Black Mathematics at Cambridge

James Okoye Chuzuka Ezeilo

Education

PhD, University of Cambridge, Queen's College, 1958
Dissertation: 'Some Topics in the Theory of Ordinary Non-linear differential Equations of the Third Order'
Supervisor: Mary Cartwright

MSc, University College Ibadan, 1955
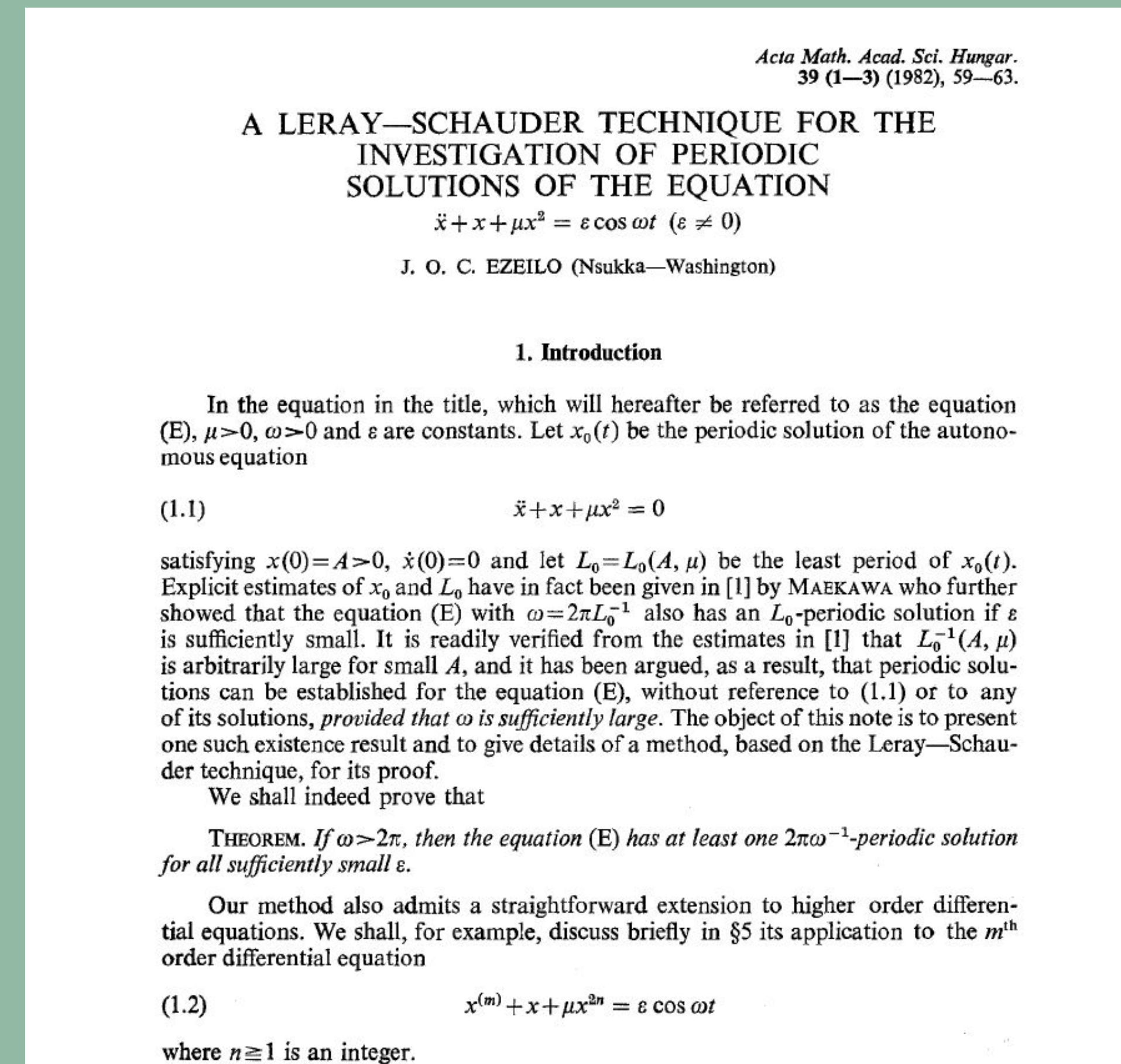BSc, University College Ibadan, 1953

Academic Positions

Professor of Mathematics, Ebonyi State University Abakaliki (2002-2009)

Head of Department of Mathematics, University of Swaziland, Kwaluseni, (1997-2001)

Vice-Chancellor, Bayero University Kano, Nigeria (1978-1979)

Vice-Chancellor, University of Nigeria (1975-1978)

Head of Department), University of Nigeria (1970-1975, and 1980-1988)

Professor, University of Nigeria (1966-1967)

Professor (previously Lecturer and Senior Lecturer), University of Ibadan, Nigeria (1959, 1962, 1964-1966)

Main source: http://www-history.mcs.st-andrews.ac.uk/Biographies/Ezeilo.html

Profile

Professor James Ezeilo, with Chike Obi and Adegoke Olubummo, was one of a trio of black mathematicians who pioneered modern mathematics research in Nigeria. A Leverhulme scholarship enabled him to come to Cambridge for a PhD in 1955.

James Ezeilo's early research dealt mainly with the problem of stability, boundedness, and convergence of solutions of third order ordinary differential equations. Apart from extending known results and techniques to higher order equations, the main thrust of his work was the construction of Lyapunov-like functions, which he did elegantly and used to study the qualitative properties of solutions. In addition he was a pioneer in the use of Leray-Schauder degree type arguments to obtain existence results for periodic solutions of ordinary differential equations.

James Ezeilo's indefatigable and innovative contribution to mathematics in Nigeria was carried out against a backdrop often affected by turbulent conflict. One of the most tragic events was the burning down of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in July 1967 during the Biafran war. The students at the University had joined the Biafran army when war had been declared, even though they had no weapons. Few of them survived the attack by the Nigerian army.

James Ezeilo(right) with Alexander Animalu (PhD, Theoretical Physics, 1965, Cambridge)

Following Ezeilo's death in 2013, the Edward Bouchet Abdus Salam Institute in Trieste noted in their obituary: *"Professor Ezeilo was a brilliant mathematician and fun to be around and will be greatly missed by all who knew him."*