

# Existentialist Education, Good Governance and Democratic Culture in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper interrogates the crisis of governance and democratic culture in Nigeria through the lens of existentialist philosophy and education. It argues that the present landscape of corruption, ethnic chauvinism, violence and weak democratic institutions reflects a deep disintegration of values that once linked personal freedom with social responsibility in indigenous African societies. While postcolonial discourse has rightly emphasized the recovery of African cultural identity, the paper contends that mere romanticisation of tradition or the addition of civic-education subjects is insufficient for genuine social reconstruction. Drawing on Sartre's notion of freedom and bad faith, Kierkegaard's emphasis on individual choice and responsibility, and Dewey's conception of democracy as a way of life, the paper shows how existentialist education anchored in lived experience, authentic choice, critical reflection and commitment can undergird democratic values such as tolerance, reciprocity, accountability and respect for the common good. It further links these existentialist aims of education to the properties of good governance (authority, trust, reciprocity and accountability) and to Nigeria's formal educational objectives. The paper concludes that rebuilding democratic culture in Nigeria requires a profound reorientation of curriculum, pedagogy, school governance and assessment practices so that learners are formed as free, self-responsible citizens whose everyday choices consciously "will into being" a more just, participatory and humane political order.

## 1. Introduction

The challenge facing Africa today is that of social reconstruction. The need for this task is borne out of the fact that what hitherto was referred to as arena of peace is now metaphorically comparable to the Hobbesian state of nature. The optimism of political independence in the continent has been replaced with despair; economic crisis, ethnic clashes, and political instability are fast becoming the defining characteristics of the African state.

Although the question or the task of social (re) construction in Africa has been on for quite some time, it continues to enjoy prominence in contemporary discourse. Education being seen as an instrument par excellence for the social reconstruction has not been able to meet the demands of the emergent democratic African state. This is so not only because the existing cultural values are inadequate for the survival of the society and the promotion of global solidarity, but also because of the failure to succinctly examine the ideological foundation upon which the African social and education sordid condition is based.

For some time now, discussions on the African condition and African philosophy (African belief system) seem to follow a path that sees the understanding and development of the African society in the promotion of traditional worldviews, concepts and ideas. The commitment of this agenda is a reaction against the excesses of the 19th century Euro-American scholar who saw Africans as a people that cannot make any meaningful contribution to world civilization. The result of this denigration in many cases was, as D.H. Munro says, an intolerant excess of interference which has led to the disruption of viable cultural values. This ethno-centric attitude may be as J.J. Kupperman (1970) points out, a combination of two factors "cultural absolutism" (that is, the belief that something may be right or wrong independently of what any culture or individual may believe) and the feeling that one's own culture has arrived at the correct answer to existential problems. The impression held by the Euro-American scholars is that their cultural values are the most superior, enlightened, or more advanced than others. On this showing, ethnocentrism leads to intolerance, and this is what gives the intellectual orientation of the traditionalists much ethical appeal. The intellectual task for this group is to promote the understanding of African belief systems through the exposition of their logical structure and the assumptions on which they are based. But there are some problems with this position.

Before examining these problems, let us quickly see the reason for the insistence on the promotion of indigenous values. First it is the psychological effects Africans suffered as a result of the very high degree of depersonalization by the colonialists. In the process Africans were made to believe that their values were useless and so inadequate to meet the challenges of survival and development, hence the desire by the traditionalists "to restore the intellectual dignity of African belief systems and ideas (Oladipo.1996). The assumption here is that because the African crisis is a product of the dislocation of African cultural values by the colonialists, to move ahead is to first reconstruct the dislocated values by freeing them from negative influence and condemnation.

The fact that there are aspects of our cultural lives such as our "moral and communal development" which Bankole (2004) says are peculiar to Africans, and by which they stress their exclusiveness and forge their identity is not in doubt. In fact, as he further puts it, these features of African culture have resisted the changes that have occurred through colonialism and globalization. He argues that although there are lots of changes in the African society, the basic theoretical or conceptual schemes on which these beliefs and practices are based have not been totally uprooted by contact with western civilization. The changes have occurred are outer changes, in most cases. What is left, in Bankole's opinion, is that we emphasize or promote these features of African culture so as to properly establish an authentic African identity that will lead to the development of human personality. But mere development of human personality in Africa, it could be argued, is not enough to meet the challenges of our contemporary socio-political and economic situation.

The incursion of colonialism and globalization has even affected the social structure of the African society so much that those factors which necessitate the spread of values, culture and social ways of life in western societies, are now present in other parts of the world, to the extent that Ayandele (1974) writes that "the Nigerian Educated Elite demanded an education system that would emphasize Africa, the Yoruba Country, its natural objects, its manufactures, its language and proverbs, history of the Yoruba country, reading and composition in Yoruba prose and poetry; above all conducted in the Vernacular".

The above quotation motivates this paper to look into the current New World Order (International Political Culture) and how the educational and political socialization will equip and empower Nigerians to live, work and play their roles in the ever-expanding capitalist world; by looking at existentialism, a critically approached school of thought that emphasizes, freedom, orderliness and intellectual contributions of Africans to the new world order. And since the years after the cold war witnessed the beginnings of dramatic changes in people's identities and symbols of those identities, global politics and social lifestyles began to be reconfigured along cultural lines. Sharing a social life and having a sense of common good is an important ethical guide that directs the form of attitude and behaviour of traditional African societies. The values involved here are reciprocal obligation, mutual aid, caring for others, mutual trust, etc. These values help in cultivation and development of peaceful coexistence and happiness, which in the long run serves as the foundation for sustainable social order. Given that social order refers to the harmonious functioning of different facets of a society, we can say that the diffusion of well served cultural items have implications for the sustainable social order.

## 2. Aim of Education

Several scholars and philosophers of education have written about the types and aims of education. Kelvin Harris in his paper "Aims! Whose aims" wrote that Plato's aim in education was to produce philosopher kings. Aristotle according to Harris said that education should aim at making men use their leisure properly, while for Rousseau, the aim of education was to come into accord with the teaching of nature. A.S. Neil believed the aim of education should be to make people happier, more secure, less neurotic, less prejudiced. John Locke claimed education must aim at virtue and teach man to deny his desires, inclinations and appetite and follow as reason directs. These various aims and types of education motivated the existentialist who is concerned principally with liberal education, freeing his mind from the confusions that prevent him from seeing his solution and his situations and powers. That is, whatever form of education to be given to an individual should prepare him to be free, freely make choices and be responsible for any of such actions so taken so as to be an authentic and rational personality.

Going through the philosophy of existentialism and its education of programmes, one would see that Nigerian education and the Nigerian people have failed to achieve true freedom and education has not done much in the area of political socialization to entrench viable political culture in Nigerians so as to play their vital and democratic roles in the nascent democratic rule being experienced in the country now. This has made Nigeria as a nation to be undergoing what Babarinde (2003) called value disintegration, from the level of an individual to the national level. This state of educational system has led to the total breakdown of law and order, moral laxity, social injustice, corruption, general insecurity and a departure from the traditional value system. The Traditional value system was a comprehensive one; even though this was not written in black and white for the people to read, the system upheld freedom and responsibility in which every individual was free to act within the social norms and be accountable for any action so taken. The traditional value system like the thought of the existentialists contained all that the individual needed to know about his expectations as a useful member of the society. Thus, virtues like honesty, integrity, chastity, modesty, tolerance, truthfulness, self-discipline, and

brotherliness, honour, humility, patience, industry, self-control and many more that form the big sack of virtues were taught and upheld faithfully. The pattern of life has over the years changed and, the school has not done much to salvage the situation. Instead of achieving freedom and be responsible,

Nigerians are experiencing the manifestations of undesirable behaviour like economic sabotage, corruption, armed robbery, violent crimes, political and tribal killings. Political thurgery, examination malpractices, godfathers in political system with its effects of bad governance, government insensitivity to the plight of the ordinary man on the street and many more. This has been the situation that Nigerians irrespective of their educational attainment have to contend with. Nigerian educational programmes were drawn with the principal aim of (1) inculcating consciousness and national unity (2) inculcating the right types of values and attitudes for the survival, of the individual and the Nigerian society; (3) training the mind in the understanding of the world around; and (4) the acquisition of appropriate skills, ability and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

These national objectives and aims were linked to the five main national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the second National Development Plan and endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education:

- a. A free and democratic society;
- b. A just and egalitarian society;
- c. A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- d. A great and dynamic economy;
- e. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

These national and educational objectives display a small selection of what Peters called "high level directives for education", that is, what education is supposed to do or provide for the people as individuals and the nation as a whole. These objectives resemble the existentialist aims of education of making an individual free to acquire and utilize skills and knowledge in educational programmes and outside the four walls of the school respectively. What is existentialist philosophy and its educational programmes?

### 3. The Existentialist Philosophy

Existentialism is a philosophy that sees the existence of man as very vital to any other study or argument about what he does or becomes hence "existence precedes essence". As a philosophy, it is relatively young. It is not only young but probably lacks the intrinsic character to be philosophically coherent, thus people have different opinions about the school of thought. Max Charles Worth in Bamisaiye says "Existentialism is more an intellectual mood or atmosphere than a coherent creed or body of doctrine, more an outlook or "mind set" than a "philosophical" party line, more a method or approach than a school of thought. While Joseph Chiari, J. (1973) says "Existentialism is more a philosophical attitude to life than a philosophy, the most fundamental principle of existentialism is that a man is a free and self-determining individual.

The existentialists' answers to metaphysical questions are that the universe is an unchangeable giver, an impersonal and indifferent environment in which humans must survive. On human nature of mankind: Human beings fashion their essence and their everyday choices. Ability to choose and of choice intellectual awareness (examination of the quality of choices made) are essential human traits. Life was surrounded by himself against intellectual, spiritual and dread, yet the individual could protect physical paralysis. He could be guarded in his commitments. Even if his choices were limited, even if he could have no confidence that his choices might be correct, he had an obligation to live out his life, and to extract from it what he could. Choice and awareness are the key elements in the existentialist's metaphysics.

The existentialist epistemology assumes that the individual is responsible for his own knowledge. Existentialist knowledge is initiative, it his "human". It originates in and is composed of what exists in the individual's consciousness and feelings as a result of his experiences and the projects he adopts in the course of his life. Existentialists are very much concerned about knowing the truth. They are especially interested in the truth about themselves, about what they are, but since what they are depend on their choices of truth lying outside themselves, they are earnest about these choices also.

Griese N. F (1973) agrees that it is perhaps in existentialism that we find the most obvious connection between meta-physics, and axiology. Individual choice which is the heart of existentialist metaphysics is also the source of its values, both ethical and aesthetic.

Morris in Griese made the importance of both valuing and choice in the life of existentialists clear when he says a value theory, a philosophy according to which everything must pass through the funnel of choice.

Since choice is fundamentally an exercise in valuing, the entirety of may be described as axiological. Let us philosophical content in existentialism say what we must say, namely that our values consist of our own choices, In choosing, we make our values out of nothing. Bamisaiye (1985) sees existentialism as not being a strong philosophical school of thought but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Apart from their staunch commitment to individualism, one of the glaring features of existentialist writers (as some of them are literary giants) is their concern for human conditions and the tragedy of human problems as finitude, guilt, alienation, despair, death, freedom, choice, determinism, and responsibility among them to propound an educational programme that aims at making individual human beings creative. That education should guide the individual into awareness of his condition and to promote his successful commitment to a significant and meaningful existence, education: Akinpelu (1981) identified the following as the goals of existentialist

- a. To develop individual awareness;
- b. To provide opportunity of free choice;
- c. To encourage the development of self-knowledge;
- d. To awaken sense of individual commitment.

Apart from the lofty idea of freedom and social responsibility which existentialism preaches, the philosophy and educational programmes proposed by the existentialists are too individualistic and too personal which do not pave the way for collectively of living. Some of the proponents of existentialism are atheists while some are religious (theists) for example, Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), Albert Camus (1915-1970), and Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980).

#### **4. Existentialism on Freedom and Responsibility**

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) is one of the greatest French thinkers. A polemical and witty essayist, a metaphysician of subjectivity, a political activist, a revolutionary political theorist, a humanistic novelist, a didactic playwright; his genius lies in his powers of philosophical synthesis and the genre breaking breath of his imagination. Jean Paul Sartre is generally given the compound identity of philosopher "litterateur". This shows that although Sartre remains a strong force in all areas of scholarly, aesthetic and political endeavors he has ever tried his brain on, his grip on philosophical discourse is desirable. Jean Paul Sartre's concept of responsibility and freedom owes its origin to his ontological theory of Being.

Sartre's ontology encompasses a duality of Being and Nothingness, and his philosophical masterpiece is a book of that title. Sartre identifies two domains of Being. The being of the world of objects and the being of human consciousness. Man is separated from the world of objects of phenomena by a space of nothingness that enables us to realize our potentialities; without this nothingness man would be ready-made solid, "massif and therefore incapable of self-determination. Our nothingness therefore constitutes a lack of the complete existence of the phenomena world. This makes us aware and therefore conscious of the world around us. Our nothingness constitutes our potentialities. The being of the phenomenon is called the being-for-itself while the being of consciousness is the being-in-itself. The being-in-itself unlike the being-for-itself is always in the process of attaining definition in order to achieve the solidarity of the being in itself. The process of becoming is impossible because of the possession of the nothingness inherent in the being-for-itself. Nothingness is therefore, "this fall of the in-itself towards the self, the fall by which the for-in-itself is contributed".

To Sartre, being can neither be divided nor affirmed, it is the interaction of objects with consciousness that gives one freedom and how reality is interpreted and understood. Man is sacred by this absolute freedom to choose and be responsible. The option is either to take up a leap of faith and mortgage his freedom to a God, a country, a job, a church or a hero, or embrace it as the irreversible yoke of human existence. To mortgage human freedom is to indulge in bad faith and live an inauthentic life. Hence, Sartre says that the realization that man is free results in anguish

Man knows that by the dictates of his freedom he can will to be other than what he is at any point in time. This is not comfortable for man. Essentially therefore, man would always prefer that somebody else be responsible for his actions. It is convenient always to blame God or our country or our parent for misfortune, never ourselves. In relationship with others in the society, Sartre sees himself as existing only for himself, that he cannot prove the existence of others in the society; in relating with others, we have to either accept ourselves as objects to be used or we have to take others as objects rather than human beings.

It is even worse when the people concerned are in love, as Sartre illustrates the typical lover relationship with the example of unwilling lover who lets herself be used just to keep the relationship going.

According to Sartre, man does not need others, and he is not bound to relate with others. Sartrean freedom and responsibility cannot be understood without understanding the situation.

A human being is not separable from human condition. A person divorced from the totality of his situations is an intellectual abstraction that can only be partly achieved. I am what I am only in relation to my situation. The totality of the situation is the world and the kind of being that have is being-in-the-world. What I make myself is inseparably bound up with my projects, with my surroundings as I take them to be for example, keeping an appointment depends upon friendship or meetings.

These in turn depend upon the existence of human beings, their projects and situations. Our projects will depend upon situations, locations, atmosphere and cordiality and so on. At whatever level, we are free to decide and choose our project and situations, and at the same time, man is responsible for the outcomes of such project. The act of choice is usually one that all people must accomplish with a deep sense of anguish, for in this act people are responsible not only for themselves but also for each other.

## 5. Soren Kierkegaard on Responsibility

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) on his own advised are not to lose oneself in a crowd because whatever is the nature of the crowd or collectively, it is untruth and the individual is completely impenitent and irresponsible because it reduces the individual's sense of responsibility to a fraction of the crowd. Kierkegaard believes that rational argument itself shows us that in the end the choice of the individual must be sovereign. To think in existence meant for Kierkegaard to recognize that one is faced with personal choices. Human beings find themselves constantly in an existential situation with a view to coming to terms with the problem of alternatives and choices. Kierkegaard made a distinction between the spectators and the actor, arguing that only the actor is involved in existence. To be sure, the spectator can be said to exist, but the term existence does not properly belong to inert or inactive things whether these be spectators or stones.

In his early work *Either /Or; A Fragment of life* (1843) the doctrine of choice is put to work in relation to a distinction between two ways of life, the ethical and aesthetic. The aesthetic point of view is that of sophisticated and romantic hedonism, that is the life of a man whose only goal is his own satisfaction, he must avoid pain and boredom. By contrast, the ethical constitutes the sphere of duty of universal rules, of unconditional demands and tasks. For the man in the ethical stage, the chief thing is not whether one can count on one's fingers, how many duties one has, but that man has once felt the intensity of duty in such a way that the consciousness of it is for him the assurance of the eternal validity of his being, that is, he is being responsible to himself, society and to the eternal being (God). Kierkegaard describes the transition from the ethical to the religious differently at different periods. Since the movement from aesthetic to the ethical level required an act of choice and commitment, it ushered us into the presence or reason in as much as the moral law is an expression of our universal reason. To Kierkegaard, the movement from ethical to religious stages in life is a place where general and universal rules cannot aid man, accept he as an individual has to decide and choose, and be responsible for whatever decisions or steps so taken. The doctrine of choice put forward by Kierkegaard raises two fundamental questions, are there criterionless choices? And is it by such choices that we either can or do arrive at our criteria of true belief? These questions were not solved in his *either/or*. Existentialists believe that education can assist an individual to select the best criteria on which to make appropriate choices.

Soren Kierkegaard's notion of responsibility places a lot of emphasis on the freedom of the individual to choose out of different options available and rely on natural or artificial guidelines on what to do or choose. He believes that when man is committed to a course of action, he should be responsible for what one is doing in school and not to blame anybody or group for failure. So also, the leaders are expected to be committed to the general welfare of the people and be transparent and accountable to the people they are leading.

How can one choose in a society where there are many forces, pressures and options influencing one in taking or making choices? Here education for responsibility and critical thinking would assist to select the best criteria to use in making appropriate choices. The best criteria can also raise a moral argument. However, rational or critical analysis of the available options or criteria can minimize the critique of moral dilemma that can be raised against our argument.

Education for freedom and responsibility as well as education for democratic political values, following the Kierkegaard and other existentialists' argument must allow an individual to select the criteria on which to make appropriate choice based on through and critical appraised of available choice options The leader and the individuals in the Nigerian society must be equipped with necessary intellectual skills to weigh the available choices/options before taking decisions. The Existentialists are saying that in any democratic process the leaders and the followers have choices to make, with democracy as the best system of government. To Dewey,

to promote democracy, majority must allow the minority to say its own view and intensive/extensive dialogue must be allowed to take place so as to have mutual agreement or consensus and understanding, and education is expected to develop these habits and dispositions that constitute intelligence for rational thinking. What do we mean by democracy and democratic/political values?

## 6. Democracy and Democratic/Political Values

Democracy: The term democracy to the new Encyclopedia Britannica 2005 edition, literally means rule by the people. It is derived from the Greek "demokratia", which was coined from two Greek words, "demos" ("people") and "Kratos" ("rule") in the middle of the 5 century B.C. to denote the political system then existing in some Greek City States, notably Athens.

John Dewey in his book *Education and Democracy* (1944), sees democracy as the most described form of government because it alone provides the kinds of freedom necessary for individual self-development and growth; that is, the freedom to exchange ideas and opinions, the freedom to form associations to pursue common goals, and the freedom to determine and pursue one's own conception of the "good life". Democracy is more than a form of government, however, as Dewey remarks in the book; it is a "mode of associated life in which citizens cooperate with each other to solve their common problems through rational means in a spirit of mutual respect and goodwill. Moreover, the political institutions of any democracy, to Dewey, should not be viewed as the perfect and unchangeable creations of visionary statesmen of the past; rather, they should be constantly subject to criticism and improvement as historical circumstances and public interest change.

Participation in a democracy as Dewey conceived it requires critical and inquisitive habits of mind, inclinations towards cooperation, a feeling of public spiritedness and a desire to achieve the common good. Because these habits and inclinations must be inculcated from a young age, Dewey place great emphasis on education. His contributions to both the theory and practice of education are enormously influential in the United States of America and some progressive countries.

John Dewey offered a few concrete proposals regarding the form that a democratic institution should take. Nevertheless, in *The Public and its problems* (1927) and other works, he contended that individuals cannot develop their fullest potential except in a social democracy, or a democratic welfare state. Accordingly, he held that democracies should possess strong regulatory powers. He also insisted at among the most important features of a social democracy should be the right of every citizen to participate directly in the running or management of the affairs of the state and enjoy civil and political rights. We shall now take a closer look at what culture is; Democratic political culture and good governance.

Culture is a broad network of references which indicate the entirety of a people's material, intellectual and metaphysical patterns of living. This encapsulates the corpus of arts and crafts which many people generally want to refer to as the ultimate of cultures. Furthermore, it transcends such physical manifestations to dwell on the essence of a people's existence. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1963) have described the definitions of culture as capable of six different forms; descriptive, historical, narrative, psychological, genetic and structural. These approaches indicate that the explanation of culture cannot be limited to anyone single academic discipline. In essence therefore, the word "culture" would be found varying in the complementary meanings in history, sociology, literary discourse, philosophy, linguistics, political science, law, business administration, accountancy, insurance, biology, environmental sciences, etc. as relevant to our own indigenous experiences. Thus, it is a cross-disciplinary phenomenon which necessarily impacts upon all aspects of our lives.

Furthermore, we can seek to understand culture in various ways depending on whether we choose to perceive it as Urhobo culture or Hausa Culture, Christian Culture or Islamic Culture, Civil Service Culture, Literary Culture, Youth Culture, the Culture of corruption, the culture of ethnic politics, etc. Another instructive definition is that preferred in the Declaration of Mondia Cult in the UNESCO-Organized World Conference on Culture Policies and Practices in Mexico in 1982 (as stated in Diagne and Ossebi, 1996, p.11): culture is a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features which characterize a society or a social group. Other than arts and humanities, it covers modes of life, fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

These explanations I have attempted provide for us a global pedestal on which we can adequately conceptualize the experiences of governance and democratic culture in Nigeria. It is pertinent to state that both good governance and democratic culture are indicative of culture and could be responses to and products of cultures.

## 7. What is Good Governance?

Dafinone, O. (2000) says governance generally refers to the business of running a government. It indicates the manner in which authority, control and power are managed in a nation's attempt at developing her social and economic resources. It entails the type of political regime in place, the modes of resource management, and

the capacity of an administration to initiate, develop and implement policies and successfully carry out the functions of government.

Hyden (1992) Identifies four properties of good governance as authority, reciprocity, trust and accountability. Authority emphasizes the importance of effective political leadership, and is given force by the presence of trust, reciprocity trust and accountability. Trust indicates a working understanding that defines actions and responses in a political community. Reciprocity indicates the quality of interaction at the social and political levels between the leaders and governed. Accountability indicates the extent to which the masses can influence or control their leaders. These elements are very important in determining the degree of political participation, equality and development in any community. They also indicate that both the leaders and the led play significant roles in the realization of good governance. Good governance is a two-way traffic! This traffic depicts relationship in a political community as both action and structure. As action, there is always an exchange between the leader and the led (masses). As structure, there are established frameworks within which the governor and the governed can pursue their socio-political and economic goals. Thus, governance is a style of living in a political community and is indicative of a political culture. Governance as it constitutes management of human, social and economic resources for the purpose of community and state development is often shaped by a people's culture. Such influence could be positive or negative, and a deviation from such traditional cultures could mean the evolution of a new culture of governance. Kinship of ethnic ties have been a strong characteristic of our contemporary political experience, but if Nigeria must experience total and even socio-political and economic development, the overriding negative dimensions of ethnicity and Kinship ties in our national political system should be addressed as a matter of utmost importance.

## 8. What Democratic Value?

Values share many characteristics of culture already discussed but with the significant difference that values are more fundamental than culture. Behind every culture can be discerned a system of values that undergirds it, that motivates it and that gives it direction and worth. The value of anything is its worth and worthwhileness. They constitute the principles of selection and choice in every human endeavour, and the objects of motivating and directing human action measurement and assessment in any action. Hence, to talk of a democratic culture is to envisage that there will be a certain and unique set of values which act as the principal undergirding, towards the democratic posture. What to teach in values are those principles which can be learnt and put into practice, with a view to their becoming a habit and eventually an attitude. Therefore, if one were to address the Nigerian value system today, to be relevant one should be talking about the democratic values, which if embraced would produce the appropriate democratic culture as the only conducive environment for the successful practice of political democracy.

Some of the democratic values are:- Democratic way of life, that is, consideration of the interests of others and the society alongside one's own interest, tolerance of other's views, ideas and practices, and of differences in general, flexibility and open-mindedness on issues, respect for truth; commitment to a life of reason and dialogue, responsible use of freedom, and passionate commitment to fairness, justice, impartiality and equality. Existentialism as a school of philosophical thought therefore, differs from traditional schools of thought because it is concerned with a live world, that is, live reality and with states of feeling in which this reality fully apprehended, existentialist philosophy is generally more personal in style than traditional philosophy being closer in fact, to interculture. Therefore, the goals of education to promote democracy, good governance and democratic values should include:

- a. To develop individual awareness To provide opportunity for free choice
- b. To encourage the development of self-knowledge
- c. To awaken a sense of individual commitment and self-responsibility
- d. To assist the individual to cultivate the good habit of self-reliance, which is a major criterion in character development
- e. To enable the child to use his experiences which he acquires both home and school in order to achieve self-fulfilment.
- f. To afford the individual the great opportunities of using the knowledge he has gained when making decisions as a citizen, leader and policy marker.

## 9. Conclusion

The study points out that Nigeria's current governance crisis—characterized by corruption, ethnic chauvinism, violence, and democratic fragility—is the direct result of the disintegration of a value system that

formerly combined personal freedom with social duty. Colonial disruption and subsequent globalisation replaced this integration with an ethos of external dependency, moral evasion, and "bad faith" in Sartre's understanding. Existentialist education, as exemplified by Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Dewey, provides a counter-trajectory: an education that begins with the learner's lived experience, values authentic choice, cultivates critical self-knowledge, and insists that every choice is also an answer to the question, "What kind of society do I will into being?"

## 10. Key Findings May Be Summarised as Follows

- a. Existentialist elements, such as individual accountability within a communal perspective, were already incorporated in indigenous African traditions, but they have been devalued.
- b. Despite rhetorical commitments to "national unity" and "democratic citizenship," the formal school curriculum remains examination-centered and authority-driven, undermining the very capacities that democracy requires reflective choice, tolerance, reciprocity, and accountability.
- c. Existentialist pedagogical goals (awareness, free choice, self-knowledge, and commitment) are perfectly aligned with Hyden's four properties of effective governance: authority, trust, reciprocity, and accountability.
- d. Democratic culture is not an imported artifact; rather, it is the result of many everyday decisions made by citizens who have learnt to connect personal authenticity with civic responsibility.
- e. As a result, curriculum reform must go beyond adding "civic-education" periods to reforming the underlying curriculum: classroom power dynamics, school governance, teacher education, and assessment procedures must reflect Nigeria's desired democratic ethos.

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## Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript. AI were used only to improve readability and language under strict human oversight; no content, ideas, analyses, or conclusions were generated by AI.

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