

## RE-ENGINEERING THEATRE ARTS EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is very alarming. This nation is blessed with diversity of individuals with each person having a unique talent. Nigeria is a country with a population of over 160 million, producing lots of graduates every year without jobs for them. While some of them are unemployable either because of their discipline or their inability to defend what they have studied in the university. Nigeria today, with a high number of Theatre Arts graduates and teachers should not be experiencing high rate of unemployment, if the philosophy and objective of Theatre Arts education are properly implemented and executed. This presentation looked at the society's conceptualization of this discipline and x-rayed it as a more encompassing course, which better equips the students and prepares them for life than any other course. Finally, this paper proffered suggestions for then re-engineering of Theatre Arts education for employment and self-productivity in Nigeria.

Theatre Arts is a discipline that is multi-dimensional in nature. This discipline in itself is composed of elements such as playwriting, directing, acting, song, dance, criticism, educational theatre, management and most recently, the media. There are others which are simply referred to as technical. These include set, lighting and costume designing, make-up, sound, and special effect design. This discipline is more or less like a catalyst that sets other activities in motion, which further helps one to acknowledge, accommodate and reassess his world-view in the light of new experiences in a world or nation bedeviled with the plague of unemployment.

Employment for all is perhaps an ambiguous concept or notion going by the concept of employment. To employ all, means that in the economy people who are capable of working and who are qualified by age, law, custom, and other factors relating to employment are engaged. In a developing economy like ours, there is high rate of unemployment. Many people who are of working age cannot find employment.

Therefore, the justification is there for the use of Theatre Arts as a panacea for employment and self productivity in Nigeria. According to Adebola(2000) in essence, he says, *"Theatre Arts as a course prepares students for full citizenship into the society and inculcates into them a capacity for survival"*.

To him Theatre Arts educates, entertains and is a means by which the society functions.

The concept of self-productivity through the arts of the theatre, brings us into the relevance for future prosperity, relevance for future development, and relevance for having a future worth living.

The school system as it relates to education deals with the process, skills and methodologies employed to enhance the act of imparting knowledge to the learners. Owing to the importance, complex and difficulty involved in the process of knowledge dissemination, education researchers have continued in the act of improving the school system so as to promote the achievement of our educational goals and objectives.

However, so many strategies have been adopted in our Nigerian school system in the time past with relatively no significant outcome in respect of functional education. Education, being a social thing geared towards promotion of economic, sustainable development, social reform and above all, inculcation of the right attitude and values for peaceful co-existence demands a more social

participatory and practical approach to achieve the numerous goals. Farrant (1980:18) summed up education as

*“the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed”.*

This attempt can be summarized thus: that education, be it formal or informal is the process of human learning by which knowledge is transmitted, imparted and transferred where the faculties, innate capacities, impulses, attitudes and skills of the individual are developed and re-produced in the society. This also means that education must be aimed at integrating human capacities and power resulting in well-adjusted, useful, functional and balanced individuals.

Based on the facts above, this study is set to review the effectiveness of re-engineering Theatre Arts Education as a means of strengthening the employment level and self-productivity in the Nigerian economy.

### **Re-Engineering Theatre Arts Education in Nigeria.**

Theatre Arts Education refers to the composition and importance of the elements of theatre in solving educational problems. What then is theatre? Akinwale (2007:2-3) states that:

*The word theatre connotes two concepts. A building and an experience. A theatre is a building in which performance takes place be it drama, music or dance. The building consists mainly of a stage and an auditorium where the audience sits and watches the performance. When a performance is performed on stage by artists, by actors, musicians or dancers, in the presence of an audience, we say that the experience of Theatre is taking place. It does not matter whether the audience is a paying or non-paying one.*

Theatre evolved out of man's desire to cater for the inadequacies of nature, hence, to ensure its survival, theatre must continuously champion the development process of its society and re-direct the erring practices therein. This discipline has a wholesome approach to the development of man. However good as this may sound, the society still see this discipline as a course that is not serious or worth of studying.

Most parents cannot understand why their children would go into the university to study Theatre Arts. They would rather their children or wards study “good courses” such as Law, Economics, Medicine and the like. This is because, in a society like Nigeria, certain myths are erroneously attached to the study of Theatre Arts and practitioners. According to Bamidele (2003:27):

*The problem of assessing the social role and worth of art and the artists in society derives from what art itself is. Just as Thomas Mann has conceived of it, so many of us too conceive of art as a dreamer's idle fancy; it is for fun and games and more delusions and at best useless and meaningless without any validity to the moral or social.*

The general belief that theatre arts profession is corrupting and that it causes marital instability, high rate of bachelorhood and spinsterhood is untrue. Osofisan [2000] posited that:

*The illusion of the stage is being taken for reality outrightly. It is not the career one chooses that determines one's sexual lifestyle.*

However, he argues further that Theatre Arts is an all encompassing discipline that teaches practicals, arts and students learn to design costumes, constructs sets playwrighting and management. This is a discipline whose structural composition enables it to be used as a tool for information, character reformation, education, exercises as well as entertainment. This is the only arts that helps to develop man cognitively, psychomotor- wise and affectively. Theatre Arts Education is in the best position to correct the corrupt society of ours by its proper use to inculcate the right attitudes in our younger generations at their formative level. According to Herbert Reads [1967] in Bamidele[2007;19]

*“The aim of teaching creative Arts he says is not to produce more works of arts but to provide better persons and better society”.*

### Re-Engineering Theatre Arts Education for Employment and Self-Productivity in Nigeria

Theatre has therefore been recognized as a major aspect of education. Apart from being a vehicle for instruction, this is a discipline that combines other art forms to achieve its goals. According to NTI, [2000]:

*The composite nature of the theatre is further stressed by the functions of different theatre personnel. The makeup artists, the costumer, the actor, the director, the dancer, the singer, and the theatre manager, all come together under one umbrella to produce a work of art stresses theatre as a synthesis of the art.*

If the aforementioned benefits are not being harnessed by the system, it goes to show that something is wrong with Theatre Arts Education in Nigeria. As Nigeria works towards employment creation and a better society, Theatre Arts Education should be re-examined and evaluated properly to be able to show this art as a place for convergence for employment and self productivity in the Nigerian economy. Fafunwa [1982] is of the view that:

*when evaluating any educational system one must determine the extent to which it is meeting the need of a particular society at any given time.*

This brings us to the concept of re-engineering Theatre Arts in our society despite the identified importance of Theatre Arts in the lives of the society as a whole. It is disheartening to note that our educational system will pay lip services to this discipline. There are elements that are highly emphasized by the Arts of theatre which are symbolic contraception of life. Theatre Arts incite other men to learn about themselves, their society and their roles therein. Adedeji [1980:3] asserts that:

*ours is a discipline which combines learning with performance or reinforces learning by doing and by its scope and method of evaluation.*

New ways and methodologies on how to improve the study of Theatre Arts should be put in place so as to create in the artistes a sense of belonging and the spirit of entrepreneurship. In reengineering Theatre Arts Education, the curriculum should be designed in such a way that the students should be exposed to the economic viability of the discipline rather than too much of theoretical to the detriment of experimental. In the words of Tanner [1995:21] participation in theatre activities:

*Will stimulate your creative abilities, allowing you to develop inner resources that lead to an enriched life, which is so necessary in our world of cold science and hard facts.*

Tanner's argument is that the involvement of practical demands responsible commitment as one works towards a creative goal in the process one develops qualities that promote maturity, teamwork, cooperation and dependability is one reason of judgement which aids the appreciation of past and present times.

It is also observed that in most Theatre Arts Departments in Nigerian schools, teachers emphasize much on theories like all cognovits in their literary creation and this is what the students go away with from all their endeavours without gaining a single yardstick for aesthetic perception or having realized that they have gone through an aesthetic experience. Bamidele (1994:19) agreed that:

*The overriding goal of aesthetic education is not that it should separate sharply, arts from the rest of life, but what the arts there is a unified area of human experience and no matter how we describe this experience, that come to us in aesthetic terms.*

Since this paper is advocating for the re-engineering of Theatre Arts Education more emphasis will be placed on practical and exposure for students to have production groups of their own, outside the practices organized by the department of Theatre Arts. The Arts of the Theatre, as said earlier is all encompassing; it is a process of creative activity where the experienced individual is aware of how forms and meaning gradually develop not only in surface level, but also in life. This experience as defined, comes to the individual during the process of exposure to pure practical practices.

Looking at the roles of this discipline, which are to inform, enlighten, and educate, which lightens up the atmosphere and provides some useful food for thought for what amounts to sociological phenomenon is a dynamic product of the society. According to Umukoro (2002:115):

*The modern day (emphasis mime) theatre has continued to grow in influence and significance, performing the traditional functions of information, education and entertainment, in addition to its effective use for political propaganda and ideological persuasion. It has also been used to fight oppression and dictatorship, with remarkable impacts at different times in different parts of Africa.*

The theatre has a symbiotic relationship between itself and the society. Theatre is a complex phenomenon associated with Performer-Audience transaction; the roles of Theatre Arts are discernible. It takes into cognizance all aspects of human life- modes. Theatre is life and it seeks meaning to man's existence in life. The ephemeral nature of the theatre as a product of the society has placed it at a vintage point where it could be used to correct the social malady within the society. Apart from the pedagogical and creative instinct theater inculcates in man, it is also fundamentally a collaborative effort.

### **Theatre Arts: For Employment and Self-Productivity**

A continuous participation in theatre activity at different levels would provide participants with various capacities the opportunity of always engaging themselves in many endeavors in life. This will also develop the sense of responsibility in them. Theatre is comprised of highly plural elements that combine to function for the productivity of a theatrical whole, all of the elements are individualized and controlled by persons who form the unity whole. The theatre may comprise of the directors, actors, stage managers and of course the technical crews. All of these divisions are fully at work to give birth to a safe production. A study in theater provides better social and individual development. In belonging to a group that works towards a creative goal, participants develop a quality that promotes maturity, teamwork, co-operation, and dependability. They also gain deeper insight into people by studying characterization in numerous performances. Personal growth is assured as participation gains confidence poise from frequent participation and as they achieve emotional release and control through the numerous vicarious experiences on stage. Improved body coordination and vocal flexibility that individuals need for everyday communication also results from active participant in a theatrical performance.

The theatre is the only discipline that combines all other art forms so as to achieve its goal .Dandaura (1994:90) puts it this way:

*Theatre refers to that participatory spectacle that includes artistic expressions like songs, music, dance, mime, drama, costume, makeup and the like.*

Theatre entails a lot of practices through rehearsal for perfection. The technical aspect of a production is enough to create jobs for crew members that are serious with their areas of specialization. Whether it is in a liberalized market-method or the school-model or the dual system-model, the arts of the theatre in school prepares the students for professional job as well as educating him in a general sense of it. Theatre gives participants much exposure to experience the satisfaction and thrill in the course of participating in any theatre activity. This discipline helps to mould whoever wants to make a career out of it. The theatre is broad based; whether you are intent upon earning a living as an actor or as a technician in legitimate theatre, television, or the movies, or whether you wish to spend your free time as a dilettante in local amateur theatre groups, theatre can be a worthwhile and satisfying activity for you throughout your life. Talking about employment and self-productivity through the use of theatre activities, this brings us closer to the concept of self-dependency to the teeming population and solution to the prevailing problems such as bad leadership, governance, corruption, cultism, examination malpractices etc. Looking at the extreme dynamism of this profession, Clifford (1972:83) commented on the relevance of the theatre in our society thus:

*Theatre because it reflects nature and human behavior has at times led the way in prompting new revolutionary philosophies, economic theories and social reform. It has shown man, moral evils in human attitudes and behavior. It has chastised human conducts, moral degeneration religious hypocrisy and political injustice and has helped in isolating personal mental disorders and in teaching psychological theories.*

Theatre activities are geared towards producing a socially relevant individual; and for this to be achieved Malomo (1986) in Ebohon (2011:46-47) gave a highlight of the functions of theatre, he said for theatre to take place, there must be four basic ingredients

- i. *The creative raw materials which consist of the dramatic script or scenario, musical composition or dance choreography, or a combination of the three.*
- ii. *The artists to refine the raw materials*
- iii. *The place for presenting the refined materials, and*
- iv. *The audience.*

The four functions mentioned by Malomo can only come to function where man power is available; qualified personnel that can take care of functions one and two, as presented by Malomo. Looking at two of the main ingredients presented; brings to light the effects of professionalism in this profession. A script can employ more than two hundred people at a time, from actors, stage hands and technical designers .Adedina (2007:156) posited thus:

*Theatre Arts gives the chance to the individual no matter his level participation. A play produced, give opportunities to all those involved to give appropriately according to their individual endowments As we have the Director, we have the Stage Manager, the Costumes designer, the actors' etc.*

It is imperative that if the materials and techniques of the theatre are to be used intelligently, the designer must have an awareness of the theatre as a medium of expression.

The discipline can create jobs for the citizens of this country on steady basis if the profession is practiced either on full-time or part-time basis. Theatre practitioners can work for themselves or for an organization especially when it is done to earn income. In this view, theatre activities are suitable as a tool to achieving the overall objectives of the calculated employment system and self-productivity in Nigeria. Ebohon (2011:8) states that:

*We have make-up artist, the set designer, the lighting man or designer, the stage designer, the costume designer, e.t.c where these are properly practiced the artists as students graduate into the society to become self-employed. Well equipped to create jobs for themselves and for the society at large.*

A well trained lighting designer can become an electrician working in the areas of repairing electrical gadgets and wiring of houses, as well as training others in these days of entrepreneurship education. A costume designer becomes a fashion creator or a garment maker, set and stage designer can metamorphose into becoming furniture maker and an interior decoration expert. A script writer can become a creative writer and live on his/her published works in an ideal situation. The list goes on and on. Today, modern or contemporary periods have indeed made issues very simple as a fast continuous search for new technology brings new innovations, readily prepared practitioners for the task ahead in reengineering Theatre Arts Education for employment and self-productivity.

## **Conclusion**

So far so good, this paper has attempted to take an objective look at re-engineering of Theatre Arts Education and how it can enhance employment as well as create room for self-productivity in the Nigerian economy. It was also established that Theatre Arts and Education have common aims at developing the personality of the individual that stimulates his abilities to know, control, imagine, create and execute ideas that are inborn to better the lot of the individual. Also the position of this paper is that the society should not see this course as a profession for vagabonds, but rather it is what will spur an individual to break the walls of social exclusivity thereby making friends across ethnic, regional and religious divisions that will help to accelerate economic growth.

### **Recommendations**

- Government should establish vocational and skills acquisition centres where individuals can learn various skills including those life-enhancing skills in Theatre Arts
- All Theatre Arts departments in Nigerian schools should endeavour to expose their students to more practical participation in the areas of technical theatre, this will help in no small way to solve or provide solution to the problem of unemployment immediately they leave school.
- This discipline should be accorded its rightful place in our educational system, because it is collaborative, multidisciplinary and it teaches skills that are useful to the individual for nation building.
- Theatre practitioners should not be seen as unserious people rather the government can make them economically viable and independent by supporting their programmes and projects
- Our educational system should not be certificate based only .People should be given the chance to show-case what they know .This will help the system reward hard-work, as well as create employment and job opportunities.

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