like the BHCPF promise major improvements in service delivery, the actual implementation often falls short, particularly regarding how such policies affect those at the centre of care which are doctors. Ameh *et al.* (2021 p.19) conducted a national-level study on health worker satisfaction and found that “implementation delays and bureaucratic confusion reduce the likelihood that healthcare workers experience the benefits of policy innovation”. For instance, several state primary health care boards have either delayed or misappropriated funds allocated under the BHCPF, with no repercussions or clear follow-up systems. In some facilities, physicians are unaware of any improvement plans because the funds are reabsorbed by administrative layers or diverted toward infrastructure alone. In addition to funding gaps, the absence of a national implementation monitoring tool specific to physician conditions worsens the situation. Unlike patients, whose health outcomes are periodically measured under the National Health Indicators Framework as no official mechanism exists to measure physician wellbeing outcomes be it job satisfaction, burnout rates, absenteeism due to stress, or mental health status. The only available data often come from independent surveys conducted by professional associations or academic researchers. Ogundiran *et al.* (2020 p.631), reviewing physician burnout across tertiary hospitals in Nigeria, noted that “most institutions do not have functioning Human Resource units that monitor or document health worker morale”. This means implementation bottlenecks go unnoticed until doctors strike, resign, or emigrate. The findings make it clear that without tracking systems and frontline feedback loops, health policies risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Doctors remain on the receiving end of decisions they had no part in shaping and must implement reforms for which they are not adequately prepared or resourced.
- iii. **Actors:** The exclusion of physicians who are actors from policymaking processes emerged as one of the most critical findings. While doctors are often central to service delivery and emergency response, they are rarely consulted in national health planning or evaluation sessions. Ogunsemi *et al.* (2022 p.5), in their study on health worker emigration, emphasised that “the government’s reluctance to consult doctors before major workforce policies has fostered a culture of apathy and passive resistance”. One major example is the National Task Shifting and Sharing Policy, which was designed to delegate tasks from doctors to nurses and community health workers. Although intended to address workforce shortages, many doctors viewed it as a downgrading of their professional autonomy, yet the policy was passed with minimal physician input. Even at the level of professional organisations like the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), the engagement with government is often limited to wage negotiations, not broader systemic reforms. This

results in reactive, rather than proactive, doctor-government interactions. Abimbola *et al.* (2015 p.5) describe this pattern as “elite capture of policy space, where participation is based on title rather than field experience”. Doctors at the lower and middle ranks are the most affected. They are expected to implement broad reforms sometimes involving electronic health record systems, task-sharing, or reporting innovations without prior consultation or even basic orientation. Many find themselves improvising, interpreting, or even resisting policies that feel out of touch with local realities. This lack of actor inclusion compromises policy legitimacy with physicians who are not involved in shaping the system feel no deep obligation to protect or sustain it. The resulting atmosphere is one of mistrust, poor communication, and bureaucratic fatigue.

- iv. **Contextual Barriers:** The socio-political context in Nigeria imposes severe constraints on physicians’ wellbeing. The prevailing health infrastructure, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas is often inadequate. Doctors deployed to such areas face long hours, erratic power supply, non-functional equipment, and personal security threats. According to Ilesanmi *et al.* (2020 p.74), “most rural doctors do not receive hazard allowances or trauma support, even when posted to high-risk zones”. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these contextual vulnerabilities became more visible. Physicians in states like Zamfara, Borno, and Niger were operating in isolation centres without PPE, ventilation support, or psychosocial services. Ugochukwu *et al.* (2021 p.160) reported that “doctors in these settings described their work as battlefield duty without armour or exit strategy”. Several quit public service or migrated internally to urban private hospitals. Even in relatively secure urban centres like Abuja or Lagos, the workload disparity remains extreme. Due to workforce shortages, doctors in teaching hospitals often handle patient volumes that exceed recommended limits. Emergency physicians, in particular, are frequently on 24-hour call rotations without adequate rest periods or supportive supervision. The context is further compounded by a cultural narrative that views physician resilience as a given. In many government circles, complaints from doctors are viewed as entitlement rather than warning signs. This mindset delays systemic reforms and deepens the psychological toll on doctors who continue to work under exhausting and sometimes humiliating conditions.
- v. **Mental Health:** Mental health, despite being a key component of SDG-3, remains one of the most neglected aspects of physician wellbeing in Nigeria. None of the national policies reviewed including the *NHIA Act (2022)* or *National Health Policy (2016)* makes explicit provision for the mental wellness of doctors. Burnout, depression, and anxiety are rarely discussed in institutional meetings or state-level planning sessions. In their review of stress among physicians during the pandemic, Ugochukwu *et al.* (2021 p.165) found that “over 68% of doctors reported symptoms of emotional exhaustion, but none had access to an institutional counselling system”. Many resorted to self-medication, avoidance behaviour, or spiritual support networks. While informal coping strategies may provide temporary relief, they cannot substitute for structured mental health policies or support systems. The stigma surrounding mental health also discourages doctors from speaking up. Those who attempt to seek help are often labelled as weak or unserious. As a result, many suffer in silence, leading to avoidable errors, professional disengagement, and in extreme cases, suicide. This systemic neglect has long-term implications. A mentally distressed workforce

cannot sustainably deliver quality care. Without intervention, physician morale will continue to decline, weakening Nigeria's ability to meet its broader SDG-3 targets.

- vi. **Physician Emigration:** The findings also reveal a sharp increase in physician migration as a coping response to systemic neglect. Young doctors, in particular, are actively pursuing exit routes to the United Kingdom, Canada, Saudi Arabia, and Australia. The reasons are not merely economic but are deeply tied to the absence of professional support, institutional respect, and policy alignment. Ogunsemi *et al.* (2022 p.3) observed that, "most doctors cite lack of institutional protection and bureaucratic delays as key push factors not just salary differences". Government attempts to curb migration such as imposing bond clauses or withholding training certificates have not been effective.

Discussion

The findings of this study show clearly that although Nigeria's health policy frameworks under SDG-3 may appear comprehensive on paper, in practice, they fall short of addressing the realities of physicians working within the system. Thus, the implications of these findings are examined alongside engaging critically with the literature and interpreting what the gaps in policy, process, and actor involvement mean for the goal of sustainable physician wellbeing in Nigeria's healthcare system.

- i. **Lack of Institutional Focus on Physician Wellbeing:** What stands out immediately is the absence of physician wellbeing as a stated objective in most Nigerian health policy documents. This silence is not just rhetorical but carries material consequences for how doctors are treated and what level of support they can expect from the state. Onwujekwe *et al.* (2019 p.6) noted that "policy documents routinely mention service delivery goals and access improvement but are silent on frontline worker conditions". From this, it becomes clear that physicians are not being actively positioned as stakeholders in need of protection or investment; instead, they are simply viewed as agents for delivering policy goals. This mindset reproduces a cycle where the expectations from doctors are high, but institutional investment in their wellbeing remains minimal.
- ii. **Misalignment Between Policy Content and Frontline Experience:** The findings suggest a striking disconnect between what Nigeria's health policies say and what actually plays out at the facility level. For example, while policies like the *Basic Health Care Provision Fund* promise to improve service delivery at the primary level, doctors working in rural and semi-urban facilities often do not see any real improvement in working conditions. Ameh *et al.* (2021 p.21) captured this gap when they stated that "the implementation of BHCPF across states has been highly uneven, with little visible impact on frontline worker morale or retention". The reason for this misalignment, as shown in this study, is two-fold: bureaucratic inefficiency and absence of physician input during policy formulation. Implementation bottlenecks such as delayed fund release or political interference turn even well-structured policies into paper exercises. Furthermore, since doctors are usually not involved in planning stages, they lack the opportunity to ensure the relevance or adaptability of those policies to clinical realities.
- iii. **Power and Participation:** It was evident from the findings that doctors, especially at the junior and middle levels, are largely excluded from the spaces where major health policies are debated or finalised. This exclusion has a demoralising effect and also reduces the

likelihood that such policies will be embraced or supported by those tasked with implementation. Ogunsemi *et al.* (2022 p.4) made this point clearly when they observed that “the consistent side-lining of health workers during planning has contributed to the breakdown of policy ownership at facility level”. Without participatory mechanisms that give doctors voice and agency in decision-making, policies are likely to remain disconnected and ineffective. To build a more inclusive system, there must be deliberate effort to institutionalise frontline consultation into policy design. Until then, the system risks repeating cycles of failed reforms and growing mistrust between government and physicians.

- iv. **Psychological and Emotional Costs of Public Service:** The psychological and emotional cost of working in Nigeria’s public health system is perhaps the most underreported crisis facing physicians today. Beyond infrastructure challenges or poor pay, many doctors are struggling with profound emotional and psychological fatigue, what Ogundiran *et al.* (2020 p.631) categorised as “deep-rooted emotional exhaustion, marked by depersonalisation and low personal accomplishment”. Doctors are working under intense pressure, often in overcrowded wards, without adequate tools, rest, or even recognition. What makes the situation worse is the absence of institutional support with no counselling services, routine mental health checks, and culture of wellbeing in government hospitals. The psychological toll is not just personal; it affects the overall functionality of the healthcare system. Without emotionally stable and supported physicians, SDG-3 targets around quality care and universal health coverage will remain unattainable.
- v. **Insecurity and Conflict on Physician Retention:** Another important layer revealed by this study is the impact of insecurity on the practice environment. Many Nigerian doctors, especially those working in Northern Regions, operate under real threats to their lives. Armed conflict, kidnappings, and attacks on health facilities are now frequent in several parts of the country. Ilesanmi *et al.* (2020 p.75) noted that “doctors posted to high-risk zones often lack institutional protections, hazard allowances, or even psychological preparation”. This means that doctors are left to navigate life-threatening work conditions on their own without state support or legal recourse in the event of trauma. Many physicians are simply refusing to work in certain locations. Others who do remain suffer from chronic anxiety, hypervigilance, and emotional detachment. The insecurity crisis, therefore, is not just a security issue as it is a workforce and wellbeing issue, and a policy failure all at once.
- vi. **Physician Exodus:** The exodus of Nigerian doctors to countries like the UK, Canada, and Saudi Arabia based on the findings, is a rational response to a system that has persistently failed to prioritise wellbeing, safety, or professional respect. Ogunsemi *et al.* (2022 p.3) affirmed that “young doctors are increasingly using emigration as an exit strategy to avoid systemic collapse, not just to earn higher wages”. It means that retention is not simply a matter of salary scale but of system integrity and psychological investment. When doctors leave *en masse*, the losses are multidimensional. The country loses years of educational investment, younger doctors lose mentors, and patients are left with overburdened or inexperienced replacements. Government attempts to restrict emigration through bonding schemes or policy threats have failed because they do not address the root causes of dissatisfaction. To stem the tide, the government must focus on building an environment

where doctors want to stay. That begins with credible health policies, functional support systems, and an honest appreciation of physician experiences.

Conclusion

This study has offered a critical appraisal of the Nigerian government's approach to implementing Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3), with a specific focus on how these policy efforts affect physician wellbeing. Using the Health Policy Triangle Framework as a guiding principle, the study exposed several layers of policy and structural deficits, particularly in relation to how physicians experience the Nigerian healthcare system not as planners or beneficiaries of policy, but often as overstretched tools in a failing system. The findings made it evident that, despite numerous health policies and strategic plans, physician wellbeing has not been given due institutional recognition. Across the reviewed policies, there is a disturbing silence on mental health support, workload redistribution, workplace safety, and psychosocial resilience of doctors. Even when health policies such as the *Basic Health Care Provision Fund* attempt to address workforce capacity, their implementation has been riddled with inconsistency, politicisation, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms. It was also discovered that physicians especially younger and mid-level practitioners are largely excluded from policymaking conversations that directly affect their work. This disconnection between decision-makers and implementers fosters apathy and contributes to what several scholars have called a policy-practice gap. Furthermore, the wider context of insecurity, weak infrastructure, and low budgetary allocation to the health sector continues to erode the confidence of physicians in public health governance. Many doctors no longer see themselves as partners in the delivery of SDG-3 goals but rather as casualties of a system that fails to protect them even as it expects the best from them. In sum, it is not enough to proclaim SDG-3 objectives in policy documents. For Nigeria to truly promote health and wellbeing for all, the wellbeing of the physicians who deliver these services must be systemically integrated into the health policy environment.

Recommendations

To address the systemic gaps identified in this study and reposition Nigeria's healthcare sector on a sustainable path under SDG-3, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. The Federal Ministry of Health and relevant agencies should revise national policies such as the *National Health Policy*, *National Strategic Health Development Plans*, and *Basic Health Care Provision Fund Guidelines* to include dedicated sections on physician wellbeing.
- ii. Hospitals across the country, especially teaching and tertiary hospitals, should establish mental health and counselling units specifically for medical staff. Confidential support services, group therapy, burnout recovery programs, and time-off provisions should be structured into the HR policies of all government hospitals.
- iii. Professional medical associations (e.g., NMA, ARD) and frontline clinicians should be involved in every major policy dialogue regarding healthcare workforce reforms. Their participation should go beyond reactive negotiations or strike resolutions.
- iv. The Federal Ministry of Health should create policy advisory panels that include frontline doctors especially younger ones to help evaluate ongoing interventions and provide on-the-ground insight into what works and what does not.

- v. There should be a national data dashboard or reporting framework dedicated to tracking physician-related metrics, including job satisfaction, burnout levels, emigration rates, patient load per doctor, and exposure to traumatic events.
- vi. Nigeria must move closer to fulfilling the Abuja Declaration of allocating at least 15% of the national budget to health. Within this allocation, specific budget lines should be created for workforce wellbeing, not just infrastructure and equipment.
- vii. Doctors working in high-risk regions must be treated as frontline workers under duress. Hazard allowances should be reviewed and expanded, and protective measures including security escort options, trauma care coverage, and risk insurance should be institutionalised. Incentives such as student loan forgiveness, accelerated promotions, and sabbatical provisions should also be offered to those serving in under-resourced and dangerous areas.
- viii. Finally, the Federal Government and development partners should officially recognise physician wellbeing as a measurable target under SDG-3. This would enable Nigeria to align better with WHO's calls for workforce resilience and ensure that health delivery is not achieved at the cost of health worker dignity. By doing so, the country will not only protect its doctors but will also build a stronger, more responsive, and sustainable health system.

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Article

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PRINCIPLES AND THEORIES IN EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: BASIS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract

This paper examines how the integration of classical, behavioural, and contemporary management theories can enhance institutional efficiency and effectiveness in Nigerian educational institutions. Classical theories provide structural and administrative frameworks; behavioural theories emphasize human motivation and participatory leadership; while contemporary models, such as transformational leadership and strategic management, focus on adaptability and innovation. The study highlights critical management areas including planning, leadership, human resource development, financial accountability, monitoring, and evaluation. Despite growing efforts to adopt modern management practices in Nigeria, participatory governance and data-driven decision-making face challenges like inadequate funding, policy inconsistency, and persistent bureaucratic rigidity. These issues often hinder the practical application of management theories, resulting in gaps between policy intentions and actual outcomes. The paper advocates for a holistic, integrated management approach that balances resource optimization (efficiency) with quality educational outcomes (effectiveness). It concludes with policy recommendations focused on capacity building, financial transparency, and stakeholder engagement, emphasizing the need for deliberate reforms to foster sustainable improvement in Nigeria's education sector.

Keywords: Principles, Educational Management, Institutional Efficiency.

Introduction

Educational management is a multidisciplinary field that integrates principles from administration, leadership, and organizational theories to optimize the functioning of educational institutions. The evolution of educational management has been influenced by various management principles and theories, including classical, behavioral, and contemporary frameworks, which provide insights into leadership styles, decision-making processes, and organizational behavior within educational settings (Hoy & Miskel, 2018). It integrates principles from administration, leadership, and organizational behaviour to optimize institutional performance, resource allocation, and policy implementation (Ololube, 2017). The field has evolved significantly over the decades, driven by socio-economic changes, technological advancements, and the growing need for accountability and quality assurance in education (Babalola, 2020). Educational management emerged as a structured discipline in the 20th century, primarily in response to the growing complexity of educational institutions and the increasing demand for accountability, quality assurance, and institutional performance (Oplatka, 2019). The field has gained further prominence in the 21st century, particularly as education systems worldwide grapple with issues such as globalization, technological advancements, resource constraints, and evolving pedagogical paradigms (Hallinger & Heck, 2020). As a result, scholars and practitioners have emphasized the need for effective management practices that balance efficiency - maximizing resource utilization - with effectiveness - achieving educational goals and enhancing student learning outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2021).

In Nigeria, educational management has been shaped by government policies, economic constraints, and the challenges of educational access and equity. The role of school administrators, policymakers, and educational planners in ensuring the smooth operation of schools cannot be overstated, particularly in addressing challenges such as poor funding, inadequate facilities, and limited professional development opportunities for teachers (Oduwaiye, 2019). Educational management is a field of study and practice that focuses on the planning, organization, coordination, and supervision of educational institutions to ensure their optimal performance. It involves the application of management principles and theories to the administration of schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations (Bush, 2021). Educational management encompasses various functions, including leadership, decision-making, policy formulation, resource allocation, and performance evaluation, all aimed at improving institutional effectiveness and achieving educational goals (Okeke, 2019). According to Nwankwo (2020), educational management is the systematic approach to organizing human and material resources within the educational sector to enhance teaching, learning, and overall institutional effectiveness. This definition aligns with the broader concept of management in public and private sectors but emphasizes the unique characteristics of education, such as pedagogical leadership, student-centered approaches, and knowledge dissemination. Unlike general management, which primarily focuses on profit maximization, educational management is driven by objectives such as academic excellence, equity in education, and societal development (Ogunyemi & Adekunle, 2022).

Furthermore, scholars argue that effective educational management requires a deep understanding of both internal and external dynamics that influence school operations (Bolarinwa, 2023). Internally, this includes administrative structures, teacher competencies, and curriculum implementation, while externally, it involves government policies, socioeconomic

conditions, and global educational trends. Consequently, educational management serves as the backbone of institutional efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring that schools and universities fulfill their mandates of knowledge creation, skills development, and national progress (Ukeje, 2021). Theoretical foundations in educational management provide a framework for understanding how educational institutions can be governed effectively. Classical management theories emphasize structured administrative approaches, while contemporary theories advocate for participatory leadership, transformational change, and strategic planning (Okeke, 2021). These theoretical perspectives help school leaders navigate the complexities of education delivery, particularly in regions where educational institutions face economic and social constraints. Efficiency and effectiveness are two critical benchmarks for measuring the success of educational management. While efficiency focuses on optimizing resources - human, financial, and material - to achieve educational goals with minimal waste (Omoregie, 2019), effectiveness refers to the extent to which educational institutions fulfill their mandate of knowledge dissemination, skill acquisition, and character development (Ogunyemi, 2020). Achieving efficiency in education requires addressing systemic challenges such as poor funding, overcrowded classrooms, and the issue of inadequate modern teaching materials (Bello, 2018). Schools that operate efficiently allocate resources in a manner that maximizes learning outcomes without unnecessary expenditures. For example, strategic teacher deployment, investment in digital learning technologies, and well-structured curriculum planning can significantly enhance the efficiency of educational institutions (Odukoya, 2019).

On the other hand, effectiveness in education is measured by factors such as student academic performance, teacher competence, curriculum relevance, and the overall impact of education on national development (Ukeje, 2018). A school may be highly efficient in resource management but ineffective in delivering quality education if students lack critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and employability prospects (Osokoya, 2020). Thus, balancing efficiency with effectiveness remains a central challenge for educational managers, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. Empirical studies have shown that educational institutions that implement evidence-based management practices tend to perform better in both efficiency and effectiveness metrics. For instance, research by Adeyemi and Uko (2021) on secondary schools in southwestern Nigeria revealed that schools with strategic leadership practices, continuous teacher development programs, and well-defined performance evaluation systems recorded better academic outcomes compared to those without such structures. This underscores the importance of management principles and theories in shaping educational policies and practices that enhance institutional performance.

Distinction between Efficiency and Effectiveness in Educational Institutions

Efficiency and effectiveness are two critical but distinct concepts in educational management. Efficiency refers to the ability of an educational institution to achieve its goals using the least amount of resources while maintaining high standards of quality (Drucker, 2019). It is concerned with optimizing inputs such as finances, infrastructure, and human capital to produce maximum outputs, such as high student performance, graduation rates, and research productivity. Efficiency in education often involves cost management, streamlined administrative processes, and the minimization of waste while maximizing educational outcomes (Ololube, 2020). Effectiveness, on the other hand, is a broader measure that focuses on whether the educational

institution successfully achieves its intended goals and objectives, regardless of the resources used (Bamiro & Adetunji, 2021). It assesses the impact of education on students, society, and national development by considering factors such as the quality of learning experiences, curriculum relevance, and employability of graduates. Effectiveness is often evaluated through long-term indicators like student satisfaction, teacher performance, research output, and contributions to national development (Adebayo, 2022). The distinction between efficiency and effectiveness is significant in educational management because an institution can be efficient without being effective, and vice versa. For example, a school may successfully manage its budget and resources (efficiency) but fail to produce competent graduates who can contribute meaningfully to society (ineffectiveness). Conversely, a university may have a strong research impact and produce highly skilled graduates (effectiveness) but struggle with financial mismanagement and resource wastage (inefficiency) (Ogunyinka & Ojo, 2023). In the Nigerian educational context, striking a balance between efficiency and effectiveness remains a challenge due to issues such as inadequate funding, policy inconsistencies, and administrative bottlenecks (Ajayi, 2021). While efforts to improve efficiency have led to reforms in school governance, digital learning adoption, and financial accountability, concerns persist regarding the effectiveness of educational outcomes, particularly in terms of graduate employability, research innovation, and social impact (Eze, 2022). This underscores the need for a strategic application of educational management principles and theories to enhance both efficiency and effectiveness in Nigerian schools and universities.

Role of Management Principles and Theories in Shaping Educational Outcomes

Management principles and theories provide a structured framework for understanding, organizing, and improving the operations of educational institutions. These principles are derived from established management thought and practices that inform leadership styles, decision-making processes, resource allocation, institutional governance, and overall school performance. As education continues to evolve, especially in response to globalization, technological advancements, and societal demands, the application of sound management principles has become indispensable in ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in educational administration (Mintzberg, 2020). Effective educational management requires a combination of classical, behavioral, and contemporary principles and theories that balance structure, human relations, and strategic planning. By integrating these principles and theoretical frameworks, educational leaders can develop policies and management strategies that foster a conducive learning environment, improve teacher motivation, enhance student achievement, and ensure optimal use of resources. The interplay of these principles and theories determines the effectiveness of educational institutions in fulfilling their mission of knowledge dissemination, skills development, and national progress (Ogunbanjo, 2023).

Classical Management Theories in Education

Classical management theories, such as Frederick Taylor's Scientific Management Theory and Henri Fayol's Administrative Theory, emphasize efficiency through structured administration, standardized procedures, and hierarchical authority. These theories provide foundational principles that guide educational administration, ensuring that institutional operations are systematized for optimal outcomes (Fayol, 1916). Taylor's Scientific Management focuses on

increasing efficiency by breaking tasks into simpler, more specialized components to enhance productivity (Taylor, 1911). In education, this theory has influenced curriculum structuring, teacher specialization, and assessment standardization. By applying scientific management principles, educational institutions can optimize workflow, improve lesson delivery, and ensure uniformity in teaching methodologies (Akinbode & Balogun, 2023). However, critics argue that excessive emphasis on efficiency can lead to rigidity in education, limiting teachers' creativity and student engagement (Bolarinwa, 2023). Fayol's Administrative Theory outlines key management functions—planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling (Fayol, 1916). This theory has significantly shaped school leadership, particularly in hierarchical school structures where administrators oversee policies, monitor staff performance, and enforce discipline. In Nigerian schools, Fayol's principles have been instrumental in defining administrative roles, ensuring accountability, and establishing clear lines of authority. However, the challenge remains in balancing administrative control with flexibility to accommodate changing educational needs (Ajayi, 2021). Max Weber's Bureaucratic Theory emphasizes formalized rules, hierarchical structures, and standardized procedures (Weber, 1947). Many Nigerian schools and universities operate within bureaucratic systems where policies, reporting structures, and standardized assessments dictate institutional operations. While bureaucracy ensures stability and consistency in educational management, it can also lead to excessive red tapeism, slowing down innovation and decision-making processes (Ogunyemi & Adekunle, 2022).

Behavioral Theories and Human Relations in Education

Behavioral management theories emerged in response to the limitations of classical management approaches, shifting focus from rigid structures to human relationships, motivation, and participatory leadership. Scholars such as Elton Mayo, Douglas McGregor, and Abraham Maslow emphasized the role of motivation, workplace satisfaction, and psychological well-being in improving productivity, concepts that have significantly influenced educational leadership (Mayo, 1933; McGregor, 1960; Maslow, 1943). Elton Mayo's research on workplace productivity, particularly the Hawthorne Studies, demonstrated that social factors such as team collaboration, recognition, and communication significantly impact performance (Mayo, 1933). In educational settings, this implies that teacher morale, student-teacher relationships, and a positive school culture are essential for effective learning. Schools that foster strong interpersonal relationships, encourage teacher development, and provide student-centered learning environments tend to achieve better educational outcomes (Adeyemi, 2020). Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y describe two contrasting views of human motivation (McGregor, 1960).

- i. **Theory X** assumes that employees (or teachers) are inherently lazy and require strict supervision, a perspective that aligns with traditional authoritarian school leadership styles.
- ii. **Theory Y**, on the other hand, posits that people are self-motivated and thrive when given autonomy and responsibility. In education, schools that adopt Theory Y principles by promoting teacher autonomy, professional development, and participatory decision-making tend to experience higher levels of teacher engagement and student performance (Ogundele, 2022).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs explains human motivation in a tiered structure, starting from basic physiological needs to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). In education, teachers and students must have their basic needs (salary, security, learning resources) met before they can achieve higher-level outcomes such as academic excellence and creativity. Schools that provide a safe learning environment, fair compensation for teachers, and opportunities for personal growth create a foundation for efficiency and effectiveness (Ogunbanjo, 2023).

Contemporary and Strategic Management Theories in Education

Modern management theories integrate classical and behavioral insights while incorporating flexibility, innovation, and strategic planning. These theories are more adaptive to the complexities of today's educational landscape, emphasizing leadership effectiveness, evidence-based decision-making, and institutional sustainability. Transformational leadership, as proposed by Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass (1990), highlights the role of visionary leaders who inspire change, innovation, and institutional growth. In education, transformational school leaders motivate teachers, foster student engagement, and drive curriculum reforms. Studies have shown that transformational leadership is positively correlated with school performance, student achievement, and teacher satisfaction (Adebisi, 2021). Strategic management theories emphasize long-term planning, data-driven policy formulation, and continuous quality improvement (Mintzberg, 2020). Schools and universities that adopt strategic management principles are more likely to achieve sustainability, adapt to technological advancements, and respond effectively to societal demands. In Nigeria, some universities have successfully integrated strategic planning and ICT-driven management systems, improving administrative efficiency, student services, and research productivity (Onifade & Oladapo, 2022). Educational institutions increasingly rely on data-driven decision-making to enhance efficiency and effectiveness (Ogunbanjo, 2023). Through performance metrics, teacher evaluations, and student assessment data, schools can develop policies that address specific educational challenges. However, challenges such as data inaccuracy, resistance to innovation, and lack of technical expertise remain barriers to fully implementing evidence-based management in Nigeria (Akinola, 2023). Management principles and theories provide a structured approach to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of educational institutions. Classical management theories emphasize structure and efficiency, behavioral theories focus on human motivation and leadership styles, while contemporary theories advocate for strategic planning and innovation. In the Nigerian context, integrating these theoretical perspectives remains crucial for enhancing educational governance, optimizing resource utilization, and improving student outcomes. However, systemic challenges such as bureaucracy, inadequate funding, and policy inconsistencies continue to hinder full implementation. Addressing these gaps through strategic leadership, participatory decision-making, and evidence-based policies will be essential in transforming Nigeria's education sector for long-term sustainability and global competitiveness.

Principles of Educational Management for Efficiency and Effectiveness

Planning and decision-making are fundamental to the success of educational institutions, as they determine how resources, policies, and instructional strategies are structured to achieve institutional goals. Effective planning in education involves setting long-term and short-term objectives, aligning them with national education policies, and ensuring that they address both

immediate needs and future challenges (Obanya, 2020). Decision-making, on the other hand, is a dynamic process that requires evidence-based approaches, stakeholder consultation, and adaptability to changing educational demands. Classical management theories, such as Fayol's Administrative Theory, emphasize the role of systematic planning in enhancing efficiency, while contemporary strategic management models advocate for data-driven decision-making (Adepoju & Fabunmi, 2019). In Nigerian educational institutions, planning often faces significant challenges, including inadequate data for forecasting, political interference, and inconsistent policy implementation (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2021). The gap between strategic plans and actual implementation further exacerbates inefficiencies in school administration. An ideal scenario would involve the integration of participatory decision-making models where teachers, school administrators, parents, and policymakers collaborate to develop actionable educational plans. This approach is supported by the Human Relations Theory, which underscores the importance of stakeholder involvement in institutional governance (Ogunyemi & Ojo, 2022). The current trend in educational planning in Nigeria has shifted towards digitalization, with the adoption of technology-driven planning tools to improve efficiency (Yusuf & Olatunji, 2023). However, gaps persist in terms of implementation, particularly in rural schools that lack technological infrastructure.

Leadership in educational institutions plays a crucial role in shaping organizational culture, influencing policy implementation, and driving institutional success. Various leadership theories, including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, provide frameworks for understanding how school administrators can foster efficiency and effectiveness (Northouse, 2021). Transformational leadership, in particular, has been widely advocated in educational management, as it emphasizes vision-driven change, staff motivation, and continuous professional development (Bass & Riggio, 2019). In contrast, transactional leadership, which focuses on reward and punishment, is less effective in dynamic educational environments where innovation and collaboration are necessary (Ogunyinka, 2020). In Nigerian schools, the leadership structure is often hierarchical, with decision-making concentrated at the top levels, limiting the autonomy of middle and lower-level administrators (Oyetunde, 2022). This rigid structure tends to slow down innovation and responsiveness to emerging challenges. The ideal situation would involve a more decentralized leadership model, where school leaders at different levels are empowered to make context-specific decisions. The growing trend towards distributed leadership—where responsibilities are shared among teachers, administrators, and stakeholders—has shown promising results in improving school efficiency (Ukeje, 2021). However, leadership gaps persist, particularly in the public education sector, where political interference and bureaucratic constraints often hinder effective leadership practices. Human resource management (HRM) in educational institutions is critical for ensuring that teachers, administrators, and support staff are well-trained, motivated, and effectively utilized to achieve institutional goals. The application of HRM theories, such as McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, helps in understanding teacher motivation and performance management (McGregor, 2006). Theory Y, which emphasizes intrinsic motivation and professional development, aligns well with modern approaches to HRM in schools, as it fosters innovation and job satisfaction (Okeke & Adeyanju, 2021).

In Nigeria, teacher recruitment and retention remain significant challenges due to poor working conditions, inadequate remuneration, and lack of professional development

opportunities (Ige, 2020). The ideal scenario would involve a well-structured HRM system that ensures merit-based hiring, continuous capacity-building, and performance-based incentives. The recent trend in HRM in Nigerian schools has seen an increased emphasis on teacher training through digital learning platforms and capacity-building workshops (Adesina & Alabi, 2022). However, gaps remain in the implementation of effective teacher appraisal systems, as many schools lack standardized performance evaluation frameworks. Addressing these gaps requires policy reforms that prioritize teacher welfare, professional development, and accountability mechanisms. Efficient financial and resource management is essential for the sustainability of educational institutions. The principles of financial management in education emphasize budget planning, resource allocation, cost-effectiveness, and accountability (Brighouse & Tomlinson, 2020). Theories such as Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) and Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) provide frameworks for understanding how financial decisions impact institutional efficiency (Hall & Taylor, 2019). In the Nigerian education sector, financial mismanagement, inadequate funding, and corruption are persistent challenges that hinder institutional effectiveness (Babalola, 2021). An ideal financial management system in Nigerian schools would ensure transparent budgeting, equitable resource distribution, and financial autonomy for school administrators. The recent trend in financial management in education has been the adoption of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to bridge funding gaps and improve infrastructure (Eze & Okonkwo, 2022). While this approach has yielded some success, disparities in resource allocation remain, particularly in rural schools that lack access to alternative funding sources. The gap in financial accountability is another critical issue, as many public schools struggle with inefficient expenditure tracking systems, leading to resource wastage. Strengthening financial oversight mechanisms and promoting digital financial management tools can help address these challenges.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are essential for ensuring that educational policies, teaching methodologies, and administrative strategies align with institutional goals and national education standards. Theories such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Continuous Improvement Models emphasize the need for regular assessment and feedback loops to drive institutional progress (Deming, 1986; Stufflebeam, 2019). Effective M&E systems in education involve setting clear performance indicators, data collection, stakeholder feedback, and adaptive learning strategies (Onwu & Afolabi, 2020). In Nigeria, M&E in education is often hampered by inadequate data collection mechanisms, lack of standardized evaluation frameworks, and poor stakeholder engagement (Olorunsola, 2021). The ideal scenario would involve a robust M&E system that integrates technology-driven data analytics to assess institutional performance in real-time. The trend in M&E practices has shifted towards the use of digital learning management systems (LMS) and school performance dashboards to enhance data-driven decision-making (Adelabu & Aina, 2023). However, gaps remain in terms of policy implementation, as many schools lack the technical expertise and infrastructure needed to support effective monitoring systems. Strengthening capacity-building initiatives and investing in digital M&E tools can help bridge these gaps and improve overall educational outcomes. The principles and theories of educational management provide a strong foundation for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in educational institutions. While classical and contemporary management theories offer valuable insights into planning, leadership, HRM, financial management, and M&E, their practical application in Nigerian schools faces several

challenges. The ideal situation would involve a strategic integration of participatory leadership, data-driven decision-making, equitable resource allocation, and continuous monitoring to drive sustainable educational reforms. Current trends show promising developments, particularly in the use of digital tools for planning, HRM, and M&E. However, significant gaps remain in policy implementation, financial accountability, and leadership autonomy. Addressing these gaps requires a multi-stakeholder approach that involves government agencies, school administrators, teachers, and policymakers working collaboratively to enhance governance and operational efficiency in Nigerian educational institutions.

Application in Educational Institutions

The practical application of educational management theories in institutional settings serves as a critical determinant of efficiency and effectiveness in school administration. The integration of classical, behavioral, and contemporary management theories into educational practice has been observed to yield positive outcomes in various educational systems globally, including Nigeria. However, the extent to which these theories are applied effectively depends on contextual factors such as leadership capacity, resource availability, policy implementation, and stakeholder engagement. This section explores case studies of effective educational management strategies, best practices from successful educational systems, and the challenges and limitations of implementing management principles in Nigerian schools. Several studies have highlighted the impact of integrating classical, behavioral, and contemporary management theories in improving school administration and student outcomes. For instance, the transformational leadership model, which emphasizes participatory decision-making and motivational leadership, has been successfully implemented in several Nigerian schools. A study by Oyetakin and Akinwumi (2022) found that secondary school administrators in Lagos State who adopted transformational leadership practices recorded improved teacher commitment and student academic performance. Similarly, a case study by Adedokun (2021) on strategic planning in Nigerian universities demonstrated that institutions with well-structured governance frameworks experienced enhanced operational efficiency and better financial management. Beyond Nigeria, international case studies provide further insights into effective educational management. The Finnish education system, for example, is renowned for its decentralized management approach, which grants autonomy to schools while ensuring adherence to national educational goals. Research by Sahlberg (2020) underscores that Finland's success is largely attributed to its trust-based management system, where school leaders exercise professional autonomy in decision-making, curriculum implementation, and staff recruitment. Additionally, the Singaporean education system is a model of evidence-based decision-making, where policies are continuously refined based on research and performance metrics. According to Goh and Lee (2021), Singapore's Ministry of Education employs a strategic human resource management approach that prioritizes teacher training, career progression, and performance appraisal, ensuring optimal educational outcomes.

Drawing from successful educational systems worldwide, certain best practices emerge as key drivers of efficiency and effectiveness in educational management. One of the most significant best practices is data-driven decision-making, where educational leaders utilize empirical evidence to guide policies and interventions. Research by Ogundele et al. (2023) highlights that Nigerian schools that employ data-driven management techniques, such as

student performance tracking and teacher evaluation systems, tend to exhibit improved academic outcomes. Another critical best practice is participatory leadership, which involves engaging teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in decision-making processes. This approach aligns with behavioral management theories, which emphasize motivation, collaboration, and psychological well-being in organizational settings (McGregor, 1960). In Nigeria, schools that implement participatory leadership frameworks, such as the involvement of teachers in curriculum planning and school improvement initiatives, often experience higher staff morale and better student engagement (Afolabi & Bello, 2022). Furthermore, strategic resource allocation is another best practice that enhances efficiency in school management. Research by Nwagwu (2022) demonstrates that well-managed schools prioritize investments in teacher development, infrastructure, and learning materials, ensuring that resources are optimally utilized for educational improvement. The Kenyan education system, for example, has successfully implemented strategic resource allocation through its government-funded free primary education program, which ensures equitable distribution of educational resources across the country (Wanjala, 2021).

Despite the potential benefits of applying educational management theories, Nigerian educational institutions face several challenges that hinder their effective implementation. One of the primary challenges is inadequate funding, which limits the ability of schools to adopt best practices such as teacher training, technological integration, and infrastructure development. According to Edeh and Uche (2023), many public schools in Nigeria struggle with insufficient financial resources, leading to overcrowded classrooms, outdated learning materials, and poorly maintained facilities. Another significant challenge is bureaucratic inefficiencies and policy inconsistencies. Educational policies in Nigeria are often subject to frequent changes due to shifts in government administration, resulting in a lack of continuity in management strategies (Ogunleye, 2023). Additionally, bureaucratic bottlenecks in the allocation and disbursement of educational funds contribute to inefficiencies in school administration, making it difficult for institutions to implement long-term strategic plans. The issue of teacher motivation and professional development also presents a major limitation. Many Nigerian teachers face poor remuneration, delayed salaries, and limited career advancement opportunities, which negatively impact their commitment and performance (Adewale, 2021). Without adequate motivation and continuous professional training, teachers are unable to effectively implement modern educational management principles that require innovative teaching methodologies, classroom management skills, and student-centered learning approaches. Furthermore, resistance to change among school administrators and teachers poses another obstacle to the adoption of contemporary management practices. Research by Yusuf and Adekunle (2022) indicates that some educational institutions in Nigeria are reluctant to embrace new management models, such as digital learning integration and performance-based evaluations, due to entrenched traditional practices and fear of disruption. The application of educational management theories in Nigerian schools has the potential to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, but the extent of their impact depends on various contextual factors. Case studies from Nigeria and international educational systems reveal that participatory leadership, strategic planning, and evidence-based decision-making are essential components of effective educational management. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, bureaucratic inefficiencies, teacher motivation issues, and resistance to change continue to impede progress

in the Nigerian education sector. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that involves policymakers, school leaders, and stakeholders in implementing sustainable management strategies that align with global best practices.

Argument for an Integrated Management Approach

Educational institutions require a balanced and integrative application of management theories to navigate the complexities of modern education systems effectively. Classical management theories, such as Taylor's scientific management and Fayol's administrative theory, provide foundational principles on organizational structure, efficiency, and hierarchical leadership (Fayol, 1916; Taylor, 1911). These models emphasize task specialization, accountability, and standardized procedures to enhance institutional efficiency. However, their rigid and mechanistic approach often limits adaptability and fails to address the human dimensions of educational institutions (Ezenwafor & Olaitan, 2022). Conversely, behavioral theories, as advanced by scholars like Elton Mayo and Douglas McGregor, underscore the significance of human relations, motivation, and participatory decision-making in fostering institutional effectiveness (McGregor, 1960; Mayo, 1933). These theories advocate for democratic leadership, open communication, and a conducive work environment that enhances teacher performance and student engagement. Nonetheless, an overreliance on behavioral approaches without strategic planning may result in inefficiencies, such as resource misallocation and lack of institutional discipline (Olowookere & Omodan, 2023). Contemporary management theories, such as systems theory and transformational leadership, offer a holistic approach by integrating structural efficiency with human dynamics. Systems theory emphasizes the interdependence of various educational subsystems—administration, curriculum, human resources, and finance—suggesting that any dysfunction in one area affects overall institutional performance (Bertalanffy, 1968). Transformational leadership, championed by Bass and Avolio (1994), promotes visionary leadership, teacher empowerment, and continuous innovation, crucial for adapting to 21st-century educational challenges (Okonkwo & Adeyemi, 2021). However, challenges arise when transformational leadership is not supported by strong institutional frameworks and policies. In the Nigerian educational context, an optimal management approach should integrate elements from all three theoretical perspectives. The structured efficiency of classical management, the participatory elements of behavioral theory, and the adaptability of contemporary approaches can create a robust framework for school governance. For instance, studies by Nwosu and Ajayi (2022) highlight that Nigerian schools that blend hierarchical leadership with teacher collaboration and data-driven decision-making report higher academic performance and institutional stability.

Synergy Between Efficiency (Resource Optimization) and Effectiveness (Quality Education)

Efficiency and effectiveness in educational management should not be viewed as mutually exclusive; rather, they must operate in synergy to create a well-functioning system. Efficiency in education primarily concerns the optimal use of resources—financial, human, and infrastructural—to achieve maximum output with minimal waste (Akinyemi & Fasasi, 2022). This involves strategic budgeting, transparent financial management, and ensuring that funds allocated for education are utilized appropriately. However, mere resource optimization without a corresponding focus on effectiveness—measured through quality teaching, student

performance, and institutional impact—can lead to a system that is financially stable but academically deficient (Olawale & Adebajo, 2023). Effectiveness in education encompasses qualitative aspects such as student-centered learning, curriculum relevance, teacher competency, and inclusive education policies. Research indicates that schools with well-defined instructional leadership models and ongoing professional development programs for teachers tend to outperform those that focus solely on cost-cutting measures (Alabi & Ige, 2021). Additionally, effective schools adopt a data-driven approach to decision-making, where student performance analytics guide curriculum adjustments and teaching strategies (Usman & Adediran, 2023). In Nigeria, inefficiencies such as corruption, poor infrastructure, and inconsistent policy implementation hinder the realization of both efficiency and effectiveness in educational institutions. Studies have shown that while government budgets for education have increased, actual learning outcomes remain suboptimal due to resource mismanagement and policy inconsistencies (Obi & Onyekachi, 2023). Thus, achieving synergy between efficiency and effectiveness requires policies that not only promote financial prudence but also enhance teaching quality and institutional accountability.

Conclusion

Educational management plays a crucial role in shaping the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions by providing a structured approach to leadership, decision-making, and resource allocation. The integration of classical, behavioral, and contemporary management theories offers a robust framework for navigating the complexities of the Nigerian education system. As examined in this study, classical theories emphasize hierarchical organization and administrative efficiency, behavioral theories advocate for human-centered leadership, and contemporary theories highlight adaptability, innovation, and evidence-based practices. The synergy of these theoretical perspectives creates a holistic approach that fosters institutional effectiveness, enhances teacher performance, and improves student learning outcomes (Bush, 2021; Okoroma, 2020). However, despite the theoretical advancements in educational management, several challenges continue to hinder its practical implementation in Nigeria. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate funding, policy inconsistencies, and resistance to change impede the successful adoption of modern management principles (Ogunode, 2022). Many Nigerian schools lack the strategic leadership necessary to operationalize participatory and data-driven decision-making processes. Additionally, the gap between policy formulation and implementation remains a significant concern, as policies designed to enhance efficiency are often not effectively executed due to systemic constraints (Obanya, 2021). Without addressing these issues, achieving sustainable educational transformation remains elusive. In light of these findings, this paper strongly advocates for a paradigm shift in educational management practices within Nigeria. Policymakers, school administrators, and other stakeholders must prioritize the adoption of an integrated management approach that harmonizes traditional and modern theories. This requires proactive leadership, capacity-building initiatives, and data-driven policy formulation to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for increased investment in educational infrastructure, professional development programs for teachers, and a commitment to accountability in school governance. By embracing a comprehensive and adaptive management model, Nigerian educational institutions can achieve greater efficiency, ensure improved student outcomes, and contribute

to national development (Bamiro & Adediji, 2023). Therefore, stakeholders at all levels must take deliberate actions to institutionalize best practices in educational management, ensuring a sustainable future for the Nigerian education system.

Policy Recommendations for School Administrators and Policymakers

To overcome the challenges hindering the integration of educational management theories in Nigerian schools, specific responsibilities must be assigned to the relevant stakeholders. School administrators should adopt a hybrid management model that blends classical efficiency-driven strategies with behavioral and contemporary approaches. This requires maintaining structured administrative protocols while fostering participatory decision-making and adaptive leadership. For example, administrators should enforce performance-based accountability systems while simultaneously nurturing a collaborative work culture (Ogundipe & Yusuf, 2022). Government agencies and policymakers must be responsible for establishing continuous professional development programs for educational leaders. These programs should emphasize transformational leadership, strategic planning, and data-driven decision-making. Embedding such initiatives into national education policy will ensure sustainability and continuous improvement in managerial effectiveness (Ajibola & Oladimeji, 2023). The Nigerian government, in collaboration with regulatory bodies, should enforce strict financial monitoring mechanisms to prevent misallocation of funds. This includes implementing digital financial tracking systems, mandating regular independent audits, and holding school authorities accountable for transparent budget management (Eze & Okoro, 2023).

Policymakers should spearhead the development of a national education management information system (EMIS) capable of generating real-time data on student outcomes, teacher performance, and resource utilization. School administrators must then integrate this technology into daily operations to guide informed decision-making (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2022). In addition, policymakers should mandate the creation of School Management Committee (SMCs) that include parents, teachers, and community leaders. School administrators must ensure these committees are actively involved in governance processes, thereby promoting accountability and aligning school activities with local educational needs (Ogunlana & Abiola, 2022). Finally, lawmakers must enact legislation that insulates education policies from political interference and frequent reversals. Policymakers should operationalize such laws by establishing a legally binding framework for long-term educational planning, thereby guaranteeing stability and continuity across political transitions (Ibekwe & Nwankwo, 2023). A balanced application of management theories is essential for optimizing both efficiency and effectiveness in Nigerian educational institutions. While classical theories provide structural and operational guidance, behavioral and contemporary approaches introduce adaptability and human-centered governance. Achieving synergy between resource optimization and quality education requires transparent financial management, capacity building, and data-driven decision-making. For policymakers and school administrators, integrating these strategies into education governance will not only enhance institutional performance but also contribute to national development through improved human capital formation. Addressing the major challenges in implementing these management principles—such as policy inconsistency, financial mismanagement, and lack of stakeholder engagement—will be pivotal in transforming Nigeria's education sector into a globally competitive system.

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