

Quality Theatre Education: A Recipe for Social Re-Engineering of the Nigerian Youths for National Stability

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ABSTRACT

The principal characters in the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates which eventually led to the birth of Nigeria did not envisage the voluminousness of the social re-engineering which their decision may engender upon the natives. Their main aim of carting away natural and human commodities as well as civilizing the natives must have beclouded their intention and expedition and therefore could not see that their decision was a dagger on the throat of our co-existence. Today, no region in the nation is devoid of turbulence and social crisis; intolerance and struggle for religious supremacy, the south east is known for militancy while the south west sit on kegs of gun-powder each time the region experiences a change in governance. In all these disturbances which are inimical to the peaceful co-existence of the various tribes that constitute the nation, the youth had been turned to veritable tools in the hands of the chief perpetrators. The focus of this review therefore is the potency in theatre education as a recipe for social re-engineering. This work observes that in an era besmeared with youths' involvement in political and social disturbances, theatre education has the veritable power to curb social unrest. It concludes that theatre education has the capacity to create social awareness as it brings the people together and helps them to identify with each other.

Keywords: Education, Theatre Education, Youth, Re-engineering, Recipe

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian nation is bedeviled with many socio-cultural and socio-political problems which are inimical to the creation of a peaceful atmosphere as well as the growth and development of her citizenry. The government is not helping matters as resources are taken out of the nation for the enhancement of other nations' economy at the expense of youths' empowerment. Religious turbulence, kidnapping, electoral malpractices, abduction, raping, ritual killings and other social maladies have turned Nigeria to a peculiar nation among the nations in the Black continent of Africa and it seems there is no solution in sight as greed and avarice, selfishness and self-centred reign supreme among the ruling class. Laudable social, political and economic programmes towards the emancipation of the youths from the quagmire of these self-inflicted crises are poorly implemented. This wrong implementation has obviously contributed to the socio-political and socio-economic woes of the country. Nigeria, in almost all the facet of life "reap and harvest poverty rather than wealth in proportion to its overwhelming abundance of rich human, material and other natural gift resources" (Edde, 2004). Unemployment has become the nemesis of most educated youths and thus their idle hands have become the devil's workshop. However, the edges of these problems are tinkered with instead of looking for an objective re-

construction of the entire system. Despite that no amount of tinkering can improve or subjugate the problems, government in the three tiers of our political system pretend not to foresee a future bleaker and cloudier than the present. The Nigerian youth has been put in a cloze condition that requires his smartness and caprice in order to fill the void, that is, the emptiness of his today. He has become a veritable tool in the hands of our political, economic and social perpetrators. We hereby submit critically that a high proportion of crime and social maladies in most nations are perpetrated by young males in their twenties.

The major factor responsible for this is the wrong or non-implementation of the liberal pronouncement programmes in favour of social, political and economic development by the political leaders. Coupled with this is the regular obstruction to academic calendar which is as a result of the incessant strikes of academic unions in its reactions to the charlatan attitude of the government to the plight of education. These and other factors have turned the Nigerian youth to a harbinger of social vices such as armed robbery, cultism, terrorism, militancy, raping, the network scam (popularly called yahoo), ritual killing, political thuggery and hooliganism. At this stage, it is imperative to chart a course for social re-engineering of the youths towards salvaging our today, building a virile nation and upholding a cohesive national stability for the betterment of our future.

The Theatre Arts is an omnibus discipline that draws its subjects for discussion from its immediate environment. It is a collaborative art that involves creativities and services of various human personnel towards the achievement of its goals. It is a unique discipline that makes use of unique individuals and professionals. This feature of the theatre has not changed from the traditional to the contemporary forms. These practitioners are charged towards using the theatre as a tool for education, information, mobilization and entertainment. Edde (2001), in his essay entitled 'Performing Arts and National Development' elaborately explains the uniqueness of the theatre practitioners. He elaborates that the theatre practitioners, in many ways are unique individuals in a unique collectivity, often charged, unequivocally, with humanistic mission. The development of human personality, human values, emotions, communication and relations, equity, justice, fair play and other humanistic ethics and ethos (Edde, 2001). Wilder (1960) also buttresses the uniqueness of the theatre arts discipline with four conditions that raise it above other arts. These conditions demarcate the theatre arts discipline from the other art forms. According to Wilder (1960):

1. The theatre is an art which reposes upon the work of many collaborators;
2. It is addressed to the group mind;
3. It is based upon a pretense and its very nature calls out a multiplication of pretenses;
4. Its action takes place in a perpetual present time.

Moreover, the theatre, if well empowered and meaningfully accommodated, can play the role of socialization, character moulding and social re-engineering as well as enhance social programmes towards the process of restructuring. It is also a viable weapon for pervasive truthful moral rearmaments. The perspective towards having a definite concept of education is as wide as the perceptions of the term by educators and educationists alike. Education connotes different notions to different people. However, most definitions

contain same meanings but different perspective, therefore, every definition depends on the perception of the word by the individuals. Being educated or enlightened falls short of the meaning of education as it also transcends the experience garnered from the four walls of an education institution. Aside the formal school experience, the home and society at large have important roles to play in the educational processes of individual. In general terms, education may be viewed as:

The process of transmitting societal lores, values and desirable attitudes from one generation to another. It seeks to socialize individuals so as to equip them with the desired mode of behaviour that is in conformity with the way of life of the society in which they live. Education is the process of teaching, training, learning in schools and colleges for the development of knowledge and skills so as to prepare individuals to live happily with themselves and others in the society where they live (PGDE Module, 2007).

With the above clarification, it is vividly clear that to become educated transcends the schooling experience of being literate or skilled in one vocation or the other. Education comprises a number of activities which are designed to shape and bring an individual to a worthwhile state of being called educated. Suffice to say that cultural factors also played important roles in both the formal and informal education of an individual. However, despite the fact that various educators and educationists have offered series of definitions to education, a researcher needs to pause in order to examine these definitions before choosing the one that is relevant to his discussion. This is not to say that other definitions are loose or irrelevant to the concept of education. For the purpose of this work therefore, we shall adopt the definition given by Fafunwa (1974) that education is the aggregate of all the processes through which a child develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society. Education thus becomes the process an individual passes through in order to be relevant to socio-political and economic issues which are germane to the peaceful co-existence of the society. Hence, this review assesses quality theatre education as a recipe for social re-engineering of the Nigerian youths for national stability.

The Argument about who is a Youth?

The argument of who could be categorized as a youth may be a global phenomenon, but the fact that the youths of any nation are the tomorrow of a nation is not controversial. In the African cultural concept, an old man or woman of 80years sees a 50year old person as a youth. This may not be acceptable when global suggestions are considered. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) categorizes persons between the ages of 15 years and 20 years as youths. It states that the period of being called a youth is “the period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood dependence and awareness of interdependence as a member of a society”. A person between the age when he/she may leave compulsory education and the age at which he/she may finds his/her first employment” (www.unesco.com/news/en/social). If the position of UNESCO is critically looked at, the issue of unemployment may not be a veritable

yardstick to the categorization of who should be called a youth, bearing in mind that the issue of unemployment has remains the bane of many nations, most especially the black African nations. This might have also played a significant part in the observation of the African Youths Charter (AYC) which categorizes a youth as “someone between the ages of 15years and 35years” (www.konga.com). However, if we look at the positions of UNESCO and the African Youths Charter (AYC), it is clear that economic and cultural factors are parts of the determinants of who could be categorized as a youth. Arguably, a youth may be someone in the bracket of ages 20 and 40. This might be the age when the society expects the individual youth to show his/her sense of belonging and responsibility towards himself/herself, the community and the society where the individual youth finds himself/herself. All things been equal, individuals in their thirties are believed to be more active.

Theatre Education and its Relevance in the Process of Social Re-engineering of the Nigerian Youth for National Stability

Historically speaking, theatre education started as a separate art form and as an educational activity in Coventry of the Belgrade Theatre in 1965. It started as separate skill forms and informative movement of the Belgrade business show as a base for the training of children and youths. The Coventry experience was an alliance comprising performers, instructors and social employees who were brought together to generate a community outreach team. Theatre education is a form of performance that weaves its story or performance around an educational topic or debate. It is a performance that requires the active audience participation and often in the form of an interactive workshop. The workshop of theatre education is mostly facilitated by the performers/teachers using a variety of techniques. Theatre education is less concerned with imparting factual knowledge but more concerned with exploring sensitive issues mostly supported by teaching materials designed to encourage further work by teachers and followers. For its productions, projects and survival however, theatre education relies on funds, grants, government departments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, arts councils and educational departments of higher institutions.

The theatre is a unique art with an omniscient quality where and when societal issues are raised. Although it engrafts unto itself other disciplines for its benefits, yet, it remains a vital tool when issues relating to mobilization, sensitization, information, education as well as re-engineering are raised. It is more of a stem with branches that carry buds and shoots which signifies various forms for various functions. Suffice to say that the community theatre or theatre for development (TFD), the rough theatre, theatre education and other forms have special antidotes that can serve as panacea to each topical societal crisis that are inimical to the growth and development of a nation. This feature of the theatre, which separates it from other art forms, is present in its commitment and functionality as it reflects life as we live it through its power to arouse the consciousness of the participants. No matter the form chosen to address societal issues, the theatre posses a multi-sense appeal, another characteristic of the theatre which makes it to appeal to all the senses at the same

time. This very important potential, when recognized by the artiste and fully exploited, achieves tremendous positive influence in the audience (Nwosu, 2004). However, it is necessary to choose a relevant theatre form when topical societal issues are raised. The relevance of theatre education in addressing youth problems is the fact that it gives room for interactions between the instructors/performers/teachers while imparting factual knowledge. Theatre education also shuns fictions (especially in interactive workshops) as it discusses sensitive issues with the support of teaching materials.

Theatre of relevance is a theatrical exploration of man and his environment. It x-rays life in different dimensions with a view either to comment on the foibles of human nature or praise it...is tended to awaken the consciousness of the Nigerian citizenry and direct them on the way forward alongside concerning ontological issues. Thus a particular theatre could be concerned with the social aspect of life while the other may deal with economic aspect. However, the anticipated goal is reformation towards charting a new course suitable for the progress of the society (Nwosu, 2004).

It is in cognizance with this background that this work in its focal view discusses the relevance of theatre education as a recipe for social re-engineering of the Nigerian youths for national stability. If we take into consideration the power of the theatre to manipulate various art forms in order to embellish its functions, then it is clear that theatre have diversity in its role as a recipe for social re-engineering. The art forms use by theatre includes music, mime, puppetry, poetry, song and the narratives. These are the yardstick the theatre uses in reaching its audience aesthetically through its manipulations. A quality theatre education uses these art forms solely or in combination to drive home its points. As these art forms appeal to the audience/spectators at the same time, it creates a sense of awareness which is a necessity for change.

Theatre education, like other theatre forms is a collaborative experience. It brings together performers, instructors/teachers and social employees to generate an outreach team. This feature helps the participants to identify with each other no matter their cultural differences. Although it is difficult for people who are not directly involved in the arts to see the value of theatre education, one has to be knee deep in it to see the benefits. However, as participants are brought together especially through interactive workshop, they identify with each other which makes it possible to chart the same course for a common goal that tends towards a change in the participants as well as the spectators. The participants also develop communication skill that is needed for peaceful interactions and co-existence. It is difficult to effect a change in people without social awareness. Social re-engineering can be made possible through the creation of awareness in individual and groups.

Theatre education has the potential for the creation of awareness needed in the Nigerian youths towards establishing national stability needed for the growth of the nation and her people. Theatre education dwells predominantly on the needs of teenagers and adults, and like Mathematics, provides skills in logic and reasoning. Through the live theatre performance or interactive workshops, teenagers and adults are sensitized to be more accepting of their differences. This is one of the major reasons that make it a relevant tool

for social re-engineering. Every dialogue created in its drama is a process of give and take. This process teaches the participatory youth how to accept offers as they react to each other in an extemporaneous manner or from memorized lines. Also, theatre education is a process for problem solving as well as a weapon for conscientization as it aids the thinking and widens the intellectual horizon of the youth participants as they gather to share in the experience of a theatre education. As topics are raised and diagnosed through the performance or interactive workshop, the hope of arriving at a viable resolution will arrest the participants' concentration and reawakens his reasoning and conscience towards problem solving. However, it is necessary to state that the audience/spectator is not spared of all these stated benefits of the performance/workshop as theatre education remains a performance/workshop that requires the active audience/spectator participation for its fulfillment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has discussed that a quality theatre education if well enhanced with the necessary ingredients contains the potency viable enough to serve as recipe for the social re-engineering of the Nigerian youths which may be germane to national stability. The study has exposed theatre education as the relevant tool for social awareness as well as an instrument of change through its benefits such as:

- i. It helps the youths to be more accepting of their differences;
- ii. It provides a skill set for teenagers and adults;
- iii. Theatre education like mathematics, provides skills in logic and reasoning;
- iv. It helps to create social awareness and aids communication skills;
- v. It brings people together and helps them to identify with each other.

The researcher recommends that institutions with theatre departments should inculcate theatre education into their curriculum for the benefits of their students after their programmes. That government, art councils, educational department, non-governmental organizations (NGO) should provide grants or funds for the crusade of theatre education. The researcher also observes that no university in Nigeria offers theatre education as a course of study, we hereby recommend that the Nigeria University Commission (NUC) should look into this issue and constitute a committee to look into the creation of theatre education department in our universities, for instance, Tai Solarin University of Education in Ijebu Ode will serve as a vital ground for the experiment. This may pitch us in the same tent with Warrick University, Birmingham in London. Also, government in the three tiers of our political system should encourage non-governmental organizations (NGO) and art councils to fund interactive workshops with salient socio-political issues that are inimical to national stability. Universities with theatre departments should provide funds for theatre professionals in their midst to carry out interactive workshops/performances that are educational oriented. This is necessary if we realize that the university environment is a society with its own social vices.

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