

THEATRE-IN-EDUCATION (TiE) AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA EXPERIMENT

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Abstract

Africa is undergoing a transition process, some of which are violent. Nigeria is not left out in this transition. For some years now, insecurity in Nigeria has become an issue of serious concern to her citizens and the government at large. This has affected the socio-economic and political growth of the nation. This paper identifies and examines the role theatre practice plays in raising national consciousness in the wake of these security challenges through Theatre-in Education (TiE) with special reference to the Peace and Conflict Resolution Experiment in the University of Nigeria Nsukka. It attempts an appraisal of the ways through which awareness and consciousness could be raised through such methods of instruction in the curriculum because (TiE) is acknowledged as one of the viable forms of educational activities that are participatory and encompassing, capable of bringing people together to create a community outreach team to establish a strong bond within the growing conurbation of a locality. This paper attempts a survey of the impact of participatory and analytical paradigms of (TiE) among the students who have undertaken the course on Peace and Conflict Resolution in the University .

Key words: Theatre, Education, Conflict-resolution, Security

Introduction

Nigeria celebrated her golden jubilee as an independent nation-state in 2010. And it was a time, again, to re-examine how the nation had been able to forge a sense of common unity and identity as a nation made up of people with divergent cultural, religious and ethnic strains aiming for common national aspirations. The lack of visible indices of development such as social security and economic progress was palpable in the deductions of most commentators. The Nigerian citizenry were quick to put the blame of our lack of a sense of shared national aspirations, fore grounded by the bomb blast during the Nigeria's 50th Independence Anniversary Celebration in Abuja on October 1, 2010, on the shoulders of the political class. A significant minority however saw the state of the nation as occasioned by a shared abdication of responsibility by both the establishment and the citizenry. Citing the example of the cultural quandary in the country E. J. Alagoa puts it succinctly:

Clearly, the cultural community in Nigeria has not achieved the complete education of policy makers to the centrality of cultural values that even the apparently decorative/entertainment peripheral arts of say, dance, drama and visual arts create value. These arts are invaluable tools for the communication of messages, original ideas and constitute positive agents for the creation of a national spirit and identity. (6)

In this regard however one may still argue that, the Nigerian theatre has played a serious role in the liberation and emancipation of the society from the clutches of debasing contemporary political, social and economic practices. The majority of the people are rendered voiceless, socially degraded, psychologically dehumanized and economically disadvantaged by the oppressive leadership. In some of the performances, individuals or groups have been mobilized and conscientized, to stand up and fight against oppressive social structures.

Bode Sowande observes:

In the Nigerian political space, we continue to have a drama that is on-going, that is often very tragic (conflicts upon conflicts) repeating itself and we don't have a resolution because there is no dialogue. Somehow, I believe Nigeria can be better, I believe when the dramatist has a play on stage that is based on dialogue, for the sake of the audience, we say the play must go on... However, the only time our leaders speak of dialogue is when they are panicked into it. They want to dialogue with Boko Haram, but they don't believe that Boko Haram menace can in fact be resolved within the context of national dialogue. So, the Nigerian politician should come to the theatre and benefit from the discipline of dialogue and how dialogue has been used for millennia to discuss problems and conflicts on stage within the structure of aesthetic entertainment, arriving at resolutions in the political space. There are no issues that can't be resolved through dialogue. (31)

Sowande further maintains that:

Nigeria of today is dysfunctional. It is holistically dysfunctional. So, the arts within that kind of anomic suffer. But the Nigeria of my early days encouraged the arts. We did not have theatre buildings but we had town halls. From Lagos to Sokoto, Hubert Ogunde was touring the cities. There were town halls everywhere – Mapo in Ibadan, Centenary Hall in Abeokuta and the Old City Hall in Lagos – all of which harboured theatre. At that time, theatre was alive, buoyant, stable and profitable. What practitioners did then was that if one was an artiste or a professional, you would take time off your occupation to pursue your objective during the theatre season, make your money and later return

to your tailoring job... Theatre was still on but what killed theatre really were the military regimes of IBB and Abacha. The rate of insecurity increased during this era and everybody was forced to stay indoors. (31)

Sowande's views above show that drama is more than just a mechanistic reflection of social reality. As part of man's artistic activities, it is in itself part of man's weapon for achieving change and self-realization as he struggles to overcome the forces inimical to his survival. It is a symbol of man's historical process of being and becoming. It is also an enjoyable end product of man's artistic labour. But importantly drama consciously or unconsciously, does shape our attitude to life and daily struggle to overcome the forces of nature which is the fundamental spine of genres such as Theatre in Education. We can give a little insight here, Barth Alison a TiE facilitator in the UK observes that:

One of the most memorable workshops we ever did was an anti-bullying workshop with a Yr 5 class. One small boy stayed silent at first but during the hot seating he joined in heartily. He even got up and played one of the roles, brilliantly defending the 'victim'. His teacher was amazed and afterwards we learned the pupil had not spoken in class since his mum had passed away six weeks earlier. It was fantastic knowing that the workshop had not only taught about the subject of bullying, but that it had brought about such a powerful change in one individual's life.

The above scenario shows that behaviour change is a process and not an event. Individuals vary in levels of motivation or readiness to change. People at different points in the process of change can benefit from different interventions, matched to their stage at the time.

The primary distinguishing feature of TiE is its explicit educational purpose. The theatre companies/groups aim to provide more than entertainment and to teach something other than theatre appreciation or skills. Teaching objectives vary enormously, and this might include but not limited to an analysis of issues such as insecurity, racism, religious fundamentalism or the exploration of a concept or the critique of a contemporary issue. The dramatic content chosen to focus the learning is usually drawn from the real world of historical or contemporary events. TiE methodology has also been enlisted for HIV/AIDS education, Conflict Resolution, Behavioural Change and Security Challenges among many other important social issues. Practitioners usually work with small audiences of young people and the programme is often longer than an average play, lasting half a day or more. Some programmes are in several parts, presented at intervals and linked by interim workshops. TiE's distinctive formal feature is the use of active audience participation. The degree and kind vary from programme to programme, but possible components include simulation games, role-play, improvised drama, dialogue between the

audience and character from a play, audience intervention in the dramatic action and group discussion. The integration of these methods with more familiar performance techniques is a unique innovation in theatre form.

Examples of companies that aim their performances at specialised groups, include; Paul Robeson Players UNN (a Nigerian University based theatre group that works with the HIV centre in the school), Oily Cart Children's Theatre (a theatre group in the UK that works with students with multiple learning disabilities). Most TiE productions are especially adapted for touring, making them flexible enough to perform well in school or any other similar settings.

Theatre in Education is capable of achieving its conscientizing aim because live performance engages the attention of people through a dramatic presentation of problems. It makes the audience see their problems in fresh and critical ways. In this regard, the theatre has the capacity to engage and appeal to all the senses at the same time. And this is a very important potential of the theatre as an art form. When properly used by the dramatist, it could have a tremendous positive influence on the audience. Thus in the world today, theatre has continued to address the problems affecting the society ranging from cultural conflicts, to development problems such as corruption, exploitation, security, oppression and behavioural issues.

Any meaningful discussion of peace and conflict resolution in Nigeria perhaps, must take into cognisance the larger spectrum of the West African Sub-region. This is because the West African sub-region has been plagued by intra-state conflicts in the past two decades. Ethnic and religious clashes are common in most countries in the sub-region, with some escalating into full scale civil wars as in Liberia, Seirra Leone and Cote d' Ivoire, while other countries such as Nigeria, Mali and Niger have had to contend with internal strife that borders on ethnic /religious violence and terrorism. The enormity of this state of insecurity that confronts the Sub-region and slowed it down in development indices has led a scholar like Okebukola to assert that:

To promote development in West African sub-region, there must be peace, not just peace as defined by 'the absence of war' or some form of détente, but as an atmosphere of tolerance, harmonious co-existence and mutual development; an atmosphere where people are not only aware of their differences but are also understanding and willing to live and work together- the concept of peace as captured in the Swahili word; *ubuntu*.(vii)

The various conflicts in Nigeria today are certainly not something to cheer about. There is urgent need for the government and its agencies to consciously identify the root causes of these conflicts, create structures and programmes that would engender solutions and confidence building among the federating units of the country. One area social scientist have cohered as important in tackling the problem is

education. Given the high rate of illiteracy in the society, the citizens are often ignorant of their fundamental rights. By the same token there is the tendency for the corrupt politician to exploit this ignorance to fan the embers of ethnic and religious hatred all in an attempt to acquire political power. However, the poor and ignorant people who voted for him are soon forgotten once he ascends to political office. This scenario in most cases has raised armies of disenchanted young people who are further told the lie that their state was occasioned by their competitors who have monopolised political and economic power. It is this large pool of ignorant and poor masses that reactionary forces find as willing tools to foment trouble and mayhem in the country. In fact Nnadozie in highlighting this reality maintains that: "One major challenge facing Nigeria today and indeed Africa is producing broad-based knowledgeable middle and higher stakeholders that are attuned to the problems and needs of their immediate society, as well as globally competitive and can stand the test of time" (iii). He concludes further that "the need to expose the youths especially those in the higher institutions of learning to the myth behind the western negative view of Africa and the contribution of our leaders to this negation cannot be overemphasized" (iii). This paper allies itself with the views above and stresses the need to inculcate in our young people a broad-based knowledge that would form the bedrock on which their various areas of specialization are anchored and professionalized in their various areas of chosen academic endeavours. However in doing this we should not lose sight of also imbuing in them a positive attitude, a sense of responsibility and patriotism and leadership by example which are all paramount. The above concern may probably be captured best in the design of our educational curriculum in both the tertiary and secondary levels. It is in this regard, that the University of Nigeria has made much inroad by integrating peace and conflict resolution into its curriculum. A course titled *Peace and Conflict Resolution* (GS207) is domiciled in the General Studies Programme where conflict resolution forms an important nexus for students semester work. This course employs tokens of drama and has benefitted much from the expertise of scholars and practitioners from the department of Theatre and Film Studies in the same University. The primary thrust of the course is to make the students understand the futility of allowing themselves to be used as pawns by unscrupulous characters who parade as leaders in our polity. They are made to learn and imbibe the culture of hard work and the values of participating and contributing positively in whatever community they find themselves. Uche Nnadozie who is involved with the seminar groups avers that:

The course work is prepared to drill students in current and topical issues shaping their lives both within their immediate communities, the wider society and indeed the international community. This is achieved through constant review of course content and methodology for disseminating them, so as to

enable student understand and appreciate better the social mechanism of existence (i).

Topics such as electoral process, political violence, conflict management, conflicts of all kinds, poverty, gender issues, roles of international organizations, environmental degradation, unemployment and insecurity are discussed in class. The students are encouraged to create theatrical performances on the topic enumerated above with the expertise of lecturers from Department of Theatre Arts who impart the participants with skills in creating performances that bear messages on how to combat conflicts, confront issues and attain peace. They create performances with topical messages and educative lessons as they put up dramatic enactments to enlighten the University audience.

Method of Performance

The first component of the course highlights conflict management. Conflict management, in Nigeria has tended towards reducing the negative and destructive effect of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the conflicting parties involved. Therefore, conflict management could be said to be the application of the operational phase of conflict resolution. It represents the enforcement mechanism, strategic responses for the achievement of the ideas and goals of conflict resolution with social peace as the ultimate aim. While conflict resolution represents a theoretical design, conflict management represents the operational and implementation regulation or prevention. The methods of theatrical performances which students present in the simulation exercises include Drama, Dance, Pantomime, Songs, and Acrobatics.

Students are encouraged by the lecturers to create theatrical performances which could use any of the methods listed above and to go about in groups to produce a finished work which borders on themes revolving around conflict resolutions and management using vivid examples found in the Nigerian society. Students in a lot of instances develop stories from the insecurity situations in the nation, articulating and proffering possible solutions to them. The lecturer gives ten minutes to the groups to present the finished work and there after, scores are awarded to various groups. The message is very clear and graphic due to the nature of performance. The students are entertained and taught, without losing the message (s) embedded in the performances.

The audiences could be students of that class and beyond. It is pertinent to note that the target audience here is the undergraduates who are the stakeholders, the privileged minority that has perhaps, crossed the level of ignorance, so to speak. Not those who are still in the rural areas or ignorant of conflict resolution and management situations, but those who are on the path towards leadership. These are future policy makers that will make the laws that will shape the lives of others. The costume and make-up are done with regards to the messages and interpretations, the same goes for the props used. There are provisions for a conducive environment to

enable students create and rehearse their performances without disturbance and interference.

The theatre performances also called simulation exercises introduced to help students understand the course better have achieved tremendous success. Investigations were carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of theatrical involvements in the course and how it is handled. Our survey and evaluation is restricted to the University of Nigeria.

A Cross section of the undergraduates in the University of Nigeria who have passed through the course were interviewed through the use of questionnaire 'face validated' by a lecturer in Education Measurement of the University. Below shows a review of the results obtained. A total of 452 questionnaires were distributed out of which 300 were returned. The analysis of responses to each question is shown, tabulated as raw data with percentages for each item found. The information gathered from the respondents is discussed as follows:

Section A

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender;

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Male	135	45%
Female	165	55%
Total	300	100%

One hundred and thirty-five (45%) of the respondent were male while one hundred and sixty-five (55%) were female.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondent by Marital Status;

MARITAL STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Single	270	90%
Married	30	10%
Total	300	100%

Two hundred and seventy (90%) were single while thirty (10%) of the respondents were married.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondent by level in School;

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Male	135	45%
Female	165	55%
Total	300	100%

Fifty (16.7%) of the respondents were in final year. One hundred (33.3%) were in penultimate year and one hundred and fifty (50%) of the respondents were in sophomore class.

Table 4: Distribution of respondent by Age;

AGE BRACKET	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
15-20	110	36.6%
21-30	170	56.7%
31-Above	20	6.7%
Total	300	100%

One hundred and ten (36.6%) of the respondents were between 15 and 20 years old, one hundred and seventy (56.7%) were between the ages of 21-30. Twenty (6.7%) were above 31 years old.

SECTION B SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Table 1: Whether the respondents have participated in the course *Peace and Conflict Resolution* (GSP 202).

RESPONSE CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	300	100%
No	0	0%
Total	300	100%

To ascertain respondent's qualification to the sampled, they were asked in this table if they have done the course *Peace and Conflict Resolution*. All the respondents ticked "YES", it was necessary because it was a pre-condition to qualify for the survey.

Table 2: The kind of Theatrical Performances (Stimulation Exercises) the respondents participated in during their stimulation exercise.

PERFORMANCE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Drama	250	68.3%
Dance Drama	50	16.75%
Pantomime	20	6.7%
Song	20	6.7%
Acrobats	5	1.6%
Total	300	100%

Table seven indicates that two hundred and five (63.3%) participated in drama during their stimulation exercise, while fifty (16.7%) goes to dance drama, twenty (6.7%) to pantomime same as song and 5 (1.6%) to acrobatics.

Table 3: Whether Guidelines were given by the Lecturers on how to go about the theatrical performances.

RESPONSE CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	300	100%
No	0	0%
Total	300	100%

It is shown in this table that the 300 (100%) students say that guidelines were given to them by the lecturers on how to go about the theatrical performances.

Table 4: How many Minutes were allocated to each group to present?

NUMBER OF MINUTES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
10 Minutes	200	66.7%
15 Minutes	100	33.3%
20 Minutes	0	0%
30 Minutes	0	0%
Total	300	100%

From the data in table 4, 200 respondents representing 66.7% of the sample size states that the minutes allocated to present the theatrical performance is 10 minutes while 100 respondents representing 33.3% states that it is 15 minutes.

Table 5: How the Respondents see the Theatrical Presentations.

RESPONSE CATEGORY	FREQUENC Y	PERCENTAGE
Instructive/Entertaining	210	70%
Entertaining Only	60	20%
Not Sure	30	10%
Total	300	100%

It is shown in this table that seventy (70%) respondents believed that the theatre presentation done is instructing and entertaining, Sixty (20%) believe that it is entertaining only while thirty (10%) of the respondents are not sure of its purpose.

Table 6:How the Respondents rate the lecturers handling the theatrical presentations for the stimulation exercise.

RESPONSE CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Qualified	280	93.3%
Manageable	20	6.7%
Not Qualified	0	0%
Total	300	100%

In Table 6, two hundred and eighty (93.3%) respondents rate the lecturers handling the theatrical performance as qualified, twenty (6.7%) rate them as manageable and none was rated as not qualified to handle the course.

Table 7: Response perception on how they view theatre performances as it concerns the course, *Peace and Conflict Resolution*.

RESPONSE CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Excellent	250	85%
Good	50	15%
Very Poor	0	0%
Total	300	100%

Finally in Table 7, two hundred and fifty (85%) respondents perceived theatre performance as it concerns the course to be Excellent, fifty (15%) respondents perceived it to be good and none of the respondents perceived it to be very poor.

Results

With the statistical data above, one can deduce that theatrical performances which are employed to enlighten students on Peace and Conflict Management are very effective. The physicalization of the issues involved through dramatic enactment by the students, give them vivid and concrete forms thus creating lasting impression on the participants. The time students are given to create, harness, interpret and produce theatrical performances that discuss conflict issues and their managements are quite proper and result-oriented. The availability of qualified teachers, coaches and adequate facilities appears to have paid-off so well that these students are well enlightened and empowered to take decisive steps in their immediate communities when issues of conflict management arise.

Recommendation

From our results TiE has been demonstrated to have a wide range of acceptance among the student participants. It promotes interpersonal and group communication and debate after exposure, thereby enhancing learning and behaviour change. It is

recommended that governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector should make greater and more effective use of such a medium to encourage public discussion of important and sensitive issues related to socio-political and religious conflict in the country. This is because Theatre-in-Education allows the audience to make decisions on their own without being preached to. It frames messages in a popular, educating and entertaining format that can help create an environment where people of all ages can carry on conversations about an issue(s) discussed. TiE programmes using the "talk show" format allow questions to be asked and talked about freely. They may inspire listeners to advocate for change, increase their knowledge or change their attitude towards a topic, and empower audiences to change their own behaviour or approach issues from different perspective.

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ISSN: 2360-7718

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ISSN: 2361-0034



Design & Prints by
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA PRESS, LTD.
Bookshop/Bank Complex Enugu State Nigeria.
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