

**Psycho-Analytical Foundations Of Creative Dramatics, Reflective Thinking and Behavioural Self-Regulations in Childhood Development.**

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**Abstract**

This paper recalled some Nigerian childhood education curriculum policy provisions which recommends the use of practical and exploratory instructional/pedagogical methods towards enhancing and promoting basic learning among children. It critically examined the psychoanalytical foundations of certain related or implicit elements, especially creative dramatics, reflective thinking and behavioural self-regulation in children. Based on the above, the paper contended that professionally - trained teachers and other co-providers of learning within and without classrooms need to step up activities directed at creating certain environments considered auspicious or favourable to "drawing out" and "nurture" innate and latent tangible and intangible deposits of knowledge in children during their developmental years. Pursuant to the above, this paper envisaged such challenges as inadequate funding of school programmes needing creative dramatics as teaching tools; lack of experienced teachers to engage learners in creative dramatics, lack of physical facilities for proper implementation of the early years' curriculum policy provisions which included creative dramatics as teaching tools. Consequently, the paper suggested among others, the need to prioritize training and retraining of childhood education providers, increase of budgetary allocation to cater for indispensable instructional facilities and periodic assessment of programme outcomes.

**Keywords:** Creative Dramatics; Pedagogical tools; Reflective thinking; Stimulation; Educational development.

### **Introduction**

Children are young individuals who are not matured enough to do everything leading to their survival alone. They therefore lean on the adults around them for their survival, growth, development and care. According to Osanyin (2004), mankind owes the child the best it has to give and as such, the child's environment becomes a major issue of concern. In furtherance to the above statement, the environment of the child occupies a position of vital importance in the growth and development of the child. In this case, the environment would mean all the situations and conditions that can affect the development and behaviours of the child which include all human and material qualities. Research abounds on the effects of the environment on the development of the child, thus emphasizing the effects of the environment on the future of the child and in particular, his behavioural self-regulatory capacity development. Glen et al (1987), asserted that the future of any society depends largely on how well such society meets the need of the children, because the young population of any society is the future of that society. Whatever happens to that young population determines the development of the whole society.

In Nigeria, the child's Right Act 2003, which was passed into law in the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), defines a child as a person who has not attained the age of eighteen years. However, according to Act 2 of Children and Young Persons Act enacted in Eastern, Western and the Northern regions of Nigeria (CYPA), a 'child' means a person under the age of fourteen years, while a 'young person' means a person who has attained the age of fourteen years and is under the age of seventeen years. In summary, a child is a young person who has not yet attained the age of taking full decision on matters that concerns him, and therefore must be accorded his or her rights accordingly and adequately.

The Federal Government of Nigeria, in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) presents pre-primary education as an education given in an educational setting for children between the age of 3 and 5 years, preparing them for entry into the primary school. A child aged 3 to 5 years receiving education in an educational institution is regarded as a preschooler. He has not attained the recommended school age of 5+ or 6 years in the education policy. Hence, the instructional strategy that will be

used for this level of education as stated in the education document must ensure that the main method of teaching at the childhood education centres is play-based. This suggests that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented towards play-way method, because children develop thinking and learning skills through play. To this end, the National Association of Education of the Young Children (NAEYC, 2022) states that preschool education is the most diverse level of education in terms of cognitive and social skills, this makes it important for teachers to deliver their lesson appropriately.

The need to support Early Childhood learning has been continuously advocated in the last few decades in the whole world. These advocacies have been founded on the growing general understanding of how the young brains develop. Neuroscientists have submitted findings on how the early childhood period is the most critical period of a child's brain development. It has also been established that humans learn more from birth to around the age of five years than they are likely to do in any other five years period of their life. However, it is observed that brain development intricately is dependent on activity, which invariably means that stimulation of the brain is highly important during the identified sensitive period (that is 0-5 years). This time is believed to be when the brain is rapidly developing. It has also been observed that early appropriate stimulation naturally promotes the growth of the brain. Consequently, the daily experience which an appropriate early childhood education programme provides will definitely be in the right direction towards promoting the growth and development of the child's brain.

Apart from the educational experts' development of instructional strategies appropriate for the target audience of this paper, the public health guidelines also prescribes guidelines that stated that children should accumulate minimum of sixty (60) minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) per day and minimize the amount of time spent sedentary (sitting). Research abounds that children do not meet the MVPA guidelines and that sedentary behaviours are highly prevalent (Ekelund, Tomkinson, & Armstrong, 2011). Continued efforts to identify the primary influences on these behaviours has become imperative and

essential to change the narratives towards effective behaviour change (Bauman, Reis & Sallis, 2012).

In the view of Nor and Ismail (2012), children need to have the environment that addresses them, challenges them, and provides something for them to observe, to think about, to make choices, to attract their attention, to engage in their favourite activities and to give them the opportunity to meet friends. Educational dramatic presentation is poised to offer all these to the children. They also need the freedom to explore and to satisfy their curiosity about the world. The opportunity to be in the outdoor environment is important for the development of children's motor and cognitive skills, interpersonal attitudes and emotions. The differences in outdoor environments such as neighbourhoods, parks playgrounds, school grounds and natural environments can comprise rich sources of stimulation and affordances for children. Affordances refer to the functional properties of the environments offering a child to interact actively with the environment (Gibson 1979, Heft, 1988, Kytta, 2004).

Laying solid foundation in preschoolers for further creative educational advancement is the major tool needed by countries the world over to meet up with the challenges of educational advancement. Therefore, early childhood education and care should be attended to accordingly both in Nigeria and at the international level. More so, in the recent time, early childhood development education has become a theme for serious consideration in the recent years starting with the 1989 United Nation's (UN) adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the child and the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, then the year 2000 World Education forum in Dakar, Senegal up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the United Nations, UN) as well as the most recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all of which have led to the heightened awareness of the importance of Early Childhood Education as a corrective measure for the decline in the standard of education as well as decline in behavioural self-regulation globally.

**Conceptual Framework****Psycho-Analytical Foundations of Creative Dramatics**

Drama is a literary genre that is usually associated with performance and has been simply defined by Adewoye (1994) as a literary creation where human imagination is entangled with human activities. By extension also, the American Association of Theatre for Youth according to Davis & Behm (1978) defined creative drama as an improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centred form of drama in which participants are guided by an experienced leader to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experience.

Generally, drama is used to showcase themes ranging from cultural mores, myths, traditions, dressing and many other aspects of people's cultures and way of life. Drama thrives in a creative environment which stimulates an individual's imagination and expression towards certain direction in life. A lot of themes could be explored in the educational drama to instil certain values in learners. Adeseke (2019) opined that virtues such as love for one another, truthfulness, respect and obedience to elders, perseverance and loyalty, equity amongst colleagues, hardwork and industry could be projected through dramatic presentations in the school. This is believed to have much impact on the nation as a whole and specifically on the individual learners/participants.

The Psycho-Analytical Foundation of Creative Dramatics is hinged on the Gestalt and pragmatist theories which believe that learning should be based on the social life of the learners where due consideration is given to the psychological and sociological issues of the child and his environment. John Dewey, a pragmatist advocated instructional strategies that would allow the learners to be involved in their own learning because such strategies promote brain stimulation and skills development rather than learning by rote or memorization. The pragmatic approach to learning supports the practical approach to education at every level.

Onah (2011) emphasising Dewey's pragmatic views on education, posits that knowledge is an outcome of an individual's interaction

with his environment and the place of learning by doing cannot be downplayed by any means.

Learning by doing simply means active learning, participatory learning or practical approach to learning which are all related to movement education which emphasises activity-based learning at every level of education. Creative dramatics is an instructional strategy that renders school topics into literary creation where human imagination is displayed with human activities or performance which in most cases to drive home moral lessons.

### **Reflective Thinking**

As Homo-sapiens (the thinking species), it is highly imperative to adopt reflective thinking as a way of life. To engage in reflective thinking demands a great deal of self awareness and recognition of the individual's thinking order. Golmen (2006) postulates intrapersonal intelligence as the key to self-knowledge which actually gives access to one's own feeling and the ability to discriminate among such and draw inferences which have the propensity to guide one's behaviour.

Self-knowledge which psychologists refer to as metacognition could also be explained as the ability to be aware of one's thought process and emotions leading to self-awareness. Self-awareness could be seen as an ongoing focus on an individual's state of the mind whereby the mind observes and investigates the individual's experience by itself. In this situation, the mind is expected to be impartial because it has to maintain self-reflectiveness when the emotions are being troubled by beings neutral. This awareness of emotions is the fundamental emotional competence that lays the foundation for other aspects such as emotional self-control. Self-awareness is the ability to be aware of both the mood and the thoughts surrounding the mood. Self-awareness allows the individual to monitor his own reactions in the course of any experience.

The possession of reflective thinking skills is an off-shoot of the self-awareness capacity. Giving consideration to the role of emotional intelligence in planning the curriculum of children will enhance the adequate achievement of the objectives of childhood

education. The child's psychological balance is paramount in their early years of development. Encouraging children to explore, learn to take roles in dramatic activities and expressing themselves goes a long way in giving them the required psychological balance in the process of their development.

Studies have shown extensively that emotional expressions help to enhance self-awareness and emotional understanding. This skill can help children to arrange their feelings positively, develop compassion towards others, navigate different relationships with equilibrium in their emotional responses. Possessing self-awareness can allow children to develop new hobbies which invariably enhance creativity and adaptability. It also allows children to discover new interests, refine old skills, and cultivate stronger passions that enrich their personal and social lives. Literary creativities such as educational dramatic presentations, music and arts exhibition have a high propensity to boost children's creativity, cognitive development, discipline, self-expression and strengthens skills and values like patience and ability to focus which are beneficial for lifelong personal growth.

Drama just like other sport is based on the expression of the inner passion of an individual. A lot of skills are put into dramatic presentations, such as cooperation with the other team members, perseverance and physical well-being, discipline and fairness in competition, confidence, courage, patience, strength and goodwill.

Planning the school curriculum based on the Gestalt and pragmatist theories have benefits for the individual learners and the nation as a whole. Based on the nature of children, encouraging practical involvement in the teaching and learning process will go a long way in producing the right type of citizen needed for nation building in any country.

### **Behavioural Self-Regulation**

The basis for self-regulation is first and foremost self-awareness. The ability of an individual to be aware of his actions and impulses and how to manage such positively to be in tandem with the situation on ground is known as self-regulation.

Behavioural self-regulation can therefore be explained as having the ability to act in the individual's best interest, consistent with his deepest values. Self-regulation is a vital skill every individual must possess and it can be described as the control an individual impose upon himself by himself. Psychological concept of self-regulation posits that "someone who has a good emotional self-regulation has the ability to keep his emotion under control and can resist impulsive behaviours that can worsen his situation. Developing in the young learners the willpower to resist temptation and choose the best path is major role played by the direct caregivers of children at their formative years.

One of the key objectives of Early Childhood Education is the development of social skills such as team spirit, cooperation, kindness, courage etc. which can all be instilled through children's participation in educational drama in the school setting under the leadership of their teacher. The interaction with other children and the acting of roles in drama to foster certain values are steps in the right direction to develop behavioural self-regulation in children. Drama and other artistic expressions give the child opportunity to express his inner most passions and see things differently. Allowing also the opportunity to make friends while seeing the need to exercise values like patience, kindness, trustfulness, hardwork, perseverance, diligence and self-reflection actually becomes the major tools he needs to regulate his behaviour, checking himself and controlling the instinct to exhibit negative behaviours thus having the right foundation to becoming a sound individual who contributes meaningfully to his environment.

Duckworth, Quinn and Seligman (2009), remarked that the teacher's role is not just about imparting knowledge to learners but "is about helping learners get their minds, their awareness and their feelings so active and thoughtful and in forms that are in a place where lively connections, understandings, new ideas, can find them". Circle time just like educational dramatics with its emphasis on communal engagement, is in line with Duckworth's philosophy by providing a platform for collaborative learning. Moreover, the success of any instructional strategy is

significantly dependent on the perceptions of the teacher employing it and its impact on the learners' development.

### **Contextual Framework**

#### **Six major values to be inculcated in the Nigerian learners through the Quality of instruction**

In all walks of life, education contributes meaningfully to the development and improvement in the quality of life of an individual, his immediate environment and the nation in general and this informed the basis of the philosophy of Nigerian education, which is based on the moral consciousness of the whole citizenry. It goes without saying that the status, relevance and significance of morals are the major ingredients for the achievement of the national goals and aspirations. Hence, the federal government's declaration of orienting the quality of instruction at all levels towards the inculcation of the six major values necessary for the development of the nation, namely:

- respect for the worth and dignity of the individual;
- faith in man's ability to make rational decisions;
- moral and spiritual principle in interpersonal and human relations;
- shared responsibility for the common good of the society;
- promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children;
- acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance.

FRN (2013), achieving the goals of Early Childhood Education will go a long way in achieving the overarching goals of education in general.

#### **Childhood Education Objectives and the Values they foster in Children**

In the Nigerian education policy, the objectives of early childhood education are:

- effecting a smooth transition from home to school;
- preparing the child for primary level of education;
- providing adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents are at work;
- to inculcate social moral norms and values;

- to inculcate in the child, the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art; music and use of toys etc.,
- developing a sense of co-operation and team spirit,
- stimulating in the child good habits, including good health habits
- and to teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc. through play.

The objectives of early childhood education as stated above are poised to foster the most accepted values in the young learners. In this case, the parents, the teachers, and the government as stakeholders are expected to leave no stone unturned in order to achieve the following values in young learners:

- Sound moral and social values;
- Good habits of working and playing with others;
- Positive self-concept and confidence;
- A strong sense of curiosity about things and objects around them;
- An ability to communicate effectively in English and a mother tongue language;
- Physical control and manipulative skills;
- Positive attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle; and
- Positive family values and strong community ties.

#### **Impact of the environment on the child's stimulation**

In the views of Osanyin (2002), the early years of a child's life are very important for its later development. As the child grows, his parents, peers and other members of the immediate environment influence him. They help the child in forming attitudes, habits and beliefs. In order to effectively and positively assist a child to develop properly, there is the need to truly know the child. This entails knowing what the child likes, his interests, what he wants to know and needs to know. It must be pointed out that children, even at birth, are ready to learn, provided they are born normal. They are ready to use their senses to find out about the world around them. It is the duty of the parents, teachers and care-givers to offer activities geared towards developing the wholeness of the child and promoting healthy development, physically, socially, emotionally and mentally.

The quality of interaction and stimulation provided for a child in his environment greatly influences his total development. Learning during the early years depends on sensory experiences. The child discovers and constructs his knowledge through activities on the material objects presented to him. According to the work of the Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget (1952), a child's intellectual development is the result of his active engagement with the environment. The child therefore needs things to play with, talk about, look at, reach out for, and kick. He also needs exposure to objects of varied colours, sounds, shapes, and sizes. There is need for adults to play with the child, talk to, touch and respond to him.

The child's explorative activities, which begin in the earliest weeks of life, are termed "play". Play activity of the child does not seem to have a goal or motive, but simply for him to derive immediate satisfaction and enjoyment from it. However, play is an important component of development as it affects a child's capacity to learn. It provides a foundation for learning more complex social and intellectual skills. Therefore, a care-giver who understands the importance of play must provide the space, material, situation and patterns of interaction that encourage children's playful exploration, invention and enjoyment. Learning begins at birth. According to Weber (1970), "the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young tender child, for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is most readily taken". By promoting the healthy development of the children from birth, therefore, a society promotes its own growth and development. Any damage to the children by the age of three may already be irreparable. The underlying goals of a society's education for its children are derived from the society's desire to stimulate, support and meaningfully guide the developmental processes in the direction of competence.

The proclamation of Nigerian Government on the importance of play as the major method of teaching at the pre-primary level of education in the education policy cannot be downplayed. Play, being an integral part of the child's nature and one of his rights must be allowed to flourish maximally in his developmental

process according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). It is generally believed that children learn through active engagement within their environment as well as through social engagement and involvement with other human beings.

It is equally agreed by all and sundry that the whole essence of education is to meet the needs of mankind. Hence the definition of education by Plato (428-347BC) as the search for truth, identifying it and applying it is not out of place. He further said that nations will grow positively only if such education is adopted. To him, this kind of education that seeks the truth also encourages continuity, creativity and application for the betterment of man and his environment, however such education cannot be given or received by rote, memorization and regurgitation but rather through active participation, creativity, manipulation, exploration, discovery and understanding of concepts and themes in the individuals environment. Thus play as instructional strategy at the early childhood and primary levels of education is expected to aid the achievement of the overall national goals of education and the specific objectives of the various levels of education in question.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria in the National Policy on Education document, FRN (2013) has categorically presented education as an instrument 'par excellence' for achieving national development and social transformation; hence the various levels of education to cater for the needs of every citizen have been adequately arranged. A considerably amount of recognition is also given to Early childhood education whereby the strategies of teaching in order to achieve the objectives of this level of education are also prescribed, such teaching strategies include: Practical; exploration of the child's environment; enquiry; inquiry; field trips; play way methods etc. The recognition of the importance of early childhood education in the development of an individual is based specifically on the ability of such early childhood programme to provide the vital physical psychomotor, affective, cognitive and social potentials which are fundamental to human development as well as in the pursuit of academic excellence.

### **Concept of Instructional Strategy at the ECE level and Brain Development**

Instructional strategy is a tool designed and arranged by the teacher to establish an interaction between the teacher, the learners and the subject matter, or the combination of any of these three variables. The instructional strategies mostly used in the academic process of children are derived from behavioural experiences and are vital in the supportive roles teachers play in the early learning and development of the child. The choice of instructional strategy by the teacher or caregiver is dependent on the teachers' knowledge and understanding of developmental stages of the child and the appropriate strategy that should be adopted in order to achieve the objectives of the lesson. No doubt early childhood education is vital to the overall development and the child's later educational achievement and success in life. Therefore the application of Developmentally Appropriate Practices to achieve the goals of early childhood education is a major concern to the stakeholders of this level of education.

Many instructional strategies exist for the teaching and learning process. Owojori & Gbenga-Akanmu (2021), listed some of the strategies that a teacher can make use of as play-way, class discussion, questioning, cooperative learning, creativity, modelling, and integrating technology. Moore (2019), was of the opinion that teachers should know how to add the tools and techniques that actually yield results and discard those that have stopped yielding results for improving preschoolers' learning outcome. Invariably, this means that the extent a teacher achieves in his/her goals and objectives at the end of the class is determined by the way he delivers the teaching, that is, the instructional strategy employed.

All the strategies of teaching prescribed in the education policy document by the Nigerian Government have great propensity for brain stimulation because the brain according to the neuroscientists is a complex and highly integrated organ which is composed of a large number of circuits that involve extensive connections among neurons that transmit information from one cell to another all of which result in the full range of cognitive, language, emotional and social competences that are necessary for the individual's full growth and development. In the views of Berk (2008), the brain grows faster than any other organ in the body during infancy and toddlerhood. It is also observed that

during the peak period of the synaptic growth, in any brain area, many surrounding neurons die. It is equally observed that stimulation determines which neurons will survive. Brain researchers have discovered that about 90% of brain development is completed by the age of three. This is the more reason why stimulation of the brain is highly essential during this period of early childhood. This is the major goal of the Gestalt school of thought which focuses on the brain process and how it accounts for the way an individual's brain organises perception. The Gestalt psychologists according to Onabamiro, Gloria & Afolake. (2021) viewed human experience in whole as against in the collection of smaller elements. He went further to say that pragmatism in education advocates that learning should be focused on life and growth. School curriculum should therefore be dispersed practically in order for learners to be well prepared for problem solving in their later years. Hence, the instructional strategies prescribed in the Nigeria's education document were founded on the Gestalt and pragmatist psychologists. Stimulating the brain in this case means the application of all those practical-oriented teaching strategies prescribed for the teaching of the learners in their formative years. Play, drama, arts, being recurring decimal in all the strategies prescribed should be well planned and articulated to bring about the expected success in children's development.

### **How Play, Drama and Arts Connects to Children's Learning and other Human Aspects**

Play is naturally the first and most important defining behaviour of a young child. It can hardly be replaced by any other activity. Play contributes to as well as enhances all other areas of development in young children. Through play children construct their understanding of the world, re-create their knowledge, employ their own rules, make ideas part of their reality and most often than not discover solutions to complex problems. In the same vein, educational drama and artistic expressions play the same roles as organised play.

Play contributes to the development of the child in various ways:

- i. Play is vital in cognitive development of children who play freely with designated materials, they exhibit more

thinking skills and problem-solving abilities than those not given such opportunities. Play also fosters creativity and imaginative thinking. The symbolic play of children lays the foundation for their understanding of the written symbols of language and mathematics. The opportunity to engage in educational drama enhances the learners self-awareness leading to behavioural self-regulation.

- ii. Play enhances physical and perceptual skills. Complex learning tasks depend upon well integrated neurological development which is supported by playful activities. Sensory motor skills must be developed adequately before the activities of reading, writing and arithmetic can be mastered.
- iii. Play promotes social interactions. It is generally believed that social skill is a vital ingredient needed by all individuals and this can be facilitated through play. Children gain confidence and learn to trust each other. They share, express ideas, feelings through play. Through Dramatic plays, children plan cooperatively with others, use language and identity with a variety of societal roles which contribute to their self-awareness and emotional control. Possession of emotional control is a major indices for self-regulation.

Closely related to use of play as an instructional strategy, the teaching of the arts can be a very important ingredient of education as a working example of integrating knowledge, skills and attitudes ranging from emotional self-control, empathy and behavioural self-regulation. In supporting this view, Eisner (2005) listed some lessons the arts i.e. educational dramatic can teach, they are:

- i. teaching children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships;
- ii. teaching children that problems can have more than one solutions and that questions can have more than one answer;
- iii. celebrating multiple perspectives;
- iv. The arts teach children that problems are seldom fixed for a problem-solving purpose;

- v. making vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know;
- vi. teaching students that small differences can have large effects;
- vii. teaching learners to think through and within materials;
- viii. helping children learn to say what cannot be said;
- ix. enabling children to have experience that they cannot have from other sources

Children who engage in outdoor plays in natural environment have been seen to exhibit less conduct disorders, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and lack of compassion than their peers who do not have natural habits around them. Allowing children time for outdoor play and other natural explorations will definitely reduce sedentary lifestyle and allow children to grow holistically because being close to nature in general helps boost a child's attention span. When the attention span of an individual is high, concentration becomes easy many issues associated with anxiety are dissipated. Behavioural self-regulation is vital to human existence and the development of the other areas of learning becomes easier and learning is also effective.

### **Challenges of Implementing the Creative Dramatics Instructional Strategies in Schools**

1. Early childhood and primary education is mostly in the hands of the private sector, this most often than not would not allow for uniform practices among the proprietors of pre-primary and primary institutions. The various outfits catering for early childhood education are not built to a specified government standard such that will promote exploration, manipulation and experimentation of the environment.
2. Majority of practitioners/proprietors of early childhood education are not trained in the early childhood education programmes such that they can apply the knowledge in their practices.

3. Most school owners do not have enough resources to fund their schools for proper implementation of the curriculum. A lot of them rely on the income from school fees and donations from parents towards projects in form of levies.
4. The government does not put in place enough supervisory outfit to monitor the extent of adherence or compliance to the policy guiding the early childhood education practices in Nigeria, this is actually what led to the various inappropriate approaches used by the school owners.
5. The curricula of teacher education is still teacher centred, efforts have always been in the pipeline to review and embark upon new curricular packages for teacher preparation.

#### **WAY FORWARD**

Successful use of creative dramatics or educational drama as teaching strategies demands a good level of collaboration amongst all the stakeholders of Early Childhood Education and Care.

Starting with the parents, they should show genuine interest in their children's play activities and their development such that the children will be encouraged to freely take up positive play roles. In supporting children, parents should not just be on-lookers, they should also participate in what their children choose to do. Getting involved in children's play by parents, increase the child's confidence and strength. Playing together as a family has always been beneficial to children's optimal growth, providing psychological balance and self-regulatory skills.

Some children find it difficult to join other children to play, the parents can gradually encourage mixing with other children by being very nice to those other children and playing with them which will encourage their own child too. When children are playing, adult around them should observe their story line and not push too far so as not to disrupt their plans. Let them make their own choices but watch out for many things.

Give children dedicated space in the home where they can play freely with different safe play gadgets. This dedicated place can assist the child's imaginative thinking.

Integrating creative dramatics/play into the curriculum of pre-primary education should be done through a coordinated systems approach. This approach involves the simultaneous efforts of the government and the implementers of the curriculum of the young learners. If workshops are provided for teachers on the value of play/creative dramatics as instructional strategies but no guidance, or curriculum expectations for the role of play in the education of children, then implementation may be unrealistic.

In essence, the policy of education at this level should spell out the percentage of play both indoor and outdoor required in the curriculum and present ways for evaluating activities since all teachers understand the existing learning domains.

Getting the right funding for the education of children is vital to national development/nation building

Quality leadership to provide and manage the policy guiding children's education is germane to the implementation of early childhood education policy.

Providing pre-primary education with the needed facilities at every time.

Ensure adequate planning for age appropriate play laddened curriculum at the early childhood education level.

## **CONCLUSION**

Learning through play is a very vital part of children's skills development that can encourage creativity, imaginative thinking, self-awareness and regulation. It can also lay a solid foundation for later years. Keenly observed also is the importance of outdoor plays especially closeness to natural habits which has been found to have soothing effects on an individual's temperament. It has equally been observed that the inadequate exposure of children to nature leads to various diseases and health conditions caused by sedentary lifestyles of sitting for long hours behind the television or computers watching films or playing games. This also had been observed to lessen the bond between parents and children since the computer had replaced the quality bonding time that could have been developed amongst them.

Poor achievement in school had also been traced to poor connection with nature and less quality hours to engage in free play which has the potentials for boosting the brain for quality learning.

A need for urgent intervention is hereby sought from stakeholders – parents, government, teachers and other care givers. These stakeholders are expected to understand the principle, the roles of play and artistic expression in the education of children.

Integration of play and other educational drama into the learning process of children can only take place when the full importance of play is appreciated, and an evaluation process has been incorporated to check the extent of achievement of goals.

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**Eco-Cultural Dynamics in Jason Allen-Paisant's *Thinking With Trees*****Atouoto James Kerker PhD**Department of English and Literature  
Benue State University, Makurdi – Nigeria**Abstract**

The 21st century has witnessed an upsurge in poetry production especially in Africa and the Caribbean. The focus of this study is on Eco-Cultural Dynamics in the 21st century Caribbean poetry. The study appraises the elusive but dynamic nature of 21st century Caribbean poetry with particular attention to Jason Allen-Paisant's *Thinking with Trees*. The study adopts Eco-Criticism, an approach that examines the dialectical connection between literature and the natural world as a theoretical basis for the analysis of the selected poems. It explores the interconnections that exist between nature and culture on one hand, and literature and environment on the other hand. As a critical discourse, Ecocriticism, analyses the thematic and artistic ways in which literature reflects the physical world and influences the readers' perception of, and attitude towards nature. Using the literary analysis approach, the study appraises Allen-Paisant's ruminative renditions of contemporary poetics. The poems portray the idea of leisure and interrogate the relationship that exists between race and ecology – who belongs to nature and who to ecology. Findings of the study reveal that: *Thinking with Trees* is Jason Allen-Paisant's debut collection that reflects contemporary cultural dynamics; the poems are about connecting with nature and the environment as the connection is an act of reclamation; the poems influence the readers to appreciate the beauty of nature. The study submits that the 21st century Caribbean poetry is exceptional both in language and style as portrayed by Jason Allen-Paisant in *Thinking with Trees*.

Keywords: Cultural Dynamics, Ecocriticism, Environment, Nature, Motif and Race

**Introduction**

Literature is better appreciated for its reflection of human experiences and culture. This agrees with Abiola Irele's submission that, "Literature involves our deepest responses to the facts of human existence and intervenes in those areas of

experience where we assume consciousness of our situation with regard to others and to the world” ( as qtd in Egya, 1). All literary works are rooted in certain cultural and historical contexts. It is against this background that Irele submits that “The need to consider the specificity of individual works in their socio-historical context cannot be overemphasized” (12). Corroborating Irele’s view, Edwin Mosoti opines that; “Every trend in literary expression ... has a specific background or historical frame of reference and evidently, contemporary African poetry is no different” (20). The above quote advances the relationship between literature and history on one hand and the socio-cultural or socio-historical contexts of literary works on the other. In addition, Mosoti is concerned about African literature but the submission also relates to the Caribbean literature which is the focus of the present study

Thus, the context in which modern poetry is produced has been changing since its inception; and the 21st century Caribbean poetry is not an exception. It has evolved over time. And the evolvement of Caribbean literature thus signifies the essence of the periodisation of the literature which is why the paper focuses on the 21st century Caribbean literature with particular reference to Jason Allen-Paisant’s *Thinking with Trees*. According to Edwin Mosoti,

Forms and conventions of poetry that prevail in a certain time are over-determined by the conditions and circumstances of production. Although these forms and conventions may adequately and sufficiently serve the aesthetic needs and imperatives of a particular era, it is inevitable that tastes shift and what appears to one generation or a certain period like great or „major poetry“ often reads like doggerel, insufficient or malpractices of the art to the next. Of particular concern therefore, is ascertaining and validating the assumption that the contemporary socio-political and economic times are different and hence have occasioned or engendered a certain identifiable poetics. (21)

Therefore, poetry cannot be conceived outside of history and specific social environments – and which vary from one region and epoch to another. This has informed the various

nomenclatures – world literature, European literature, African literature, Caribbean literature and the likes. Contemporary cultural productions creatively capture and represent this intricate web with “other” worlds, spatially and temporarily separated, to the extent that these become the defining feature of the period’s poetics (Edwin Mosoti). The backdrop has informed the present study which focuses on 21st century Caribbean literature; poetry.

### **Methodology**

The paper employs the qualitative research method which explores issues by analysing data through words and concepts. This study therefore involves an in-depth analytical evaluation of primary data drawn from Jason Allen-Paisant’s *Thinking with Trees* with Ecocriticism as its analytical framework. This study reviews secondary sources in the form of existing literature in several fields, books, e-journals, articles, unpublished works which provide valuable information about current environmental issues in the Caribbean. The Library and the Internet were also consulted for relevant data for this research. Reference is made to poems in the collection but eight poems have been specifically selected and analysed. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study that combines natural science and humanistic discipline – ecology and literature. Therefore, interdisciplinary approach is essential in this research because it connects and integrates approaches to show their complexities.

### **An Overview of Literary Traditions and Poetry Renditions in the Caribbean**

The first poems to be published by an Afro-Caribbean came as a result of an experiment centred in the noble savage concept. Francis Williams of Jamaica, a free black, was the first to publish a poem. In 1759, Williams wrote “An Ode to George Haldane, Governor of the Island of Jamaica” to celebrate the arrival of the governor at his new office. The other acknowledged poet of the eighteenth century is James Grainger, a Scottish physician who made his home in Jamaica. His extended poem *The Sugar-Cane* (1766) is often described as a pastoral epic that discusses the vicissitudes of life on the island. While Williams and Grainger represent the poetry of the eighteenth century; the poets who typify the tradition during the nineteenth

century are the Hart sisters of Antigua and Egbert Martin of Guyana and many others.

The idyllic Caribbean archipelagos, which includes (but is not limited to) Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Haiti, Cuba, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, are often known for their beaches, weather, sounds and food, architecture – a testament to the symphonic parallels between peoples, societies and places separated by water. But as a historically, linguistically, and culturally diverse region, the Caribbean hosts and boasts many pioneering literary giants: Barbadian Edward Kamau Brathwaite, St Lucian Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, Martinican Aimé Césaire, Jamaican Louise Bennett-Coverley, to name but a few. These notable poets have all grappled with the task of documenting the Caribbean experience, each covering topical issues from slavery and colonialism; migration, creolisation, and exile; to present-day sensibilities, superstitions, customs, and proverbial words of wisdom.

Literary traditions in the Caribbean have been described by many scholars to be dynamic and elusive. Many works captured besides the precolonial society both the history of colonialism and the history of English literature. Allison Donnell describes the Caribbean tradition as “more movable, divergent and unruly” (1). As it is with poetry of any part of the world, earlier poetry renditions from the Caribbean were oral in nature. By the 18th century, poetry works started emanating from the Caribbean. Donnell’s work dwells on Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature. The writing from the Caribbean across the twentieth century still holds enormous potential for exploring the issues and debates about cultural politics, ethnicity, gender and sexuality that continue to be intellectually urgent in the twenty-first century. Previous scholarship had approached this very diverse tradition of writing in one of three ways – first through a traditional critical lens, focusing on the work of a few prominent writers (Brown, Wilson-Tagoe, Harney); second by offering a generally chronological narrative which examines almost no writing by women except for in an ‘annexed’ chapter on ‘women’s writing’ (King, James, Juneja); or third, by examining only women’s writing (O’Callaghan, DeCaires Narain) and situating it within a paradigm of ‘black women’s writing’ (Boyce-Davies, Chancy).

Caribbean literary criticism focused around a cluster of issues – anti-colonialism, nationalism, migration and diaspora; the centrality of African Caribbean ethnicity; the concept of women as doubly colonised and the marginalisation of sexuality and homosexuality. In addition, most works focused on the politics of place in Caribbean writing. For instance, Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* examines the way in which a preference for migration over settlement and dislocation over location has influenced creative works of the century. Issues of cultural belonging and homecoming were also reflected in literary works. For instance, the poetry of Albinia Mackay and other works demonstrate an interest in the issues of origin, displacement and belonging. Other examples are Earl Lovelace’s *Salt* and Sam Selvon’s *An Island is a World* that portray the experience of settlement and an engagement with the conditions of the nation as an alternative redemptive model to that of the Black Atlantic .

The 21st century poets, Jason Allen-Paisant inclusive have explored new dimensions in their poetry. Their language and style is more sophisticated. The subject matter and issues reflected in the works bother on the challenges of the 21st century. It is against this background that the study focuses on the Eco-Cultural Dynamics of the 21st century with particular focus on Jason Allen-Paisant’s *Thinking with Trees*.

### **Review of Related Literature**

According to Mary Ann Gosser Esquilin, “Stereotypes of Caribbean “nature” as lush and its people as exotic others abound. For those who call the islands home, the region evokes more somber images that reflect the history of colonisation and the environmental devastation that ensues” (np). Many scholarly works from the Caribbean reflected the history of colonisation. Such works also dwelt on the language of the Caribbean. Prem, Aparna attempts an overview of the poetry from two different geographical areas— the Caribbean Islands and Africa. Because of their complicated colonial histories and influences, both countries write in many languages other than English. Mapping of the literary tradition of African and Caribbean poetry goes back to the oral customs and practices that still becomes the thematic structure of the same. Thus, early Caribbean poetry was oral in nature. Even early written poetry in pidgin or Creole and portrayed the effects of colonisation.

From a postcolonial perspective, a search for the possibilities of inventing or re-discovering an identity for the self and the nation becomes one of the foremost priorities in writing verse. The modern poetic techniques find the meaning of the self in the dilemma between the colonial past and postcolonial present. The critical positions that these and more poets take to create a literature of their own, arise from a complex poetic tradition that limits them into a boundary but at the same time allows them to explore and recreate new practices. Today's African and Caribbean poetry also have to deal with issues like globalisation, ethnic conflicts, immigration and multiculturalism. Forming a new canon also calls for an international recognition, which in turn would cause them to sacrifice their cultural and linguistic preferences. When the in-between identities gain more space and recognition through these poets, the question that remains is of tradition and modernity. Though these poets endeavour to create a balance between the dichotomies of identity, one has to be wary of the politics of inclusion and exclusion as well, that inevitably goes behind any kind of identity-creation.

The literature of the Caribbean is exceptional, both in language and subject. More than a million and half Africans, along with many Indians and South Asians, were brought to the Caribbean between the 15th and 19th centuries. Today, their descendants are active in literature and the arts, producing literature with strong and direct ties to traditional African expressions. This literary connection, combined with the tales of survival, exile, resistance, endurance, and emigration to other parts of the Americas, makes for a body of work that is essential for the study of the Caribbean and the Black Diaspora—and indeed central for our understanding of the New World. (<https://alexanderstreet.com/products/caribbean-literature>).

The backdrop informs the present study which looks at Eco-cultural dynamics in 21st century Caribbean poetry. This is in line with Gosser's submission that; "Close ecocritical readings of literary texts illuminate aspects of an encompassing nature inclusive of all others within the Caribbean ecosphere"(np). Malika Booker submits that:

Allen-Paisant's poetic ruminations deceptively radicalise Wordsworth's pastoral scenic daffodils. The collection racialises contemporary ecological

poetics and its power lies in Allen-Paisant's subtle destabilisation of the ordinary dog walker's right to space, territory, property and leisure by positioning the colonised Black male body's complicated and unsafe reality in these spaces.' (np)

Booker's submission above highlights the crux of Allen-Paisant's collection and compares the collection to Wordsworth's pastoral scenic daffodils. Booker's opinion relates to the present study in many ways. The following points in the above submission by Booker – “the collection racialises contemporary ecological poetics” and “Allen-Paisant's subtle destabilization of the ordinary dog walker's right to space, territory, property and leisure by positioning the colonised Black male body's complicated and unsafe reality in these spaces” are worthy of mention. The present study focuses on how the collection explores the interconnections that exist between nature, culture, literature and the environment. The present study is also concerned about how the collection reflects the physical world and influences the readers' perception of, and attitude towards nature.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical basis for the study is Ecocriticism. According to Joyce Onoromhenre Agofure:

...the environmental crises of the 21st Century have given rise to a literature that signifies the fragility of the interrelatedness of all life forms thus underpinning the frailty of the ecosystem. This development necessitated the emergence of Ecocriticism – a new approach which forms the increasing presence of discourses on the tension between environment, power, and consumerism in the postmodern world” (31).

Ecocriticism as a movement is known by many designations including “green cultural studies”, “eco-poetry”, “environmental literary criticism”, “green-poetry”, “eco-literature” and “eco/environmental studies”. Ecocriticism has its source from two Greek words Eco (oikos) and Critic (kritis) meaning “house judge”. Ecology in this regard means man's house and the critic is its judge – an arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order: no technological tillage, no oil spillage to ruin the original décor. By analogy, Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between literature and environment or how man's relationships

with the physical environment are reflected in literature (Buell 1091). From an interdisciplinary point, Ecocriticism is the study of literature and the environment where literary scholars analyse texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature.

Historically, the roots of Ecocriticism are traced to the pioneering works of British critic Raymond Williams in a seminal critique of pastoral literature titled: *The Country and the City* in 1973 and the American Joseph Meeker who wrote *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and Play Ethics* published in 1974. The term, “Ecocriticism” was coined by William Rueckert who used the term Ecocriticism in a 1978 essay titled: *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* with the intention of focusing on “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Glotfelty and Fromm 107). Ecocriticism as a movement, owes much to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* – an environmental expose’. In the mid-eighties, the need to establish Ecocriticism as an approach within criticism worked out through the publication of two seminal works on ecocriticism – *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996 by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm along with Lawrence Buell publishing *The Environmental Imagination*.

In a related development, the emergence of ecocriticism was however, a gradual process. It started with the efforts of ecologically – oriented individuals and scholars who began publishing works on ecotheory and criticism from the 1950’s. In the United States, such pioneering works of criticism include Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950), and Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), which have been described as “staples on any American ecocritic’s diet” ([www.enotes.com](http://www.enotes.com)). The 1970’s witnessed a tremendous growth of interest in environmental issues arising from challenges posed by industrialisation and globalisation. This surging growth of environmentalism became a driving force for the emerging ecocritical tradition. During this time, several books of criticism appeared. These included Raymond William’s *The Country and the City* (1973), which offered a seminal critique of pastoral literature, and Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival* (1974). According to an e-source, the latter work contains the argument which has continued to dominate ecocriticism and

environmental philosophy, namely, “That environmental crisis is caused primarily by a cultural tradition in the West of separation of culture from nature and the elevation of the former to moral predominance” (www.enotes.com) .

Ecocriticism, according to Hans Bartens, does a great many widely different things. First of all, it examines representations of nature – but also non-literary – texts, in films, in television series, and so on. It pays particular attention to the question of how nature is constructed in those presentations. Ecocriticism, otherwise called green cultural studies, ecopoetics, and environmental literary criticism, is a broad approach that examines the dialectical links between literature and the natural world. As a critical discourse, ecocriticism analyses the thematic and artistic ways in which literature reflects the physical world and influences the reader’s perception of, and attitude towards nature. Conversely, ecocriticism examines the thematic, artistic, social and other ways that the environment influences the process of literary production. (Ageda Ugba Thaddeus, 24)

The present study therefore, adopts Eco-criticism as a theoretical approach to analyse Jason AllenPaisant’s *Thinking with Trees*. The tenets used in the analyses are: how literature reflects nature; the relationship between literature, nature, culture and the environment; the thematic and artistic ways in which literature reflects the physical world and influences the reader’s perception of, and attitude towards nature.

### **Nature, Culture and the Environment in Jason Allen-Paisant’s *Thinking with Trees***

The natural environment appears to have surrounded the life and times of the author, Jason Allen-Paisant. This is reflective in the title of the collection – *Thinking with Trees* and in fact, in all the poems. Allen-Paisant portrays in this collection the environment in his country, Jamiaca and current environment where he lives and works, Leeds. It is obvious from the collection that his present environment brings back memories from his home town. The poems depict his childhood experiences in Jamaica and his experiences in Leeds. According to reviewer online, Allen-Paisant states that; “Trees were all around, 'we often went to the yam ground, my grandmother's cultivation plot. When I think of my childhood, I see myself entering a deep

woodland with cedars and logwood all around. The muscular guango trees were like beings among whom we lived". (<https://www.carcenet.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?product=9781800171138>). The reviewer further submits that "Now he lives in Leeds, near a forest where he goes walking. 'Here, trees represent an alternative space, a refuge from an ultra-consumerist culture".

In an interview, Allen-Paisant states the motivational factors that informed the collection thus:

I was walking one night [home through Roundhay Park], I cut across a field and, perhaps it was the silence of it all, it suddenly hit me – that I'm living here in this place [with all of this] space and nature. A place where you can roam, where there's a sense of freedom, of openness. But how did I get here? How come somebody like me is here? I felt for the first time that I had become a different person. We didn't plan to live here. It's a very affluent area. Walking across that field in the dead of night unlocked a door and I started to think about nature, trees, birds, big spaces. [Living here] is a kind of privilege on the face of it. But why couldn't I think about Coffee Grove as a privilege? Was it that bad? I grew up in nature. I grew up among a wholesome green with equality, kinship, exchange, social solidarity. I had all of that. But I had blocked out my background. I think a lot of migrants from the Caribbean do block out our background when you think it's associated with poverty.

Therefore, two environments and cultures are at play in Allen-Paisant's *Thinking with Trees*. The culture and environment of Leeds are portrayed in "Essay on Dog Walking I, 11, 111 and IV". The poet personae describes in "Essay on Dog Walking I", the dogs and it's owner in the first stanza of the poem thus; "In the woodland above us a man with his three" "I don't know the breed" "They're big and so is their bark" "scary for a baby &" "babies don't come up here but" "ours does" (lines 1- 6, p 44). Lines 5&6 portray the different environments depicted in the poem. What transpires between nature and humans is captured in stanza four of the poem thus; "but if you saw the baby running & frolicking in

the forest” “and learning to play hide and seek behind the trees” “and touching mushrooms and tapping the barks with her stick sounding them” “If you saw her smile and heard her laugh and knew that wood was her” “element...”. (Lines 13-17, P44). The way and manner the people of Leeds work and relate with their dogs is different from people in Jamaica. In fact, to the poet personae, the sight is fearful and reminds him of the colonial experience. He says: “I wish we could unknow this space” “not care about it stay home in our flat” “then everything might be easier” (Stanza 5, Lines 18-20). In fact, “Essay on Dog Walking II captures the fearful nature of the dogs and how they attempt to attack humans vividly.

The impression of the people about blacks is stated in the following lines of stanza 7: “But I know you know” “already they don’t expect to see” “us in this area” “no not *round here*”. The poet personae like to take a walk through the woodland and the forests. He discovers that the people of Leeds walking with those fearful dogs in the forest and woodland portray their culture. The poet personae says; “I’m troubled by this normalcy” “in which the dog” “gets everything it wants” (Essay on Dog Walking IV, Lines 1-3, P 81) The relationship between the dog and its owner which forms expression of surprises by the poet personae is further buttressed in the following lines of the poem; “Would you understand” “the way she looks at this dog” “makes me uneasy” “the way she speaks to it” “the way she speaks to it” “as a person” “when the dog has strayed” “a baby disappears” (Lines 10-17). Thus, the poet in Essay on Dog Walking I-IV describes his love for nature and how he loves to walk through the woodlands and the forests. He laments the new culture he experiences in Leeds which is quite different from where he is coming from.

Another tenet of Ecocriticism, is that it analyses the thematic and artistic ways in which literature reflects the physical world and influences the readers’ perception of, and attitude towards nature. Allen-Paisant’s poems reflect the physical world – the human and the non-human worlds. The first poem in the collection, “Crossing the Threshold” reflects this physical world vividly that everything comes alive and forms an impression in the readers’ mind on the beauty of nature. “I am walking” “I am not going” “my body moves along the way” “with patience for the breeze” (Stanza 1&2, Lines 1-4). As one reads through the poem and in fact, all the poems in the collection, the connection

between humans and the natural environment is captured vividly. A few lines from the poem would suffice – “a bedding of brown leaves” “covering the humus” (Line 13&14); “water with shadows” (Line 20); “I can smell spring rising” “from the soft hollow” “the stream” “hides things” (Lines 22-25). And it goes on and on ( a very lengthy poem) as it describes the relationship between humans and the environment.

The titles of the poems in the collection are reflective of how literature reflects the physical world. The first poem is titled “Crossing the Threshold” while the second poem has the title, “Naming”. The poet persona wishes he could name the birds based on the sounds they produce. He states thus; “In the wood I hear the beautiful” “call of bird I do not know I wish” “I knew the names of birds” “and could identify them by their songs” “It would be so much nicer to say” “I heard the warble of a wood pigeon” “as the red floor of the woodland” “stretched before me like an avenue” “through the high rises of beeches and oaks” (Stanza 1&2, Lines 1-9). Other reflective titles include: “Walking with the Word Tree”. “Climbing Trees”, “Coming from the Ground”, “Treeness”, “Logwood”, “Roots”, “Do You Feel Them Looking at You?”, “Behaviour (A Black Man Enters the Woods”, “A Tree and Two Humans and a host of others.

From the poems, it is obvious that eco-literature influences the readers’ perception and attitude towards nature. Allen-Paisant creatively crafts the poems in the collection because of his interaction with nature. The calmness and sounds within the environment – woodlands and forests bring fulfilment and satisfaction. To the poet, the natural world brings a feeling of leisure and this is captured in the poems with the title leisure – “Leisure I” and “Leisure II”. In “Leisure I”, the poet states that: “The sun splashes its light on the trees their exposed skins glisten Inside me a living thing is ripening In this month of December when night falls in early afternoon it is a struggle to get here and now that I am here I am living A sadness returns A sadness for the boy I once was What was my poverty? Was it living in a space that was too little? To go far might have been just to enter the woods behind the house But there was a wall separating me from it” (33).

Allen-Paisant further states that: “It was my thinking around leisure that provided the impetus to my book ... For me,

rocks, minerals, water, and trees were the most significant things to spend time with; I had known this since my childhood growing up in Coffee Grove, Manchester, Jamaica. Human beings are also filled with rocks, minerals, and trees. So, it was being able to spend my time with “things” that amounted to leisure for me. Thus, Allen-Paisant wrote *Thinking with Trees* because of his experiences in Leads that reminded him of the childhood adventures in Jamaica.

### **Conclusion**

Jason Allen-Paisant’s *Thinking with Trees* shows how walking through the forests helps him to connect with nature. It demonstrates a deep-rooted connection with the arboreal world. His vision of the world is that of leisure. The collection, especially the referenced poems portray a relationship in which human and non-human bodies become mutually entangled. The perception of the reader becomes one that even inanimate materials like rocks and water fills one’s imagination with compassion. The readers, after reading the poems, prefer to spend a significant time with rocks, minerals, water and trees. Thus, the poems are a reflection of the idea of leisure. The poems question the idea of leisure; what it means and who has access to it. *Thinking with Trees* thus demonstrates a passionate engagement with the non-human world while at the same time questioning a colonised past and the intersections between race and class.

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**Ideation and Periodicity in Cameroon Online Newspapers Coverage on Climate Change and Environmental Hazards (2020-2025): A Critical Discourse Analysis****Afutendem Lucas Nkwetta***University of Dschang, Cameroon**Research Centre in Space, Arts and Humanities (CEREAH)**Research Group in English and Commonwealth Studies***Abstract:**

With climate change emerging as a critical global issue, its coverage in the Cameroonian media (particularly online newspapers) can provide valuable insights into how the phenomenon is framed in the public discourse. This study analyses the ideation (the conceptualization of climate change) and periodicity (the frequency and timing of coverage) within the discourse. What dominant narratives and ideologies are embedded in online media coverage of environmental issues? How frequently and under what circumstances are such topics reported? Whose voices are amplified or marginalized in the coverage? What linguistic strategies are employed, in what ways does media coverage influence public opinion? The hypotheses are that the coverage has shifted significantly over these years, specific themes are economic impacts, environmental degradation, indigenous rights and the linguistic strategies vary between different online newspapers. Moreover, increased coverage of climate change correlate with the narrative and ideation. We identify and purposefully select a range of online newspapers in Cameroon that have a significant readership and cover climate change within a time frame of 5 years. The qualitative and quantitative data collected will be categorised by themes, frequency, tone and framing. Focus group interviews will come in to understand stake holders' responses to how coverage influences public perception and behaviour. We shall use a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis, Framing Theory and cultural studies as the framework for exploring ideation and periodicity in online newspaper coverage of climate change to analyse the themes, investigate the linguistic and rhetorical strategies, assess the periodicity, evaluate the impact and examine the ideological implications of these media representations. We shall focus on the ideologies they propagate

and the temporal patterns of coverage; exploring how different social actors, including the government, local communities, international organizations, and environmental activists, are portrayed in the discourse. The analysis, conclusions and results highlight the linguistic ways in which these portrayals reflect underlying power relations, political ideologies, and the responsiveness (or lack thereof) of the Cameroonian government to climate challenges. The findings contribute to understanding the role of media in shaping public perception and policy discourse surrounding climate change in Cameroon. In doing so, this research contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations around media, environment, and discourse in the Global South, while offering empirical insights into the communicative dimensions of environmental governance in Cameroon.

**Keywords: Ideation, Periodicity, Critical Discourse Analysis, Climate Change, Online Newspapers, Environmental Hazards, Perception, Cameroon.**

### **1. Introductory Background and Context**

Climate change and environmental hazards have increasingly become central to public discourse and policy concerns in sub-Saharan Africa, and Cameroon is no exception. The country faces a range of ecological challenges, including recurrent floods in urban areas such as Douala and Yaoundé, soil erosion in highland regions, desertification in the north, deforestation in the Congo Basin, and biodiversity loss in ecologically sensitive zones (Ndenecho, 2011; Ayonghe et al., 2019). These environmental phenomena are often exacerbated by anthropogenic activities, poor urban planning, and inadequate disaster preparedness, thereby amplifying their socio-economic impacts on already vulnerable populations.

Between 2015 and 2025, Cameroon has witnessed a number of notable environmental events. For instance, the 2015 floods in the Far North displaced over 30,000 people (UN OCHA, 2016), while the landslides in Bafoussam in 2019 claimed more than 40 lives and highlighted the consequences of poor land-use practices (IRIN News, 2019). Such events have drawn attention to the urgency of climate action and environmental governance in the country. However, public understanding and engagement with

these issues are significantly shaped by how they are represented in the media.

Online newspapers in Cameroon have become critical platforms for the circulation of environmental discourse. With the steady growth in internet penetration—from about 21% in 2015 to over 38% in 2023 (Internet World Stats, 2023)—news consumption has increasingly shifted to digital platforms. Online outlets such as *Cameroon Tribune*, *Cameroon News Agency* and *The Guardian Post*, play a pivotal role in informing citizens, shaping perceptions, and framing national narratives on environmental issues. These digital texts not only disseminate information but also encode ideologies, values, and power structures that influence how environmental risks and responsibilities are understood, Fairclough (2013).

From a critical discourse analytical (CDA) perspective, language is seen as a social practice that both reflects and constructs reality, van Dijk (2009). The ideational content of media discourse—what is said, how it is said, and what is omitted—offers insight into the ways environmental issues are politicized, depoliticized, or normalized. Furthermore, the periodicity or temporal distribution of media coverage over the years can reveal shifting agendas, media priorities, and institutional responsiveness to environmental threats. Peaks in coverage may correspond to environmental disasters or international climate summits, while periods of silence may suggest issues of media fatigue, censorship, or neglect.

### **1.2 Research Problem and Gap**

Despite the increasing visibility of climate change and environmental hazards in global discourse, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these issues are represented in the media within specific national and regional contexts, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In Cameroon, a country grappling with deforestation, erratic weather patterns, urban flooding, and land degradation, the role of the media in framing environmental discourse is both urgent and understudied. While international media often highlight climate crises in Africa through a humanitarian or alarmist lens, local media narratives offer a more nuanced and potentially impactful avenue for shaping public perception, influencing policy, and mobilizing grassroots action.

However, studies on media coverage of environmental issues in Cameroon have largely focused on traditional print and broadcast media, with limited attention to online newspapers—despite their increasing influence among the urban youth, diaspora communities, and policy elites. Moreover, few empirical studies have interrogated the ideational content (i.e., themes, perspectives, and framing strategies) or temporal trends (periodicity) of such media coverage. There is also a lack of critical engagement with the discursive strategies that newspapers employ to construct environmental risks, attribute responsibility, and advocate for solutions.

This gap is especially problematic in a context where media discourse can either support or undermine environmental sustainability, democratic participation, and resilience to climate shocks. Thus, a critical discourse analysis of Cameroonian online newspapers over a decade (2015–2025) is both timely and necessary for uncovering how language shapes public understanding of climate change and environmental hazards, and how media coverage evolves in response to environmental events and sociopolitical dynamics.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This research holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the fields of media studies, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and environmental communication by providing an in-depth exploration of the linguistic and ideological mechanisms through which climate change and environmental risks are framed in the digital media landscape of Cameroon. It extends Fairclough's (2013) and van Dijk's (2009) frameworks of discourse analysis to a context that has been largely underrepresented in global CDA scholarship.

Empirically, the study offers one of the first longitudinal analyses of environmental discourse in Cameroonian online media, capturing trends across a critical decade marked by intensifying climate impacts and shifting political priorities. It examines how the frequency and framing of coverage respond to environmental events, policy developments, and international climate dialogues. Such insights are invaluable for understanding the media's role in environmental risk perception and public engagement.

Practically, the study can inform journalists, environmental advocates, and policymakers on how to enhance the quality, consistency, and inclusivity of environmental reporting. By identifying whose voices are included or excluded in media discourse, and how certain ideologies are promoted or marginalized, the research can support more equitable and effective communication strategies in environmental governance. It may also serve as a foundation for curriculum development in journalism and media training programs in Cameroon and across the region.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of media as a site of ideological struggle and public education in the context of climate change—one of the most defining challenges of the 21st century.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives, Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The objectives of the research are:

1. To identify and analyze the dominant discourses and ideologies in Cameroonian online newspaper coverage of climate change and environmental hazards between 2015 and 2025.
2. To examine the periodicity of media coverage on climate and environmental issues across selected online news platforms over the ten-year period.
3. To investigate the linguistic and rhetorical strategies used in framing climate change and environmental hazards in Cameroonian online newspapers.
4. To assess the representation of key actors (e.g., government, local communities, international organizations) and how responsibility and agency are assigned in media narratives.
5. To determine the relationship between the occurrence of major environmental events and the frequency and tone of media coverage.

The questions we raise to examine the problem are:

1. What are the dominant themes and ideologies conveyed in Cameroonian online newspaper coverage of climate change and environmental hazards from 2015 to 2025?

2. How frequently have climate change and environmental hazards been reported over the selected period, and what patterns of periodicity emerge?
3. What discursive and linguistic strategies are employed in framing climate-related issues in the selected media texts?
4. How are different social actors (e.g., the government, NGOs, communities) represented in the discourse, and what roles or responsibilities are assigned to them?
5. To what extent does the volume and tone of media coverage correspond to actual environmental events or policy developments in Cameroon?

We have the following hypotheses:

Although it widely said that CDA traditionally does not require hypotheses, they are useful in this study because we are integrating quantitative content analysis.

1. **H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant increase in the frequency of online newspaper coverage on climate change and environmental hazards in Cameroon following major environmental events (e.g., floods, landslides).
2. **H<sub>2</sub>:** Online newspaper coverage predominantly frames climate change as a technical or governmental issue, with limited representation of local community agency.
3. **H<sub>3</sub>:** The language used in environmental news articles often reflects implicit ideologies that support state-centric or development-driven narratives rather than ecological or grassroots perspectives.
4. **H<sub>4</sub>:** There is an uneven distribution of coverage across years, with environmental issues receiving less attention during periods of political crises or election seasons.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1. Climate Change, Disaster Risks, and Media in Cameroon**

Cameroon is experiencing an increase in climate-related disasters, including floods, landslides, and droughts. For instance, in 2024, heavy rains led to severe flooding in Yaoundé, resulting in at least 27 deaths and over 50 injuries. The floods were exacerbated by a

broken dike in a manmade lake, highlighting the compounded risks of climate change and infrastructure vulnerabilities.

In another incident, a landslide caused by torrential rains resulted in at least four deaths and left over 50 people missing on a highway connecting Dschang and Douala. These events are part of a broader pattern of increasing extreme weather events in the region, attributed to climate change.

### **2.1.1 National and Regional Preparedness Efforts**

To address these challenges, Cameroon has developed a National Climate Change Adaptation Plan. This plan aims to reduce the country's vulnerability to climate change impacts and strengthen its capacity for adaptation and resilience. It serves as a framework to guide the coordination and implementation of climate change adaptation initiatives across the country's five agro-ecological zones.

Additionally, the National Observatory on Climate Change (NOCC) regularly issues weather forecasts and warnings. For example, in September 2024, the NOCC warned of high precipitation leading to potential floods and landslides in several regions, including the Centre, South, Adamawa, North West, and Littoral regions . [The Guardian Post Cameroon+2The Guardian Post Cameroon+2The Guardian Post Cameroon+1The Guardian Post Cameroon+1](#)

### **2.1.2 Regional Collaboration and Data Initiatives**

Cameroon is also participating in regional initiatives aimed at enhancing climate resilience. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), in collaboration with neighboring countries, is working on establishing hydrological monitoring and early warning systems in the Lake Chad Basin to improve water resource management and mitigate water-related disaster risks . [Prevention Web - Homepage+1MDPI+1World Meteorological Organization](#)

Furthermore, in November 2023, a workshop was held in Yaoundé to increase the technical capacity of climate change and disaster statistics in Cameroon. This event, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other UN agencies, aimed to enhance data collection and coordination among governmental agencies to better understand and respond to the impacts of climate change .

The role of media in climate change communication in Africa has gained scholarly attention in recent years, with studies

highlighting both its potentials and limitations. Scholars such as Ojebode and Adebayo (2017) argue that African media often frame climate issues through an anthropocentric and disaster-oriented lens, reinforcing fear rather than enabling action. In East and West Africa, media coverage tends to focus on extreme weather events and governmental responses, often neglecting structural causes or community-based initiatives Mormina & Penders, (2018).

In Cameroon specifically, existing studies have focused primarily on environmental journalism in traditional print and broadcast media, Ndenecho (2011); Mbunwe (2020). However, the growing influence of online newspapers, with their potential for interactivity and wider reach, remains underexplored. This study fills that gap by focusing on how environmental issues are ideated and periodically represented in digital media.

### **2.1.3. Critical Discourse Analysis of Environmental Reporting**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been used extensively to interrogate media representations of environmental and climate issues, especially in Western contexts. Carvalho (2007) notes that media discourse often reflects underlying ideologies that serve institutional or economic interests, with a tendency to depoliticize environmental crises. In African contexts, CDA studies, Atanga, (2019) reveal how environmental discourse often aligns with state narratives, marginalizing indigenous knowledge and local voices. However, few longitudinal CDA studies exist on African media, and even fewer focus on online newspapers. By analyzing a decade of digital environmental reporting, this study contributes a temporal dimension to the literature, showing how environmental discourse shifts in relation to socio-political events and natural disasters.

### **2.1.4. Ideology and Representation in Climate Discourse**

Media are not neutral conveyors of information but are sites where ideologies are produced and reproduced. Van Dijk (1998, 2006) emphasizes the role of discourse in maintaining or contesting social dominance, particularly through lexical choices, narrative structures, and the inclusion/exclusion of certain voices. In climate discourse, this manifests in the differential representation of actors—governments may be portrayed as saviours or culprits; communities may be framed as victims or passive observers, Boykoff (2009).

Representation also intersects with global North-South power dynamics. Scholars such as Chilwa (2012) note that African environmental problems are often externalized or naturalized, stripping local actors of agency. This study critically interrogates how Cameroonian media construct responsibility, agency, and causality in climate-related coverage.

### **2.1.5. Periodicity and Agenda-Setting in Environmental Journalism**

Agenda-setting theory, McCombs & Shaw (1972) posits that media influence what the public thinks about by selecting the issues they highlight. Several studies have shown that environmental coverage is often event-driven—peaking around disasters or international climate summits—and declining thereafter, Anderson (2015). In the African context, coverage is also shaped by political calendars, donor interests, and infrastructural constraints.

By tracking the periodicity of climate coverage over ten years, this study explores not just the content but the rhythm of media attention—what gets reported, when, and under what conditions.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the models developed by Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, and agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and framing theory (Entman, 1993) to analyze the ideological underpinnings and linguistic strategies of media discourse on climate change and environmental hazards.

Fairclough (1995, 2013) proposes a three-level model of discourse analysis: Textual Analysis in which we examine linguistic features—word choices, grammar, modality, metaphor, discursive practice in which we investigate how the texts selected are produced and interpreted, including intertextuality and media routines, and social practice which analyzes how discourses relate to wider social structures and ideologies, including power, dominance, and environmental governance.

Agenda-setting theory and framing theory are integrated to explore periodicity and how events are selectively highlighted or downplayed. This is important for understanding temporal fluctuations in media attention and their implications for public awareness and policy response.

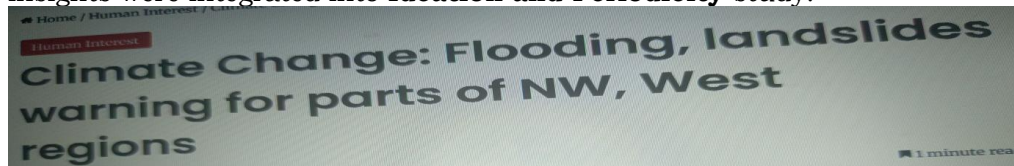
### 3. Methodology and Design

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design incorporating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and quantitative content analysis. The CDA component was used to explore how ideologies, power relations, and discursive strategies are embedded in Cameroon online media texts, while the content analysis helped quantify periodicity, trends in coverage, and the distribution of discursive elements of climate change and environmental hazards across time. There is a wealth of information available on how climate change is impacting Cameroon, particularly concerning disaster risks, rainfall patterns, and regional preparedness. This study however, collects and analyzes climate change and environmental hazard-related articles published between January 2020 and June 2025 in a purposively selected sample of Cameroonian online newspapers. These are selected based on: Frequency of publication, National reach and influence, Political/ideological diversity, Accessibility of digital archives

The purposefully sampled newspapers were *Cameroon Tribune* (state-run) and *Cameroon News Agency*. We went forth to do a Purposive sampling of relevant articles using keywords such as: “climate change,” “flood,” “landslide,” “deforestation,” “drought,” “environmental hazard,” “green energy,” and “climate policy”. We used of digital archives, internal search engines to retrieve articles. We had to ensure a balanced sample across years, and tag articles based on publication date, outlet, and section (news, opinion, editorial).

#### 3.1 Data Presentation and Analyses

Based on the article from the Cameroon News Agency titled "Climate Change: Flooding, landslides warning for parts of NW, West regions," published on September 26, 2024. the following insights were integrated into **Ideation and Periodicity** study:



Screenshot of Cameroon News Agency from their website

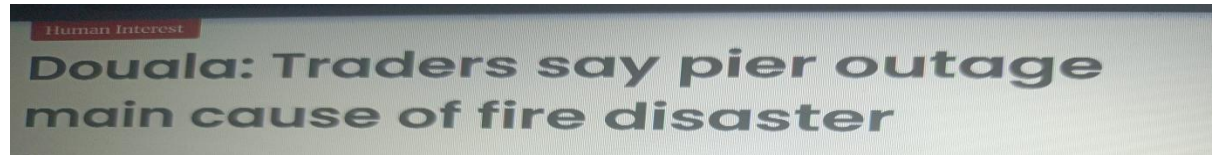
#### 31.1 Ideation in CNA's Climate Change Coverage

Considering the framing of Climate Change Impacts, we have environmental hazards emphasized. The increased risk of flooding and landslides in the North West and West Regions of Cameroon due to anticipated heavy rainfall is presented; highlighting the direct environmental threats posed by climate change. Health and infrastructure concerns come next as it addresses the potential for increased diseases such as malaria, cholera, and respiratory infections, as well as the structural vulnerability of homes and roads to heavy rains, illustrating the broader societal impacts of climate change.

The policy and public response is presented through government action as the report includes statements from the West Regional Governor; urging local authorities to enhance public awareness and implement preventive measures, reflecting governmental responsibility in climate change mitigation. Advice is given to residents to avoid settling in high-risk areas and to maintain structurally sound homes indicates an emphasis on community-level adaptation strategies.

### **3.1.2 Periodicity of Coverage**

We noted elements of event-driven reporting in the timely warnings. The article was published in late September, aligning with the rainy season in Cameroon, when the likelihood of flooding and landslides increases, demonstrating CNA's responsiveness to seasonal climate risks. The historical context is signaled through reference to past events. The mention of the October 2023 landslides in Yaoundé, which resulted in significant casualties and displacement, provides a historical context that underscores the recurring nature of climate-related disasters in the region. These elements from the CNA article illustrate the media's role in framing climate change issues and responding to seasonal events, contributing to the understanding of ideation and periodicity in climate change coverage in Cameroon. Incorporating the article "Early Rains: Douala residents in disaster-prone area prepare for worst" from the Cameroon News Agency into the study on the Ideation and Periodicity of climate change coverage in Cameroon online newspapers from 2020 to 2025 provides valuable insights into the media's role in framing environmental issues and responding to seasonal events. [Cameroon News Agency](#)



### **3.1.3 Ideation in CNA's Climate Change Coverage**

Concerning the framing of climate change impacts, the article contains environmental hazards. It emphasizes the increased risk of flooding and landslides in Douala due to early rains; highlighting the direct environmental threats posed by climate change. We have health and infrastructure concerns manifested as it addresses the potential for increased diseases such as malaria, cholera, and respiratory infections, as well as the structural vulnerability of homes and roads to heavy rains. This illustrates the broader societal impacts of climate change. Policy and public response is implied in the government action as the report includes statements from local authorities urging residents to take preventive measures and highlighting the need for improved drainage infrastructure, reflecting governmental responsibility in climate change mitigation. Advice to residents is given to avoid settling in high-risk areas and to maintain structurally sound homes indicates an emphasis on community-level adaptation strategies.

On the periodicity of coverage, we noticed event-driven reporting in the timely warnings. The article was published in early April, aligning with the onset of the rainy season in Cameroon, when the likelihood of flooding and landslides increases, demonstrating CNA's responsiveness to seasonal climate risks. Reference to past events establish the historical context as seen in the mention of previous flood incidents in the Bepanda neighbourhood provides a historical context that underscores the recurring nature of climate-related disasters in the region. [Cameroon News Agency](https://cameroonnewsagency.com/?s=disaster)

These elements from the CNA article can be used to illustrate the media's role in framing climate change issues and responding to seasonal events, contributing to the understanding of ideation and periodicity in climate change coverage in Cameroon.

<https://cameroonnewsagency.com/?s=disaster>

### **3.1.4 Visualizations and Examples**

To illustrate these findings, consider the following visual aids:



<https://cameroonnewsagency.com/?s=disaster>



Based on the comprehensive list of articles retrieved from the Cameroon News Agency (CNA) concerning disasters in Cameroon, here's an updated analysis for the **Ideation and Periodicity** section of your study on climate change and environmental hazards in Cameroon online newspapers from 2015 to 2025:



### 3.1.5 Thematic Ideation in Cameroon News Agency Online

We noted articles on infrastructure and climate justice justified in dam impacts: like the September 2023 story on Lom Panga and Nachtigal dams highlighting forest flooding, polluted water, community health and livelihoods threatened, and local agroecology as adaptation. [cameroonnewsagency.com](https://cameroonnewsagency.com).

Heat extremes and hot Weather alerts featured the heatwaves in January 2024: CNA covered a NOCC warning—driest season in decades, temperatures reaching 35–37 °C, risks to agriculture, health and rising conflict over scarce resources. [thenewcameroon.cm](https://thenewcameroon.cm).

During capacity-building and journalism we found aN April 2025 training session report on journalists' workshop in Yaoundé to strengthen climate science literacy, facilitate better reporting on floods, droughts, agriculture, water and biodiversity issues [theguardianpostcameroon.com](https://theguardianpostcameroon.com).

#### 2. Periodicity & Coverage Patterns

Concerning event-driven and reactive, CNA coverage is ad hoc, triggered by major climate events or institutional actions. For instance September 2023 (dam-related environmental justice),

January 2024 (heatwave bulletin) and April 2025 (journalist training).

Roughly 1 significant environment/climate story is presented per year, with no fixed schedule and coverage aligns with alerts, infrastructure projects, or sectoral interventions. Stories span multiple regions (East region dams, national heatwave, Yaoundé-based training), indicating a national scope.

**Table 1 Summary on Ideation and Periodicity in CNA**

Theme	Coverage Timing	Type of Coverage
Dam projects & climate justice	Sep 2023	Community voices, environmental impacts
Heatwave alert	Jan 2024	Scientific bulletin & advisories
Journalist training initiative	Apr 2025	Capacity-building & science communication

Source : Personal Computation

**Ideation:** CNA focuses on environmental hazards tied to major infrastructure projects, acute climatic events, and enhancing media reporting capacity.

**Periodicity:** Coverage is sporadic and event-triggered, roughly once annually, with no thematic continuity.

**Opportunities:** CNA could benefit from proactive coverage—like tracking seasonal forecasts, following up on dam projects' impact, or establishing an environmental reporting beat.

### 3.2. Presentation and Analysis of Ideation and Periodicity in Cameroon Tribune

Between 2020 and mid-2025, *Cameroon Tribune* has shown a marked increase in both the ideation (depth) and periodicity (frequency/timing) of its coverage on climate change and environmental hazards. The following patterns unfold:

#### 3.2.1 Periodicity & Timing: Annual Peaks Aligned with Events

Most of the articles appeared in the rainy-season hazards (June–September). The coverage aligns with frequent floods and landslides, notably the August 2020 floods in Douala, Lime, Bafoussam and the Far North region. .

- Mid-year climate workshops (June–July):

- June 2022: an in-depth interview on the role of forests in combating climate change .
- July 2024: workshop coverage on building women’s resilience to climate change .
- Q4 (October–November): adaptation-focused events, such as the October 2023 Cameroon workshop on inter-sectoral adaptation strategies .
- April 2024: agricultural capacity-building in Douala, tied to climate resilience . These regular spikes—centered around flooding seasons, institutional workshops, and awareness events—reflect a seasonal editorial strategy.
- 2. Ideation: Depth of Coverage & Framing
- Over time, coverage has evolved from surface-level reporting to multidimensional framing:
- 2020: Primarily hazard reports—e.g., floods in Douala, official safety alerts .
- 2022: Emergence of structured discourse—e.g., WWF interviews highlighting the role of forests ; calls for national climate legislation in Parliament .
- 2023: Focus shifted to integration—sector-cross adaptation strategies involving ministries, agriculture, and urban planning .
- 2024: Anchor on vulnerable groups and local strategies—workshops on women’s resilience , digital solutions for farmers .
- Institutional emphasis: consistent coverage of policy platforms, such as parliamentary recommendations and involvement of bodies like NOCC.

**Table 2. Summary of Trend Analysis**

Year	Coverage Frequency	Ideational Depth
2020	Ideational Depth	Ideational Depth
2021-2022	Ideational Depth	Ideational Depth
2023	Sectoral adaptation	Comprehensive, integrated approach (Oct 2023)
2024	Community resilience	Women’s empowerment, farmer tools (Apr–Jul 2024)

2025	Institutional follow-up	Parliament-related follow-up, adaptation finance
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Between 2020 and mid-2025, Cameroon Tribune has shown a marked increase in both the ideation (depth) and periodicity (frequency/timing) of its coverage on climate change and environmental hazards. On a thematic Ideation we have publications linked to policy and institutional developments and this includes government-led climate initiatives, like the establishment of a national climate plan and the Biennial Transparency Report in April 2025 and December 2024 respectively. Earlier efforts (2018) on greenhouse gas inventories and national observatory setup also featured .

We also have seasonal phenomena and hazards reported through on weather extremes, e.g., April 2024's heatwave in Yaoundé and a 2019 article noted recurring heavy rainfall, floods, and landslides across regions including Bafoussam with a 2020 report on the Douala floods.

Adaptation and sector-specific approaches are noted in the October 2023 coverage of cross-sector adaptation strategies , and in the April 2024 highlighted digital climate advisory services for farmers in Douala.

Conservation and forestry is manifested in June 2022 coverage of TRIDOM project emphasizing forests as carbon sinks across Cameroon, Gabon, and Congo.

On periodicity and timing we find some irregular but event-driven peaks of publication notably:

Rainy-season hazards (~June–September) in which coverage aligns with frequent floods and landslides, notably the August 2020 floods in Douala.

**Table 3 : Summary of Ideation and Periodicity in Cameroon Tribune 2020-2025**

Theme	Frequency & Timing	Nature of Coverage
Policy & Institutional	Dec 2024, Apr 2025	Government plans, national strategies
Weather Extremes	April 2024 (heat), Nov 2019 (rain),	Seasonal impact reports

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Frequency &amp; Timing</b>	<b>Nature of Coverage</b>
	Aug 2020 (floods)	
Adaptation Initiatives	Oct 2023, Apr 2024	Sectoral adaptation (agriculture, digital)
Conservation (TRIDOM)	Jun 2022	Biodiversity & forestry

Source: Personal Computation

Mid-year climate workshops (June–July) in which there is an in-depth interview on the role of forests in combating climate change and a workshop coverage on building women’s resilience to climate change. Between October–November, adaptation-focused events, such as the October 2023 Cameroon workshop on inter-sectoral adaptation strategies are presented and in April 2024 we find an agricultural capacity-building in Douala, tied to climate resilience. These regular spikes—centered around flooding seasons, institutional workshops, and awareness events—reflect a seasonal editorial strategy.

There's no strict periodic schedule; instead, articles appear tied to events such as disasters (floods, heatwaves), institutional actions, or international commitments.

Notable clusters are in April–June each year (2019, 2022, 2024, 2025), which often aligned with climate-related conferences, seasonal shifts, or policy rollouts.

A surge linked to government activity is noted in institutional or policy items such as Biennial reports (Dec 2024), climate planning (Apr 2025)—triggered spikes in coverage and seasonal extremes (heatwaves, floods) leading to thematic reports reflecting immediate public concern.

The overall frequency is found in 1–3 in-depth environmental/climate pieces per year. Many are subscriber-only, hinting at more limited public reach and CT’s overall environmental coverage appears moderate: not systematic, but responsive to high-impact triggers.

### **3.2.2. Ideation: Depth of Coverage & Framing**

Over time, coverage has evolved from surface-level reporting to multidimensional framing:

2020: Primarily hazard reports—e.g., floods in Douala, official safety alerts .

2022: Emergence of structured discourse—e.g., WWF interviews highlighting the role of forests ; calls for national climate legislation in Parliament .

2023: Focus shifted to integration—sector-cross adaptation strategies involving ministries, agriculture, and urban planning .

2024: Anchor on vulnerable groups and local strategies—workshops on women’s resilience , digital solutions for farmers .

Ideation spans institutional planning, seasonal hazards, adaptation strategies, and conservation.

Periodicity is irregular, event-responsive, with concentrations around April–June and December during policy launches.

Gaps exist: coverage is limited, subscriber-focused, and often reactive rather than proactive.

Potential: regular feature series, deeper local hazard reporting (e.g., landslides in Bafoussam), and continued investment in adaptation storytelling could enhance public engagement.

### **3.3 A Comparative Study of Ideation and Periodicity in Online Newspaper Coverage of Climate Change and Environmental Hazards in Cameroon Tribune and Cameroon News Agency (2020–2025)**

Climate change reporting in state-aligned media is critical to public awareness, policy accountability, and grassroots resilience. This study compares two prominent Cameroonian online platforms—Cameroon Tribune (CT) and the Cameroon News Agency (CNA)—focusing on the ideation (dominant themes) and periodicity (timing/frequency) of their climate-related content from 2020 to 2025.

**Table 4. Comparison of Ideation (Dominant Themes)**

<b>Thematic Area</b>	<b>Cameroon Tribune (CT)</b>	<b>Cameroon News Agency (CNA)</b>
Policy & Institutional Action	Strong emphasis on government-led initiatives, national strategies, transparency reports	Minimal policy-level coverage; focus leans toward local realities and stakeholder training
Climate Events & Hazards	Covers floods, landslides, heatwaves,	Covers major heatwaves and extreme weather

<b>Thematic Area</b>	<b>Cameroon Tribune (CT)</b>	<b>Cameroon News Agency (CNA)</b>
	typically when linked to seasonal or national alerts	when urgent warnings are issued
Adaptation & Sectoral Response	Agriculture, forestry, TRIDOM conservation, digital climate advisories	Community-level adaptation, impacts of dams, and agroecological responses
Environmental Justice	Less prominent; state-aligned tone prioritizes achievements over critiques	Strong focus on dam-related environmental and livelihood impacts (Lom Panga, Nachtigal)
Capacity-Building & Media	Rarely covered	Explicit reporting on journalist training and climate literacy initiatives

**Table 5. Comparison of Periodicity (Frequency & Distribution)**

<b>Metric</b>	<b>Cameroon Tribune (CT)</b>	<b>Cameroon News Agency (CNA)</b>
Reporting Frequency	Moderate; 1–3 reports per year on climate/environment	Sparse; 1–2 key reports per year
Temporal Peaks	April–June and December (policy/reporting seasons)	January (heat warnings), April (training), September (dam)
Trigger Points	Government announcements, seasonal hazards, int'l events	Climate emergencies, grassroots issues, civil society initiatives
Pattern Type	Institutional/event-driven, semi-periodic	Crisis-driven and issue-focused, non-periodic

Comparative Insights show similarities in that both cover climate hazards when tied to urgent weather or ecological events, both lack consistent, dedicated environment beats or sections and coverage is reactive, rarely analytical or investigative. The major differences are presented in table 6 below:

**Table 6. Differences**

Category	CT	CAN
Editorial Orientation	State-centric, developmental, institution-focused	Grassroots-facing, semi-critical, people-centered
Depth of Climate Literacy	More formal tone, with reliance on government sources	Incorporates scientific warnings, training events
Regional Diversity	National focus, minimal community detail	Broader regional scope (East, Center, grassroots voices)
Justice & Advocacy Angles	Marginalized	Evident in coverage of hydropower and displacement

The study reveals that Cameroon Tribune plays a role in amplifying national policy narratives and official frameworks, with occasional seasonal hazard updates. In contrast, the Cameroon News Agency provides a more grassroots-oriented perspective, addressing environmental justice, community struggles, and media empowerment.

While both outlets remain largely reactive and event-dependent in their coverage, CNA demonstrates slightly greater initiative in covering climate justice and training, whereas CT maintains a policy-institutional frame. To improve climate communication, both media could develop consistent environmental desks, prioritize investigative follow-ups, and establish climate issue calendars.

### 3.4 Comparison of Discursive Practice

Cameroon Tribune (CT) employed lexical choices and framing referring most to the lexicon of *developmentalism* and *state authority*: terms like “*flagship initiative*”, “*national strategy*”, and “*government commitment*” are prominent. Nominalization is noted

in abstract nouns like “*mitigation*”, “*adaptation*”, and “*resilience*” are used, depersonalizing local agency with the use of passive constructions (e.g., “measures were taken...”) minimizes human agency or assigns it exclusively to state actors.

On thematic ideation, emphasis is on *policy*, *official reports*, *national action plans*, and *international obligations* (e.g., Biennial Transparency Report), absence of grassroots voices, lived experiences, or local community challenges and finally nature is framed as *resource* and *victim*, often without agency.

Cameroon News Agency (CNA) on the other hand employs lexical choices and Framing in which the language is more conversational and accessible, using terms such as “*struggles*”, “*effects on communities*”, and “*polluted drinking water*”. Active voice and human agents are noted in “villagers report dying crops”, “NOCC warned of excessive heat” and it incorporates quotations, giving voice to citizens, experts, and NGOs.

Concerning thematic Ideation, focus is on community impact, environmental justice, infrastructure-driven hazards (e.g., Lom Panga and Nachtigal dams) and reports on journalist capacity building and media-literacy initiatives.

**Table 7. Comparison of Discursive Practice**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Cameroon Tribune (CT)</b>	<b>Cameroon News Agency (CNA)</b>
Production Context	Government-owned, official narratives	Semi-autonomous, grassroots stories & alerts
Periodicity	Clustered around official events (e.g., April-June, December)	Ad hoc, event-triggered (e.g., heatwaves, community issues)
Agenda-setting Logic	Top-down (policy first, hazard later)	Bottom-up (issue/hazard first, then contextualization)
Audience Assumptions	National/institutional stakeholders	General public, vulnerable populations

Cameroon Tribune reflects a state-centric developmental ideology, promoting narratives of control, stability, and responsibility through the government lens. The absence of dissent or localized conflict signals a discursively sanitized environment.

Cameroon News Agency, though still operating within state proximity, shows moments of counter-discourse, especially in coverage of dams, livelihood destruction, and press freedom in climate reporting. This points to an emergent environmental justice discourse, albeit inconsistently applied.

The discourse on climate change and environmental hazards in Cameroon's online state-aligned media reveals divergent ideational structures and power relations:

- Cameroon Tribune constructs a narrative of institutional resilience, where climate threats are mitigated by state machinery, and citizen agency is backgrounded.
- Cameroon News Agency introduces elements of eco-justice, local adaptation, and community voice, creating a more inclusive discursive space, though with less regularity.

While both are reactive and lack systemic environmental journalism, CNA's language is comparatively more human-centered and justice-oriented, offering a nascent platform for alternative climate discourse.

#### **4. Summary and Findings**

This study explored the discourse surrounding climate change and environmental hazards in Cameroon's online newspapers over the past decade (2015-2025), using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The analysis focused on the **ideation** and **periodicity** of media coverage, with attention to how climate-related issues are framed and how the frequency of coverage fluctuates over time. The following summarizes the key findings:

##### **4.1. Frequency and Periodicity of Coverage**

- **Increased Frequency:** There was a noticeable increase in the number of articles on climate change and environmental hazards from 2015 onwards, particularly during significant events such as the COP21 conference (2015) and the aftermath of major natural disasters (e.g., the 2020 floods). Articles were also more frequent when the government implemented new environmental policies or during global climate talks like COP26.
- **Fluctuating Peaks:** Peaks in coverage occurred in response to significant environmental disasters, such as flooding, droughts, and deforestation. The media also

increased coverage around the time of international summits, reflecting global climate change discussions.

- **Seasonal Patterns:** Media coverage was higher in the rainy season, which corresponds with the peak of environmental hazards in the country (flooding, landslides, etc.), suggesting that coverage is linked to actual, observable events in the environment.

#### **4.2. Ideation and Framing of Climate Change**

- **Framing as a Crisis:** A significant portion of the discourse framed climate change primarily as an environmental crisis, focusing on the immediate dangers posed by environmental hazards such as flooding, drought, and deforestation. The language used often depicted these issues as urgent and destructive, creating a sense of crisis.
- **Economic Framing:** There was also a notable presence of discourse linking climate change to economic opportunities, such as green jobs, sustainable development, and eco-tourism. This frame was prominent in articles discussing policy responses, international cooperation, and the potential for Cameroon to build a green economy.
- **Health and Livelihood Concerns:** A smaller but important subset of articles focused on the health impacts of climate change, particularly in relation to waterborne diseases and air pollution. These articles tended to link environmental hazards directly to public health and livelihood security, emphasizing the human cost of climate inaction.
- **Human Responsibility and Agency:** Most articles placed significant responsibility on both the government and international organizations to address environmental issues. There was also a frequent call for the public to become more involved in climate action, often highlighting the role of grassroots movements and local communities in environmental advocacy.

#### **4.3. Ideological Trends and Discursive Strategies**

- **Shift Toward Urgency:** Over the years, there was a shift towards more urgent language, particularly post-2020, when the frequency of environmental disasters increased. Articles became more focused on immediate action, and there was a clear rise in the use of alarming language (e.g., “climate emergency,” “crisis,” “disaster”).
- **Discursive Techniques:** Common discursive strategies included **nominalization** (e.g., “The impact of deforestation” rather than “Deforestation is impacting...”), which depersonalized the responsibility for environmental damage. There was also a frequent use of **passivization**, which obscured agency and responsibility for environmental degradation.
- **Call for Action:** The media increasingly used **repetition** of phrases like “act now” or “sustainability for the future” to stress the urgency of climate action. Articles often carried a sense of moral duty, urging both governmental and public participation in addressing the climate crisis.

#### **4.4. Hotspots of Coverage and Regional Focus**

- **Regional Focus:** The coverage was heavily concentrated on regions in Cameroon most affected by environmental hazards, such as the coastal areas prone to flooding, the Adamawa region hit by droughts, and the Eastern region, which faces significant deforestation. This aligns with the direct impact of climate change on these areas and the media’s focus on local vulnerabilities.
- **Urban vs. Rural Narratives:** Coverage of climate change in urban areas often focused on policy, international cooperation, and the role of the government. In contrast, rural coverage emphasized the direct impacts on livelihoods, such as agriculture and water scarcity, reflecting a grassroots concern with the tangible consequences of climate hazards.

#### **4.5. Media's Role in Shaping Public Discourse**

- **Awareness and Advocacy:** Media coverage has played a dual role in both raising awareness about the impacts of climate change and environmental hazards and in advocating for more policy action. However, while coverage is frequent, the media has yet to move from merely highlighting problems to providing concrete solutions or framing actionable steps for citizens and policymakers alike.
- **Public Engagement:** There was a clear pattern of media trying to engage the public through calls for action, but the coverage sometimes lacked the depth needed to empower individuals with the knowledge or tools to make a significant impact on the environment. The media's role could be further strengthened through more in-depth reporting and practical guidance on climate adaptation and mitigation.

## **5. Conclusion**

The media's coverage of climate change and environmental hazards in Cameroon between 2015 and 2025 reflects both global and local discourses, with fluctuating coverage based on environmental events and political actions. There is a strong ideological framing of climate change as an urgent crisis, yet also as an opportunity for sustainable economic growth. The media plays a critical role in shaping public discourse, although it may need to evolve further in its capacity to drive actionable change and empower the population.

This study highlights the importance of continued monitoring of media coverage to better understand how it influences public perceptions and actions on climate change in Cameroon. Future research could explore how these discourses influence public policy and grassroots environmental movements, and how the media can play a more proactive role in promoting climate action. Through discourse analysis we examine not just *what* is said but *how* it is said, the *contexts* in which messages are framed, and the *ideological underpinnings* of media language. In this comparative study, the ideation (themes, frames, and narrative forms) and periodicity (timing and frequency of coverage) of

Cameroon Tribune (CT) and Cameroon News Agency (CNA) reporting on climate change and environmental hazards between 2020 and 2025 have been explored. The study was grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially Norman Fairclough's (1995) tripartite model and we did a textual & ideational analysis of the two newspapers.

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**Interrogating The Dynamics Of Eco-Cracy In Imbole Mbue's  
*How Beautiful We Were* And Helon Habila's *Oil On Water*.**

Dr. Fongong Rapheal Fonsi

**Abstract**

The escalating environmental crises in contemporary society demand urgent attention to the dynamics of human-environment relationships and governance systems. This study interrogates the concept of eco-cracy—ecology-based governance and its failures as depicted in Imbolo Mbue’s *How Beautiful We Were* and Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*. These novels underscore the unbalanced eco-cratic relationships between humankind and nature, highlighting how this imbalance exacerbates environmental hazards and socio-ecological risks. Drawing on ecocriticism and geocriticism as theoretical frameworks, this research explores the complexities of human-nature interactions, the causes of ecological imbalance, and the sustainability of grassroots strategies employed to address environmental concerns. Through a comparative literary analysis, the study identifies systemic failures in ecocratic governance that prioritize resource extraction over ecological preservation, leading to widespread environmental degradation and marginalization of affected communities. The findings reveal that these failures not only perpetuate environmental hazards but also deepen socio-economic inequalities. Both novels illustrate the resilience of local populations who resist ecological exploitation while critiquing the complicity of state and corporate actors. This research contributes to academic discourse by bridging literary studies with environmental justice and governance scholarship, offering insights into the socio-political dimensions of ecological crises. Its socioeconomic impact lies in advocating for inclusive policies that prioritize sustainability and equitable resource management. The study calls for interdisciplinary collaboration to address eco-cratic failures and urges policymakers to adopt transformative approaches that integrate ecological balance with social equity.

**Keywords:** Eco-cracy, Environmental Justice, Ecocriticism, Geocriticism, Socio-Ecological Risks, Sustainability.

**“...unless the rightless thing receives it right, we cannot see it as anything but a thing for the use of us” Christopher Stone**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The environment and its components, just like humankind, constitute a set of invaluable entities deserving of a governance system that recognizes and protects its right to existence. Over

the years, environmental researchers and critics such as: Friedrich Nietzsche, David R. Boyd, Frank Fischer, have articulated the need for a governance system that considers the inevitability of a healthy environment as a basic right for all, and the recognition and preservation of the right to existence for every element of the environment. In fact, Friedrich Nietzsche (2019) on his part, underscores an urgent need for an interdependent and sustainable approach in the environment-human relationship as a palpable strategy towards a sustainable existence.

In this worldview, the earth, and its resources are seen primarily, if not exclusively, as a collection of natural resources put at the disposal of man for exploitation. As a result of this, some of these environmental resources such as: waterbodies, forest and mangroves, land and mountains, which contribute a great deal to the existence of both humankind and other elements of nature, have for the past decades suffered ecological hegemony. This to some extent, accounts for the growing complexities and the unbalanced ecocratic dynamics in the human-environment interrelationships that in turn breed varied environmental hazards in our contemporary society. This increasing ecologically hegemonic tendency has contributed to the unbalanced ecocracy that now leaves the environment in an inferiorized position where it is unsustainably exploited or abused. The redressing of this ecocratic failures and the escalating complexities plaguing the environment-human relationship requires a governance system at the center of which is enshrined, the practice of ecocracy, environmental-based democracy wherein environmental rights are duly observed by humankind and the other elements of the environment. Carina Lundmark (1985) maintains that humankind will continue to dominate nature because humans are above, superior to or outside the rest of nature (Qt in Green Democracy, 43) this hegemonic ideology accounts for the continuous subjugation of the environment by man and the subsequent exploitation and abuse of the environmental resources that results to untold environmental hazards evident in our contemporary societies.

Environmental research has for the past decades gained grounds within the academia as environmental activists, researchers, and critics such as: Olusoya Olamiran, Ken Saro Wiwa, Olubisi Friday, Olughu Michael, Fondo Blossom, etc have argued for the need for

ecocentricism and a sustainable exploitation of the environment by humankind, as opposed to the growing anthropocentric and the ecologically hegemonic tendency exercised by humankind which breeds varied environmental crises and other complexities in the contemporary society. However, despite this growing interest in environmental scholarship, motivated by the need to foster a healthy and a balanced ecocratic governance system where the right to every component of the environment is observed, the dynamics of ecocratic governance systems wherein the rights to the different components of the environment are recognized and respected, is yet to receive adequate attention. The focus of this paper is therefore; to examine the effects of ecocratic imbalanced governance system in the environment-human relationship, identifying the grassroots strategies adopted to address the environmental hazards brought about by this ecocratic imbalance. This study seeks to answer the following questions: What are some of the causes of ecocratic imbalance as depicted in the texts under study? How does the failure of ecocratic governance system contribute to the increasing environmental hazards in our society as evident in the texts? and what sustainable grassroots strategies are adopted to address their environmental concerns. Existing evidence reveals that, ecocentric and ecocratic practices unlike the anthropocentric and the glaring ecologically hegemonic tendency that punctuate the enviro-human interrelationship, will provide for a healthier environment for all elements of the biosphere.

### **1. Conceptualization and Evolution of Ecocracy**

Scholarly research relating to the concept of ecocracy or environmental-based democracy began to gain steam as far back as the 1970s, an era which also marked the rise of modern environmental movements (Markus Fischer, 2017, 91). However, other scholarship on environmental and political theories and the environment-democracy nexus emerged in the 1980s such as: Ecological Rationality (John Dryzek, 1987), Green/environmental Political theory, (John Barry, 1998, Robyn Eckersley, 1992), Deliberative Democracy and the Environment (Adolf Gundersen, 1995) Ecological Democracy (Roy Morrison, 1995), and the first monograph on environmental democracy (Michael Mason, 1999) However, (Eckersley, 2019) situates this era within the post-war ideology of democracy among researchers and critics whose

ideology centered on deliberative democracy as a way to foster a cohesive and sustainable interrelationship between the different components of the environment. As from the year 2000, research works on the concept of ecoracy, focused on reconciling between liberalism and sustainability within the framework of environmental democracy. However, scholars continued to explore the nexus between environmental preservation and deliberative democracy with the passage of time (Baber and Bartlett, 2005; Smith 2003) and research on environmental citizenship and the green state gained grounds as postulated by Dobson (2003) and Eckersley (2004) respectively.

Recent scholarship on the evolution of ecological democracy prescribes for a governance system that is centralized enough to valorize environmental citizenship and the grassroots social movements as antidote to the escalating environmental crises plaguing our contemporary society (Timothy Mitchell, 2006). Besides these, researchers such as: (Goodin, 1992; Jasanoff, 1996) stressed on the difficulty in resolving the complexities between environmental science and the democratic process. Research works on environmental/ecological democracy has emerged more vibrantly with the rise of environmental movements and Green Political Movements (Dryzek, Schlosberg, 2003). It is only recently that democratic practices and possibilities within global environmental politics have received an in-depth study (Bernstein, 2001)

Research on ecological/ environmental democracy have been seen as part of a larger collection of research that connects environmental and democratic values theoretically and empirically, including work on, environmental justice, transparency, accountability and legitimacy in environmental governance (Schlosberg, Craven, & Matthews, 2016)

Recently, the emerging scholarship on the environment-based democracy, is marked by new coined variants of democracies such as: carbon democracy (Timothy Mitchell, 2011) and energy democracy (Kacper Szulecki, 2018). The former argues that the rise of modern democracies is interwoven with the development of fossil fuel industries, while the latter explores pathways to democratizing energy production and consumption. These concepts, besides the need to sustainably exploit these resources

to foster a healthy environment for all the components of nature, denote an inclusive approach of the government and communities in the production, distribution and subsequent consumption of energy resources.

This growing ideology on energy democracy has inspired some creative literary writers whom, through their creative works have expressed the unbalanced ecocratic dynamics in the environment-human interrelationship exemplified in the way energy resources are exploited, abusing the environment in the process. Helon Habila in *Oil on Water*, presents the activities of the petroleum exploitation companies in Irikefe, a metaphorical representation of our contemporary societies plagued by diverse environmental hazards. Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* is set in a Fictional African village of Kosawa in which the population rise against the continuous exploitation of the energy resources by Pexton, an American petroleum exploitation company.

This evolution in environmental scholarship has invited critics across the globe some of whom include: Florence O. Orabueze (2015), Nwilo, Peter C. and Olesugun Badejo (2020), Nyemah Robert (2011), Ocholi Victor Idakwo (2019), Nwanyanwu et al. (2019) who have all articulated the impact of the exploitation and poor management of energy resources on the environment and the grassroot population thereby attesting to the growing complexities in the enviro-human relationship as a result of failures of ecocratic governance system.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study has adopted ecocriticism as an umbrella theory used in the interpretation and analysis of this research work. However, geo-criticism, has been used alongside ecocriticism to examine, interpret and analyze the data under study. Ecocriticism as a movement, was born out of a desire to better a suffering environment, and to improve on the relationship that exists between humankind and the environment. This idea, or movement, was not accomplished through science, but through writing and literary work. Pippa Marland refers to ecocriticism as an umbrella term which stands for "a range of critical approaches that explore the representation in literature (and other cultural forms) of the relationship between the human and the non-human, largely from the perspective of anxieties around

humanity's destructive impact of the biosphere." (Ecocriticism, 150).

The term ecocriticism as revealed in *Ecocriticism Reader*, was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay titled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." By ecocriticism, Rueckert means "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of Literature" (10). According to this critic, ecocriticism is a theory that is used to examine the position or presentation of ecology and ecological concepts in literary studies. Therefore, by this theory, the relationship between humankind and nature can be examined in the work of literature. Some of the critics of ecocriticism include: Cheryl Glotfelty, Peter Barry, Stephanie Sarver, Harold Fromm, William Rueckert, Donald Worster, White Lynn just to name a few. Some of the tenets of ecocriticism used in the interpretation and analysis of this paper include: the nexus between Literature and the environment, the interrelationship of all living things, nature and landscape, and anthropocentrism.

Geo-criticism is a critical tool propounded by Bertrand Westphal in his work titled *La Geocritique: Reel, Fiction, Espace* translated by Robert Tally in 2011 as *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Geocriticism as a critical tool, is centered on the study of the geographical features in the study of literature. Westphal argues for the adoption of a "geo-centered" or "geocentric" approach to literature that has much in common with the ecological/environmental preoccupations of ecocriticism. Geo-criticism is a strand of ecocriticism which is concerned with examining the relationship between place, space, landscape, and nature to the study of literature. The application of this critical tool in the analysis of this paper is relevant as literature itself from its geographical settings, through its subject matter, is concerned with issues of people's experiences within fictional and non-fictional spaces and places.

Some of the proponents of this critical tool include: Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Derek Gregory, Edward Soja. According to Westphal, geo-criticism emphasizes the importance of thinking in terms of borderlands, interstitial zones, and hybrid identities,

those spaces that occupy the margins between established domains and call into question the legitimacy of established borders. Simply put, geo-criticism is a critical tool founded by Bertrand Westphal as a component of ecocriticism which examines the geo-literary aspects of the works of arts.

In fact, Westphal summarizes the geo-literary relationship of geo-criticism when he maintains that, geo-critical study is done by asking geographical questions of literary texts and asking literary questions of geographical representations. Therefore, geo-criticism brings together in a productive way, the social sciences and the humanities. The application of geocriticism in this paper, will use features like places, spaces, nature, landscape to examine the transformations that have transpired in the communities of the texts as a result of the activities of the unbalanced environmental-based governance system in the environment-human relationship. Therefore, the analysis of this work will be guided by the tenets of ecocriticism and geo-criticism such as: places, spaces, nature, landscape, the nexus between Literature and the environment, the interrelationship of all living things, nature and landscape, and anthropocentrism.

#### **4. Governance System and Cultural Disregard: A Cause of Ecological Imbalance**

The texts under study underscore how bad governance, characterized by greed and corruption contribute significantly to the ecological imbalance in the two fictional communities of Irikefe in *Oil on Water* and Kosawa in *How Beautiful We Were*. These novels illustrate how, as a result of corruption the local and national government tend to prioritize personal gain over the welfare of the indigenous population and their environmental resources. The texts paint a picture of two communities in which the components of the environment such as water/rivers, lands, forest and mangroves suffer ecological hegemony from the officials of some Multinational Corporations such as Pexton in Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* and Shell, Safrap in *Habila's Oil on Water*. Imbolo Mbue articulates a lack of environment-based democracy when the Kosawa population laments over the fact their natural resources together with the population are sold to Pexton by their home government "on a date we will never know, at a meeting where none of us was present, our government had given us to Pexton. Handed, on a sheet of paper, our land and waters to them." (11) This ecological imbalance governance

system accounts for the negligence of the government of these communities to put in place policies that protect the environment and the population.

Helon Habila equally re-iterates the danger of this growing anthropocentric and egocentric manifestation of the government towards the environment and the indigenous population as seen in *Habila's Oil on Water*.

so, when people started dying, I took blood samples and recorded the toxins in them, and this time I sent my results to the government. They thanked me and dumped the results in some filing cabinet, more people died and I sent my results to NGOs and international organizations, which published them in international journals and urged the government to do something about the flares, but nothing happened. More people fell sick, a lot died. (93)

It's a satire that the government and international organizations which are supposed to be more concerned about the wellbeing of the people viz a viz their environment, give a deaf ear to the unspeakable effects of pollution on the citizens. These texts demonstrate that there is need for a change in governance system to embrace environment-based democracy whereby, the right to a healthy and safe environment is considered a basic right for all.

In a book titled *Ken Saro Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist*, Rob Nixon underscores the growing ecological imbalance and the escalating effects on the indigenous population who lament the aftermath of the ecocratic failures on their environmental resources and community at large.

An ocean of crude oil moving swiftly like a great river in flood, successfully swallowing up anything that comes its way. Cassava farms, yams, palms, streams, and animals for miles on end. There is no pipe borne water and yet the streams, the only source of drinking water, are coated with oil. You cannot collect a bucket of rain water

for the roofs, trees and grass are all covered with oil...men and women forced by hunger have to dive deep in oil to uproot already rotten yams and casava. (112)

The absence of ecocratic governance system whereby the different elements of the environment such as the rivers, the trees, mountains, land, animals etc are possess some citizenship right breeds diverse effects and expose the entire community to ecological intrusion that will eventual birth varied ecological hazards that are evident in our contemporary society.

Rights are sometimes viewed as irredeemably anthropocentric but democratising environmental politics could also involve the extension of rights to non-humans. However (Eckersley,2004) argues that environmental rights should not be seen in isolation from other human rights. Therefore, the ongoing escalating environmental hazards such as: drought, flood, and pollution need urgent and inclusive ecocratic governance that takes into considering the cultural significance of these environmental components in addressing the environmental challenges. This will result in an eco-friendly and environmentally healthier community wherein environmental citizenship and ecological consciousness are observed.

Just as ecological imbalance and ecocratic failure breed environmental exploitation and escalating death rate in Irikefe, so is the pollution of rivers and air by the Pexton Officials in Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* results in the death of indigenous population in Kosawa. This dead toll comes after the natural resources have been extracted by the officials of foreign multinationals with the permission of the local government and the chiefs, thereby polluting the air and water and leaving the population in a desperate situation. This calls for a governance system whereby the right to environmental protection and for a healthy relationship between humankind and the environment is reinforced. The lack of this governance system and policies that foster a community where eco-friendliness and ecocracy are prioritized exposes the environment to ecological hegemony whose effects, fuel abject poverty, violence, and high death rate as seen in Mbue's text:

Our parents begged the supervisors to take some water from the well, examine it, and tell them if it was the cause of the death...they told our parents that the water was fine, but for the sake of caution it would be best if they boiled it for thirty minutes before giving it to their children...Or perhaps Kosawa had wronged the Spirit? Perhaps our parents needed to atone the Spirit for one thing or another so their children might be spared? Our medium, Jakani, spoke to the ancestors and assured our parents that there was no need for atonement, their children's suffering was of this world, not from the spirit world, it was from something poisonous in our village which is entering their stomach. (34)

The lack of a system that upholds ecocentricism, and environmental citizenship as opposed to anthropocentric and ecologically hegemonic manifestations has not only birthed general ecological despair, but has led to increased death toll and general chaos in our contemporary communities. The medical laboratory test is contradicted by the message from the spirit world as conveyed by the Jakani, the medium. This sharp contrast further questions the authenticity of the Eurocentric medical judgements and those who should have supposedly be in charge of enacting laws and reinforcing inclusive policies that prioritize a balanced ecocratic governance.

Edokpayi Justina (2019) sheds light on the above postulation when she contends that, the pollution suffered by a people as a result of the exploitation of their natural resources by foreigners, is the heights of injustice meted on them. This calls for ecocratic consciousness on the part of the government to put in place policy that preserves the environment and protects the population from the adverse effects of environmental exploitation. Corruption and bad governance are seen as some of the causes of the ecological imbalance that characterize and the varied environmental hazards that plague our society today.

Corruption and bad governance are responsible for all the problems in the Niger delta. Only the

privileged few in the country enjoy the wealth accruing from petroleum, to the detriment of the Niger Deltans, who have nothing to show for their losses from oil pollutions. This is the height of injustice done to a people, and it is the cause of the Niger delta crises. It has forced the Deltan youths into a lot of criminal practices, violence and protests, which have culminated in militancy, a security risk in the Niger delta. (3)

This ecocratic failure fueled by bad governance has contributed to these escalating contemporary ecological crises in our communities. Considering the symbiotic relationship between humankind and the environment, the manifestation of these environmental injustices, leave the population with the adverse effects which breeds violence, poverty, and increasing rate of crimewaves in the society. Thus, the introduction of environment-based democracy or a governance system that recognizes and upholds a balanced interrelationship between humankind and the other components of nature will result in a peaceful and ecofriendly community in which the different elements of the environment cohabit.

One of the causes of ecocratic failure and ecological imbalance is the increasing rate of cultural denigration in our present-day societies. The sensitively symbiotic relationship between the environment and the people's culture is gradually losing grip of its sanctity in that, some of the elements of the environment such as: trees, rivers, mountains, and land, which not only serve as media of communication between the people and their gods, but also as their abodes the gods now suffers ecological hegemony. This cultural belief is an ideology which is enshrined in the culture of the African people as articulated by John Mbiti in *African Religion and Philosophy*. However, the growing disregard of this belief system as a result of the Eurocentric influence, green and corruption, has contributed to the arbitrary destruction of these elements of these trees, rivers and lands which are culturally sacred and deserves to be preserved.

this was their ancestral land; this was where their fathers and their father's fathers were buried. They had

been born here, they have grown up here, they were happy here, and though they may not be rich, the land had been good to them, they never lacked for anything. What kind of custodian of land would they be if they sold it off?... there was a brief skirmish, nothing too serious - one of the oil workers escaped with a broken jaw, the other with a broken arm-but the next day the soldiers came. Chief Malabo was arrested, his hand tied behind his back as if he were a petty criminal, on charges of supporting the militants and plotting against the Federal government and threatening to kidnap foreign oil workers. (40)

From the above except, Chief Malabo who is the custodian of the people's culture and tradition resist the intrusion of the government and multinational's ecologically hegemonic tendency as evident in their arbitrary abuse of their ancestral land. The indigenous population depend on their ancestral land for farming, fishing and communication with their ancestors. This explains why the Malabo refuses to sell the land to the foreign explorers who are poised to denigrate their land which is not just a geographical feature, but also a metaphysical site considered be sacred by the people. This articulates the need for resilience and indigenous resistance of all forms of anthropocentric manifestations and embrace an inclusive and eco-friendly strategies for a safe and healthier environment.

##### **5. Grassroot Strategies in Curbing Environmental Crises**

The role of the grassroot pollution in curbing the increasing environmental crises in our contemporary society is very crucial considering their ecological attachment to the environment. There is a need for an inclusive ecological governance system that recognizes and implements the strategies adopted by the indigenous people in addressing their environmental concerns. Mbue and Habila in their works, present the application knowledge of African traditional beliefs as a strategy to curb the environmental hazards brought about by acute ecological imbalance in the community of Irikefe and Kosawa respectively. This is articulated in the intimately symbiotic relationship between the grassroot population and the environment. The different elements of the environment such as: seas and rivers,

mangroves, forests, land, have some degree of ecological attachments to the cultures of the people. This cultural attachment has given the grassroot population culturally sensitive strategies to curb the growing ecological imbalance in their communities.

The land was so polluted that even the water in the wells turned red. That was when priests from different shrines got together and decided to build this shrine by the sea. The land needed to be cleansed of blood, and pollution. And what of the sculptures? The sculptures came later. As the priesthood grew, some became specialists in mud and wooden figures. These figures represent the ancestors watching over us...And each day the worshippers go in a procession to the sea, to bathe in it, to cry to it, and to promise never to abominate it ever again. 'And did that help? Did the rivers return to normal?' Yes, and ever since we have managed to keep this Island free from oil prospecting and other activities that contaminate the water and lead to greed and violence. (130)

Through a conversation between the narrator and the journalists who visit Irikefe, the grassroot efforts in addressing ecological crises are evident. The worshippers at the shrine go into the sea in procession, worshipping and making promises never to defile the sea. This promise is made to the ancestors whom they say are watching at them. This shows how the knowledge and practice of their culture and tradition serve as a therapy to the environmental despoilation brought about by the ecocratic failure and ecological imbalanced governance system that prioritizes ecological extraction over resource preservation.

Habila has also presented the women as vital instrument in curbing environmental challenges in our contemporary society. Apart from the fact that the woman is ecologically sensitive and culturally attached to her environment, he presents a young woman who makes efforts as a medical doctor to save the population from the numerous dead recorded in the community of Irikefe as a result of their consumption of contaminated water. Gloria devices different strategies to save the people and their

natural resources from the effects of the failures of ecocracy and energy democracy seen in the abuse of the environment by the activities of multinational companies. Gloria unravels one of the efforts she makes towards arresting the negative effects of pollution on the people and the different elements of nature when she states that:

Well, I did my duty as their doctor. I told them the dangers that accompany that quenchless flare, but they wouldn't listen. And then a year later, when the livestock began to die, and the plants began to wither on their stalks, I took samples of the drinking water and in my lab I measured the level of toxins in it: it was rising steadily...when I confronted the oil workers, they offered me money and a job. The manager, an Italian guy, wrote a cheque and said I was now on their payroll. He told me to continue doing what I was doing, but this time I was to come to him only with my results. I thought they'd do something with my results, but they didn't. (92)

In a community like Irikefe where strong network of systemic corruption has been established between the foreign petroleum explorers, the government and the community leaders, these foreign explorers consider this network as a license to ravage the population and their natural resources. This strong foundation and network of corruption can render the initiative and efforts of indigenous people futile. For example, Gloria's lab results reveal the high level of toxins in the water that the people consume as the cause of numerous dead. But instead of making efforts to address the problem and rescue the people from their deplorable conditions, the manager offers to bribe her into ignoring the effects of their activities on the people which makes Gloria's initiative fruitless. However, the grassroot population must stage a resistance against ecological imbalance, for a safe and healthy environment.

One of the grassroot strategies adopted to curb the growing ecological imbalance and the effects in their community is hostage-taking and violence meted on the perpetrators by the

indigenous population. The people of Kosawa as well as those of Irikefe launch a stiff resistance against the Pexton whose activities have deprived the population of good water, farmland, air and above all life. In a bid to discontinue the ecological hazards in their land, the people through Konga, a village mad man, launch an attack on the Pexton, seizing their tools used in the extraction. “after my friends and I had dragged away and dumped the Pexton men and Woja Beki in the corner of Lusaka’s parlor, Woja Beki cried out, upon hearing Konga tell us to bind their hands and feet and throw them in the backroom...” (83). This presentation of violence and hostage taking by the grassroot population to save themselves and their environment from ecological hegemony establishes a need for an urgent and inclusive step between the population and the government discontinue the increasing ecocratic failures and their varied environmental effects in our society.

Mbiti presents the cultural beliefs in natural objects and phenomenon as being closely associated with God. As a result, the indigenous people view natural environment and the different elements of nature as sacred and as a result, must be preserved and protected and not destroyed. This expression of the divinity and sanctity of the environment is revealed in Mbiti’s *African Religion and Philosophy* as seen below:

According to African peoples, man lives in a religious universe, so that natural phenomenon and objects are intimately associated with God. They not only originate from Him. Man’s understanding of God is strongly coloured by the universe of man is himself a part. Man sees in nature, not only the imprint but the reflection of God; and whether that image is marred or clearly focused and defined, it is nevertheless an image of God, the only image known in traditional African societies. (48)

This belief in natural phenomenon and objects by the people influences the relationship between humankind and the environment. The interdependent relationship between humankind and nature is protected by the indigenous population through the cultural practices and belief systems. This further

articulates the efficacy of indigenous cultures and belief system in curbing the effects of ecological imbalance in contemporary society.

Prompassorn Chunhabunyatip et al underscore the fact that, the increasing demands for the application of traditional and spiritual beliefs in the management of natural resources has attracted international attention as many have grown to consider indigenous belief systems as an effective method of natural/environmental conservation as underscored below:

Although there are various approaches to natural resources management, urging policy makers to take into account spiritual beliefs has increasingly attracted international attention because of their ability to effectively manage natural resources for generations ... In some rural communities in Africa, natural resources were not only important as a source of food and other domestic products, but were the basis of cultural beliefs and therefore, certain areas such as woodlands, water, and mountains were not to be abused and were considered sacred...indigenous people believe in the natural gods and/or spirits having unique roles in regulating and using the wetland resources and express this through spiritual practices such as taboos, rituals, and zoning sacred places. Engaging with spiritual beliefs for natural resources management has also been practiced from the past until the present day (1-2)

According to these critics, indigenous wetlands, mangroves mountains, waters are considered to be metaphysical as they serve as habitat for the gods who are in constant fellowship with the living. These elements of the environment are therefore, observed by the indigenous population as part and parcel of their existence and as a result, should not be abused or unsustainably exploited. This indigenous belief system is therefore, relevant in curbing ecological imbalance and other hegemonic tendencies that birth environmental crises in the present-day society. Therefore, in order to have an eco-friendly community, wherein the right to a healthy and safe environment is a basic right to all,

there is an urgent need for an. ecocratic governance system that takes into account the cultures and traditions of the indigenous population.

### **Conclusion**

The increasing environmental hazards in our contemporary society is provoked by the lack of an inclusive ecologically and culturally sensitive policies and above all, an ecocratic governance system that recognizes and protects the right to a safe and healthy environment. The bad governance system that is characterized by corruption and greed, accounts for the intrusion and manifestation of anthropocentric and ecological imbalanced governance that leaves the community vulnerably loose for wanton resource extraction that breeds violence, despair, poverty and increasing environmental hazards in our contemporary society. Therefore, a safe, healthy and ecologically balanced society requires an urgent and culturally sensitive and inclusive action whereby the government collaborates with the custodians of the cultures and tradition to put in place policies that recognize and prioritize environmental citizenship right. This will result to an eco-friendly, peaceful and ecocratic community both for humankind and the other elements of the environment.

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**The Language of the Leather: A Socio-Cultural Linguistic Exploration of Yoruba Musical Instruments as Tolls of Transformation and Sustainability**<sup>1</sup>**Oloko**, M. Jamiu Ph.D.,

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**Abstract**

Drums in Yoruba land, Southwest, Nigeria are involved in a variety of ceremonial tasks, including storytelling, dancing, and spreading messages that transform society. Rich lyrical and flowery language is infused into these musical instruments. In the light of this, this paper explores Yoruba musical instruments in greater details, concentrating on their language and messages rather than just their lyrical and entertainment value. The study investigates the sociocultural and linguistic roles of Yoruba musical instruments as indicators of sustainability and change. Gbedu, for example, can be utilised to address the issues of climate change, particularly drought, by providing sacrifices and performing rituals to the supernatural forces. The four main Yoruba drum families - Omele, Bata, Gangan, and Gbedu were selected as the major instruments for the study while the play, *Echoes of the Drums* constitute the main source of data. The play was performed by the Guild of Theatre Drummers in the NUC hall in Maitama, Abuja, in honour of World Drummers Day in 2024. Data collection also includes Face-to-face interviews with professional drummers and individuals with expertise in Yoruba traditional drums. The qualitative study is guided by Roman Jakobson's model of six language functions, which provide a framework for comprehending the different ways language can be

employed in communication. Findings show that the language of these drums reflects these language functions, allowing them to connect, enchant, command, express, inform, and clarify. Thus, the drums are rightfully viewed as transformational tools, both in the ritualistic or metaphysical sense and in the preservation and defense of the Yoruba worldview through a rich, multi-layered, and dynamic linguistic legacy.

**Keywords:** Traditional drums, flowery language, cultural insights, lingual-cultural features.

### **Introduction**

It is thought that the first Yoruba drummer was Ayangalu. Since he was deified at the time of his death, he is now regarded as one of the Orisha's among the Yoruba's who are the major occupants of the Southwest, Nigeria. According to Yoruba religion adherents, he is the patron spirit of all drummers and motivates them to perform well by taking the form of a muse. In the Yoruba language, "Ayan" signifies drummer. For this reason, the prefix "Ayan" appears in some Yoruba family names, including Ayanbisi, Ayangbade, Ayantunde, and Ayanwande. The bearers of this prefix are identified as the heirs to the mysteries of Ayangalu. Ogunjimi and Na'Alah (1991) assert that supernatural entities act as a bridge or intermediary between man and the Supreme Being. A significant component of the rituals and sacrifices offered to these supernatural spirits involves Yoruba traditional drums. As a result, it might be said that the drum's power transcends entertainment.

Yoruba drums serve a variety of cultural and societal purposes, including religious worship, ceremonies, and the treatment of long-term illnesses. They also carry out a variety of ceremonial tasks, including storytelling, dancing, and spreading messages to change society. An essential instrument, the gbedu in particular, is mostly found in the homes of the aristocracy and the courts of the Yoruba kings. It should be mentioned, too, that not only royal families and traditional rulers utilise the drum; each Orisa in Yorubaland has a unique drum. In Yoruba territory, the gbedu is a significant musical instrument used in the worship of the majority of the gods. As a result, the drums serve important liturgical purposes, particularly during ceremonial events. When the Orisa's followers execute rituals to please and converse with this deity, they employ them to accompany their songs and

chanting. Gbedu, for example, can be utilised to address the issues of climate change, particularly drought, by providing sacrifices and performing rituals to the supernatural forces. Man, and these supernatural entities are linked in African cosmology. Aside cultural and religious functions, these drums perform certain language functions. This study therefore examines the language functions performed by these drums. The main source of data is the play *Echoes of the Drums*, which was performed by the Guild of Theatre Drummers in the NUC hall in Maitama, Abuja, in honor of World Drummers Day in 2024. The play employed the adaptation of culture-based approaches with modernity by the use of bilingualism as communicative strategy. This is evident in the use of Yoruba and English in rendering songs and chants in the play. Though, this is a purely cultural play, this approach is a viable means of transforming the society and sustaining our cultural heritage as the intended message will reach a wide audience.

To gather information about the use and cultural significance of Yoruba traditional drums, particularly the gbedu, a visit to the palace of a well-known Oba in Osogbo local government in Osun state was conducted. The qualitative study is guided by Roman Jakobson's model of six language functions, which provide a framework for comprehending the different ways language can be employed in communication.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Framework**

##### **Drums in Yoruba Land**

The Yoruba drumming traditions are richly woven together. A variety of traditional Yoruba drums are played, such as the two-toned Bata drums, the hourglass-shaped Dundun (talking drum), and the revered Igbin drums. In Yoruba culture, every style of drum has a specific cultural and musical purpose, ranging from social gatherings to sacred occasions. The intricate rhythms and tonalities can be heard through the drums. One famous example of "talking" through music is the Dundun drums, which are known for their ability to replicate the tonal patterns of spoken Yoruba. Spiritual activities are tightly linked to Bata drums, especially when it comes to ceremonies honouring deities like Shango. Crucial to religious performances are the Igbin drums,

which are played with both hands and sticks. In addition to preserving these classic sounds, this collection provides information on the various cultural contexts that give them value. In addition to being musical instruments, drums like the *gangan*, *bata*, and *gbedu* are vital to the community's social and spiritual fiber because they facilitate communication with deities and over long distances. However, these ancient behaviours have been gradually eroded as a result of colonialism and subsequent technological improvements. The drums serve a variety of purposes in Yoruba culture, emphasising their importance in social gatherings, religious devotion, communication, and cultural identity. Drumming's importance in everyday life has been affected by the advent of Western cultural ideals and contemporary entertainment forms, which has resulted in a reduction in newer generations' practice and appreciation of the instruments. To protect these indigenous customs, which are essential to preserving the rich history and identity of the Yoruba people, immediate cultural preservation measures are required (Aladesanmi, 2019).

The drum, a fundamental component of Yoruba instrumental music, is an essential tool for communal communication, ceremonial expression, and spiritual bonding. The drum is considered a sacred object of profound spiritual importance in Yoruba culture, in addition to being a musical instrument. It serves as a medium for ancestral reverence, aids in religious ritual performance, and promotes communion with the divine. An essential instrument in religious rites, the drums' beats and patterns are said to convey messages to the gods and ancestors. In Yoruba religious rituals, a variety of drums are employed, each with a distinct function and cultural significance (Adegbite, 1988). Among the many drums that are essential to these cultural and spiritual practices are as follows:

1. **Dùndún (The Talking Drum):** Because it resembles the tonal patterns of the Yoruba language, this legendary drum is one of the most significant in Yoruba culture. The Dùndún are special because they can "speak," utilising their tone and pitch to communicate during religious ceremonies, rites, and festivities. According to Yoruba belief, it is essential to spiritual practices because it facilitates communication with ancestors and deities.

2. **Bàtá:** In Yoruba religious events, particularly in the worship of Orishas (deities), the Bàtá drum is particularly important. One drum leads and the other provides accompaniment when this drum is played in pairs. The Bàtá is essential to the expression of reverence and devotion in Yoruba religious life because of its unique hourglass shape and powerful sound, which foster a close connection with the spiritual realm.
3. **Iya ilu:** The Iya ilu, which is played as the lead drum in a group of drummers, gives Yoruba music its basic rhythm, particularly during religious ceremonies. It is a vital instrument in ceremonies devoted to the worship of Orishas because of its deep, weighty sounds, which serve as an anchor for the musical performance. In many Yoruba musical ensembles, the Iya ilu is frequently the first drum played, setting the tone for the other drummers to follow.
4. **Gáangan:** The Gáangan, which has a unique sound, is mostly used to accompany sacred music and dances at religious ceremonies. The Gáangan and the Bàtá drum combine to provide a complex, melodic rhythm in Yoruba culture. Its distinct tonal characteristics enhance the spiritual experience and aid in directing the Orishas' energies during worship.
5. **Sekere:** Although it is not a leathered drum, the Sekere is a beaded gourd percussion instrument that enhances the main drumming ensemble with a rhythmic layer. Its rattling sound increases the ceremony's auditory experience by producing a more complex and lively rhythm that heightens the ambiance of dedication and reverence.
6. **Agogo:** The Agogo, a bell-like instrument instead of a drum, contributes to the preservation of the rhythmic structure in Yoruba musical performances. Its tone is a subdued yet significant component that directs the ceremony's musical flow and draws attention to significant points in the worship ceremonies.

The different drums—Dùndún, Bâtá, Iya ilu, Gáangan, Sekere, and Agogo—are seen as communication tools rather than merely instruments. The rhythm of the drums is a live, breathing language that goes beyond simple music and becomes an essential part of religious life because the Yoruba people think they may communicate with the divine through these instruments.

Omele, bata, gangan, and gbedu are the four main families of Yoruba drums that have been selected for this study. Below are their pictures and descriptions:

**Omele (Ako)**



Another name for the omele is the sakara drum. Made from baked clay and goat skin, it has a round shape. Its body is surrounded by evenly placed pegs that are utilised for tuning.

**Bata**



With one cane larger than the other, the bata drum resembles an hour glass and has two heads. The drum is made up of three drums that are identical in shape but vary in size. The drummer finds it simpler to hit the drums with both hands when they are positioned horizontally on their knees while sitting.

**Gangan (The talking drum)**



The Yoruba people use the gangan, often called the talking drum, as a communication tool. You can use the adjustable cord on the drum to make it sound louder. Additionally, it is employed to alter the drum's message and tone. Most significantly, African bands frequently use the talking drum as one of their musical instruments. It is also utilised in ceremonial events and rituals such as weddings, funerals, and private gatherings. The talking drum entered West African popular music in the 20th century. It is utilised to play popular Nigerian music, including Apala, Fuji, and Juju.

**Gbedu**



It is a large drum that is customarily utilised in religious worship, rituals, and the Ogboni, an old Yoruba secret organisation, on special occasions. frequently, it is covered in carvings that depict images of animals or birds, frequently goddesses. In the past, it is even said that human skin was used to make the drum. The drum is played with a stick and both hand

#### **Empirical Framework**

The ability of the *gangan*, a Yorùbá talking drum, to mimic the prosodic and tonal characteristics of the Yorùbá language is the primary focus of Akinbo's (2021) investigation into the linguistic potential of this instrument. Akinbo illustrates how the *gangan* can successfully transmit lexical and grammatical tones through changes in pitch and rhythm by examining performances by seasoned drummers. Pitch contours of spoken Yorùbá and their drum renditions show a substantial positive association, according to the study, suggesting that drummers may use the drum to precisely reflect linguistic tones. This study emphasises the importance of the *gangan* in maintaining and passing down Yorùbá language and cultural legacy by highlighting its function as an advanced speech substitute.

In Yoruba country, southwestern Nigeria, Ogunyemi (2023) explores the speech surrogacy role of drums and makes the argument that they are culturally used as instruments of communication. Based on ethnographic field recordings gathered in five Yoruba states, the study uses a descriptive and qualitative methodology. All of the audience members, drummers, and dancers were native Yoruba speakers. The study investigates the

different speech patterns used by drummers during performances using focus groups and unstructured interviews. It makes the case that Yoruba drums, which are essential to Yoruba oratory, represent the phonetic features of the language and serve as social regulators that go beyond simple communication. The results emphasise the drums' importance in Yoruba society and their functions in maintaining language subtleties and cultural expressions.

An extensive articulatory and auditory analysis of how the *gangan*, a Yorùbá talking drum, mimics the tonal qualities of spoken Yorùbá is provided by Akinbo (2019). The study shows a direct correlation between the number of drum strikes and the number of syllables in a word using spectrographic and video analysis of performances by five native Nigerian drummers. The language's distinctive high (H), mid (M), and low (L) tones are produced by drummers manipulating the tension cords of the drum. Notably, the study shows that the drum may musically convey tonal processes, such as tone contour forms in HL or LH sequences. This suggests that drummers are able to represent complicated Yorùbá speech tonal processes in addition to syllables and lexical tones.

Abiodun (nd) provides a thorough examination of the *Iyaalu Dundun* drum's significance in Yoruba culture, highlighting its dual use as a communication tool and a musical instrument. The study explores how the lyrical and rhythmic expressions of the *Iyaalu Dundun* promote social interaction and transmit cultural values. It looks at drumming's pedagogical elements, emphasising both the symbolic purposes of drum texts and conventional teaching strategies. The importance of the drum in Yoruba culture is highlighted by the study's discussion of the instrumental discourse that developed between drummers and singers.

An incisive examination of the *Dùndún* drum's cultural and communicative relevance in Yoruba society is provided by Durojaye (2019). The article explores the history, composition of the ensemble, and various functions of the *Dùndún* drum, highlighting its use as a speech substitute and its centrality in Yoruba customs. Durojaye talks about the numerous drums that make up the *Dùndún* drum ensemble, each of which has a distinct function, and how these drums are used in a variety of

settings, including social gatherings, religious rites, and storytelling. The article offers a comprehensive explanation of the Dùndún drum's importance in preserving the Yoruba people's cultural history, which helps to preserve and promote appreciation of indigenous Yoruba music and musical instruments. It highlights how the drum can "speak" and transmit messages by imitating the tonal patterns of the Yoruba language, making it a vital instrument for cultural expression and communication.

The Yoruba people of South West Nigeria play talking drums that are structurally similar to other drums played worldwide. They are employed in musical and dance performances to create and accentuate tunes, just like many other percussion instruments. These drums, which are usually made of hollow circular frames covered in tightly stretched animal skin or plastic membranes, are played with sticks, hands, or other instruments to produce sound. They belong to the international family of musical instruments created to support artistic expression because of its melodic qualities and rhythmic patterns. However, the distinctive communication function of Yoruba talking drums makes them stand apart. Yoruba talking drums have the ability to send and receive messages, unlike most drums that are only utilised musically. Because of this capacity, Oluga and Babalola (2012) developed the idea of drumcommunication, a term that encapsulates the drums' function in communal information sharing. In addition to outlining the necessary elements of successful drumcommunication, their research offers a taxonomy to detect genuine talking drums and identifies potential obstacles to this kind of communication. In the end, the study promotes concerted efforts to protect and advance drumming as a significant cultural activity.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### **Roman Jakobson's Six Language Functions**

A foundation for comprehending the different ways language can be utilised in communication is provided by Roman Jakobson's six language functions. A different facet of the communication process is highlighted by each function. An explanation of each function is provided below:

1. The **referential function**'s main focus is on providing accurate information or outlining a specific situation. It provides context for communication by responding to queries such as "What is

being talked about?" When the goal is to educate the audience, impart knowledge, or explain events, ideas, or circumstances, this function is usually used

Since it keeps the conversation grounded in reality and guarantees that information is communicated accurately, the referential function is crucial for effective communication (Jakobson, 1960 and 1990; Rastier; 1967; Linask, 2018; Tsur, 2010; Tribus, 2017)

2. Language's **emotive function** focusses on the speaker's sentiments, attitudes, or emotions towards the topic. By reflecting the speaker's inner state and expressing personal reactions, it enables the audience to comprehend the message's emotional undertones. This function is especially noticeable in artistic media where the emotional resonance of the words supersedes the factual information, such as poetry, music lyrics, or narrative. The emotive function, for example, is used in love poems and angry outbursts to convey strong emotions like affection, annoyance, excitement, or grief, establishing a strong emotional bond with the audience (Jakobson, 1960 and 1990; Linask, 2018; Tsur, 2010; Tribus, 2017).

3. Persuading or influencing the audience to act is the main goal of language's **conative function**. It aims to modify the listener's behaviour, belief, or attitude in order to elicit a response or consequence. Persuasive situations like political speeches, advertisements, and motivational speeches frequently employ this function. For example, the wording used in commercials attempts to persuade viewers to buy a good or service. Similar to this, political discourse may aim to sway public opinion or mobilise support. The primary goal of the conative function is to influence the listener to do a desired action in response to the message being given (Rastier; 1967; Linask, 2018; Tsur, 2010; Tribus, 2017).

4. Establishing, maintaining, and appropriately concluding communication is the basic goal of language's **phatic function**. Rather than delivering particular information or messages, its main goal is to promote interaction by maintaining the communication line open. Essentially, the phatic function ensures that the interaction flow stays intact by highlighting the significance of connection and continuity in communication (Jakobson, 1990; Rastier; 1967; Linask, 2018; Tsur, 2010).

5. The use of language to define, clarify, or explain itself is known as **the metalingual function of language**. This function focusses on the code of communication and makes sure that the audience properly understands the phrases and concepts employed. It is especially pertinent in situations where meaning precision or ambiguity may be required. When a term is defined in a dictionary, for instance, the language is used to describe what the word means, which makes comprehension easier. Additionally, academic writings, directions, and translations use the metalingual function to ensure that the message is correctly understood and communicated (Tsur, 2010; Tribus, 2017).

6. **The poetic function** of language emphasises the form and aesthetic elements of communication, concentrating on the manner of communication rather than the content of statements. By highlighting language's beauty, rhythm, and structure-all of which are commonly found in poetry, music, and literature-it elevates language. This function uses stylistic features such as rhyme, metaphor, alliteration, and symbolism to interest the listener both emotionally and intellectually. Word structure and sound are just as important as meaning in the poetic function, which elevates everyday language to the level of art. Through this role, language acts as a conduit for creative expression, offering both aesthetic pleasure and emotional resonance (Rastier; 1967; Linask, 2018; Tsur, 2010).

Speakers can effectively communicate information, elicit emotional reactions, and affect audience behaviour by employing these functions. By allowing people to communicate on multiple levels-whether for factual explanation, emotional expression, persuasion, or creative expression-this multifaceted use of language enhances human contact and increases the impact and depth of communication.

### **Methodology**

The main source of data for this study is the purposefully selected play *Echoes of the Drums*, which was performed by the Guild of Theatre Drummers at the NUC Hall in Maitama, Abuja, in honour of World Drummers Day in 2024. The play underwent a critical evaluation, and the drum sounds were translated, interpreted and analysed to get the messages of the drums. Data collection also includes Face-to-face interviews with professional drummers and individuals with expertise in Yoruba traditional drums. To gather information about the use and cultural

significance of Yoruba traditional drums, particularly gbedu, a visit to the palace of a well-known Oba in Osogbo local government in Osun state was conducted. It was fortunate that a professional drummer agreed to play the Gbedu drum for a brief performance while the language and its sounds were captured. When presenting Yoruba traditional drums, the secondary source of data consists of pertinent textbooks, periodicals, and other unpublished sources. The study uses the collection and documentation approach to provide in-depth explanations and focusses heavily on the culture of the people. Qualitative method analysis of the data was employed in the analysis of data for the study.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Data Presentation - Synopsis of Echoe of the Drums**

When his wife was in labour, the clan's leader, Abayan, organised a sacrifice in the palace and called upon his ancestors' spirits to bear him children. Triplets are given to the family by the conjuring of the spirits and the sounds of the drums. Ayanlade Tayelolu was the name of the first kid. Awogbola Oko was the third child's name, while Olude Omokehinde was the second.

The three main sets of Yoruba drums are represented by the ganagan (Olude-Oko), bata (Awogbola Omokehinde), and omele (Ayanlade Tayelolu). With chants on the importance of children in the family, these drums were used to celebrate the birth of the new babies.

He instructed the youngsters to use the drums as their strength, might, and protection when they set out on a quest to find prosperity and fortune for the region. "Go in peace, bring good fortune to our land, and may the spirit of the drum lead and guard you," he said. They came across demons and bad spirits when they set out on their adventure. "We shall ward off evil spirits and monsters with our collective rhythm," they murmured in unison each time this occurred, despite the threats in the world, we will always triumph with the drums".

Abayan once became aware that his children were in danger while on the journey. The children were saved after he swiftly gathered his drummers and offered offerings to the gods. Olude used his drum to call forth the spirit of Sango, a Yoruba

deity, during one of the encounters; the god appeared and freed him from the evil spirits. The three young men ultimately prevailed in spite of all the difficulties they encountered along the way.

The significance of the drum in Yoruba worldview is demonstrated by *Echoes of the Drums*. Like other palaces in Yoruba nation, the drums of Ayangalu have been around for a long time, and are still strong, and people never stop expecting them to perform. According to Abayan, “Though the skin of the drum may be weak, but its power is never weak”.

#### **Analysis and Discussion**

Beyond just providing amusement, the Yoruba traditional drums, including the gangan, gbedu, omele, and bata, have important communication purposes. These drums, each representing a different force or strength, are essential to ceremonies, social gatherings, and spiritual practices in Yoruba culture. By applying Roman Jakobson's model of six language functions- referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic—to various drumming traditions, it becomes clear that the drums are not only aesthetically pleasing but also transforming instruments. By spreading messages, calling out spiritual forces, strengthening social ties, and transmitting ancestral information, they promote cultural sustainability and aid in the preservation of Yoruba identity.

#### **Referential Function of Drum**

In the Yoruba context, drums play a referential role as a means of conveying crucial information about the social structures, rituals, and beliefs of the culture. The several drum kinds, each with its own special meaning and symbolism, represent important facets of the Yoruba worldview in the play *Echoes of the Drums*. The drums communicate stories about the creation myths, spiritual linkages, and supernatural abilities connected to different deities and ancestral figures in addition to providing rhythmic accompaniment for ceremonies and rituals. The play weaves the Yoruba people's history and cultural identity into the story and performance, incorporating their customs into the performance itself. The myth demonstrates how deeply embedded the drums are in the fabric of existence, from birth to death, acting as

conduits of spiritual and cultural power, by naming the offspring of Abayan after various drums.

Additionally, *Echoes of the Drums* serves as an oral archive, conserving and passing on to future generations the collective knowledge of the Yoruba cosmology, rituals, and socio-cultural activities. The children's travels, which are led by the spiritual significance of their drum names, demonstrate how beliefs and rituals permeate daily life and have an impact on both individuals and communities. The play's dramatic portrayal ensures that Yoruba cultural history, including an awareness of the metaphysical world, is transmitted orally and performatively while simultaneously serving as a kind of amusement and education. In addition to establishing the drums as active contributors to the socio-religious fabric of the society, this use of the drum as a literal and symbolic communication tool strengthens the continuation of Yoruba identity.

#### **Emotive Function of Drum**

The chants and poetry lines which are rendered both in Yoruba and English languages that accompany the drums are a potent example of the emotive function of language, as they express and elicit strong emotional reactions from the audience. This bilingual creativity of blending tradition with modernity endows the play to a wide audience. The line "Though the skin of the drum may be weak, but its power is never weak" is a moving illustration of how words can express strong emotions of spiritual strength and resiliency beyond simple expression. Rich in symbolism, this expression highlights the drum's unwavering spiritual force while acknowledging its physical frailty. Such statements acknowledge the drum's status as a living thing that exists outside of its physical form in addition to reflecting the speaker's emotional relationship. The drums are transformed from simple musical instruments into hallowed symbols that represent timeless power, knowledge, and an unbreakable bond with the eternal through these poetic and metaphorical phrases.

In this sense, the drums are entwined with the community's collective thoughts, and the chants and lyrical lines act as a vehicle for emotional participation. These performances highlight the Yoruba people's respect for the metaphysical realm and their dependence on spiritual and ancestral powers through the use of metaphor and emotive language. The drums are portrayed as

emotional and spiritual energy conduits that can evoke sentiments of wonder, veneration, and even healing through their sound and rhythmic strength. These emotional displays support the drums' function as essential carriers of individual and collective identity in ritual and ceremonial contexts, in addition to their use as instruments of communication. The chants' ability to arouse deep-seated emotions contributes to the creation of a common spiritual experience, maintaining the people's strong and alive connection to their ancestors' customs.

#### **Conative Function of Drum**

During ritual and ceremonial situations, the drums are employed to actively affect and direct the participants as well as the spiritual forces, demonstrating the conative function of language. One of the best examples of how language and ritual action work together to influence the future is Abayan's instruction to his children, "Go in peace and bring fortune to our land and may the spirit of the drum guide and protect you." This statement is a purposeful invocation that calls on supernatural forces to influence the course of events; it is not just a wish or blessing. Here, the directive language compels the universe's forces to react to human intention. Together with the sound of the drums, the words' force conveys the weight of heavenly will and ancestral authority, directing the children's path and guaranteeing their success and safety. This conative feature emphasises how language plays a proactive role in Yoruba ritual, where words are used to direct and influence spiritual energy towards particular goals.

In the same vein, the drums themselves perform the conative role by channeling spiritual energy and summoning divine and ancestor involvement, making them powerful agents of direction during ceremonies. The drums direct the flow of spiritual power, call forth ancestral spirits, and invite deities through their rhythmic rhythms. This is an active involvement in the development of the cosmic order rather than a passive transmission of sound. By directing participants' actions, promoting communion with the divine, and guaranteeing that ceremonies are performed in compliance with the sacred laws, the drumbeats foster an environment of elevated spirituality. In this sense, the drums do more than just offer accompaniment; they are essential to the effectiveness of the ritual, guiding and channeling energy to affect the ceremony's results. Within

Yoruba belief systems, the interaction between the drums' power and the language of invocation emphasises the close relationship between cosmic order, spiritual guidance, and human will.

#### **Phatic Function of Drum**

The phatic role of language, which ensures the continuity and sustenance of communication is intimately related to the repetitive, rhythmic, and communal nature of Yoruba drum sequences and chants. The play's use of the words "With our collective rhythm, we shall wade off evil spirits and monsters" underlines the community's oneness and spiritual presence in a way that goes beyond a simple declaration of intent. Within the ceremonial context, this line is repeated, reinforcing the community's shared objective and fortifying the members' bond. The chant establishes a space where everyone's attention stays on the shared objective of spiritual empowerment and protection by articulating this intent in a rhythmic way. Beyond merely exchanging information, this type of communication actively maintains the bond between all parties, guaranteeing that participants stay immersed in the ritual process and in harmony with the collective spirit. This spirit of communality is well entrenched in African cosmology and Yoruba worldview.

Furthermore, in Yoruba culture, drum beats serve as essential social ties that span several spheres of life. They create avenues of contact among the audience, the performers, and the larger community in addition to between the living and the eternal. During rituals, the constant flow of drumbeats fosters a sense of unity and purpose, making the experience inclusive and participative. The drummers' constant pace guarantees that the ceremony goes smoothly and intently, strengthening everyone's sense of solidarity. Drum beats support the communal tie during social events and sacred rites, creating a setting where people are reminded of their shared identity and the spiritual forces at play. In order to keep the ritual or event meaningful and transformational for all participants, this phatic function emphasises the significance of preserving communication, connection, and togetherness.

#### **Metalingual Function of Drum**

In the Yoruba drumming tradition, the metalingual function is essential because it provides clarifications and explanations regarding the drum language, enabling listeners to decode and

comprehend the meanings behind the sounds. According to this tradition, the drum is a language entity unto itself, able to use its beats to communicate stories, feelings, and messages. Interpreting these sounds and converting them into spoken explanations that close the gap between spoken language and the non-verbal drum language is frequently the responsibility of subject-matter experts. For example, when it is told that "Gangan is a source of wealth," it is a metalingual remark that sheds light on the drum's symbolic meaning rather than just a factual statement. Deeper meanings are infused into the drum's rhythmic patterns and tones, and the metalingual function makes sure that everyone may understand these meanings, assisting in the deciphering of the intricate connections between language, culture, and sound.

Future generations will be able to comprehend and take part in the rich oral and musical traditions of the Yoruba people because of this metalingual function, which also helps to preserve and transmit cultural information. It helps close the knowledge gap between insiders and outsiders, as well as between the younger generation and elders, by providing explanations of the drum language and its symbolism. In other words, as a result, the metalingual function is essential to maintaining the tradition's continuity and making sure that the cultural knowledge included in the drumming language is preserved and applicable for future generations. Cultural literacy in Yoruba culture is defined as the capacity to decipher and comprehend the meanings included into the drumbeats; the metalingual function makes sure that this knowledge is transmitted rather than lost. Additionally, it helps people who are not familiar with the custom—like outsiders or younger members of the community—to understand the richness and intricacy of the Yoruba drumming system.

#### **Poetic Function of Drum**

A key component of the Yoruba drumming tradition that takes the performance above the level of simple communication and turns it into an artistic and profoundly cultural expression is the poetic function. **Metaphor** is one of the main figures of speech used in this tradition, and it contributes significantly to the layers of meaning that are added to the drum sounds and accompanying chants. In the statement "Ayangalu ni mo yan mi oyanku..." (I have chosen Ayangalu to be my companion...), the metaphorical language conveys a deeper connection between the

speaker and the drum. Ayangalu is more than simply a drum; it is a representation of strength, power, and spiritual protection and is frequently linked to leadership and divine guidance. The speaker's deliberate connection with a spiritual power is reflected in the metaphor of "choosing" this drum as a companion, which denotes the drum's function in directing and safeguarding the traveler. By employing metaphor, the chant goes beyond straightforward discourse and turns into a means of spiritual and emotional expression, with the drum serving as a metaphorical companion that influences the speaker's fate.

Yoruba drumming's poetic function also heavily relies on **rhythm**, which not only provides the performance's physical pulse but also heightens its visual and memorisation impact. By reflecting the Yoruba community's heartbeat, the drums' rhythm connects the speaker and the listener through a common experience. The lyrics' rhythmic delivery combined with the drum beats in chants like "Ayangalu ni mo yan mi oyanku..." produce a melodic flow that helps listeners remember the message. The Yoruba language's tonal quality and rhythmic cadence combine to create a type of oral memory that ensures cultural knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next. These performances' intentional use of rhythm guarantees that the message's form and content are unforgettable, strengthening the audience's emotional and spiritual bond.

The Yoruba chants' poetic nature is further enhanced by **parallelism and alliteration**. The synchronised drum beats reflect the sense of harmony and balance that parallelism, or the repeating of identical grammatical structures, imparts to the language. This method guarantees that important concepts are emphasised and retained by emphasising the message in addition to reinforcing the rhythm. For instance, the message is more powerful and simpler for the audience to absorb when a series of actions or qualities are repeated in parallel form in a chant like "Ayangalu ni mo yan mi oyanku..." (I chosen Ayangalu to be my companion...). In addition to giving the language more melody, alliteration—the repetition of consonants like "y" in Ayangalu ni mo yan mi oyanku..." (I have chosen Ayangalu to be my companion...) - also produces a beautiful acoustic effect that enhances the performance's visual and spiritual components. The chant is transformed into a rich, multisensory experience

through the use of these artistic methods, where sound and meaning are expertly sculpted to elicit strong emotional reactions. Lastly, the **aesthetic arrangement** of words in Yoruba drumming takes the language to the level of an art form in addition to providing meaning. Alliteration, parallelism, rhythm, and metaphor combine to produce a distinctive language and musical experience that showcases the Yoruba people's careful artistry. Since it involves the listener on several levels—intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—the language's form is just as significant in this context as its content. The poetic role in Yoruba drumming extends beyond communication; it becomes a profound manifestation of cultural history, blending language and music to form an eternal creative tradition. The drums, as an extension of this artistic language, enhance the message, resonating not just in the audience's ears but also in their hearts and souls. A multi-layered performance that speaks to the Yoruba community's collective consciousness is produced by the interaction of words and beats, reaffirming spiritual beliefs, cultural identity, and shared values.

#### **Conclusion**

The multifaceted communicative value of Yoruba drums is well captured by Roman Jakobson's paradigm. All the six of language's functions are embodied by these tools, which allow them to connect, clarify, enchant, command, inform, and express. As a result, they are appropriately seen as transformational tools, both in the metaphysical or ritualistic sense and in the preservation and projection of the Yoruba worldview through a rich, multi-layered, and dynamic linguistic legacy. The paper concludes that the adaptation of culture-based approaches with modernity, as demonstrated in this study, is a viable means of sustainability within the ambit of transformational agenda.

#### **Recommendations**

The language of the drums, particularly the gangan, should be recorded and codified, and indigenous knowledge should be included into formal education in order to conserve and develop the linguistic and cultural relevance of Yoruba musical instruments. Traditional knowledge may be preserved by training cultural interpreters and performers, and social advocacy can be strengthened by using drumming as a civic engagement tool. Interdisciplinary study should be encouraged to explore the communicative and stylistic components of drumming, and

efforts must be made to digitize and archive drum performances for future generations. Lastly, in order to preserve and advance indigenous arts as essential components of cultural heritage, institutional and governmental support is required.

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## **Appendices**

Ayangalu ni mo yan mi oyanku

Ayangalu ni mo yan mi

oyanku

Ayangalu ti kii femi payan



**Climate Change and Aesthetics in Music Popular Culture in Cameroon: A study Afro Pop Artist Asaba.****Samba, Marie Munkeng****University of Dschang, Dschang.****Abstract**

This study explores the relationship between climate change awareness and aesthetics in Cameroon's popular music culture, focusing on Afro Pop artist Asaba. The research addresses the problem of limited public engagement with climate issues in a region facing socio-economic challenges and insufficient environmental education. The study's primary objective is to investigate how musical expression, particularly through Asaba's work, serves as a medium for environmental consciousness. It examines how her music employs visual, lyrical, and sonic elements to comment on environmental degradation, deforestation, and extreme weather events. The research also considers how Asaba's stylistic choices and their reception among Cameroon's youth contribute to broader environmental awareness. A qualitative methodology is employed, involving the analysis of Asaba's songs, music videos, and performances. The theoretical framework is based on ecomusicology and social identity theory, which aids in understanding how music can reflect ecological values and influence collective environmental attitudes. The study's observations indicate that while climate change is not always directly addressed, Asaba's symbolic references and metaphoric lyrics do stimulate environmental reflection. The findings highlight the role of musicians as informal educators, bridging the gap between scientific discourse and public understanding. Recommendations from the study emphasize the potential of music as a catalyst for environmental awareness and dialogue. It suggests the integration of artistic mediums into climate communication strategies to enhance their resonance and reach, particularly in contexts where conventional approaches may be limited.

**Keywords: Climate Change, Aesthetic, Music, Popolar Culture****Introduction**

Cameroon faces mounting environmental challenges resulting from climate change. The country has seen shifts in weather

patterns, more intense rainy seasons, prolonged dry spells, soil degradation, and the reduction of forest cover, all of which have profound implications for agricultural production, food security, and biodiversity (Wodak, 2017). The consequences of these shifts are not merely environmental but extend to social and cultural systems, particularly in rural areas where livelihoods are closely tied to the land. In the context of these pressing concerns, popular culture, especially music, emerges as a potent tool for environmental awareness and public engagement. Through emotional connection and mass appeal, music can convey urgent messages in ways scientific or policy-driven discourses often cannot (Grant, 2021). In Cameroon, Afro Pop music has evolved as an influential genre with a growing capacity to comment on social and political issues, including the environment. Asaba, a rising Afro Pop artist, exemplifies this shift through her work which blends contemporary sound with lyrical engagement on climate and environmental concerns.

Cameroon's environmental degradation is accelerated by deforestation, illegal logging, over-reliance on fossil fuels, and rapid urbanisation without environmental safeguards (Wodak, 2017). These ecological problems mirror broader global trends, yet they manifest with particular severity in developing contexts due to weaker infrastructure and limited regulatory enforcement. Music in Cameroon historically served as a vehicle for collective identity, storytelling, and social criticism. It continues to fulfil this role, now shaped by digital distribution and global connectivity that amplify its reach (Streaming Platforms, 2021). Afro Pop, a genre marked by rhythmic innovation, emotive vocalisation, and accessibility across linguistic and social lines, has become a vehicle through which climate change discourse can gain traction, especially among younger audiences. Asaba's emergence in the music scene, documented in local media and online platforms (The Guardian Post Cameroon, 2022), signifies a deliberate fusion of aesthetics and advocacy. Her work does not only entertain but also confronts ecological decay, resource exploitation, and the imperative for sustainable living.

Asaba's musical style reflects a synthesis of traditional Cameroonian motifs and modern production, which resonates with both local and diasporic audiences. Through songs such as "Dilemma" and her EP \*Lighter\*, she establishes an emotional

and philosophical tension between consumerist pleasure and ecological responsibility (237Showbiz, 2022). The symbolism in her music videos often draws from natural imagery — flowing rivers, dense forests, and sun-scorched landscapes — that subtly highlight environmental beauty and fragility. Her lyrical themes, while not overtly technical or policy-focused, evoke concern, hope, and reflection. This aligns with what scholars describe as ecomusicology, a field that examines the relationship between music, culture, and ecology (Allen, 2011). By embedding climate consciousness within popular music aesthetics, Asaba bridges the gap between abstract environmental threats and personal experience. The accessibility of Afro Pop allows her messages to travel far, prompting both conversation and introspection among fans.

The role of music as a communicative device in climate change advocacy is particularly important in societies where scientific literacy or institutional trust may be limited. Music offers a shared emotional language that fosters empathy and collective consciousness. As Wodak (2017) explains, climate change communication in non-Western contexts must consider cultural specificity, oral traditions, and popular media as vital channels. Asaba's use of Cameroonian dialects, rhythmic storytelling, and visual symbolism adapts this strategy. In doing so, she not only entertains but educates, encouraging reflection on environmental responsibility without didacticism. Her public persona — visible through social media and live performances — further enhances her credibility and reach, especially among urban youth who are critical to shaping future behavioural patterns regarding consumption, conservation, and civic engagement.

The global music industry's structure also impacts the way climate change is engaged. As noted in research on streaming platforms and industry crises, digital access has democratised music distribution while intensifying environmental costs through energy-hungry data centres and unsustainable concert logistics (Streaming Platforms, 2021). Artists like Asaba confront this contradiction by using their platforms to draw attention to these ironies, promoting digital sustainability, and collaborating with environmentally conscious brands. Her media interviews and social media posts occasionally reference the importance of caring for the earth, drawing a connection between art and activism (Asaba Facebook Page, 2023). While not radical in tone, her

messaging contributes to a broader cultural shift that positions climate concern within the popular imagination, especially in regions where formal environmental education remains limited.

The emotional and aesthetic appeal of Asaba's work contributes to what some scholars term "affective environmentalism" — the use of emotional resonance to inspire ecological awareness and action (Toliver, 2004). Rather than relying solely on fear or guilt, her music fosters appreciation for natural beauty and warns of its loss through neglect. This approach is more likely to motivate sustainable behaviours by fostering a sense of shared cultural identity tied to environmental stewardship. Asaba's work also aligns with feminist readings of environmental discourse, where care, interconnectedness, and vulnerability are emphasised over domination and control. Her music videos often centre women and children as protectors of nature, subtly challenging dominant narratives of extraction and exploitation.

Moreover, Asaba's contribution must be understood within a broader historical trajectory of African musicians engaging with social issues. From Fela Kuti's anti-corruption songs to Angelique Kidjo's humanitarian messages, African popular music has long been a stage for public education and resistance. In this tradition, Asaba's attention to climate change reflects both continuity and innovation. She navigates the commercial demands of the Afro Pop market while embedding messages of sustainability, placing her within a lineage of artists who use their platforms for civic purpose. As climate change intensifies in Cameroon through rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and ecological displacement, her music offers both solace and stimulus, prompting listeners to consider their role in shaping the future.

Asaba stands out as a vital figure in Cameroonian Afro Pop not only for her musical talent but for her commitment to raising awareness about climate change through accessible, emotionally compelling means. Her artistry exemplifies how popular culture can translate abstract environmental concerns into tangible cultural expressions. In a context where formal climate discourse may be inaccessible or ineffective, her music offers a powerful supplement — one that speaks directly to the hearts and habits of everyday listeners. As climate change continues to affect Cameroon's environment and society, artists like Asaba will remain crucial in shaping a more informed and responsive public.

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative, focusing on the analysis of musical texts, visual media, and cultural expressions. It investigates how Afro Pop artist Asaba engages with climate change themes in her music. The research involves a detailed examination of selected songs, music videos, and public performances to identify and interpret the use of visual, lyrical, and sonic elements that relate to environmental issues.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

**Ecomusicology** is a framework that explores the relationship between music, culture, and the environment. It examines how musical practices express environmental concerns, reflect ecological values, or influence attitudes toward nature. In the context of Afro Pop and Asaba's work, ecomusicology provides a lens through which one can analyse how music aesthetics are used to symbolise climate issues, raise awareness, and provoke emotional or behavioural change. Asaba's use of environmental metaphors, traditional instruments, and natural imagery in her visuals aligns with ecomusicological goals of integrating cultural expression with ecological consciousness.

According to Allen and Dawe (2016), ecomusicology "focuses on the intersection of sound, nature, and culture," and offers tools for understanding how musicians reflect and influence ecological thinking through performance, composition, and soundscapes. In African contexts, this includes local expressions of ecological identity, resilience, and activism embedded in indigenous music traditions and their modern adaptations (Allen & Dawe, 2016). Asaba's artistic profile thus exemplifies how Afro Pop musicians in Cameroon can embody ecomusicological concerns, especially when climate change threatens their immediate environment and cultural heritage.

**Social Identity Theory (SIT)**, developed by Tajfel and Turner, posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups, such as those defined by culture, music, or shared beliefs. In the realm of popular music, this theory helps explain how artists like Asaba can influence collective environmental attitudes by shaping how her audience perceives themselves in relation to nature and climate responsibility.

Asaba's climate-related messages become part of a shared cultural identity among her followers. Her use of indigenous languages, symbols, and Afro Pop style reinforces a sense of

cultural belonging, while her advocacy aligns that identity with environmental stewardship. Research by North and Hargreaves (2008) suggests that “musical preferences can be symbolic of identity and values,” allowing artists to influence fans’ perceptions of issues like climate change through emotional and cultural association.

### **Asaba’s Artistic Profile**

Asaba, a leading voice in Cameroon’s Afro Pop scene, represents a growing cohort of African musicians who use popular music not only to entertain but to communicate critical social and environmental issues. Born in the Southwest region of Cameroon, Asaba rose to prominence with her debut EP *\*Lighter\**, which blends vibrant Afro Pop rhythms with themes of identity, resilience, and increasingly, environmental consciousness (237Showbiz, 2022). Her musical journey began in local choirs and talent shows, but her transition into mainstream success was marked by a strategic engagement with social media platforms and collaborations with well-established acts. Her public image combines cultural pride and contemporary style, positioning her as an influencer among Cameroonian youth and a role model for socially conscious artistry.

Asaba’s musical style reflects a blend of traditional rhythms with electronic Afrobeat and Pop influences. Thematically, her work addresses everyday struggles, love, self-empowerment, and lately, environmental change. Her song “Earth Cry,” although not widely publicised, employs nature-based metaphors to depict the suffering of the earth. In the lyrics, phrases such as “the forest weeps in silence” and “rivers run dry like empty dreams” evoke an emotional connection to environmental degradation. As Prior (2022) notes, music has a unique ability to influence thought, emotion, and behaviour by creating affective resonance. Through poetic devices, Asaba frames environmental decline as a shared human concern, thus making climate discourse emotionally accessible.

The visual aesthetics in Asaba’s music videos further amplify her environmental messages. In “Earth Cry,” for instance, visuals of deforested landscapes, cracked soils, and fleeing animals create an atmosphere of ecological urgency. The use of green and brown colour palettes symbolises both the richness of nature and its

current fragility. According to Wodak (2018), such symbolic and poetic representations of climate change in popular culture serve a dual function: they convey ecological concerns while embedding them in accessible cultural narratives. Asaba's decision to incorporate these visuals into her artistry signifies a deliberate engagement with environmental advocacy through aesthetics.

In many of her works, Asaba uses symbolism to deepen the environmental messaging. The repeated image of a lone tree in her visuals suggests resilience amidst destruction, echoing the idea of hope and regeneration. The aesthetic approach aligns with Merriam's (1964) anthropological view of music as a form of human behaviour that both reflects and shapes cultural experience. This symbolism connects with Cameroonian cultural values, where nature is often seen as sacred and central to community well-being. Thus, Asaba's use of such imagery resonates deeply with audiences, not only artistically but ideologically. and traditional instruments. In several tracks, she sings in pidgin English and local dialects, blending indigenous expressions with global musical forms. This linguistic choice affirms cultural identity while allowing for widespread understanding across diverse listener groups. Merriam (1964) highlights that music serves both as a means of social cohesion and as a vehicle for transmitting shared beliefs. Asaba's integration of environmental concerns within culturally familiar frameworks exemplifies this function. Her use of instruments such as the balafon or percussive rhythms resembling traditional drumming styles evokes a connection to land, community, and continuity.

In addition to her recordings, Asaba's public image reinforces her climate-conscious persona. She often shares content related to tree-planting initiatives, clean-up campaigns, and sustainable fashion on her social media platforms (The Guardian Post, 2022). Her alignment with these causes enhances her influence among Cameroonian youth, many of whom consume climate content more effectively through popular figures than institutional sources (Wolcott, 2016). The role of influencers, particularly in digital spaces, has transformed pop culture into a powerful medium for climate advocacy. As pop culture researcher Rajkumar (2023) argues, influencers can drive behavioural trends more rapidly than traditional campaigns, making figures like Asaba indispensable in the climate communication process.

Asaba's approach finds resonance with global trends in eco-musicology and participatory music movements that aim to embed sustainability into cultural production. According to Kerr (2018), music can create a collective identity around climate awareness, especially when presented through immersive and emotionally engaging forms. Asaba's performances, often accompanied by evocative visuals and narratives, contribute to such collective engagement. The "Music for the Environment" initiative in Cameroon, which promotes environmental messages through youth-led music competitions, similarly validates music as a tool for behavioural change (RCESD, 2017). Asaba's collaboration with these projects illustrates the synergy between professional artistry and grassroots activism.

Moreover, her style of affective environmentalism—using emotion to drive ecological reflection—has academic grounding. Prior (2022) explains that music can influence environmental beliefs by fostering empathy and a sense of responsibility. This is particularly important in regions where institutional trust is low and scientific literacy is limited. Asaba's work builds on this emotional register, using metaphor, imagery, and performance to bypass technical jargon and reach listeners on a personal level. Her lyrics often depict nature not as a passive victim but as a character with agency, grief, and resilience, encouraging listeners to adopt a relational rather than exploitative view of the environment.

Through her musical choices and personal branding, Asaba also challenges the dichotomy between entertainment and activism. Rather than creating separate "climate songs," she embeds environmental concerns into mainstream hits, ensuring that the message does not feel ancillary or forced. This strategy aligns with Wolcott's (2016) call for integrating music into sustainability discourse not as decoration but as a core component. Music, when treated as a lived cultural process rather than a detached object, can influence identity formation and social values. Asaba exemplifies this approach, making climate action part of what it means to be young, stylish, and culturally rooted in Cameroon.

Asaba's career reflects the growing power of Afro Pop as a platform for environmental aesthetics and advocacy. Her music blends traditional and modern elements, emotional and symbolic communication, and local and global concerns. By positioning

environmental themes within popular culture, she makes climate discourse more relatable and effective. Her impact illustrates the potential of music to contribute to climate action not through policy or protest alone, but through beauty, emotion, and cultural relevance. As global and local environmental challenges intensify, artists like Asaba will play a central role in reshaping public attitudes and inspiring sustainable futures.

#### **Audience Interpretation of Asaba's Environmental Messaging**

Music serves as a crucial communicative device in climate change advocacy, offering a shared emotional language that fosters empathy and collective consciousness (Wodak, 2017). Asaba's music, characterized by its emotional and aesthetic appeal, contributes to "affective environmentalism," inspiring ecological awareness and action (Toliver, 2004). Her work fosters appreciation for natural beauty and warns against its loss, motivating sustainable behaviors by creating a sense of shared cultural identity and environmental stewardship. In societies where scientific literacy or institutional trust may be limited, music can bridge the gap between abstract environmental threats and personal experience. Asaba's use of Cameroonian dialects, rhythmic storytelling, and visual symbolism makes her message accessible and encourages reflection on environmental responsibility without didacticism. Her approach aligns with feminist readings of environmental discourse, emphasizing care, interconnectedness, and vulnerability.

Asaba's public persona, visible through social media and live performances, enhances her credibility and reach, particularly among urban youth who are crucial in shaping future behavioral patterns (Röschenthaler, 2023). The emotional and aesthetic appeal of her work, combined with her strategic use of social media, amplifies her message and fosters a sense of shared cultural identity tied to environmental stewardship. Her media interviews and social media posts emphasize the importance of caring for the earth, connecting art and activism (Asaba Facebook Page, 2023).

The global music industry's structure also influences how climate change is addressed. Digital access has democratized music distribution while intensifying environmental costs through energy-hungry data centers and unsustainable concert logistics (Streaming Platforms, 2021). Asaba uses her platform to draw attention to these contradictions, promoting digital sustainability

and collaborating with environmentally conscious brands.

While music can be a powerful tool for raising awareness, its impact on directly reducing environmental damage is limited. The primary contribution of artists like Asaba is in shaping a more informed and responsive public, which can indirectly influence policy and action. The effectiveness of music in promoting climate action depends on how its emotional resonance can inspire ecological awareness and motivate sustainable behaviors.

Music's ability to unite people across the globe and invite audiences to learn and take action suggests its potential to enhance climate change communication. By leveraging the universal appreciation of music, artists can deliver information about climate change in an engaging and emotionally resonant manner. This approach can make the climate crisis a more intimate, relatable, and pressing issue, motivating listeners to respond effectively.

### **Conclusion**

Asaba's music exemplifies how popular culture can translate abstract environmental concerns into tangible cultural expressions, offering a powerful supplement to formal climate discourse. Her commitment to raising awareness about climate change through accessible and emotionally compelling means makes her a vital figure in Cameroonian Afro Pop. As climate change continues to affect Cameroon's environment and society, artists like Asaba play a crucial role in shaping a more informed and responsive public. Her work underscores the broader implications of cultural strategies in climate awareness, demonstrating how artistic expression can drive both conversation and introspection among fans, and highlighting the need for interdisciplinary approaches in addressing climate change.

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**Eco-Pedagogy And Cultural Values: An Analysis of Selected Didactic Poems of Yoruba Cosmology**<sup>1</sup>OLOKO, M. Jamiu PhD,<sup>2</sup>SONDE, S. Olufunso PhD<sup>3</sup>OMOWUNMI, Ojuolape

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**Abstract**

Eco-pedagogy plays roles in transmitting cultural values and practices that promote environmental harmony. Yoruba people are known for their rich oral traditions, didactic poems and other compositions, some of which are used to condemn acts related to social vices. This paper analysed four purposively selected translated didactic poems of a veteran Yoruba writer, Chief J. F. Odunjo: "Work is the antidote for poverty", "Why should I be a robber", "A child who despises his mother" and "Enhance your character". The four poems of Yoruba cosmology were subjected to content and sociolinguistic analysis. Hymes Ethnography of Communication and Paulo Freire's Eco-pedagogy are the theoretical perspectives for the analysis. The analysis shows that the selected poems are in the contexts of respect for elders, discouragement of stealing/robbery, discouragement of deceptions and emphasizes character enhancement. Poem about diligence to duty lays emphasis on hard work, self-reliance, resilience and the changing nature of man and the environment. Poem about respect to elders focuses on the need to respect our parents, the efforts parents make over their children and consequences of disrespecting/disobeying parental instructions. Poem that discourages stealing emphasizes the need to be contented with what we have and the need to give values to hard work. Poem about character development is about need to live a purposive, diplomatic and focused life styles. Among the speech acts that the poems were used to perform are: illocutionary elicitation acts enquiring about (why I should be a thief), conditional act, declaring verdict on (whoever is a thief), verdictive act passing judgement (of poverty on whoever despises his mother) and advisory act instructing and advising (youths to enhance

their character). The ethno-linguistic analysis of selected didactic poems of Yoruba origin underscores the profound interplay between language, culture, and moral instruction within Yoruba society. It was recommended that efforts should be made to preserve the didactics nature of Yoruba culture particularly, those passed down orally to prevent the loss of this cultural heritage.

**Key words:** Ethno-linguistics, poems of J F Odunjo, didactic poems of Yoruba origin, changing nature of man and the environment.

### **Introduction**

Yoruba societies, known for moral values and promotion of formal and informal education, have produced prominent scholars and individuals that brought glory and honour to their people and background. Those were days when the culture value system of the society was integrity, honesty, hard work, respect to elders and the likes. Today, moral decadence and social vices have eroded moral values in the society. There are several cases on the air and internet of all sorts of crimes. Social vices are a worldwide issue that cut across all ages and societies. Prominent among the known social vices are disregard for environmental sanitation, disobedience to elders, inappropriate dressing, robbery, cultism, pocket-picking, drug addiction, examination fraud, hooliganism, thuggery, betting, smoking and rape to mention but a few. Social vices affect the society as a whole and individual in particular. Also, the mental, physical, academic, moral aspects of an individual are negatively affected. There were poems written by J. F. Odunjo and others which were taught at the grassroots level. Right from the first day of a child in school, such poems were learnt on the school's assembly ground. The moral stand of the people then were quite outstanding compared to what is obtainable in Nigerian society. Such poems are referred to as 'old school' and are no longer in vogue as they have gone into extinction. The present-day societies tend to focus only on academic achievements and neglecting moral values. The difference between old and this new generation is glaring. Okwu, (2016) opines that almost everyone living in the general society engage in at least one social vice or the other either directly or indirectly. Liu, Volcic, and Gallois (2015), opine that language is a

social phenomenon that is often used by humans to convey feelings, desires, thoughts, attitudes, and intentions from one party to another. They also argue that the language we use today defines the world and the identity of every human being and that language is not only a communication tool but as a sign of power. Language is a social phenomenon that is often used by humans to convey feelings, desires, thoughts, attitudes, and intentions from one place to another. Language defines the world culture and the identity of every human being. Language is not only a communication tool but as a sign of power. Sociolinguistics looks at how language is affected by society, the cultural norms, gender, occupation, social status, social setting and other social constructs (Oyedeji, 2017). According to Appadurai (1996) culture is the work of imagination. It is increasingly what we make of the world and what the world makes of us, with the acceleration of global cultural flows. Hall (1997) opines that culture is about shared meanings. Culture is about the language we use to express ourselves and the symbols we use to represent ourselves to others." Language and culture are deeply interconnected and influence each other in various ways. First, language is the primary means through which culture is expressed and communicated. It carries the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions of a community. Through language, people share their stories, rituals, and history, which are key components of their cultural identity. Also, language serves as a vehicle for transmitting culture from one generation to the other. This transmission happens through storytelling, instructions of different types, and other forms of daily communication, ensuring that cultural knowledge, practices, and values are preserved over time (Alaba, 2002).

The Nigerian society grapples with a myriad of social vices such as corruption, tribalism, gender inequality, terrorism, religious intolerance, and youth unemployment, among others. These vices have deeply entrenched themselves in the fabric of society, posing significant challenges to national development, unity, and progress. Despite various efforts and interventions, these social vices continue to persist, highlighting the need for innovative approaches to address them effectively. There is a need to systematically analyze works from the rich oral tradition of the

Yoruba people including a variety of didactic poems that serve both educational and cultural functions. Despite their significance, these poems have not been extensively studied from the perspective of ethno-linguistic. The linguistic and cultural dimensions of these poems are what this paper seeks to analyze.

### **The Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to conduct an ethno-linguistic analysis translated versions of selected didactic poems of J. F Odunjo who is a veteran of Yoruba language and culture in order to appreciate the values in the cultural, educational and linguistics significance. The specific objectives are to identify the contexts of didactic poems of J. F. Odunjo, analyse the ethno-linguistic features and structures used in the selected didactic poems and interpret the cultural and moral messages conveyed through them and contextual the interaction of man with the natural world.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Eco-Criticism**

Ecocriticism is a critical approach to literature and culture that focuses on the relationships between human beings and the natural world. It emerged in the 1990s as a response to growing concerns about environmental degradation and the impact of human activity on the planet (Glotfelty and Fromm). Ecocritics examine the ways in which literature and other cultural forms represent and interact with the natural world. They are interested in exploring the ways in which environmental issues and concerns are reflected in literary texts, considering how literature can be used to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote sustainability and ecological awareness.

Ecocriticism also emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on fields such as biology, ecology, and environmental studies to enrich literary analysis. It seeks to explore the complex and dynamic relationships between human beings and the natural world, and to uncover the ways in which these relationships are shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors.

One of the key principles of ecocriticism is the importance of environmental justice. Ecocritics are interested in exploring the ways in which environmental issues and concerns disproportionately affect marginalized communities, and in how literature can be used to promote social and environmental justice. Ecocriticism has been influential in a variety of fields, including literature, cultural studies, and environmental studies. It has been used to analyze a wide range of literary works, from classic literature to contemporary eco-fiction, and has been applied to other cultural forms, such as film and art.

**Eco-didacticism**

Eco-didacticism is a design approach that utilizes art, architecture, and public spaces to educate and engage the public about environmental issues and sustainability. It emphasizes the use of visible and informative elements to communicate ecological messages and promote awareness about the environment. Eco-didacticism draws from the concept of didacticism, which involves teaching or instructing through art and design. In this context, it's about using artistic and architectural installations to convey environmental messages and promote ecological awareness. Eco-didactic approaches leverage public spaces as venues for community dialogue and education about sustainability and ecological concerns.

Eco-didactic design often incorporates visible elements that highlight a project's eco-friendly aspects, allowing viewers to understand and appreciate its sustainable features. The goal is to communicate ecological information in a clear, engaging, and understandable manner, fostering a sense of responsibility and action among the public

**Ethno-linguistic**

The word ethno-linguistic is originated from Greek language 'éthnos' meaning the - people, tribes. Ethno-linguistic is sometimes refers to as cultural linguistics. It is an area of anthropological linguistics that studies the relationship between language and cultural behavior of the people who speak that language. Ethno-linguistic studies the relationship between ethnic culture and language. It examines the contribution of different ethnic groups to the language and its development, as

well as the similarities and differences among ethnic groups. According to Nurova (2021) ethno-linguistic is the field of linguistics that studies the relationship between a people, a nation, an ethnic group and its language on the basis of the principle of the commonality of ethno-linguistic ethnic culture and ethnic language.

Ethno-linguistic refers to the ethnic aspect of language and the linguistic features of an ethnos. Ethno-linguistic processes internal and interethnic relations, the role of language in the formation and functioning of ethnic communities, language and traditional culture. Ethno-linguistic is an expression of culture in which the task of analyzing the ethnic characteristics of a people from a linguistic point of view is to inform the reader about it. While linguistics studies the natural language, its structure and laws, ethno-linguistic reflects the linguistic expression of folk culture, that is, the customs and traditions reflected in the language (Nurova, 2021). Furthermore, Alyeksyeyeva (2022) views ethno-linguistic as an interdisciplinary approach to language that combines methods of linguistic dialectology and comparative linguistics with the methods of Folklore Studies. He opines further that ethno-linguistic may be viewed as a component of modern Semiotics in that it overlaps with mythology, history of culture and ethnic history. Ethno-linguistic studies the correlation between language and culture, language and mentality, language and folklore.

Ethno-linguistic extracts the data from culture-bound language units, i.e., those units of grammar and vocabulary whose meanings are to a certain extent conditioned by ethnic culture, ethnic consciousness and some units becoming symbols or standards in this culture. In other words, Ethno-linguistic examines only those language units that contain culture-specific ideas of the spheres processes by human consciousness: space, time, activity, etc, (Красных, 2002). Alyeksyeyeva (2022) avers that ethno-linguistic is more interested in culture than in civilization, since it is culture that has symbolic nature. Ethno-linguistic focuses on symbols of a culture that are expressed in language and communicative behaviour. Overall, ethno-linguistic

provides insights into how language both shapes and is shaped by the cultural contexts in which it is used.

### **Common Social Vices in Nigeria**

#### **Indecent dressing**

Indecent dressing is any form of dressing that is likely to shock/offend others, or elicit sexual provocation. It is any form of dressing that does not properly cover the sexually sensitive parts of the body such as the armpit, cleavage, breast, thighs, buttocks, navel, the chest of a male, the back of a female, and so on Osamirom E,O; Ekwukoma, V, and Ekomaru, C.I. (2015). In traditional African culture, modesty is linked to virtue and reverence (Lockhart, 2021). An adage says the way you dress determines the way you will be addressed and one's appearance can reveal the kind of home one comes from. Unfortunately, this much cherished culture and tradition has been substituted with indecent mode of dressing even in places of worship. Sadly, this modesty has been replaced with immoral wardrobe choices, even in religious situations. As the culture stops perceiving anything wrong with men wearing bottom-grazing slacks or ladies displaying their body contours, this disgusting trend of societal vices is getting more and more accepted). Girls frequently wear clothes that exposes their cleavage and other vulnerable body areas.

Osamirom; Ekwukoma, & Ekomaru, (2015) posit that the menace of indecent dressing in some universities is a spillover from the larger society that is flooded with indecent dressing especially among the singles. However, some married people especially women also dress indecently. There are those of them who claim that indecent dressing is a strategy for “protecting” their homes. They presumably feel that when they dress indecently (revealing the parts of their body that are supposed to be concealed) their unfaithful husbands would not have any cause of looking at husband snatchers who dress indecently as a bait. Ako and Igbo (2013) also add that some male students dress indecently by making their boxers show above their trousers. There are those who tie headgears like ladies, have their ears and other parts of their bodies like the mouth and the nose pierced in order to wear rings on them. Some, in their care for cheap attention, maintain

spiky and unkempt hairstyles resembling everything from the horse's mane.

### **Examination Malpractices**

Cheating in an examination is when a candidate or other people conduct it improperly before, during, or after it to gain a good score. The issue of test malpractice, which includes things like exam leaks, cheating, impersonation, fake credentials, etc., has grown immensely wicked roots throughout the years, claims Okurounmu (2010). This allows candidates to get an unfair advantage over other applicants. Ghost centers, script substitution, bringing in unauthorized materials, copying, giraffe, writing on body parts, and collaboration with academics and invigilators/supervisors are further exam fraud strategies. Akinleye and Makinde (2012) observed that the problem of examination malpractice has over the years grown giant satanic roots, spreading its tentacles to even the most revered of Nigeria's Institutions of learning and examining bodies like Nigerian Law School, JAMB, NECO, COREN, NIJ, WAEC just to mention a few.

### **Cultism**

The word "cult" in modern English refers to a social group that is identified by its peculiar religious, spiritual, or philosophical beliefs and rituals. Secret cults or societies, according to Ogbonnaya (2012), are groups whose members swear an oath of secrecy regarding their identities, signs, and passwords all of which are entirely hidden from the public—and who frequently threaten violators with severe repercussions. With potential primary objectives to defy convention, reignite a long-standing rivalry, swear by a deity with human blood, and engage in other actions that are only available to members. The choice to join may be voluntary (because of a need for recognition, poverty, the fear of failing or being rejected, or depression), influenced by peer pressure, or forced based on academic ability or family wealth and influence. Due to the extent of vice in the nation, they used to operate covertly but now mercilessly kill and maim their competitors and innocent bystanders in broad daylight without the permission of the authorities (Igwe, 2014).

### **Drug abuse/alcoholism**

Substance abuse is characterized as drug use that significantly impairs a person's ability to function socially and physically. Peer pressure, poor parenting, parental influence, parental unemployment, despondency, and attention-seeking are a few elements that have an impact on drug misuse. Okatachi (2020) studied the risk variables for drug use in the Nigerian cities of Kano and Lagos using a sample of 144 people. Abuse has been described as the use of drugs to the extent that there is interference with the health and social function of an individual (Abudulahi, 2009). Drug abuse is caused by peer influence, faulty upbringing, Parental influence, unemployment, depression and means of gaining popularity. In recent time, drug abuse and alcoholism is almost turning a norm among undergraduates. The addition of hard drugs into coca cola is now in vogue. Common among such drugs are Tramador, Refnor, cocaine, marijuana, gegemu, madras, valium, tutolin and various types of alcoholic drinks. The consequences include loss of perception, loss of memory, and disrespect to constituted authority, madness, aggression and untimely death.

### **Terrorism/violence**

The term "terrorism" is frequently used to describe acts of violence committed against people in the name of a political or ideological cause. By fostering xenophobia, decreasing tourism, and increasing insurance claims, terrorism has an indirect impact on the economy. Terrorism is defined as a planned act of violence against a specific target to destabilize a duly established government, instill terror among the public, and achieve certain social and political goals. Since 2003, this act has plagued Nigeria and had two negative effects on the country: a severe humanitarian crisis on the one hand, and difficulties with insecurity on the other. The Terrorism Provision Act of 2011 was passed to prosecute, punish, and ultimately deter Nigerian people from engaging in terrorism. Nevertheless, quite a few Nigerian citizens continued to commit terrorist acts. Due to their encouragement of the damage of property and the taking of human life during crimes that violate peace and security, these statements are now widely employed. Study on children and youth involved in organized armed conflict in Nigeria revealed that area boys and Al-majors have emerged as targets of the very

society that alienated them due to youth dissatisfaction and frustration brought on by widespread poverty and unemployment.

**Cyber crime**

Cybercrime has gotten worse in our culture and is especially common among young people, to put it bluntly. It involves engaging in illegal activities like internet fraud, phone hacking, and bank information theft while using a computer as a tool. Panda (2018) asserts that cybercrime is the use of computers or networks to perpetrate crimes involving computers or networks to transmit malware, illicit data, or illicit images. Cybercriminals may utilize a device to disable it or gain access to a user's private information, critical company information, or government information. Internet users have experienced substantial problems as a result of cybercrime, which also poses a risk to national security or the victim's financial stability. Nigerian youths have escalated cybercrime to the point that victims are mesmerized by regional charms on Yahoo+ and used as props in rituals. Panda (2018), went on to state that the types, approaches, and levels of difficulty differed in each category. Cyberstalking, social engineering, attacks, potentially unwanted programs (PUPs), identity theft, phishing, unlawful or restricted online content, online scams, and exploit kits are a few of the categories that have been recognized. Without mincing words, cybercrime has become an increasingly large problem in our society most especially among undergraduates. It involves the use of the computer as an instrument to commit illegal activities like internet fraud, phone hacking, stealing information from bank etc.

**Sexual promiscuity/prostitution**

It denotes immoral behavior when engaging in sexual activity with the non-dominant sex, such as rape, extramarital sex, and any other sort of sexual aggression. According to Okafor and Duru (2010), sexual promiscuity is extremely common in our universities and there are typically multiple networks on each campus. Sexual promiscuity is the use of one's body for payment or recompense of any kind. Prostitution is another term for it. These are the kinds of services provided by women who are after money or who are eager to reach particular degrees of success. Sexual promiscuity is pervasive in our universities and there are

numerous networks in the average school. The majority of these students canvass for donations outside of their residence halls and dormitories. Virginity was previously highly valued in traditional African society, but it is now virtually extinct. Today, those who remain virgins are considered antisocial. Many people engage in it for financial gain, entertainment, to test their parents' power, as a social cue, to avoid long-term unemployment, or to achieve academic success. Some young individuals are unaware of how these illicit sexual behaviors can have detrimental impacts (Hussein, 2014). Many female students in tertiary schools, according to the study, engage in this behavior. They claim that because men are no longer frequent brothels and street prostitutes but instead choose students, it is more profitable to be a student today. At night, they boldly venture to adjacent cities, clubs, or other hotspots to conduct business with their customers directly to gain the most exposure to males who might want to use their services. Pupils who were given unrestricted liberty and freedom started to test the boundaries of proper conduct by abusing the freedom given to them as "adults." One of the factors is the neglect of parental duties.

#### **Factors responsible for Social Vices among Youth**

Nigeria is a victim of high-level corruption, bad leadership, and political instability, all of which surely played a role in the social menace the country is currently facing. On the media, there are many discussions on the primary causes of vices in Nigeria. One of the issues raised as one of the primary causes of societal vices is unemployment. Mentioning unemployment is appropriate given the frequency of young people living on the streets due to unemployment even though they are qualified and certified to work. Nowadays, young people engage in criminal activity that poses a significant threat to society as a whole, including kidnapping, robberies, fraud, violent protests, and dirty work. Due to a lack of employment, some young people have turned their resentment toward the public into acts like vandalizing oil pipelines, kidnapping foreigners and demanding a high ransom, and engaging in other actions that have a significant detrimental effect on the economy of the country and have unnerved the entire nation. Many households in the country are classified as having low socioeconomic status because they struggle to make

ends meet each month. If only one family member works to support the other members' needs, the family cannot be financially stable. The majority of the so-called youth are in this kind of predicament; many drop out of school because their parents can't afford the tuition; many were exposed to financial risks too early in life; and many felt there was no need for them to go back to school because they were aware of the country's unemployment situation. To stay with their buddies, they decided to engage in vices including child trafficking, auto theft, and even ritual homicide. The undergraduates instead of focusing on their future by reading acidulously in order to graduate with good grades that will qualified them to work now prefer to go for cyber-crime because of their believe that those outside with good grades are unemployed. They therefore become readily available in the hands of the bad elements in the society and rotten politicians who are bent to distort the ruling government.

According to Agbaegbu (2011), young people tend to trust their classmates who are close to them in age, an older friend who acts as a mentor, or the so-called school father or mother, with ease. Being born with a tabular rasa (blank slate), children have a strong desire to learn, have fun, and practice new skills. They consequently smoke, drink, and participate in a variety of criminal activities, which is in keeping with the adage that "bad communicators corrupt good manners." This illustrates the value of friendship and how people may influence one another either negatively or favorably depending on the type of relationship they had.

Furthermore, Makinde, Kehinde-Dada, and Babatunde (2020) identify poverty as a major factor that is responsible for social vices in Nigeria society. They discover so many families fall into the category of low socio-economic status in the country because their monthly income is not enough to feed the family. In a situation where only one person in family is working to feed the rest of the family members, there is no way such family can be alright economically. Majority of the so called undergraduates find themselves in this type of situation, many drop out of school because their parents are unable to pay school fees and so many were wide-opened to money making risks too early in life, they felt

there is no need for them to go back to school since they are aware of the unemployment situation of the country. They thereby preferred to join their mates in vices like child trafficking, car snatching and even ritual killing. Bakkihs and Tor (2020) also corroborate the above reason responsible for social vices in Nigeria. They assert that the high poverty rate in Nigeria have compelled many people to devise ways of survival such as prostitution, drug abuse, cultism, etc. which are at variance with the norms and values of the country.

Another factor is corruption, it is a form of dishonesty or criminal cases undertaken by a person or organisation entrusted with position of authority, to acquire illicit benefit or abuse power for ones' privilege gain. Corruption is caused generally by greed, lack of positive values, porous system, weak enforcement, societal pressure, poverty of the mind, Fagbadebo (2017) stated in his work that Nigeria is a victim of high-level corruption, bad governance and political instability. The Educators most especially teachers are meant to positively affect the life of students committed into their custody but now the reverse is the case. Teacher now help in examination malpractices by pretending as if he/she is not aware of student cheating in an examination hall instead of reporting the case to disciplinary committee, they fail to discharge their duties promptly due to laziness and personal problems. Some even stoop so low to collect bribe from the student either by paying certain amount of money or sleeping with them of the victim are female.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical perspectives for this study are Eco-Pedagogy and Ethnography of Communication

#### **Eco-Pedagogy Theory**

Paulo Freire's (2000) Eco-pedagogy fosters critical thinking skills that enable learners to analyze literature for its environmental messages, biases, and potential for promoting positive change. By critically engaging with literature, learners can develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and be empowered to take action towards a more sustainable future. Eco-pedagogy emphasizes the connection between literature and real-world environmental challenges, encouraging

learners to see the relevance of their studies to their lives and their communities. In essence, Freire's eco-pedagogy provides a framework for using literature as a tool for environmental awareness, critical thinking, and social action. It encourages learners to become active participants in shaping a more sustainable and just future.

Eco-pedagogy, though not a direct theory of literature, it however utilizes his broader critical pedagogy to address environmental issues. It emphasizes a holistic, interconnected view of humans and nature, advocating for education that fosters ecological awareness, social justice, and a critical understanding of environmental problems. This approach encourages learners to analyze power structures, challenge unsustainable practices, and engage in actions towards a more sustainable and equitable future. Eco-pedagogy uses critical literacy to analyze how literature (and other texts) can reflect, shape, or challenge our relationship with nature and environmental issues. It encourages learners to develop a critical consciousness (*conscientização*) about environmental problems, their root causes, and their social and economic dimensions. Eco-pedagogy emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living things and the environment, encouraging learners to see themselves as part of a larger ecological system.

It promotes action-oriented learning (*praxis*) where students move beyond simply understanding environmental issues to actively engaging in solutions and promoting change. Eco-pedagogy challenges anthropocentric (human-centered) views of the world and dominant narratives that legitimize unsustainable practices. Eco-pedagogy encourages learners to analyze how literature depicts nature, environmental problems, and human-nature relationships. This includes examining the language, imagery, and perspectives used in texts. It promotes the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives on environmental issues, moving beyond dominant narratives and single interpretations.

### **Ethnography of Communication Theory**

The ethnography of communication theory is a framework for analyzing the ways in which communication practices are embedded within and shaped by cultural contexts. The theory

was developed primarily by Dell Hymes in the 1960s with the emphasis that communication cannot be understood apart from knowledge of the cultural and social contexts in which it occurs. Among the key components and concepts of the ethnography of communication theory are: i. **Communicative Competence:** Hymes (1961) introduced the concept of communicative competence, which extends beyond the grammatical correctness of language to include the ability to use language appropriately in various social and cultural contexts. This involves knowing when and how to speak, what to say, and to whom. ii. **Speech Community:** A central concept in the ethnography of communication is the speech community, a group of people who share norms and rules for using language. These norms and rules are shaped by cultural, social, and situational factors. iii. **SPEAKING Model:** Hymes (1972) developed the SPEAKING model as a tool for analyzing communication within its cultural context. The model includes the following components:

- Situation: The setting and scene in which communication takes place.
- Participants: The individuals involved in the communication event.
- Ends: The purposes, goals, and outcomes of the communication.
- Act sequences: The sequence of actions and messages in the communication.
- Key: The tone, manner, or spirit in which the communication is carried out.
- Instrumentalities: The channels and forms of communication used (e.g., spoken, written, nonverbal).
- Norms: The social rules governing the communication event.
- Genres: The types or categories of speech acts or events (e.g., storytelling, debate, prayer).

iv. **Ethnographic Methods:** The ethnography of communication employs ethnographic methods to study communication practices. This involves immersive fieldwork, participant observation, and detailed analysis of communicative events within their cultural settings. v. **Cultural Patterns and Practices:** The theory emphasizes that communication practices are deeply rooted in cultural patterns and social structures. Ethnographers of communication analyze how these practices reflect and reinforce

cultural values, social norms, and power dynamics. vi.  
**Contextualization:** Understanding communication involves looking at the broader context in which it occurs. This includes considering historical, political, economic, and social factors that influence communication.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative method to comprehensively investigate the role of poetry in combating social vices in Yoruba culture and Nigerian society using the theories of Eco-Pedagogy and Ethnography of Communication. The qualitative component will involve in-depth analysis of poetic works. The selected poems for the work are J. F. Odunjo's *Work is an Antidote to Poverty, Enhance your Character, Why should I be a robber? and A Child that Despises his Mother*. The selected poems were critically examined with the aim of identifying the contextual analysis in the poems and virtues as well as eco-pedagogy and ethnographic elements used by the poet to preserve his messages.

### **Analysis of Context of the Selected Didactic Poems**

This section deals with how the selected didactic poems serve as a vehicle for cultural transmission and environmental preservation, reflecting the values, norms, and societal structures of the Yoruba people. The time the poems were composed, the major occupation of our fore fathers was the practice of Agriculture, hence the aspect of ecology being addressed. The selected poems are dissected to reveal the layers of meaning embedded in their linguistic and socio-cultural context, highlighting their role in shaping and preserving the values and norms in Yoruba worldview across generations.

### **Poem related to diligence to work**

The first poem is J F Odunjo's "Work is the antidote for poverty" (Ìṣẹ̀ loògùn ìṣẹ̀). The poem is written in Yoruba, language spoken predominantly in Southwestern Nigeria. This poem emphasizes the value of hard work, ecological preservation and self-reliance. The poet encourages the reader to engage diligently in their work, as it is through hard work and perseverance that one achieves success and social standing. The poem underscores the importance of hard work as the key to success and personal advancement. During the period the poem was written, farming was the major occupation of our people. To work hard is to wake up early in the morning and go to farm. Yoruba people believe

that hard work saves, it is laziness that kills. The lines "It is through work that we achieve greatness" (Iṣẹ lafi ní deṅi gíga)" and "What we work hard for, lasts in our hands" (Ohun tí a bá fara ṣiṣẹ fún, Níí pé lówó ẹni) convey the idea that effort and dedication are essential to attaining lasting achievements. The poem warns against relying on others for support, even if those others are close family members like parents. This is highlighted in the lines, "Bí ó bá gbójú lé wọn, Ó tẹ tán ni mo sọ fún ọ" (If you rely on them, you are finished, I tell you)". The poet encourages the reader to take personal responsibility for their success rather than depending on others. By working hard, the land would be tilled and food will be abundant in the society and with this, man is interacting with the natural world. In doing this however, there should be caution in the destruction of the earth. This is the reason why in today's mechanized farming, fertilizers are applied to replace the lost nutrients in the process of tilling the land.

Apart from the fact that ecology is about nature and the environment, it is also about the people. People must come together. If people are divided, nature will revenge. Farm settlement, where people live as an integrated whole, is very common in Africa. This practice of communality coupled with rejuvenating the soil by applying fertilizer and practicing crop rotation will enable the ecology to be at peace with the people.

The poet also suggests that material wealth or external support, such as that from parents, is not reliable in the long term. Most time, people depend on their parents, the space of land being cultivated by the parents has to be shared based on the number of children at his death. But the child that acquires his own space of land for farming would have additional farm to use. This is reflected in the lines, "Ìyá rẹ lè lowo lówó, Bàbá rẹ lè lésin léèkàn" ("Your mother may be rich today, your father may own horses"). The poet stresses that depending on these sources can be risky, as they might not always be available.

Educational training is also emphasized as crucial to success, the educated speaks in high places. Hence the child is advised to strive to learn well, as success in education makes someone great (Èkó sì ní sọ ní dógá). This line suggests that education empowers individuals and provides them with the tools needed to navigate life successfully. With good education, an individual will engage in farm work productively. The poem also touches on the fleeting

nature of life and the importance of utilizing time wisely. The closing line, “Commit to work, the days are passing bye” (Múra sí işẹ ojò ní lo), is a reminder that time is not infinite and must be used productively. A lazy person is left at home playing away his time. The hardworking farmer meets him where he left him for farm. The poem is structured as a series of admonitions or advice from the speaker to a younger or less experienced individual. The language is simple yet powerful, with the repetition of certain phrases to reinforce the poem’s core message. The poem employs proverbs and sayings common in Yoruba culture, which enriches its meaning and makes it more relatable to Yoruba-speaking audiences. The title “Work is the cure for poverty” (İşẹ loògùn işẹ) encapsulating the main theme of the poem in a single line. The tone of the poem is didactic and motivational. *Hard work makes one great. Work hard and do not rely on the wealth of your parents. The wealth that is worked for lasts, etc.* The speaker adopts a guiding, almost parental role, urging the reader to take action and be proactive in their own life. There is also a sense of urgency, especially in the closing lines, where the passing of time is mentioned.

This poem is deeply rooted in Yoruba culture, where proverbs and sayings are often used to convey the wisdom of the people in the need to do well whatever is the source of our daily bread, including farming which was the major occupation of our fore fathers. The emphasis on hard work, self-reliance, and the temporality of life reflects values that are highly regarded in many African societies. Additionally, the poem addresses the universal human experiences of striving for success, dealing with challenges, and the importance of self-determination. "İşẹ loògùn işẹ" is a powerful poem that serves as a motivational guide, urging individuals to embrace hard work and self-reliance while being mindful of the transient nature of life and opportunities. Through its use of Yoruba proverbs and straightforward language, the poem delivers a timeless message that resonates across cultures and generations.

Among the speech acts that were achieved with the poem are **illocutionary advisory act, giving conditional advice** to anyone who has no one to assist him. “If there is no one to lean on, one concentrates and continues to work hard”. The perlocutionary effect of the speech act is to emphasize the need to

work hard. Another **illocutionary advisory act urging** is given at the end of the poem: “Don’t waste your morning my friend, for time hastes away”. Morning in the poem is metaphoric. It represents the youthful age. Do not waste youth youthful time playing but work hard. Not yielding to this advice makes them to regret in their old age.

**Poem about respect for elders**

"Odunjo's "A child that despises his/her mother" (Ọmọ tó mọyá ẹ lójú o) is written in both Yoruba and English for clarity. Odunjo's "a child who despises his mother" explores the idea of the need to give accounts for one's own actions. In the traditional society, it is expected that children should respect their parents and anyone that is older than him/her. A child that fails to do this is seen as a miscreant. A troublemaker is however declared a misfit to the family and the entire community. It highlights the impact of one's behavior on their loved ones, emphasizing that neglect or irresponsibility can lead to serious consequences. The child who disrespect his/her parents will face the consequences, represented by the phrase "poverty will destroy that child" (Ọ̀sì nì yòò tá ọmọ nàà pà). This underlines the idea that failure to honor one's own parents can lead to ruin. Parents in this context has its semantic extension to include all older members of the community. The poem makes extensive use of repetition, particularly with the lines "Ọmọ tó mọyá ẹ lójú o" and "Ọ̀sì nì yòò tá ọmọ nàà pà". This repetition serves to reinforce the central message about the consequences of neglecting one's duties and responsibilities. The repetition of "Ọmọ tó mọyá ẹ lójú o" (a child who disregards their parent) emphasizes the importance of respecting and honoring one's parent or responsibilities. It also creates a rhythmic and emphatic structure that drives home the poem's warning.

Odunjo's "A child that despises his mother" is structured with a clear, repetitive pattern that underscores its moral message. The use of repetition and the concise, parallel structure contribute to its didactic nature, making the message straightforward and memorable. This form is typical in oral poetry and proverbs, where repetition aids in memorability and emphasizes key points. The imagery in the poem is symbolic, using "Ọ̀sì" (poverty) to represent the dire consequences of neglect or failure to respect

familial bonds. Poverty serves as a metaphor for the destructive impact of irresponsibility. The term “Òṣì” (poverty) symbolizes severe punishment or downfall resulting from a lack of respect or duty. This imagery conveys the seriousness of ignoring one’s responsibilities and the far-reaching effects it can have. The speech act achieved with the text “a child that despises his mother” is an Illocutionary **verdictive act passing judgment** of poverty on a child that despises his mother. In the context of Yoruba culture, it is not right and acceptable for a child to despise their parents including elderly ones who are not even their biological parents. It is expected by traditional cultural laws that such a child that despises his mother would be poor in life. Poverty verdict in the sense that such a child will no more be obedient to his parents. By that, all the duties of parents on her would stop. Such child is expected to end a poor person as he /she wouldn’t have received the required instructions and supports to be independent. In an agrarian society, he would need the initial supports to get and cultivate a farm of his own. His /her disobedience would have made him/her forfeit those benefits.

The tone of the poem is cautionary and serious, reflecting the gravity of the consequences discussed. The mood is one of forewarning, aiming to instill a sense of urgency and respect for familial and social duties. The serious tone is evident in the repeated warning about the pestilence that will befall the child who does not respect their parent. This tone is meant to provoke thought and encourage adherence to social and familial norms. The poem reflects Yoruba cultural values, where respect for parents and elders is paramount. The consequences mentioned are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs about social conduct and the importance of ancestral relationships. The emphasis on the relationship between a child and their parent aligns with Yoruba cultural norms that stress the importance of honoring and respecting one’s elders. The consequences (pestilence) reflect traditional beliefs about the repercussions of failing to meet social and familial obligations. The poem uses repetition, symbolism, and a clear structure to deliver a powerful message about the consequences of neglecting social and familial responsibilities. Its serious tone and cautionary content reflect traditional values and serve as a moral lesson, emphasizing the importance of respect and responsibility within familial relationships. The cultural

context enriches the poem's meaning, grounding it in Yoruba values and beliefs.

Family life is paramount in Yoruba culture. Parents play a significant role in the upbringing of children, especially, the mother. Odunjo's "A child that despises his mother" reflects on the deep respect and appreciation expected from children towards their parents. The Yoruba people place immense value on respect for parents. Disrespecting one's parents, particularly a mother, is seen as a serious moral failure. In Yoruba culture, respect for elders generally is a fundamental lesson an individual has to imbibe from childhood. The poem taps into the cultural norms, using the fear of poverty as a deterrent for disrespect. Poverty is not just a physical state of bankruptcy, it include moral and social states as such life will be lived without the blessing of parents.

Odunjo's "**Enhance your character**, my friend" is similar to the poem "the child that despises his parents". The poem explores themes of moral integrity, societal apathy to unruly behaviour, and the consequences of one's actions (or inactions). In a traditional society, every member of the community has right to rebuke an unruly child. However, where a child is well behaved, it is expected that such a child is appreciated. In those days, leadership positions were not contested for but nominated for. The elders agreed on who to nominate and who not to nominate. An unruly child is declared *omo to ti bale je bona je* (a child that is not responsible). Such a child would not be reckoned with. The poem resonates on issues of child's responsibility and the need for a child to choose right. The central message of "Enhance your character, my friend", *Toju iwa re, ore mi*, is the importance of developing good moral integrity. The poem emphasizes that wealth, beauty, and stature are transient and ultimately inconsequential if one lacks a good character. The poem's repetitive structure underscores the idea that no matter what external successes a person achieves, it is their character that truly matters. The poem is written in Yoruba, with a rhythmic and didactic tone. It uses proverbial wisdom to convey its message, a common feature in Yoruba oral tradition. The poem's structure includes parallel phrases and comparisons, such as wealth being likened to a rope that can be cut off (symbolizing its

temporary nature), while character is described as something that accompanies one to the afterlife, implying its permanence. The imagery in the poem is rich and metaphorical. For instance, the comparison of wealth to "okun" (a rope) and "igbi oro" (a wave of riches) suggests that wealth is fluid and unstable, easily lost like waves in the ocean. On the other hand, character ("iwa") is depicted as something that endures, outlasting physical or material possessions. The poem serves as a moral guide, advising the reader to prioritize character over material wealth. It warns that without good character, education, beauty, and wealth are meaningless. The repeated exhortation to "take care of your character" reinforces the idea that character is the true measure of a person's worth.

The speech act achieved with the locutionary act, "enhance your character my friend" is an **illocutionary advisory act**, advising and instructing youths to enhance their character as no condition is permanent. With good character, it may not be difficult to rise again if they have problems. The poem advises that money should not be seen as priority but good character should they see as beauty of humanity.

#### **Socio-cultural implications of the poems**

The poem "**Work is an Antidote for Poverty**" (*Ise Logun Ise*) addresses social values, particularly the importance of hard work and self-reliance. The participants are the poet and the audience who are predominantly youths and parents. The poet who is an elderly man or a wise figure in the society is imparting knowledge. The audience include younger members of the community, possibly children or young adults are advised to work hard and not rely on their parents' wealth. Part of the types of work that a youth can engage in is conservation of the environment, especially during this age when there is the problem of unemployment on the land. Apart from that, a youth can engage in crop production such as food crops, vegetable garden, etc. The primary purpose of the poem is to teach youths and children moral lessons about life. It aims to teach and remind individuals about the importance of self-reliance, hard work, and the dangers of relying on others for success. The poem follows a logical sequence of presenting the value of hard work, the futility of reliance on others, and the consequences of not heeding this

advice. It begins with an assertion that work is the antidote for poverty, provides examples and elaborations, and concludes with warnings and encouragement to work hard. The tone is advisory and motivational. It carries a sense of urgency and seriousness, emphasizing the importance of the message. There is a mix of concern and encouragement, reflecting the cultural value placed on diligence and self-reliance.

The poem is didactic, and it teaches moral lessons. It aligns with the Yoruba tradition of oral literature, where poems and proverbs are used to communicate important societal values and norms. It serves as a vehicle for imparting critical societal values, particularly the importance of hard work and self-reliance. The structure, tone, and style of the poem are all tailored to ensure that the message is clear, relatable, and impactful for the intended audience. This approach highlights the richness of Yoruba oral traditions and their role in shaping individual behavior and societal norms.

**Enhance your Character** is a conversation between friends or a mentor advising a mentee. The scene here is a moral or ethical, emphasizing the importance of good character over material wealth and superficial beauty. The participants in this poem are the speaker (presumably an elder, mentor, or wise friend) and the addressee (referred to as "my friend"). The speaker adopts a didactic tone, imparting wisdom and advice to the listener. The primary purpose of the poem is to convey a moral lesson about the transient nature of wealth and beauty and the enduring value of good character. The desired outcome is for the listener to prioritize character development over material or superficial gains. The poem follows a logical sequence of introduction and assertion of the transient nature of wealth and beauty; emphasis on the enduring nature of good character; presentation of rhetorical questions to highlight the consequences of lacking good character and conclusion reiterating the importance of character over education or other attributes without character. Enhance your Character refers to the tone, manner, or spirit in which the communication is carried out. The tone of the poem is earnest, advisory, and reflective. The speaker's manner is that of a wise elder or mentor sharing important life lessons. The poem uses written language in a poetic form. The diction is formal and

didactic, appropriate for delivering moral instruction. The use of rhetorical questions and repetition enhances the persuasive power of the poem. Enhance your Character reflects societal norms that value good character and moral integrity over material wealth and physical appearance. It serves as a piece of moral advice emphasizing the importance of character. The setting and scene are reflective and advisory, involving a wise speaker and a receptive listener. The poem's ends are to instill values of good character, the act sequence follows a logical argument structure, and the key is earnest and didactic. Instrumentalities involve formal written language, norms reflect societal values, and the genre is didactic poetry.

**“Why should I be a thief”** is also a didactic poem telling the boy and girl child the need to be hardworking and set in a contemporary societal context where moral choices and social values are critically examined. The tone and atmosphere of the poem are reflective and somewhat solemn, emphasizing the ethical dilemma faced by individuals in society. The speaker in “Why should I be a Robber?” is an individual contemplating their moral choices in life. The audience could be society at large, particularly those who face similar moral decisions or who can influence societal norms. The poem aims to express a moral stance against theft and to promote the virtues of honesty and hard work. It seeks to reinforce the idea that integrity and serving others (even as a servant) is preferable to engaging in theft. The poem is structured with repetitive lines and stanzas, creating a rhythmic and emphatic effect. The content revolves around the ethical choice between theft and servitude, emphasizing the preference for the latter. The tone is serious and didactic, urging readers to consider the consequences of their actions. The mood is reflective and cautionary, instilling a sense of moral responsibility. The medium is written text, specifically a poem. The language is Yoruba, rich in proverbs and cultural references, which adds depth and resonance to the moral message.

The text, “Why should I be a thief?” is also used to perform **illocutionary acts of elicitation, inquiring** about why they should be a thief. Though the question is not directly answered immediately. But the other stanzas of the poem respond to the interrogation. There are also different forms of **informative acts** in the poem. They show the need to be resilient and focused as it is better to become a slave than being a thief.

**“A Child that Abuses His Mother”** is a didactic poem offering advice to children to respect their parents. It is not expected that a child abuses his/her parents. However, when a child is rebuked, he or she seemed to be sad and tend to want to express his annoyance, hence, the poem warns him to be very careful of what he says. “A child that abuses his mother” is structured to convey a poignant message. Descriptions of abuse, the emotional state of the mother, and perhaps reflections on societal attitudes towards such abuse. It is somber, reflective, or accusatory, depending on the specific language and style of the poem. “A child that abuses his mother” evokes feelings of sadness, anger, or a call to action. The language used, including specific word choices that reflect the severity of abuse and cultural attitudes. Cultural expectations around family dynamics, respect for elders, and the taboo nature of discussing family abuse. The audience is expected to understand and react to the poem and influenced by cultural attitudes towards child abuse and parental respect. A social or moral commentary in the form of poetry. Use of literary devices like imagery, metaphor, and symbolism to convey the emotional depth of the subject.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the eco-pedagogy and ethno-linguistic analysis of selected didactic poems of Chief J. F. Odunjo, a great Yoruba cultural educator, underscores the profound interplay between language, culture, ecology and moral instruction. These poems steeped in rich linguistic features and cultural nuances. They serve not only as a medium for aesthetic expression but also as a vital tool for cultural/ecological preservation and ethical education. The exploration of their language reveals a sophisticated use of proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and oral traditions that enhance their didactic power. Culturally, these poems reflect and reinforce Yoruba values, beliefs, and social norms, offering insights into the community's worldview and social structure. The moral and ethical teachings embedded in these poems are conveyed through vivid imagery and compelling narratives, emphasizing the role of the poet or storyteller as a custodian of wisdom and tradition. Ecologically, it teaches us to work hard to preserve our culture. The performance aspect of these poems further highlights their communal significance,

illustrating how they are experienced and internalized by the audience. This communal engagement not only reinforces the moral and cultural messages but also strengthens social cohesion. The issue of hard work as illustrated in farming activities also reinforces the need for man to protect the earth from total destruction for the ecology to have peace with him. Comparative insights reveal both the unique features of Yoruba didactic poetry and its universal themes, contributing to a broader understanding of didactic traditions across cultures. Ultimately, this analysis affirms the importance of preserving and studying Yoruba didactic poems as a means of safeguarding our cultural heritage.

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**Amplifying Indigenous Voices for Environmental Cleanliness:  
Communication Strategies and their Impact on Climate  
Governance Policy in 21st Century Niger Delta**

**Oyewole Ayodele John  
Okoro Fedeinad**

**Abstract**

The Niger Delta region confronts substantial environmental degradation exacerbated by climate change and decades of oil exploitation, threatening local ecosystems and the livelihoods of indigenous communities. This study addresses the problem of inadequate integration of indigenous knowledge and perspectives into environmental governance and climate policy. Its primary objectives are to assess the communication strategies employed by indigenous communities in the region, to determine the influence of these voices on environmental policy formulation, to identify barriers hindering effective communication and participation, and to propose recommendations for strengthening indigenous involvement in policymaking. The methodology involves a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative case studies of community-driven environmental initiatives and quantitative analysis of relevant policy documents. Observations reveal that while indigenous communities utilise diverse communication methods, both traditional and modern, their impact on formal climate governance policy remains limited due to factors such as language barriers, technological constraints, mistrust, and inadequate participatory mechanisms. Key findings indicate a significant potential for indigenous ecological knowledge to enhance the effectiveness and social equity of environmental policies. The study recommends investing in community-based communication infrastructure, promoting culturally relevant information dissemination, establishing formal platforms for indigenous consultation in policymaking processes, and fostering collaborative partnerships between indigenous communities, government agencies, and non-governmental organisations to achieve more inclusive and sustainable environmental governance in the Niger Delta.

**Keywords:** Amplifying, Indigenous Voice, Environmental Voices, Climate Governance, policy

**Introduction**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria faces significant challenges stemming from climate change and extensive environmental degradation, largely attributed to decades of oil exploration and exploitation (Akpofure et al., 2000). This situation threatens the delicate ecosystems and the livelihoods of the numerous indigenous communities who depend directly on the land and its resources. Amidst these difficulties, the knowledge and perspectives held by these local populations offer invaluable insights into sustainable environmental management practices, honed through generations of close interaction with their surroundings (Berkes, 2012). This study examines the crucial role of communication strategies in amplifying the voices of indigenous communities within the Niger Delta. It aims to assess how effective communication can enhance environmental governance and shape more inclusive and impactful climate policy in the region. To achieve this, the study will explore the historical context of environmental challenges, the contribution of indigenous knowledge, various communication methods, the impact of indigenous participation on policy, existing barriers, and potential future directions. The research will employ a mixed-methods approach, drawing upon qualitative case studies and quantitative analysis of policy documents. The theoretical frameworks guiding this investigation include participatory development theory, which emphasises the involvement of local stakeholders in development processes (Chambers, 1983), and environmental communication theory, which examines how communication shapes environmental perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours (Cox, 2010).

**Historical Context of the Niger Delta's Environmental Challenges**

The environmental problems plaguing the Niger Delta have deep historical roots, primarily linked to the discovery and exploitation of oil. Since the mid-20th century, the region has been a major hub for oil extraction, which has brought economic benefits at a national level but has simultaneously inflicted severe damage on local ecosystems (Frynas, 2001). Oil spills, gas flaring, and the discharge of industrial waste have contaminated water sources, degraded agricultural land, and destroyed biodiversity, impacting the health and livelihoods of indigenous communities (Ite, 2012).

Before the advent of large-scale oil operations, indigenous communities in the Niger Delta possessed intricate systems of environmental management rooted in their traditional knowledge and cultural practices. These systems often involved customary laws and regulations that governed resource use, protected sacred sites, and ensured the sustainability of fishing, farming, and forestry activities (Orubu, 2006). Environmental stewardship was not merely an economic activity but was deeply interwoven with the cultural identity and spiritual beliefs of these communities.

Over time, the dominance of the oil industry marginalised these traditional environmental management practices. Local communities found themselves increasingly vulnerable to environmental degradation, with limited power to influence the activities of multinational oil corporations and the policies of the central government (Watts, 2005). This has led to significant environmental struggles, including protests, legal battles, and social unrest, as communities sought to protect their rights and their environment (Obi, 2001). The legacy of this historical context continues to shape the current environmental challenges and the complex relationship between indigenous communities, the state, and industry actors.

#### **The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Environmental Cleanliness**

Indigenous knowledge in the Niger Delta encompasses a wealth of ecological understanding, accumulated through generations of observation and interaction with the local environment. This knowledge system includes detailed information about local flora and fauna, traditional farming techniques adapted to the region's unique conditions, sustainable fishing practices, and methods for managing natural resources without causing long-term harm (Sikorowski et al., 2020). For example, traditional fishing methods often incorporate seasonal restrictions and the use of specific gear to prevent overfishing and protect breeding grounds (Akinsemoyin, 2015). Similarly, indigenous farming systems frequently employ crop rotation, intercropping, and natural pest control methods that enhance soil fertility and reduce the need for chemical inputs (Okigbo, 1990).

This deep understanding of local ecosystems can significantly contribute to the development of more effective and context-specific modern environmental policies. By integrating indigenous

knowledge with scientific approaches, policymakers can gain a more holistic understanding of environmental problems and devise solutions that are both ecologically sound and socially acceptable (Agrawal, 1995). For instance, traditional indicators of environmental change, such as alterations in plant life cycles or animal behaviour, can provide early warnings of ecological shifts that might be missed by conventional monitoring systems (Huntington, 2000).

Furthermore, environmental stewardship is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of many indigenous communities in the Niger Delta. Their relationship with the environment is often framed by spiritual beliefs and customary laws that emphasise respect for nature and the interconnectedness of all living things (Wilson, 2008). This cultural significance fosters a strong sense of responsibility towards environmental protection and can serve as a powerful motivator for community-led conservation initiatives. Recognising and valuing this cultural dimension is essential for fostering genuine partnerships between indigenous communities and other stakeholders in environmental governance.

#### **Communication Strategies to Amplify Indigenous Voices**

Indigenous communities in the Niger Delta employ a variety of communication methods, both traditional and modern, to share their knowledge, express their concerns, and advocate for their rights. Traditional methods include oral storytelling, community meetings, cultural performances, and the use of traditional leaders and institutions as channels of communication (Eyoh, 2003). These methods play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage, disseminating local knowledge, and mobilising community action.

In recent years, modern communication technologies, such as mobile phones, radio, and the internet, including social media platforms, have become increasingly important tools for indigenous communities to connect with wider audiences, raise awareness about environmental issues, and exert pressure on policymakers and corporations (Fuchs, 2014). For example, community-based organisations are using social media to document environmental damage, share testimonies of affected individuals, and organise campaigns for environmental justice (Okonkwo & Ezeibe, 2017). Radio stations operated by or in collaboration with indigenous communities can broadcast

information in local languages, reaching a wider segment of the population and facilitating dialogue on environmental concerns (Tacchi et al., 2003).

Several case studies illustrate the effectiveness of community-driven environmental initiatives in the Niger Delta. For instance, some communities have successfully used traditional ecological knowledge to rehabilitate degraded mangrove forests, monitor oil spills, and document the impacts of pollution on their livelihoods (Emoyan et al., 2018). These initiatives often rely on strong internal communication networks and the ability to effectively convey their findings and demands to external stakeholders, including government agencies and oil companies. The role of media, both mainstream and alternative, is crucial in amplifying these local voices and bringing their concerns to the attention of the broader public and policymakers, thereby influencing policy debates and outcomes (Downing, 2001).

#### **Impact of Indigenous Voices on Climate Governance Policy**

The increasing recognition of the importance of local knowledge and participatory approaches in environmental management has led to some instances where indigenous input has influenced environmental discussions and, to a lesser extent, policy changes in the Niger Delta. For example, advocacy by indigenous groups and their allies has contributed to greater scrutiny of the environmental practices of oil companies and has, in some cases, led to demands for compensation and remediation (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

When indigenous communities are actively involved in the policymaking process, the outcomes of environmental governance are often improved. Their direct experience of environmental change and their understanding of local contexts can lead to the development of more relevant, effective, and socially just policies (Young, 2010). Policies that incorporate indigenous perspectives are more likely to be accepted and implemented at the local level, fostering greater environmental stewardship and accountability.

However, significant challenges remain in fully incorporating indigenous voices into formal governance frameworks in the Niger Delta. These challenges include a lack of formal mechanisms for indigenous participation, power imbalances between indigenous communities and other stakeholders, and a frequent disconnect between national-level policies and local realities (Oyegun, 2014). Overcoming these challenges requires a commitment from

government and other actors to create inclusive and participatory processes that genuinely value and integrate indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

#### **Barriers to Effective Communication and Participation**

Several barriers impede effective communication and the meaningful participation of indigenous communities in environmental governance in the Niger Delta. Language barriers pose a significant obstacle, as policy documents and official communications are often in English, which may not be widely spoken or understood in many indigenous communities (Fishman, 1991). This can limit access to information and hinder effective engagement in decision-making processes.

Technological challenges, such as limited internet access and poor telecommunication infrastructure in many parts of the Niger Delta, further constrain the ability of indigenous communities to utilise modern communication tools for advocacy and participation (Servaes, 2007). Educational gaps can also affect the capacity of community members to understand complex environmental issues and engage effectively in policy discussions. Furthermore, a history of mistrust between indigenous communities and government bodies, often stemming from past experiences of marginalisation and unfulfilled promises, can create significant obstacles to effective dialogue and collaboration (Idemudia, 2010). Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and limited access to resources, can also restrict the ability of indigenous groups to participate fully in policymaking processes, as they may prioritise immediate livelihood concerns over engagement in environmental governance. Addressing these barriers requires targeted efforts to improve communication infrastructure, provide access to education and information in local languages, and build trust through transparent and inclusive engagement processes.

#### **Future Directions for Strengthening Indigenous Voices in Policy Making**

Strengthening the voices of indigenous communities in environmental policymaking in the Niger Delta requires a multi-pronged approach focused on improving communication, fostering genuine participation, and building partnerships. Recommendations for improving communication include investing in community-based media initiatives, supporting the

development of culturally relevant educational materials in local languages, and utilising mobile technology to disseminate information and facilitate feedback between communities and policymakers (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006).

Opportunities exist for more effectively integrating traditional ecological knowledge into formal environmental governance structures. This can be achieved through the establishment of joint research initiatives involving indigenous knowledge holders and scientists, the inclusion of indigenous representatives on environmental advisory bodies, and the development of policies that explicitly recognise and value traditional environmental management practices (Nazarea, 1999).

The role of partnerships between non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the government, and indigenous groups is crucial in fostering effective climate action. NGOs can play a vital role in facilitating communication, providing technical support to indigenous communities, and advocating for their rights and perspectives at local, national, and international levels (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Collaborative initiatives that bring together the strengths and resources of these different actors can lead to more sustainable and equitable environmental outcomes in the Niger Delta.

### **Conclusion**

The environmental challenges facing the Niger Delta necessitate a paradigm shift towards inclusive climate governance that genuinely respects and incorporates the perspectives of indigenous communities. Their traditional knowledge offers valuable insights into sustainable environmental management, and their active participation in policymaking is essential for developing effective and equitable solutions. This study has highlighted the crucial role of communication strategies in amplifying indigenous voices, examining both the opportunities and the barriers to their meaningful engagement. While progress has been made in recognising the importance of local knowledge, significant work remains to be done in creating truly participatory governance frameworks. A concerted effort is needed to improve communication channels, build trust between stakeholders, and foster partnerships that empower indigenous communities to play a central role in the conservation and sustainable development of their ancestral lands. Greater recognition of the invaluable

contributions of indigenous peoples to environmental conservation in the Niger Delta is not only a matter of environmental justice but also a prerequisite for achieving lasting environmental sustainability in the region.

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**Eco-Justice and the Urban Poor: A Study of Wole Soyinka's *Beatification of an Area Boy*****Akpughe, Oghenemudiaga Praise PhD**

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**Abstract**

Wole Soyinka's *Beatification of an Area Boy* offers a poignant exploration of the intersection between environmental degradation, social injustice, and the plight of the urban poor in Lagos, Nigeria. This study examines the play's portrayal of eco-justice, focusing on how the marginalized "area boys" are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards and denied access to basic amenities. The research is driven by the alarming reality of urban poverty and environmental injustice prevalent in many postcolonial megacities like Lagos. Rapid urbanization, coupled with inadequate planning and governance, has resulted in sprawling slums, polluted waterways, and mountains of waste, posing significant health risks and hindering the well-being of the urban poor.<sup>1</sup> This study investigates how Soyinka's play serves as a powerful critique of these conditions, highlighting the urgent need for social and environmental reform. The study employs a qualitative methodology, drawing upon close textual analysis of the play, supported by relevant secondary sources on ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, and urban sociology. It examines how Soyinka utilizes vivid imagery, satire, and character development to depict the harsh realities faced by the area boys, who are often victims of forced displacement, environmental pollution, and systemic neglect. The analysis reveals that "Beatification of an Area Boy" exposes the stark contrast between the affluent and the impoverished, emphasizing how environmental degradation exacerbates existing social inequalities.<sup>2</sup> The play challenges the audience to confront the ethical implications of environmental injustice and consider the urgent need for policies that prioritize the well-being of all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic status. This study concludes by advocating for a more inclusive and sustainable approach to urban development, where the voices of the marginalized are heard and their needs are addressed. It recommends policy interventions that prioritize environmental remediation, equitable resource distribution, and

community empowerment as crucial steps towards achieving eco-justice in urban spaces.

**Keywords:** Eco-justice, Urban Poor, Beatification of an Area Boy, Environmental Injustice

### **Introduction**

The discourse on environmental justice has gained traction globally, especially in postcolonial cities grappling with the dual challenges of environmental decay and social inequality. In Nigeria, particularly in Lagos—a city marked by explosive population growth, poor urban planning, and economic disparity—the intersection of ecological degradation and the marginalisation of the urban poor presents a complex crisis. Wole Soyinka's *Beatification of an Area Boy* (1999) offers an incisive commentary on these realities through theatrical representation. This paper explores the concept of eco-justice as reflected in Soyinka's play, arguing that the environmental decay in Lagos is not merely an ecological issue but also a profound ethical and social injustice borne disproportionately by the poor, especially the "area boys."

Eco-justice, in this context, refers to the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in environmental decision-making and the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. Soyinka's play examines this issue through the lives of the dispossessed, particularly Sanda and his fellow "area boys," whose plight illustrates the systemic exclusion of the poor from urban development and environmental safety. The paper adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach, analysing Soyinka's text alongside secondary sources drawn from urban sociology, ecocriticism, and real-time urban reporting from credible online platforms and verified social media data.

### **Lagos as a Theatre of Environmental Injustice**

Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital and one of the fastest-growing cities in the world, stands as a stark example of how rapid

urbanisation, poor governance, and economic disparity converge to create entrenched environmental injustices. With an estimated population exceeding 20 million, Lagos grapples with severe infrastructural and environmental challenges that disproportionately affect its urban poor. According to the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA, 2023), the city generates over 13,000 metric tonnes of solid waste daily. Alarming, a substantial portion of this waste finds its way into open drains, informal settlements, and street corners, resulting in blocked waterways, flooding, and the proliferation of diseases such as cholera and typhoid.

The socio-spatial configuration of Lagos exacerbates these issues. Informal settlements like Makoko, Ajegunle, and Agege are some of the most affected. These densely populated slums are often constructed on precarious terrains—coastal wetlands, refuse dumps, and reclaimed land—where proper sanitation infrastructure is either absent or inadequate. Residents rely on pit latrines and open defecation, with many communities lacking access to potable water or reliable waste disposal systems (UN-Habitat, 2022). These communities are typically excluded from formal urban planning processes, leaving them vulnerable to not only environmental degradation but also forced evictions and gentrification campaigns disguised as development (Amnesty International, 2023).

Wole Soyinka's *Beatification of an Area Boy* cleverly situates its narrative in this very context, using Lagos not just as a backdrop but as an active agent of oppression and survival. Through the protagonist Sanda and his interactions with fellow "area boys," Soyinka paints a vivid picture of marginalisation within an urban jungle teeming with inequality. The characters inhabit transitional zones—bus stops, markets, roadside corners—where formal employment and state protection are absent, and survival depends on cunning, performance, and solidarity. These spatial dynamics reflect the lived experiences of many in Lagos's informal economy, who not only face systemic neglect but also bear the brunt of the city's environmental hazards.

Environmental injustice in Lagos, as Soyinka implies, is not a coincidence—it is structurally entrenched. As Aluko (2020) argues, the environmental divide in the city mirrors broader social and economic hierarchies. Gated estates in Ikoyi, Lekki, and Victoria Island enjoy round-the-clock power supply, borehole water systems, private waste management services, and flood-resistant infrastructure. In contrast, less privileged communities, often located on floodplains or beside industrial zones, are denied even the most basic public services. During the rainy season, entire neighbourhoods become submerged due to blocked drains and inadequate infrastructure, displacing thousands and increasing health risks. This dual-city reality is emblematic of environmental apartheid, where one's access to clean air, water, and safety is determined by class.

The Lagos State Government's development initiatives, such as "Mega City" and "Smart Lagos" projects, frequently exclude the urban poor from their vision of progress. Urban renewal policies have often led to mass demolitions of slum communities, justified as efforts to beautify the city or curb crime. However, these displacements rarely offer sustainable resettlement plans and instead reinforce cycles of poverty and environmental vulnerability (Lagos Urban Development Initiative [LUDI], 2024). Thus, environmental injustice in Lagos is not only a question of pollution or infrastructure but of citizenship—who is seen as deserving of a clean, safe, and sustainable environment.

In *Beatification of an Area Boy*, Soyinka challenges audiences to confront this inequity. His characters are not merely victims of poverty or environmental neglect; they are political actors who expose the hypocrisy and contradictions of urban governance. By dramatizing the squalor, corruption, and resilience within Lagos's neglected spaces, Soyinka forces a reckoning with the ethical and political dimensions of urban environmental justice.

Ultimately, Lagos is not just a setting in Soyinka's play—it is a contested site where the right to the city is daily negotiated and often denied to its most vulnerable residents. The city's environmental challenges cannot be divorced from its socio-

economic inequalities, and any meaningful reform must address both in tandem.

### **Summary of *Beatification of an Area Boy***

Wole Soyinka's *Beatification of an Area Boy: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope* is a satirical stage play that unfolds in post-military Lagos, a city riddled with corruption, decay, and survivalist hustle. The narrative follows Sanda, a reformed "area boy" and former soldier, who attempts to live honourably amidst the chaos by running a modest restaurant with the help of his friend, Siki. Set against the backdrop of a transitioning Nigeria, the play introduces a vibrant cast of characters—including misfits, street performers, civil servants, and religious charlatans—each navigating the contradictions of urban life.

Sanda's personal transformation and his resolve to uphold dignity and truth challenge the systemic rot surrounding him. Through humour, dramatic irony, and pointed social commentary, Soyinka exposes the intersections of political repression, economic hardship, and moral compromise. The "area boys," often dismissed as criminals, emerge as victims of a failed system, struggling to find purpose in a city that marginalises them. The play's climax metaphorically elevates Sanda's moral stance as a symbolic act of "beatification," portraying him as a modern-day martyr for justice. Ultimately, Soyinka uses Lagos not merely as a setting, but as a critical space to examine identity, resistance, and the human cost of socio-political disillusionment.

### **Environmental Themes in the Play**

#### **Pollution and Toxicity as Normalised Experience**

In *Beatification of an Area Boy*, Wole Soyinka dramatizes the environmental crisis in Lagos not as a temporary anomaly, but as an entrenched, normalized aspect of daily urban existence. The play consistently references filth, decay, and sensory pollution as a way to reflect the larger social rot of the city. One of the most evocative lines occurs when Sanda states, "We live in a city where

the gutters have learned to speak. They gurgle, they mutter, they reek of secrets long buried” (Soyinka, 1999, p. 43). This personification of the gutter transcends poetic flair; it positions environmental degradation as both witness and participant in the systemic neglect of the poor. The image of the gutter “speaking” symbolises the suppressed voices of the marginalised whose suffering is continuously ignored by those in power.

This theatrical motif reflects a lived reality for many Lagos residents. According to TheCable (2024), repeated floods in areas such as Mushin, Ajegunle, and Ojuelegba are exacerbated by clogged drains, uncollected waste, and poorly planned infrastructure. Viral social media content on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok routinely capture scenes of children navigating flooded streets filled with refuse, businesses operating amidst sewage, and residents creating makeshift channels to redirect polluted water. These digital records, shared by citizen journalists and environmental activists, serve as a contemporary mirror to Soyinka’s critique.

Environmental injustice, as depicted in the play, is also psychological. Soyinka shows how the characters have internalised their toxic surroundings. For example, the area boys are never shocked by filth; they treat it with indifference, even humour. This resignation reflects what Nixon (2011) terms “slow violence”—a gradual, invisible harm that unfolds over time, disproportionately affecting the poor. The state’s failure to intervene, or even acknowledge these conditions, is central to Soyinka’s critique.

Moreover, pollution in the play serves as an allegory for moral and political decay. Just as the physical environment is contaminated, so too are the institutions meant to serve the public good. Government officials are portrayed as indifferent or complicit, while religious figures exploit faith for profit. Sanda’s choice to resist through honesty and dignity stands in stark contrast to this surrounding decay, positioning him as a beacon of moral clarity amidst a polluted city.

In essence, Soyinka uses pollution not only to reflect the physical suffering of the poor but also to expose the deeper ethical rot in the urban governance of Lagos.

### **Displacement and the Ethics of Urban Renewal**

Forced displacement is a recurring theme in *Beatification of an Area Boy* and serves as a central pillar in Soyinka's eco-justice critique. The play illustrates how policies masked as environmental "beautification" are often deployed as instruments of dispossession. Characters like Morenike, a flower seller, embody this phenomenon. Her business and livelihood are destroyed in the name of urban order, and her bitter remark—"They said they wanted a clean city, but they only cleaned us out!" (Soyinka, 1999, p. 59)—captures the irony of a system that prioritises visual tidiness over human dignity.

Soyinka's narrative aligns closely with contemporary patterns of urban governance in Lagos, where slum clearance and land reclamation are frequently conducted under the guise of environmental reform. The 2023 demolition of houses in Jakande Estate and forced evictions in Makoko—an informal settlement on the Lagos Lagoon—mirror the fictional events of the play. According to Amnesty International (2023), residents in these areas were evicted with little or no notice, often without alternative housing arrangements. These actions, although framed as efforts to reduce congestion and improve aesthetics, result in the erasure of entire communities and livelihoods.

This raises pressing ethical questions about the nature of urban renewal. In theory, environmental management and urban development should aim to enhance the quality of life for all city dwellers. However, when these projects disproportionately target the urban poor—without their participation or adequate compensation—they become forms of structural violence. The language of cleanliness, order, and modernisation becomes weaponised to displace the very people who need protection from environmental harm.

Soyinka's play is a vital artistic intervention that critiques this perverse logic. Through satire and characterisation, he shows how state actors manipulate environmental rhetoric to legitimise inequality. The victims, often portrayed as societal "clutter," are in fact integral to the city's informal economy and social fabric. Their removal does not resolve environmental challenges; rather, it displaces them—often to more precarious and polluted locations.

Thus, the ethics of urban renewal must move beyond aesthetics to justice. As *Beatification of an Area Boy* argues, true eco-justice requires recognising the rights of the urban poor not only to remain but to participate meaningfully in shaping their urban futures. Displacement, when framed as progress, must be exposed for what it often is: exclusion.

### **Theoretical Framework: Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Urbanism**

The framework for understanding *Beatification of an Area Boy* as a text of eco-justice requires an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that draws from both ecocriticism and postcolonial urban studies. These theories offer lenses through which the environmental suffering of the urban poor can be seen as a result of structural inequalities embedded in both natural and built environments.

### **Ecocriticism and Environmental Justice**

Ecocriticism traditionally concerns itself with the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Early ecocritics focused on nature writing and wilderness; however, more recent scholarship—particularly the second wave of ecocriticism—emphasises environmental justice, urban degradation, and the lived experiences of marginalised communities (Nixon, 2011). This shift centres on the concept of "slow violence"—the gradual, often invisible environmental harm that disproportionately affects the poor and voiceless.

In *Beatification of an Area Boy*, Soyinka dramatizes slow violence by depicting Lagos as a city choked with waste, moral decay, and toxic systems of governance. Characters like Sanda and Morenike do not live in pristine wilderness; their environment is an urban battlefield of pollution, displacement, and bureaucratic neglect. The metaphor of “gutters that speak” and “sins dumped like used oil” (Soyinka, 1999, pp. 43, 67) transforms the cityscape into a sentient witness to ecological and ethical collapse. These narrative devices align with Nixon’s call to recognise how literature can visualise environmental harm that is spatially displaced and temporally diffused.

Eco-justice, as an offshoot of ecocriticism, becomes central to the play’s message. It demands not only environmental remediation but also equitable access to clean air, water, and dignified living for the urban poor—rights that Lagos routinely denies to its most vulnerable residents.

### **Postcolonial Urbanism and Spatial Injustice**

Postcolonial urbanism, as articulated by scholars like AbdouMalik Simone (2004), offers another critical dimension. It interrogates how African cities, shaped by colonial legacies, global capital, and fragmented governance, produce spaces of exclusion and precarity. In Lagos, the spatial organisation of privilege and poverty is not accidental but historically constructed.

Soyinka’s depiction of the city reflects this. The area boys inhabit “interstitial zones”—bus stops, gutters, abandoned lots—while elites retreat to fortified estates with private sanitation systems. These contrasts are not merely scenic; they are symptomatic of what Simone calls “splintered urbanism,” where infrastructure, opportunity, and even environmental health are unevenly distributed.

By placing area boys at the centre of his play, Soyinka challenges the spatial logic of postcolonial Lagos. The play reclaims informal spaces as politically significant, countering official narratives that frame slums and their occupants as disposable. In doing so, it aligns with urban theorists who argue that justice in African

cities must begin with recognising the agency and rights of those excluded from formal planning.

Together, ecocriticism and postcolonial urbanism provide the analytical backbone of this paper. They reveal that environmental degradation in *Beatification of an Area Boy* is not a passive condition but an active result of policy, power, and neglect. Eco-justice, then, must be understood as a political and spatial struggle, particularly in the context of urban Nigeria where the poor live not only on the margins of the city but also on the frontlines of environmental risk.

### **Eco-Justice in Action: Character Analysis**

Sanda serves as the primary lens through which Soyinka presents the ethical demands of eco-justice in a postcolonial urban context. As a reformed area boy and self-declared “Beatifier of the Unbeatified,” Sanda symbolises both the moral transformation of the marginalised and their capacity for political awareness. His character resists the binary classification of the poor as either criminals or victims. Instead, he functions as a thinking, reflective urban subject who consciously critiques the physical and moral degradation of his environment.

His sharp critiques—such as the metaphor comparing elite pollution to “dumping sins on our streets like used oil” (Soyinka, 1999, p. 67)—establish him as a mouthpiece for environmental accountability. This metaphor explicitly connects ecological harm to class-based moral failure, critiquing the affluent who insulate themselves from the filth they generate. Sanda’s resistance is not armed but rhetorical and performative; he reclaims public space as a site of eco-ethical discourse. In a society where the urban poor are blamed for their own squalor, Sanda repositions them as the conscience of the city.

His role aligns with the paper’s argument that eco-justice must involve the *meaningful inclusion* of those who suffer the most from environmental degradation. By speaking for those rendered invisible, Sanda performs the central function of eco-justice

advocacy: giving voice to the silenced and holding power accountable.

Sodi, the blind friend of Sanda, is a paradoxical figure. Though blind, he perceives with heightened clarity the moral and environmental decay that others ignore. His blindness becomes symbolic of the broader social blindness that afflicts the ruling elite and state institutions—those who refuse to “see” the consequences of pollution, displacement, and neglect.

Sodi represents what Rob Nixon (2011) calls the victims of “slow violence”—those who suffer gradually and invisibly from long-term environmental harm. His physical condition draws attention to the internalised suffering of the urban poor, for whom pollution and decay are no longer shocking, but normalised. His frequent philosophical remarks illuminate the systemic disregard for the lives of the poor, reminding us that eco-justice is not just about physical spaces but also about psychological and existential recognition.

In the broader framework of the paper, Sodi exemplifies how environmental injustice transcends the visible. His role confirms that those most affected by environmental breakdown are also the most perceptive, even if ignored by formal power structures.

Morenike, a flower seller displaced under the guise of a government “beautification” project, personifies the intersection of gender, poverty, and environmental injustice. Her role highlights how eco-justice is not a gender-neutral issue. Women in informal economies—hawkers, street vendors, domestic workers—are often the first to be displaced during urban renewal schemes disguised as environmental clean-ups.

When Morenike laments, “They said they wanted a clean city, but they only cleaned us out!” (Soyinka, 1999, p. 59), she captures the ironies of environmental policy in Lagos, where “cleaning” often means evicting the poor from spaces they have claimed through necessity. Morenike’s flowers—symbolic of natural beauty—are ironically erased in a campaign meant to restore

urban order, revealing the deep contradictions in state-led environmental actions.

Her character connects directly to the paper's argument that eco-justice involves not only remediation of the environment but also a re-evaluation of who gets to exist in urban space. She shows that justice must include protection against arbitrary displacement and support for the economic survival of the urban poor—especially women.

Miseyi represents the educated, middle-class Nigerian who sympathises with the urban poor but remains largely distanced from their realities. Her relationship with Sanda is marked by affection and curiosity but ultimately constrained by her social status and emotional hesitance to fully align with his cause.

While Miseyi does not contribute directly to environmental degradation, her character reflects the broader urban elite's ambivalence towards eco-justice. She cares, but her concern is passive; she critiques from the sidelines. In relation to the paper's thesis, Miseyi symbolises the failure of the educated class to translate awareness into action, mirroring the ineffectiveness of elite-driven environmental discourse that ignores grassroots voices.

Miseyi's limited involvement highlights the need for solidarity that transcends empathy. Her role underscores that achieving eco-justice requires political commitment, not just emotional support.

State actors in the play, especially the police, municipal authorities, and local enforcers, are portrayed as antagonistic forces who use the rhetoric of order and cleanliness to mask brutality and corruption. Their involvement in slum evictions, extortion of street vendors, and harassment of the area boys aligns with real-world reports by Amnesty International (2023), which document forced evictions in Lagos under the guise of environmental reform.

These characters reinforce the paper's claim that environmental policies in Lagos often exacerbate inequality. Rather than addressing the root causes of urban pollution—industrial dumping, lack of infrastructure, and poor governance—the state punishes the symptoms: informal settlements, street vendors, and the visibly poor.

Their role as enforcers of systemic injustice makes them critical to Soyinka's satire. They help dramatise the play's core argument: that without structural reform and genuine inclusion, environmentalism becomes a tool of repression.

Each major character in *Beatification of an Area Boy* is a dramatic agent through which Wole Soyinka interrogates the ethics, failures, and possibilities of eco-justice in a postcolonial urban setting. Sanda advocates for recognition and reform; Sodi offers prophetic insight; Morenike embodies the tragedy of dispossession; Misyi reflects liberal inaction; and the state actors illustrate institutional violence. Collectively, they animate the paper's central thesis: that eco-justice cannot be realised without acknowledging and addressing the lived realities of the urban poor.

### **Media, Protest, and Public Memory**

In recent years, online platforms have become tools for environmental advocacy. Nigerian influencers like Aproko Doctor and media organisations such as Pulse Nigeria frequently spotlight issues of poor sanitation, floods, and environmental neglect in Lagos. For instance, the viral 2023 video of students in Ikorodu navigating waist-deep floodwaters triggered national outrage and forced temporary government action (BBC Pidgin, 2023).

These real-time digital narratives enhance Soyinka's critique, showing how the voices of area boys and poor communities continue to demand justice, albeit in new formats. The #SaveMakoko campaign on Instagram and TikTok is a recent example of grassroots environmental resistance.

## **Linking Theatre, Policy, and Reform**

### **Discussion: Linking Theatre, Policy, and Reform**

Theatre has long served as a platform for civic engagement, especially in postcolonial societies where the intersection of art and activism is essential to challenging power structures. Wole Soyinka's *Beatification of an Area Boy* exemplifies how political theatre transcends entertainment to become a vehicle for ethical inquiry and societal reform. The play does not merely portray the suffering of the urban poor; it interrogates the policies, power dynamics, and social attitudes that enable their continued marginalisation. By weaving humour, satire, and dramatic irony into a vivid critique of Lagos's environmental and moral decay, Soyinka holds both the state and its citizens accountable.

The play's refusal to offer clear heroes or villains reflects a nuanced understanding of systemic injustice. In Soyinka's world, complicity is widespread—from corrupt officials to passive bystanders. This lack of simplistic binaries forces the audience to confront the uncomfortable reality that eco-injustice is sustained not only by explicit policies but by societal indifference, cultural apathy, and class insulation. Theatre, in this context, performs a diagnostic function: it reveals the deep structural and psychological layers that policy alone often overlooks.

This recognition necessitates a shift in how environmental justice is pursued. Rather than relying on token clean-up campaigns or cosmetic beautification drives, there is a need for genuine systemic reform rooted in inclusive urban policy. Soyinka's critique aligns with contemporary policy recommendations that advocate for participatory planning frameworks. For instance, *The Lagos Urban Development Initiative* (LUDI, 2024) has piloted slum upgrading projects that involve local communities in design and implementation. These initiatives aim to replace top-down demolitions with co-created, locally relevant solutions—emphasising access to water, sanitation, drainage, and tenure security. However, as the play indirectly warns, the success of such initiatives depends not only on good design but on political

will, transparency, and sustained engagement with marginalised voices.

Additionally, decentralised waste management systems—such as community-based recycling and sanitation hubs—must be prioritised in Lagos’s dense urban settlements. These approaches support both environmental remediation and economic inclusion by creating green jobs for informal workers. Theatre like Soyinka’s helps amplify these realities and demands by dramatizing the consequences of inaction.

Ultimately, *Beatification of an Area Boy* serves as a cultural blueprint for reform: it calls for environmental justice not just as a legal obligation, but as a moral imperative and democratic right—an appeal that policymakers must heed.

### **Conclusion**

Wole Soyinka’s *Beatification of an Area Boy* is more than a theatrical piece; it is a call to conscience. By highlighting the environmental injustices suffered by Lagos’s urban poor, Soyinka challenges us to rethink our urban future. The play exposes the complicity of the state, the apathy of the elite, and the resilience of the marginalised. Its relevance has only increased in an age of climate change, urban migration, and widening inequality.

This paper has argued that eco-justice in urban Nigeria must centre the voices of those who live closest to environmental harm. Through the example of Sanda and his community, we are reminded that sustainable development is not just a technical problem but a moral and political imperative.

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