

**TOWARDS ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF  
THEATRE ARTS IN NIGERIAN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

As a process, teaching and learning moves jointly in a continuous manner. Although the former may involve a considerable level of learning, the learner through adequate learning can eventually become a teacher since as a learner, he influences the behaviour of his teacher(s). Nevertheless, the process of learning must move abreast of teaching to achieve the set goal. Although learning is not necessarily an outcome of teaching, the effectiveness of the former must reflect in the latter through the product who supposedly should be a harmonious all round developed personality whose head, heart and hands must have been adequately cultivated. The Theatre Arts discipline possesses a feature that makes it more demanding than other disciplines in the arts and humanities. This feature entails the practical aspect which arguably, is not inherent in other disciplines of the arts and humanities. As a result of this, a graduate in the discipline is enhanced with skill in at least one of the arts of the theatre as well as the theoretical acquisition. Professionalism in teaching aside, the skill makes him/her a complete theatre artiste. This discourse examines the factors that may enhance the effective teaching and learning of Theatre Arts in Nigerian Colleges of Education. It argues that the present curriculum is inadequate if the objective is to produce self-reliant and well groomed teachers with abilities to teach all aspects of the Arts. The paper concludes that the authorities concerned should give the discipline a double major status, redesign the curriculum so as to give room for more practical, and provide necessary equipment for the teaching and learning of the course.

**Keywords:** Effective teaching, Learning, Theatre arts, Education, Curriculum

**Introduction**

The catatonic state of education in Nigeria has reached a point where scholars, educational authorities and administrators should take diagnostic approaches to the problems plaguing the system and come up with adequate prescriptions that may rescue it from total collapse. In a system, where most products of our higher institutions of learning cannot defend the certificates obtained at the end of a three or a four year programme, calls for urgent attention from the individuals and authorities concerned. It is high time the three tiers of government and individuals concerned in the planning and administration of education in the nation, probed into the myriad of problems that are now bane of our educational system. This concept paper is not aimed at teaching scholars, organisations, and educational administrators of the nation's educational system a novel idea, but rather, to reawaken their consciousness towards ways through which effective teaching and learning of Theatre Arts can be achieved in the Colleges of Education where Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) in Theatre Arts is awarded.

Entry qualifications and requirements aside, most students of Theatre, Dramatic, and Performing Arts today are endeared primarily into the course by the achievements and popularity of a few successful actors and actresses they watch on the tube, hence, their decisions to enroll for the discipline either at a University or a College of Education. Their primary aim is to become popular actors and actresses not knowing that there are other skills and talents-enhancing courses in the theatre where they could excel. Their imagination and thoughts are hinged on the fact that in the nearest future, they too would be a force to reckon with or a reference point in the trade without being oblivious of the fact that some of the actors and actresses they admire are products of years of schooling that incorporated studies in a variety of courses. Hence their imagination is a bit frozen in the first year when they realise that it takes more than their initial thoughts of just coming in and leaving with a certificated skill in acting. While some do call it quit, a few crosses to other departments, some grudgingly stay, while a few with the desire and urge to succeed stay to whether the storm.

The National Certificate in Education (NCE) holder in Theatre Arts is of more marketable value when considered from the point of view of a professional teacher as well as an artiste through the business point of view. The thrust of this paper is to raise awareness on how graduates of Colleges of Education in Nigeria could be relevant in the educational system and as well be useful to themselves in a period when the hope of survival of the graduates of our higher institutions are besmirched by unemployment and corruption in diverse places. Although Mugenyi and Chang Zhu (2015), observe that “the challenge in teaching and learning in the 21st Century is found in the over-reliance of learners on their teachers which leads them to be spoon fed without putting enough effort on their own for knowledge construction,” the Theatre Arts discipline is different as it gives room for students to learn on their own during practical classes.

### **Significance of the Study**

This concept paper, unlike most research work on the Theatre Arts, is not aimed at paying undue emphasis on the commercialisation of the Theatre Arts discipline, which can as a matter of fact breeds negative implications on the curriculum as designed by the National Commission on Colleges of Education (NCCE). Nevertheless, it portrays the discipline as one that is capable of producing teachers with other viable avenue for survival through the practice of the profession, if effectively groomed. The significance of this paper is in its conceptual look at the factors that may lead to effective teaching and learning of Theatre Arts in the Nigerian Colleges of Education. It also delves into the process of teaching and learning of Theatre Arts and comes up with assumptions on how to achieve effectiveness in the process. Although this is a concept research, we believe that the paper shall be of valuable assistance to theatre academics, educationists, educational authorities and administrators, curriculum designers of Theatre Arts discipline and other concerned bodies or personalities.

### **Learning**

The reasons for the setting out of educational goals call for extreme care. This parsimony suggests that students should concentrate on the most important concepts and skills in order to benefit from the quality of information presented. The theatre arts student has the opportunity to choose at least one area of the arts of the theatre; masters the skill of the art; and at the end, becomes self-reliant. Okafor (1988) points out that “the primary goal of general or liberal education component is to give the trainee teacher a more rounded academic preparation so as to make him feel more at home, absolved of intimidation in the academic environment and academic world outside his field of specialisation.” Although it

may be contentious to say that the theatre arts discipline, is one out of the many courses in the Arts and Humanities, that gives students a rounded academic preparation. Yet, it remains one course that produces professionals with different fields of specialisation – theatre directors, set designers, actors, singers, theatre managers and administrators, costumiers, event planners, critics, teachers, producers, and others.

The process of learning often requires more than just making multiple addition of new ideas to old ones. It sometimes requires that people should restructure their thinking radically. That is, during learning process, learners should incorporate some new ideas and change connections among the things they already know, or even discard some long-held beliefs about the world. Also, during the process, learners learn to do well in what they practice doing.

Learning requires feedback. This aspect often takes place when learners have opportunities to express ideas and get feedback from their mates and the teacher. This feedback calls for more than the provision of correct answers to questions. Rather, it is the reactions of the learners to the perspicuity of the teacher, that is, the clarity or lucidity of the teacher during the process of teaching. Students need to be given opportunities to provide feedback for the teacher so that he/she can adjust the learning process, materials, and instructions accordingly. If and when students realise that they possess the abilities to learn something new, they usually make headway. But, if they lack confidence, learning eludes them. They grow in self-confidence as they experience success in learning, just as they lose confidence in the face of repeated failure. Thus the teacher needs to provide students with challenging but attainable learning tasks that enhance success. Experience shows that teachers always look out for innovations as they attempt new things in order to enhance their pedagogy. It is important however, to focus maximum attention on clarity of purpose and intention on what really matters – learning, which is the reason behind what they do – teaching.

The Theatre Arts discipline encourages collaboration among learners, students are given opportunities to plan, organise, monitor their work, direct their own learning (especially during practical classes), which aids self-reflection along the way. Students of Theatre Arts are provided with time and space to be aware of their own ability, knowledge and their own thinking. Theatre courses such as ‘Acting and Speech Training’, ‘Community Theatre’, ‘Directing Theories and Practice’, and ‘Final Year Production’ encourage active participation of students as members of collaborative groups. This allows for self-confidence and a positive change in the process of acquiring knowledge. They are encouraged to construct their own meaning regardless of how clearly teachers teach them new things. Since most of the courses call for the ability to create, Theatre Arts students are encouraged to learn how to connect new information and concepts to what they already learn.

In the notion of John Hattie (2010), in his discourse titled, *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximising Impact on Learning*, we deduce that learning is achieved through “clarity of purpose and intention, feedback, meta-cognitive strategies and collaboration with colleagues.” Although no one definition of the concept of learning is universally accepted, there is a general consensus that learning means modification of behavior as a function of practice. For the purpose of this paper, we shall view the concept of learning as the process of acquiring knowledge or mastering a skill through the formal system of an organisation - the school - which requires the presence of a teacher whose conduct, thought and message are guided by a curriculum which is a product of the educational authority.

### **Effective Teaching**

According to the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1977), “the emphasis on teacher education is to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching which determines the quality of man and his environment. No educational system can rise above its teacher.” Suffice to say that the brain behind every process of teaching in a formal system is the teacher, a professional who guides and directs learning activities. However, what determines the effectiveness of teaching is the quality of the product and his impact on the immediate society. As earlier stated in the foregoing, the polymorphous nature of the concept of teaching makes it a term yet to have a generally acceptable definition. Despite the polymorphic nature of teaching however, the process must as a matter of compulsion, contain three elements which according to the observation of Okoye (1998) are “the teacher who performs the teaching act, the learner, pupil or student who wants to know and ultimately from the teacher, and the subject matter, which is something worth knowing that links the teacher and the learner.” However, in some instances, Theatre Arts students learn under a collaborative exercise that subjects them to learning from one another.

According to Opute-Imala (1998), “teaching is the teacher’s behaviour or activity designed and performed to produce a change in students (learners) behaviour. In a formal sense, it is organised work adults do in the school system in their conscious effort to help the learner in their care to acquire all desirable knowledge and skills, habits and values in an atmosphere of mutual freedom, trust and respect.” Castle (1978) in Abe (2007) is of the opinion that “good teaching is easy to recognise but far from easily achieved...the teacher’s task is shown to require an exacting range of techniques and skills, and specialist knowledge together with patience, insight and ability to take the long term view.” Castle’s opinion no doubt, contains majorly the qualities expected of a teacher whose aim is to have an effective impact on the learners. Nevertheless, Abe (2007) gives a simple clarification on what effective teaching should entail. In his own view,

*effective teaching should be measured only in terms of what the students involved actually learn. If there is no learning, then there is no teaching. However, it is essential to state that no teaching is bad in as much as it achieves the stated aims and objectives...there cannot be effective teaching without effective communication, which is a means through which the relationship between the teacher and the learner is established, extended and maintained and the lubricant that keeps the machinery of teaching functioning.*

Moreover, Coe, Aloisi, Higgins and Major (2014) define effective teaching as “that which leads to improved student achievement using outcomes that matter to their future success. Effective teaching is that which leads to student progress.” Suffice to say that effective teaching imparts a notable change noticeable in the learner at the end of the learning process. Therefore, the effective teaching of Theatre Arts should be seen in the quality and ability displayed by the student in the discharge of his duty as a teacher and a creative artiste.

### **Towards Achieving Effective Teaching and Learning of Theatre Arts in Nigerian Colleges of Education**

The Theatre Arts disciplines possess a unique attribute that sets it apart from other arts. For instance, adequate training and education in technical theatre is affected through

theatre design in space and woodworks, costumes, carpentry, stage lighting and acoustics, making copious use of physics and mechanical principles. “Theatre in education encompasses sound principles of guidance and counseling, the techniques of educational psychology in relations to the needs of children, gleaned through children’s theatre, dramatics, workshops, play productions, teaching practice, methodology among others” (Iji, 2004). Also, Theatre Arts create opportunities for students’ artistic products or performances to be viewed or experienced in a manner where the work is valued, appreciated, and used as a learning tool for other students.

The theatre remains an avocation to many professional teachers in Nigeria. Universities and Colleges of Education lecturers such as Ayo Akinwale, Kola Oyewo, Peter Fatomilola, Omololu Abe, Abiola Akinboye, Afeez Oyetoro, Pete Edochie, Kayode Fajobi and a host of others have taken the theatre as an avocation and as such, another means of survival. They have shown that the job of a teacher is not a hindrance to theatre practice. Akinwale’s notion of the aim of education must have been influenced by his many years of experience as a University Don and a theatre practitioner. According to Akinwale (2007), “the most important aim of education is to lift man to a higher level of understanding and awareness, a development of intellectual ability and a method of making him grow effectively within the society.” This shows that societal relevance and dynamism should be germane to the design of educational curriculum for it to remain a very vital factor in influencing quality education and shaping the course of development in the society. The curriculum in the Nigerian Colleges of Education is one of the challenges to providing quality education for development because it is sometimes not focused on the present needs of the nation. It does not lay emphasis on skill acquisition but primarily focuses on teacher-education and examination orientation such as end of semester examinations which the students must pass minimally at 40percent. Suffice to say that, “the theatre curriculum must be designed to incorporate elements of dynamism as pertaining to dealing with social and economic realities as evidenced in the society. The curriculum must be tailored towards empowering the graduates of the discipline to achieve economic independence” (Julius-Adeoye, 2009). Since the National Certificate in Education (NCE) curriculum is wide enough to accommodate the Theatre Arts discipline, it should have been designed to create room for the teaching and learning of practical oriented courses since the recommended courses in education are meant to enhance the students’ ability with the background needed to become quality professional teachers.

The sustainability quality derived from the practice of theatre has elevated it above the idea of art – for - art – sake. This is why the call for the redesign of some of the objectives of theatre arts curriculum as designed by NCCE becomes inevitable. Julius-Adeoye (2009) emphasises that “the question concerning the curriculum meeting the expectations of scholars, demands of the disciplines, and accommodating enough practical courses is another issues entirely.” As a discipline, Theatre Arts is not available in the programmes offered by the Polytechnics and Technical Colleges in Nigeria where much emphasis is laid on technology and specialisation in basic skills. This singular reason calls for a diversified approach to the teaching of the discipline in Colleges of Education in order to produce well baked products that can stand their own when situation calls for a display of skills in any of the arts. Theatre Arts graduates of our Colleges of Education should put an abrupt end to the dearth of teachers of Creative Arts in our primary and secondary schools. This paper is not advocating for students’ participation in theatre productions, but for a redesign of courses that will impart the theatre students with more special skills. Effective teaching of Theatre Arts can only be achieved through a curriculum that softens the rigidity in making the curriculum an educationally oriented one but puts into consideration students engagement in more challenging practical courses that may eventually channel

their parts towards skills acquisition. The need is expedient in order to place in good stead graduates of Theatre Arts from the Colleges of Education. For example, a curriculum that recommends the study of Costuming, Properties and Set Design will invariably create opportunity for the discovery of fashion designers, toy makers, furniture makers, and possibly, event planners. The problem here is that over the years, students are not made to undergo intensive practice of these aspects of theatre study due to inadequate hours allotted to the teaching/learning process.

However, a glance at the six objectives of the Theatre Arts discipline as designed by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Abuja shows that the essence of the programme is to:

- i. Inculcate artistic and academic excellence in the students;
- ii. Teach and help the student to create plays through collective improvisation and individual scripting;
- iii. Inculcate in our students the spirit of utilising theatre for rural development;
- iv. Prepare qualified personnel to teach creative arts in our primary and junior secondary school under the UBE system of education;
- v. Develop an outreach programme into our communities and schools. This is done through the organisation of community theatre project and performing arts festivals for post-primary institutions; and
- vi. Train students to develop an appreciation and understanding of theatrical developments in Nigeria towards enhancing national unity, and using theatre for national development, (NCCE, 2012).

This is an encompassing objectives no doubt, but the shortfall is in the inadequate equipment and periods allotted to some of the courses. Although some of the courses have not yielded results to the expectations of the stated objectives, still, the objectives stated in numbers (iii) and (v) are being achieved beyond expectations due to enough time allotted to the teaching. The study of Community Theatre has remained a challenge to the teacher and the learners. The course remains a challenge to the collaborative abilities as well as the sense of creativity of the learners. The Department of Theatre Arts, College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, have taken community theatre to few communities in the state where the positive impact of the course are felt through the provision of social amenities such as electricity, water (drilling of boreholes), and construction of good roads. Almost on yearly basis, the course has served as a wake-up call to the local governments in the state and the latter have been responding positively in some instances. The course creates “learning environments where students are active participants in creating and performing, as well as responding to the arts through questioning, sharing, discussing, reading, and writing about the arts and analysing meaning and processes involved in the arts” (Frankfort, 2006). As the students are given the opportunity to act as catalysts as well as mingle with the residents of their chosen area or village, it boosts the teacher’s encouragement of the students to accept responsibilities for their own learning and accommodates the diverse learning needs.

Also, courses such as ‘acting and speech training’, ‘principles of directing’, ‘directing theories and practice’, ‘theatre workshop’, and ‘final year production’ that encourage artistic processes such as improvising, interpreting, composing, creating, constructing, and designing are deeply challenging. Some of these courses create avenue for collaboration among the students under the supervision of teachers. In some instances, students are allowed to work under little supervision in order to learn how to solve challenging problems among themselves. Dapo Adelugba, a late Professor of Theatre Arts, in Yerima (2005) is of the opinion that “...we have found more and more that, the more you allow a

student, in the rehearsal process, to use his own first language in developing a role, the more you are able to liberate him.” This is a sort of freedom in creativity which aids the student in using his conscious intellectual ability. The courses have imparted in the students the abilities to create plays individually and collectively as well as developed abilities to understand, appreciate and interpret plays which are the objectives stated in numbers (i), (ii) and (vi). Frankfort (2006) also observes that,

*grappling with a challenging problem, painstakingly revising a work, giving and receiving critique, exploring difficult issues, reaching deeply to express what one really feels, searching widely for ideas, developing a rhythm of working collaboratively within a classroom community of learners all can create engagement when the learners whole focus and soul is invested in the work.*

However, government has not done enough in achieving the objective stated in number (iv) due to inadequate supply of equipment to aid the teaching of related courses. Although theatre graduates are known for skills in singing, dancing, acting, scripting, etc, there is the urgent need to pay more attention to costuming, properties (props) and the technical theatre courses. The effective teaching of related courses is hindered by the non-availability of equipment to assist the abundant manpower. Nwamuo (2007) is of the opinion that “for theatre to survive, it must either be well supported by the government immediately or the organisation must go commercial...It will be a grievous mistake for one to think that because one is in the art business one is removed from the realities of existence in a world governed by the matrix of demand and supply...”

### Conclusion

Although this paper has not condemned the important role(s) of the teacher in the teaching/learning process of the theatre arts courses, it has virtually in the discussion emphasised the collaboration of students of Theatre Arts as one way through which skill acquisition can be achieved. However, to achieve effective teaching and learning of Theatre Arts, aside the call to government and educational administrators to see to the design of a curriculum that will focus emphasis on courses that may enhance skill acquisition, we hereby suggest, however, with no claim of completeness that:

- i. Teachers should create an environment where student work is valued, appreciated and used as a learning tool;
- ii. Theatre Workshops should not be predominantly based on play productions;
- iii. Media courses should encourage practical classes where skills such as camera handling and editing are taught;
- iv. The provision of editing suite, lighting equipment, etc, by the authority is compulsory for effective teaching/learning media and theatre courses;
- v. The National Committee for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should give Theatre Arts disciplines a double major status to give room for an all-round teaching/learning of major courses;
- vi. Well equipped theatres should be provided for all Colleges of Education where Theatre Arts discipline is available;
- vii. Courses such as Props and Costume Design, and Set Design should be created and given maximum attention.

All our discussion in this paper is neither a condemnation nor a rejection of the educational courses for theatre arts students but a call for skill acquisition in some of the departmental courses. We can boldly say that any learning process in the Theatre Arts discipline should primarily result into effective learning and skill acquisition. We assume that if the above suggestions are taken into proper consideration by the National Committee for Colleges of Education (NCCE), they would make the teaching and learning of Theatre Arts courses more effective as well as produce well-baked graduates with adequately cultivated creative minds.

### Recommendation

Most universities in Nigeria do not offer Theatre Education as a programme. This is affecting the NCE holders of Theatre Arts who may want to proceed in their study. Therefore, we hereby recommend that the National University Commission (NUC) should as a matter of urgency look into the creation of Theatre Education departments at the existing universities in the nation, particularly, the University of Education. This would encourage NCE graduates of Theatre Arts to proceed in the study of theatre arts and avoid crossing to other departments in the arts and education. It would also assist in producing not only quality but more qualified teachers for the teaching of Creative Arts at Senior Secondary School levels and lecturers for the discipline in Colleges of Education.

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