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Insecurity Challenges in Nigeria: Existentialism Principles in Yoruba Traditional Early Childhood Education as Paradigms of Preventive Measures

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Abstract

A central principle of existentialism is that, “existence precedes essence for humans”. This means that, humans must first exist before any importance (essence) is attached to the living. Other existentialism principles as contained in its metaphysics, epistemology and axiology emphasise that humans are indispensable creatures in the world who should be accorded all rights to existence for essence. It is however disheartening that the existence of the citizens for essence are being threatened in Nigeria by diverse insecurity challenges being perpetrated by religious extremists tagged *Boko Haram*, bandits, kidnappers, criminal herders, armed robbers and the like. As a way of proffering solutions to these threats to human sustainable existence, this paper looks into the practice of existentialism principles in Yoruba traditional early childhood education as a model of preventive measure against the aforementioned insecurity challenges in Nigeria, as, previous works on insecurity challenges in Nigeria have not dwelt on existentialism principles in traditional Yoruba early childhood education as preventive measures.

Speculative, normative and analytic philosophical methods are utilised in this study of insecurity menace in Nigeria. Speculative method as a systematic thinking is combined with normative method, an axiological-natured method which dwells on standard of values on what is right or wrong, thereby giving prescription on actions that can be considered right or not on insecurity menace in Nigeria. The speculative and normative methods served as background and complements for the general use of analytic method, which is a breaking down of complex concepts for the purpose of examination and clarification in clearer form.

It is revealed in the paper that various measures were adopted by Yoruba traditional early childhood education to forestall threats to peaceful existence and freedom of humans by having a well nurtured early childhood education in place, using strategies such as parental bond, family name/panegyrics, parental modelling, poems, songs and other communication tools to nurture children into responsible adults that will live and let others live, which subsequently translate to a peaceful society for all.

This paper recommends that children who are the adult/leaders of tomorrow should be well nurtured and guided morally in order to have them as responsible adults and leaders of tomorrow. Lots of findings have revealed the foundational years of humans as the most important stage, hence the need to guide and guard it spiritedly. In the case treated in this

paper, proper up-bringing of children is important in order to have the children later in life as responsible citizens who will not be armed-robbers, terrorists, bandits, murderers and the like. The task to nurture a child to a responsible adult should not be taken with levity in all ramifications.

Keywords: Insecurity, Prevention, Nigeria, Existentialism Principles, Yoruba Early Childhood Education.

Introduction

There is no gainsaying the painful fact that Nigeria is under siege of diverse insecurity issues in which the occurrence of such is at regular intervals. The situation is so terrible that, if one should open the pages of newspapers or listen to electronics media including social media, one will be downhearted to read or hear various news of diverse insecurity challenges including kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, suicide bombing, banditry, criminal herders' murderous activities and the like. It is a fact that cannot be disputed that these insecurity menace calls for remedies from all angles as can be exemplified in a Yoruba proverb that says, "*Oriṣùrìṣì òbẹ̀ là á rí lójó ikú erin*" literally translated as, "The death of an elephant attracts different types of knives". This means that a big problem demands different types of solutions, both immediate and preventive.

It is in the light of this devastating menace of insecurity confronting Nigeria that this paper is written using the postulations of existentialism principles, especially the central one that says, "Existence precedes essence". In a clearer term, what existentialism postulates by the saying of existence preceding essence is that, humans need to exist before they will be able to attach any meaning to their lives. This, then proves that, if existence is important, then, the existence has to be guarded spiritedly and anything against the successful existence is a menace that should be dealt with. Existentialism also recognizes the humans' freewill to make a choice which is also a way of having a successful existence.

The truisms of existentialism philosophy as contained in its metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology all emphasise that humans are indispensable creatures in the world, as, apart from humans, the whole world has neither meaning nor purpose. It is however disheartening that, the diverse insecurity challenges being witnessed in Nigeria is denying humans all these rights as contained in existentialism principles. It may not be an overstatement to say that the menace of insecurity challenges in Nigeria is at an emergency rate as diverse reports of one form of insecurity challenge or the other are being reported almost on daily basis.

The issue of insecurity challenge prompts this paper to look into the maintenance of existentialism philosophy in Yoruba traditional early childhood education as a model of preventive measures against all sorts of insecurity challenges in Nigeria. To achieve this aim, this paper is delineated into various sections starting with this introduction. After this, the major concepts in the study are explained. Subsequently, an overview of insecurity challenges in Nigeria is given before dwelling on insecurity challenges as impediments against existentialism principles in human lives. After this, existentialism principles in Yoruba traditional early childhood education as a paradigm of preventive measures of insecurity challenges in Nigeria

are treated. Conclusion and recommendations are thereafter provided based on the polemics of the paper.

Clarification of Concepts

Yoruba Traditional Early Childhood Education

Yoruba: The Yoruba is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria who occupy the South-Western states of the country (Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo and Osun) mainly and some parts of Kwara and Kogi states in Nigeria. Apart from Nigeria, the Yoruba are also found in sizable numbers in South-Eastern parts of the republic of Benin and Togo in West Africa.¹

The traditional early childhood care and education of this ethnic group whose existentialism's maintenance is chosen as a model of preventing insecurity challenges in this paper is under traditional education which Fafunwa² describes as the educational system prevalent among Africans before their contact with Islam, Christianity and Colonialism. The type of Yoruba traditional education chosen is its early childhood education. Early childhood education as an important segment of education of humans is defined by Essa, Young and Lehne thus: "the term, early childhood refers to the period from birth to eight".³ Early childhood education has also been defined as consisting of activities and/ or experiences that are intended to effect developmental changes in children prior to their entry into the primary school.⁴ Expatriating further on the concept of early childhood education, the Nigerian National Policy on Education describes early childhood education as the "care, development, education, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0 to four years in a crèche, or nursery."⁵ Lewis⁶ also describes early childhood education as "a term that refers to educational programmes and strategies geared towards children from birth to the age of eight".

Having dwelt on definitions and descriptions of Yoruba traditional education and early childhood education, the definition of Yoruba traditional early childhood education can now be construed to mean the education of young children from birth to eight years given by the Yoruba before the advent of colonialism, Christianity and Islam. The early childhood educational system under reference was informal and did not include all the paraphernalia of the formal school system like chalk, school buildings, classrooms, chalk, certified teachers and the like. Parents, siblings, community elders and family members were the teachers.

¹ O. A. Balogun. "In defence of the "living dead" in traditional African thought: the Yoruba example" *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*. 2009. 38, (1): 10-12

² B. Fafunwa. *History of Education in Nigeria*. Ibadan: NPS Educational Publishers Limited. 1974.

³ E, Essa. R, Young. & L, Lehne. *Early childhood education*. Ontario: T.P Nelson. 1998.

⁴ E, Oduolowu. *Contemporary issues in early childhood Education*. Ibadan: Franco-Ola Publishers, 2011:1

⁵ Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC Press. 2013.

⁶ B, Lewis. "Early Childhood Education". www.keducators.about.com/... (Accessed July 3, 2019)

Insecurity

Insecurity is a state of being subject to danger or injury. It can also be defined as the anxiety that is experienced when one feels vulnerable and insecure.⁷ . Insecurity has also been described as the case of not being safe or strong.⁸ . Drawing inferences from these definition of insecurity, one can foreground the central idea or words suggesting insecurity as danger, injury, unsafe, evil, anxiety, disturbance, disadvantage, problems, harm, death, injury, violence, crime, fear and calamity. In other words, to be in a state of insecurity can be accompanied by all the aforementioned related words to insecurity which are all threats to human existence.

Existentialism Philosophy

The idea that existence precedes essence is a central idea in existentialism. The idea had its source in a speech by F W J Schelling which was delivered in December, 1841. Soren Kierkegaard who was at the occasion reflected the idea in his works in the 19th century⁹ . Some prominent existentialists are Jean-Paul Sartre, Martins-Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Soren Kierkegaard.¹⁰ Existentialism is chiefly a 20th century philosophical movement that embraces diverse doctrines but centering on analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of the individual who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will.¹¹ Jean-Paul Sartre posited that existence precedes essence. That is, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards defines himself. Thus, man begins as a zero, a nothing and then only becomes something. Hence, man defines the meaning of his existence and beyond man, there is no meaning to explain.¹²

In addition to these definitions and descriptions of existentialism, Akinpelu¹³ notes that, choice is the key and fundamental concept in existentialism, stating further that it is around choice that existentialism is built.

Metaphysics of Existentialism

According to the metaphysics of existentialism, philosophy should be reason informed by passion. Ultimate realities are manifested in states of heightened feeling. The whole man is disclosed through passionate reason. Apart from man, the whole world has neither meaning nor purpose. It is only those things we feel, see and touch that are real and that exist. Philosophy should therefore concern itself with human beings in their concrete existence. Existentialists

⁷ Udoh, E.M. "Insecurity in Nigeria: Political, Religious and Cultural Implication" *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. 5. 2015. <https://core.ac.uk/pdf>. (Accessed October 16, 2021).

⁸ dictionary.cambridge.org (Accessed October 17, 2021)

⁹ worddisk.com/wiki/Existence_precedes_essence. (Accessed May 15, 2022).

¹⁰ B, Douglas. and P, Papandree. *Existentialism*. <https://ceptrum.edu/existentialists>. (Accessed October 12, 2021).

¹¹ Merriam-Webster. "Definition of existentialism" merriam- webster.org. (Accessed October 12, 2021)

¹² M R, Dallas. *Introduction to Philosophy*. <https://www.qcc.cung.edu/ppecorino> (Accessed October 12, 2021)

¹³ J A Akinpelu. *Essays in Philosophy and Education*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers. 2005:80

define man as a living person who is conscious that he is alive, that he thinks, and that he has the ability to make decisions on what he wants to do and what he wants to be.¹⁴

Epistemology of Existentialism

Like pragmatists, existentialists regard experience as the most important source of knowledge. The most important knowledge is personal knowledge a person is emotionally and passionately involved. First-hand experience is unique. It can neither be duplicated, initiated nor adequately described by another person. The only person who knows what being poor is like, is a poor person. No amount of studies can convey to a rich person what it feels to be poor.¹⁵

Axiology of Existentialism

Existentialists believe that there are no absolute values. Rather, values are determined by the free choice of the individuals. Man, therefore is the judge of what is of value to him. Value to the existentialists is personal.¹⁶

An Overview of Security Challenges in Nigeria

Olanibi¹⁷ cites some newspaper headlines on the rising crime in Nigeria thus:

- Four feared dead in Kaduna bomb blast (The Nation, April 23, 2011).
- Over 100 dead in Kano blasts (Sunday Tribune, Jan, 22, 2012)
- Police discover bomb making factory in Kaduna. Terror in Bauchi: 2 soldiers, DPO, 8 others killed. Explosions rock 2 churches. Fresh bombs diffused in Kano. (Nigerian Tribune, Jan 23, 2012)
- 8 killed, 39 injured in fresh Jos church blast. (National Mirror, February 27, 2012)
- 4 soldiers, 4 policemen killed by gunmen. (Nigerian Tribune, March 2, 2012).
- Kidnappers place N60m ransom to free lecturer in Lagos. (Zimbio Inc. May 27, 2012).
- Slaughter of two Indians, others. JTF kills 4, arrests 50 in Maiduguri. (Weekly Trust, July 28, 2012).
- Gunmen attack Ogun monarch, ex-lawmakers. (The Punch, June 13, 2012)
- 15 year old bombs mosque, kills 10. (Sat. Tribune, July 14, 2012)
- Gunmen attack Sambo's house in Zaria. As suicide bombers hit Sokoto. (Daily Trust, July, 31, 2012)
- In Yobe Borno ex-commissioner shot dead. (Daily Trust, August 6, 2012)
- Genocide going on in Borno. (Daily Trust, August 17, 2012)
 - Bayelsa Kidnapped monarch: Abductors demand N50m ransom for his release. (The Nation, quoted by Zimbio inc. Aug.2012)

¹⁴ E M, Nwabuisi. *Philosophy of Nigerian education in modern times*. Onitsha: Etuokwu Publisher. 1992:77

¹⁵ E M, Nwabuisi. *Philosophy of Nigerian education in modern times*. Onitsha: Etuokwu Publisher. 1992:79

¹⁶ T, Lorvaa. & A.M, James, *Introduction to philosophy*. Makurdi: Authors.2009

¹⁷ S. A., Olanibi, "Peace and security in Nigeria: Lessons from Yoruba traditional education". A paper presented at WICE conference held from 8 -12th Oct, 2012 at Umunze, Anambra State.

- Evil Banker: Female Cashier sends robbers after customer: Gang snatches N5m from victim. (Daily Sun, September, 16, 2012)

A close look at these happenings suggests that they happened around 2011, 2012. The disheartening event connected with these evil happenings is that, instead of the situations abating, or, at least reduced to a reasonable extent, the menace has become worse, growing into a bigger and deadlier monster. Writing on the current disturbing situations, Tanko¹⁸ states that, “Nigeria is faced with an unprecedented wave of different but overlapping security crises from kidnapping to extremist insurgencies, almost every corner of the country has been hit by violence and crime”. In a similar vein, Duerksen¹⁹ laments that, “Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari has said that Nigeria is facing “a state of emergency” as a result of ongoing insecurity”. Also worried about the ongoing and unbaiting insecurity menace in Nigeria, Kyari²⁰ also adds her voice thus:

In the past decade in particular, there have been a spate of violent attack linked to the group, notoriously known as “Boko Haram” in the northern part of the country where thousands of lives have been lost and extensive damage to property suffered. Furthermore, conflicts between nomadic herdsmen, cattle rustlers and farmers have almost recently expanded to other parts of the country with an escalation in the spate of violent clashes resulting in several deaths with entire villages being burnt down and animals and farmlands being destroyed.

All these citations explained the deplorable and dangerous situation that Nigeria is, which demands arrays of solutions from all areas. This brought a need to analyse further the threats to lives, as against what was canvassed by the principles of existentialism which is done in the next sub-heading thus:

Insecurity Challenges as Impediments against Existentialism Principles in Human Lives

As earlier cited in this paper, the central idea of existentialism is that, existence precedes essence. That is, whatever humans have to plan, become or execute, humans must first exist before all other things are added. This can be coined as, “Seek ye the smooth existence first, and all other things shall be added unto you”. The complete truth inherent in this existentialism principle cannot be gainsaid, but the insecurity challenges are sabotaging this important aspect of human lives as can be cited in different cessation to lives (existence) thereby blocking the essence that may be added thereafter.

Another area whereby the existentialism principle on human lives is being sabotaged by insecurity challenges is the area that, humans have freewill and can therefore make a choice, but where is the freewill to make the choice amidst diverse threats to lives and properties where even the existence can be terminated abruptly?

¹⁸ Aliyu, T. “Nigeria’s Security Crises – Five different Threats” <https://www.bbc.com>news> (Accessed October 12, 2021).

¹⁹ Duerksen, M. “Nigeria’s Diverse Security Threats” <https://africacentre.org>spotlight> (Accessed October 12, 2021).

²⁰ Mohammed, F. K. (2016) “The Future of Nigeria: Security Challenges and Implications for Internal Regional and Global Security” cairin.info/revue-defense-nationale-2016-7-page-132.htm (Accessed October 16, 2021)

In the metaphysics of existentialism, it states that, apart from humans, the whole world has neither meaning nor purpose. Again, the truism of this existentialism principles is being violated by the nefarious activities of the perpetrators of diverse insecurity menace in Nigeria.

The epistemology of existentialism is that experience is the most important source of knowledge. The most important knowledge is personal knowledge a person is emotionally and passionately involved. First-hand experience is unique. Just like the other facts expressed by existentialism, this important one is also being violated by insecurity challenges, in that, even if lives are not lost in the insecurity menace, one of the channels of acquisition of knowledge – schools, are being threatened as there have been many cases of kidnapping of school children cum the destruction of schools' buildings. In some case that some lucky students escape or released on ransom, others lost their dear lives. Those who do not lose their lives are even afraid to go to schools.

The axiology of existentialism which stipulates that there are no absolute values, rather values are determined by the free choice of the individuals is also in serious danger as citizens are not allowed to freely choose their values due to diverse insecurity to their lives. The cogent points here is that, humans can only value things or choose things to value only when there is life. When there is no life, there is no value. In some other cases, the intentions of Nigerians to choose valuable things are abruptly truncated. An example is a child who attach so much value to the acquisition of education, but unfortunately kidnapped on his/her way to school or even in the school's premises. Examples like this in Nigeria abound but time and space cannot permit the narration of all.

Having treated the dangers posed by diverse insecurity challenges and the great need to find solutions, the next sub-heading focuses on existentialism principles in Yoruba traditional early childhood education as a paradigm of preventive measures of insecurity challenges in Nigeria.

Existentialism Principles in Yoruba Traditional Early Childhood Education as Paradigms of Preventive Measures of Insecurity Challenges in Nigeria.

The diverse methods in Yoruba traditional early childhood education highlight that a weak foundation needs to be avoided to avoid a weak future, as the child of today is the adults of tomorrow and if tendered and guided appropriately, becomes an asset to himself/herself, the family and the society as a whole. In the attempts of the Yoruba to maintain existentialism principles in their lives starting with the children at early childhood periods, various methods and tools are used which are explained thus:

Parent-Child bond: The traditional Yoruba parent maintains a very close relationship with the child from the womb to adulthood. Right from the womb, the mother takes cautionary measures on what to do, eat, and drink for the sake of the child, which signifies the genesis of love showering on the child. At birth, the child is welcomed with a befitting naming ceremony and prayer. The showering of love continues from the mother in form of breast-feeding, strapping the baby on her back, and sing-dancing (*pípasẹ́ fún*). The baby is usually pet to sleep with melodious lullaby with the family panegyric and other rhythmic child praising poems as the content.

However, the enforcement of discipline starts from this stage as the baby is given a mild beating on the buttocks after soiling the mother while being strapped to the mother's back. Interestingly, the baby takes corrective measure in the form of squeezing his/her body which serves as a notification to the mother, of intention to urinate or defecate while on the mother's back. Observations as well as numerous studies conclude that attachment-parented infants are more likely to become moral children and adults.²¹

Family Panegyric: As soon as the child reaches the communicative stage, that is, when he/she can talk and understand speech. The family lineage poetry is constantly rendered to the child by the father and mother, especially, after the child kneels down (if a female) or prostrates (If a male) to greet the parent in the morning. As the child grows, he/she is introduced into the history of the family which mostly borders on the gallantry and other laudable achievements of the family. The child is also constantly reminded of the need to protect the family's name as those before him/her did. This consciousness sinks into the child's mind and makes him to avoid all sorts of bad actions, including crimes which may bring disrepute to the family's name. A popular Yoruba proverb exemplifying this, is: "*Orúkọ ọmọ ni ijánu ọmọ*" (the child's name cautions him/her).

Communicative Strategy: At a stage the infant has grown to communicative stage as earlier mentioned, which can range between three and six years of age, the use of interesting, but cautionary messages is emphasised for the child in the form of rhymes, folktales, songs and paralinguistic. For space economy, an example shall be given on each of the aforementioned instructional methods. An example of a rhyme warning against killing goes thus:

Yí ẹ̀sẹ̀ rẹ̀ sí apá kan,	Turn your foot sideways,
Má ẹ̀ pa kòkòrò nnì,	Do not kill that insect,
Kòkòrò tí iwọ̀ kò le è dá,	The insect you cannot create
Olúwa Ọlórún ló lè dá a.	Is created by God

Here, the child is instructed that the life of an insect he/she is about to terminate is very important. If a life of an insect can be important, one can imagine how important a life of a human being will be to such child. A song warning against stealing goes thus:

Kínni n ó folè ẹ̀ láyé tí mo wá, (2ce)	Why should I steal in my life
Láyé tí mo wá.	In my life,
Kàkà kí n jalè	Instead of stealing,
Ma kúkú dẹrú.	I will be a slave.

This song also passes a strong signal to the child to avoid stealing as being a slave is even portrayed better, considering the stigma and other evils attached to stealing.

²¹askdrsears.com/topics/discipline-behaviour/, morals-manner... (Accessed July 2, 2011).

The Use of Folktales: While space may not allow a full text of a tale, a summary of a folktale warning children to avoid stealing goes thus. Tortoise stole a hot plate of porridge and in an event to hide the loot, covered its head with the plate of the hot porridge, which eventually burnt his head's hair and made him bald-headed till today, after being found out and disgraced. Animal and human characters mingle together in Yoruba folktales. Animals are also made to speak, dress, and act like human beings which is borne out of the need to suitably present didactic stories to children.

Personifying animals in folktales is analogous to modern day use of cartoons in teaching and entertaining children. All these are in consonance with a renowned psychologist, Jean Piaget's view which strongly recommends play as a very effective method of teaching children.²² It is however a sad reality that modernity has relegated folktales to the background, as modern parents rarely spend time with their kids which the use of folktales foregrounds. The use of folktales has unfortunately been replaced with television watching, which, sometimes wreak havoc on the morality of children. Children who consistently spend more than four hours per day watching television are more likely to be overweight. Aside being overweight, kids who view violent acts on television are more likely to show aggressive behavior, and to fear that the world is scary and that something bad will happen to them.²³

The Use of Paralinguistic: The use of head, eyes, hands and legs is another way of imparting discipline to a Yoruba child. For instance, a disapproving behaviour of a child can be corrected by a stern look on such child while a nod or a smile encourages the child on a particular behaviour. According to Opefeyitimi, "Children who decode the semiotics of kinesis are credited and considered intelligent."²⁴

Parents as Models: The recognition of the parent as the first and best models for children by the traditional Yoruba compels them to exhibit good behaviour as models for children. Apart from the parent, siblings, elders, and other community elders hold the morals of children in high esteem and avoid immoral acts in children's presence. There are many Yoruba proverbs reminding the parents and other traditional teachers of the need to be good models to children. Some of them are:

Òwú ìyá gbòn	It is the mother's step,
L'òmọ ó ran	That the child follows.
Ènìkan soṣo ní í bímọ,	The child belonged to a parent,
Gbogbo ayé ní í báni wò ó,	It is the duty of everybody to raise the child morally.
Bí a bá n pe orí bíbẹ lójú ọmọdé,	If you talk of beheading someone in a child's presence.

²²www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html (Accessed May 15, 2022).

²³ [google.com/search?q=can+children+copy+bad+behavior+on+television](https://www.google.com/search?q=can+children+copy+bad+behavior+on+television). (Accessed October 16, 2021).

²⁴ A. Opefeyitimi, *Women in Yoruba Culture*. Ibadan: Penthouse Publications Nig. 2009.

Lòrùn lórùn ní í wo ni.
neck.

The child keeps focusing on the would-be victim's

All these reinforce the need for parents and the like to be good models for children.

Recommendation

As earlier stated in this paper, the focused early childhood education is used as a model and the polemic of the paper is that, children who are the adult/leaders of tomorrow should be well nurtured and guided morally in order to have them as responsible adults and leaders of tomorrow. Lots of findings have revealed the foundational years of children as the most important stage. Hence, the need to guide and guard it spiritedly. In the case treated in this paper, proper up-bringing of children is important in order to have the children later in life as responsible citizens as against irresponsible adulthood which produces armed-robbers, terrorists, bandits, murderers and the like. The duty to nurture a child to a responsible adult should not be taken with levity in all ramifications.

Conclusion

Attempts have been made in this paper to treat the issue of threats to existentialism principles in human lives by diverse insecurity challenges bedeviling Nigeria. As a way of preventive measures, the existentialism principles in traditional Yoruba early childhood education is focused as a model of preventive measures against the menace. Drawing an analogy, the paper contends that a bad or weak foundation of a building eventually leads to the collapse of such building, which means that a badly brought-up child constitutes a menace to the society, while a well brought up child, especially on morality becomes useful to himself/herself, the family and the society at large, thereby leading to a prosperous existence and a profitable essence.

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