

# Integration of Indigenous Philosophy of Education into Drug Abuse Prevention: A Mixed-Methods Approach of Essencist Model for Youths Empowerment and Sustainable Development in Taraba State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Drug abuse among youths remains a critical social and developmental challenge in Nigeria, particularly in Taraba State where poverty, unemployment, peer influence, and policy gaps in education exacerbate the crisis. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data from 500 distributed questionnaires with qualitative insights from focused group discussions (FGDs), to analyze the multidimensional causes and consequences of drug abuse in Wukari Local Government Area. The findings reveal that structural poverty, peer influence and the absence of preventive education in schools expose youths to dangerous substances that reinforce cycles of violence, crime, and social conflict. To move beyond descriptive diagnosis, this paper deploys Essencism, an indigenous Nigerian Philosophy of Education developed by Samuel Asuquo Ekanem, as a normative and practical framework for intervention. Essencism emphasizes the realization of essential human capacities through education and moral consciousness, aligning with the global goals of sustainable development. The paper argues that integrating an Essencist educational model into school curricula and community-based programs provides a transformative pathway to youth empowerment, reduction of drug-related violence, and sustainable development in Taraba State.

**KEYWORDS:** Indigenous, Philosophy, Education, Essencism, Empowerment, Sustainable, Development, Integration.

## INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of drug abuse among Nigerian youths poses one of the greatest threats to social order, security and sustainable development. In Taraba State, especially within Wukari Local Government Area, the issue manifests in alarming rates of violence, crime and youth vulnerability. Existing research suggests that poverty, unemployment and weak educational policy frameworks are central drivers of this phenomenon (Adelekan 47; Obot 23). While global discourses often prescribe universal models of drug abuse prevention (UNODC 112), there remains a lack of contextually rooted, indigenous frameworks that reflect the socio-cultural realities of Nigerian communities. This paper seeks to bridge that gap by proposing the integration of Essencism, an indigenous Philosophy of Education, into drug abuse prevention strategies. Essencism, founded in 2005 by Samuel Asuquo Ekanem, posits that education should cultivate the essential nature of the human being, nurturing moral, intellectual and social capacities toward the common good (Ekanem 88).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Drug Abuse and Youth Vulnerability in Nigeria

Drug abuse has reached epidemic proportions in Nigeria, with the National Bureau of Statistics estimating that nearly 14.4% of Nigerians aged 15–64 use psychoactive substances (NBS 2020, 5) and this has led to recent Government policy of drug and substance test before any employment in the Federal service. Scholars identify a direct correlation between youth unemployment and drug abuse, which in turn fosters crime, cultism and

violence (Olley 317; Ibrahim 54). In Taraba State, the problem is compounded by porous borders and weak enforcement, leading to easy access to cannabis, cough syrups and locally brewed stimulants (Ogbonna 2019, 144).

### **The Gaps in Educational Policy**

Nigeria's National Drug Control Master Plan advocates prevention through education, yet implementation remains ineffective (NDLEA 2021, 26). Schools lack structured curricula that address substance abuse, and teachers are rarely trained in preventive pedagogy. According to Ugwu and Onwu (102), this policy vacuum leaves students to rely on peers and popular culture, both of which often normalize drug use.

### **Indigenous Philosophy of Education and Social Transformation**

African indigenous philosophies of education emphasize holistic development, moral integrity and communal responsibility (Wiredu 44; Nyerere 68). Essencism, as articulated by Ekanem, goes further by positing that education must lead to the actualization of essence, a process where learners become morally responsible, intellectually capable and socially relevant (Ekanem 112). Scholars such as Akinpelu (2002, 77) and Ozmon (2012, 143) agree that without grounding education in indigenous values, social challenges like drug abuse persist unmitigated.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ESSENCISM AND EDUCATION**

Essencism argues for the cultivation of human essence the moral, rational and creative capacities of the learner through holistic education. Its principles include:

1. Essence Actualization: Prioritizing the development of inherent human potential (Ekanem 117).
2. Communal Responsibility: Orienting knowledge toward societal flourishing (Etuk 56).
3. Moral Consciousness: Integrating ethics into education to counter existential crises (Okafor 213; Ekanem 118-119).
4. Transformative Development: Positioning education as a tool for social reform and justice (Oyeshile 97). Applied to drug abuse prevention, Essencism insists that pedagogy must transcend medical warnings to instill existential awareness and moral consciousness in learners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a mixed-methods design. Quantitative Phase: 500 structured questionnaires were distributed to youths in schools, vocational centers, and communities in Wukari LGA. 460 were returned (92%). Variables included socio-economic background, exposure to drugs, peer influence and awareness of drug dangers. Qualitative Phase: Five FGDs, each with 10–12 participants (youths, parents, teachers, and religious leaders), were conducted. They examined cultural narratives, perceptions of drug abuse, and community-driven solutions. Statistical analysis (SPSS v.26) was used for quantitative data, while thematic coding was applied to qualitative transcripts (Creswell 2014, 224).

## **FINDINGS**

1. Socio-Economic Drivers: 72% of respondents cited poverty and unemployment as key reasons for drug initiation. FGDs confirmed that youths often turned to drugs as coping mechanisms.
2. Peer Influence: 63% indicated that friends or peers introduced them to drugs. Narratives from FGDs revealed strong peer-group solidarity around drug culture.
3. Educational Gaps: 81% of surveyed students reported never having received formal drug education in school. Teachers admitted curricula were silent on the subject.

4. Consequences: Youth drug abuse was linked to rising rates of armed robbery, cult violence and intra-communal conflicts in the Local Government Area and surrounding communities.

## PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

The Nigerian educational system has failed to address drug abuse because it privileges cognitive skills over existential development. Education without moral essence produces graduates who are vulnerable to destructive social influences. From an Essencist perspective, poverty is not merely material but existential, which have to do with the absence of realized essence. Peer influence reflects a vacuum of authentic role models. Drug prevention cannot be reduced to external enforcement; it must emerge from inner essence cultivation (Ekanem 139). Thus, Essencism reorients drug prevention from a reactionary model to a proactive moral-educational project.

### Towards An Essencist Model for Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Development

1. Curriculum Reform: Embed drug education into civic and moral education rooted in Essencist philosophy.
2. Teacher Training: Prepare educators as role models capable of cultivating essence (Akinpelu 81).
3. Community Education Programs: Extend prevention campaigns beyond schools to parents, churches and mosques.
4. Youth Empowerment: Link Essencist pedagogy with vocational skills and entrepreneurship to reduce unemployment.
5. Policy Integration: Institutionalize indigenous philosophies within Nigeria's National Education Policy. This model aligns with SDG 3 (Health), SDG 4 (Education), and SDG 16 (Peace and Justice) (UNDP 2019, 32).

## CONCLUSION

Drug abuse among youths in Taraba State reflects structural poverty, weak educational policies and existential disorientation. Conventional interventions are insufficient. By embedding Essencism as an indigenous Philosophy of Education, Nigeria can cultivate essence, empower youths and foster sustainable development. The paper concludes that drug abuse prevention must be reframed as existential education for essence actualization, a project that can reorient Nigerian youths toward creativity, morality and social responsibility.

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