

## PROMOTING PRACTICAL IN THEATRE ARTS EDUCATION: AN ANTIDOTE FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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### Abstract

To achieve sustainable future in Nigeria of today the educational sector must provide a pragmatic solution which calls for collective dogma. These days education or learning process is far more advanced than it was some decades back. There have been pragmatic attempts to look for new ways of improving the existing methods to enhance the learning capability of the learner. However it is evident today in the pathetic histrionics now observed in the debilitating school system in the country and to stem this tide all hands must be on deck. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the promotion of practicals in theatre arts education that will position theatre arts graduates be they college of Education or University graduates in the society as a very important factor towards improving the dysfunctional economy that will bring about sustainable future for Nigeria. This paper concludes by recommending pure entrepreneurship training skills for all would-be theatre graduates if the future of the country's economy is to be sustained.

“Unemployment: Nigeria sitting on a keg of gun powder”. This statement is credited to Nigerian former President Olusegun Obasanjo (OBJ) as a guest lecturer at the 16th Annual lecture of the Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI) 21<sup>st</sup> march, 2013 at Ilorin, Kwara State capital. The statement thus read in full “*The number of Nigerian Universities is growing to about 150 now, we have a problem. The graduates coming out of the Universities do not have hope of getting employment. This means we are sitting on a keg of gun powder*”. With a statement like

this from a former president, then it means that there is no future and where something does not exist, how can its sustainability be talked about?

The development of man-power and its effectiveness rests solely on the educational system. If the graduates from colleges of education, polytechnics, universities and other higher institutions of learning cannot create jobs for themselves and others in this technology driven society, it means we have to look inwards and re-define our curriculum. A school curriculum is the sum total of the school's efforts to influence learning and the learner whether in the classroom or outside the classroom. Tanner and Tanner (1975) in Ughamadu (1993:9) defined curriculum as:

The planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstitution of knowledge and experience under the auspices of the school, for the willful growth in personal-social competence.

The definition exposes the dynamism of curriculum by systematically reconstructing knowledge and experience. This goes to show that curriculum as a progressive process should be dynamic rather than static. By implication it means that there should be regular reviews of the school curriculum to reflect the changes in the society. Ughamadu (1993:13) agreed and posited thus: “*societal values and problems are not fixed or permanent and hence contemporary problems of the society should be considered in curriculum planning and development*”.

The position of this paper therefore is for the promotion of practical in courses where practical abound as requirement before graduation from such departments and by this therefore, such graduates become practical oriented in their area of academic disciplines. As they leave the school system there will be the possibility of getting themselves engaged in their own little enterprises, which will in turn increase the *per capita* income of the country over a period of time. Without jobs, it would not be possible to increase *per capita* income as well as the improvement of the living conditions and standards of the citizens. It is only when this is done that we should begin to talk of a sustainable future.

### **Theatre Arts and its Elements**

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (1968), theatre is derived from the Greek word "*Theaomai*" meaning "*to see*". The word theatre connotes two concepts, a structure and a performance. Theatre is a building in which performance takes place. According to Adedokun (1997:1) "*Theatre has two main literal meanings. It is the acts of writing and performing plays, hence, it is the work of theatre artists. Secondly, it refers to a building or auditorium where performances of plays take place*". A performance is the objects of seeing. A performance is a finished theatrical product manufactured from creative raw materials such as drama, dance, music, poetry, mime, pantomime etc by theatre artists and presented before a gathering of people who are consumers called audience at a given location and time. According to Akinwale (2007:3):

It does not matter whether the audience is a paying or non-paying one. The performance may be spontaneous or designed. It must be created by a group of creators who struggle to bring the audience to the same level of

understanding of the performance as they themselves.

Theatre is a synthesis of the arts, because it serves as a meeting point of all other arts. It is the only umbrella body under which other arts come. Implied here is that, for theatre to be achieved other arts forms must be employed. The composite nature of the theatre is further stressed by functions of different theatre personnel. The makeup artists, the costumier, the actor, the director, the dancer, the singer and the theatre manager, all come together under one umbrella to produce a play. The coming together of all these artists to produce a work of art portrays the theatre as a synthesis of the arts.

Theatre itself is composed of many elements such as playwriting, directing, acting, song, dance, audience, criticism and management. There are others known as technical dimensions such as sets, lighting, costume, make-up, sound etc. According to Brockett (1969:8):

The various elements which go into a production are usually provided by separate artists. The visual background, for example, is the work of the sets, lighting and costume designers, who seek to interpret the qualities found in the script through visual means. The scenic designer not only indicates place and historical period, he supplies the architectural forms, light and shadow, colour line and composition which add to and reflect the drama's action. In like manner, the costumier, the lighting designer and the choreographer seek to embody the mood and the spirit of the play through visual means.

It is the interdependent workings of the various arts comprising the theatre and or the production of a theatrical performance that this presentation wishes to pursue, considering the technicalities involved in these other aspects of the theatre. There is this growing army of Theatre Arts graduates from some Colleges of Education

and Universities that are out there looking for paid employment and the lack of opportunities for these graduates is however a source of concern. Meanwhile, if given the proper practical training through their course of study, they are supposed to be employers of labour and not the reverse.

### **Relevance of Promoting Practical in Theatre Arts Education for Sustainable Future**

Theatre arts discipline is a vocation that gives room for specialization in the course of study. Theatre arts education is geared towards producing a socially relevant individual that can take care of himself or herself after graduation from school. Furthermore, the students should be knowledgeable in the arts of the theatre in order for them to identify the inherent potentials in them for job creation. The entertainment industry is not only growing and existing, the industry seems to offer opportunities to youths who are equipped with employable skills. If the students are not properly taught the practical in their areas of specialisation, it means that they have not been helped to become self employed or well equipped to make a living from the entertainment industry. Theatre Arts education is to make its practitioners economically viable and independent.

To overcome this problem of Theatre Arts graduates and other disciplines with practical oriented study or courses to be economically viable immediately they graduate from school, it requires an increasingly reorganization and responsive reawakening to the needs of the remarkable transformation in the curriculum of these courses to include concentration on practicals so that when they leave school they can practice on their own. It is not as if practicals are not done during the course of study. The real issue is that in most cases practicals are left in the hands of the students to handle themselves. In most schools the

infrastructures and apparatus to carry out these practical are not in place.

### **Technical or Practical Area in Theatre Production**

In the practice of theatre as mentioned earlier, this discipline is having areas where students can specialize in. Theatre arts education has a lot of value to offer both arts and sciences knowing no frontiers in time past and no boundaries of nationality or creed, it offers attainment in a form that is convenient to study. Osofisan (2001:107) has this to say about the course:

Theatre arts is perhaps still the most viable of all courses in the Humanities. It is the most rounded of the available Arts disciplines, which offers the most comprehensive training for the students... through the study of subjects as Dramatic literature, Theory and Criticism, History, Sociology, Philosophy, Lighting and Sound etc.

Theatre arts is a discipline that aids integration and self discovery and the ability to adjust within society. And in the words of Hodgson (1972:19) Theatre Arts serve as a “*crossroad where all arts meet*”. Theatre teaches the basic fundamentals of life which include the variety of skills and competencies that the students are open to go through multi-varied subjects in the course of learning or training to become well trained theatre artists. According to Adedina(2007:156) “*A well trained graduate must have gone through History, Sociology, a little bit of Physics, Engineering, Fine Arts and Design, Accounting and other areas that are embedded in the process of producing a play*”

The production of a play involves other talents, abilities and co-operative efforts of so many people from so many arts, crafts and professions blended together in the creation of a theatre performance or production among these are directors, actors, scene designers, lighting men, costume designers, make-up artists, musical directors,

choreographers/dancers, sound engineers, theatre architecture e.t.c

According to Adedina (2007:156):  
Theatre Arts gives the chance to the individual no matter his level to participate. A play produced, gives opportunities to all those involved to give appropriately according to their individual endowments. As we have directors, we have stage managers, the costumes designers, actors e.t.c

A well endowed and practically trained Theatre Artist can contribute his or her quota to a theatre production with or without much supervision. This can lead to job creation. Take for example the Theatre Architectural designer, he does not work alone, that is why Cohen (1997:8) posited that “*the creative work of the theatre is in its essence collaborative and interdisciplinary*” Theatre design is an art that has been in practice right from when man started entertaining himself. It has greatly influenced theatrical productions in design and techniques in modern theatres. Ebohon (2011: vi) is of the view that:

Due to the dynamic nature of man and the advancement in the utilization of science and technology, architectural design became an integral part of theatre design to heighten visual aesthetics and to enhance the comfort of actors and audience alike during theatrical activities.

The ultimate aim is that many hands are needed but without adequate practical training and preparation they cannot effectively deliver. Today we have graduates that cannot deliver in their subject areas, because of inadequate training. Therefore the crux of this presentation is for us to see how we can reduce the unemployment rate through redesigning our curriculum to include serious practical training for courses that involve such and in turn make

our graduates not only employable but employers of labour.

### **Conclusion**

Theatre Arts Education however has always been part of the tools for educating behavior modification and changing man since the beginning of time and therefore a key to human development. With what has been discussed in this paper, it is very clear that technical and vocational skills acquisition in the form of promoting practicals in theatre arts education is a veritable strategy for deploying sustainable solutions to address and readdress socio-economic vices in the country as it will facilitate the generation of self-reliant and responsible citizenry. According to Gbadamosi (2013:7) :

For Nigeria to industrialise and develop, there is need to give vocational skills training attention in the country even as it has been observed that if some of the country’s socio-economic problems must be addressed, the issues of wealth creation and poverty reduction should be properly addressed.

### **Way Forward**

1. Since Education is the acquisition of the art of utilization of knowledge, our educational system should be redesigned in such a way that the ultimate will be production of knowledgeable and experienced persons that can impart as well as create employment for themselves and others.
2. Government should begin to look at pure entrepreneurship training skills to be included as part of conditions for would be graduates from any discipline in the Nigerian higher institution of learning.
3. Theatre Arts Department should emphasize more on practical as part of the requirement for assessment and evaluation for graduation.

4. Theatre Arts Department should be equipped with facilities and gadgets that will help in the handling of the practical aspects of the discipline. Encyclopedia Britannica (1968) Volume 18. Chicago. *Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.* William Benton Publishers.
5. There should be adequate funding of Nigerian tertiary institutions and hard-working staff members should be rewarded accordingly. Gbadamosi, S. (2013) Vocational Skills Training, Pathway for Nigeria's Industrialisation-ITF DG in *Nigerian Tribune* 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2013.

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