

**HISTORY, EDUCATION, SOCIETY AND UNIONISM
(HESAU)**

**Journal of
Department of History,
Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education,
Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos State**



**In Conjunction with the
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Tai Solarin University of Education,
Ijagun, Ogun State.**

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In honour of

Comrade Samuel Akanni Akindele

who retired as a Chief Lecturer in the Department of History,
Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos,
in year 2021



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EDITORIAL COMMENT

Human life is a history book of three (3) pages. The first and the last page have been written for us by the unquestionable determinant of historical destiny. The first page contains the parental connections, place and time of birth. Humans have no free will about this, the parents have determined this by their choices and crowned by God. The last page is our time on earth, place, time and manner of death. We travel in the world without knowing our last stop or final destination, the moment our tickets expire, the uncreated creator will simply command us to come down to the world beyond in whatever manner and at whatever time. The middle page undoubtedly is written by every individual with his own book in form of actions, reactions and inactions. This has been justified by freewill which the creator has given humans and it is on the account of this that his actions would be judged.

Comrade Sam. Akindele as popularly called by colleagues and 'Uncle Sam' by juniors has written on his own vacant page of a three leave page of history in gold, that even the deaf could see, the blind could feel and pessimists could always appreciate. It is against his backdrop that the second edition of History, Education, Society and Unionism (HESAU): A Publication of the Department of History, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos State in Conjunction with the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State came to lime light in honour of an academic per-excellence, a teacher of substance, a unionist of unprecedented achievements, a leader of vision and mission, a man of impeccable integrity, an awardee of many Regional, State and National Awards, a role model without blemish, a disciplined father and husband, an educative religious leader and an ideal gentle man comes this second edition of the publication.

This edition covers some of the areas which Comrade Sam. Akanni Akindele has impacted. It covers problem areas in education-teaching and learning, History Education, Political Science, Unionism, Music, Technology and Social problems among others. It is hoped that readers, researchers, and students would benefit greatly from salient issues discussed in this edition. More importantly, on the roles of heroes and heroines, as well as, biography in the study of society.

We thank colleagues, friends and researchers that have contributed articles to this edition to honour one of our heroes in education. We also congratulate members of the History Department of the College (AOCOED) and those of Tai Solarin University of Education for their collaborative efforts. What is more, we thank the management of Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education ably led by a woman of inestimable virtue, the College Provost, Prof. B.B. Lafiaji Okuneye and the performing Registrar, Mr. S.A.O. Muhideen for creating an enabling environment for academic excellence to thrive- in the manner of the Lagosians *mo yo fun e, mo yo fun ra mi*- I congratulate you and congratulate myself.

Prof. Rasheed Owoyele Ajetunmobi

Editor-in-Chief

Member, AOCOED History Family,

Dean, College of Humanities,

Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun.

2021

**REFLECTIONS ON CHILDREN'S THEATRE PERFORMANCES:
FOCUS ON DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS, ADENIRAN
OGUNSANYA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (AOCOED),
OTO/IJANIKIN, LAGOS**

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Abstract

Children's Theatre is a term used to describe formal productions for children audience with emphasis on entertainment. Children's Theatre is a developmental process for child's growth revolving around all aspects that the child will later be exposed to. It further establishes it as a fundamental preparatory stage for integrating children into the larger society by examining its major contributions. Apart from this, Children's Theatre is a medium for effective learning to enhance academic performance. Given these concerns, this paper has given a retrospective look to Children's Theatre performances in an educational theatre, in the Department of Theatre Arts, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos. It has taken into consideration its distinctive features/ characteristics, processes and benefits to student teachers in training in the department and pupils in schools where performances have been held over the years.

Introduction

Theatre in today's world has become a consistent tool for change, social transformation and catalyst for development in human lives and the society at large. This is not leaving out the entertainment value, which appears to be the most outstanding feature popularly ascribed to theatre. Theatre is one of the oldest art forms that combine other arts forms in words (writing), voice (speech), movement (acting) and visual (designs) to express thoughts and meanings. The field of theatre is not limited to improvised and scripted works only. It encompasses other dramatic forms such as, film, television, radio and social media in present times. Theatre deals with the examination and resolution of fundamental human issues and is anchored on understanding and presenting interactions between people. Theatre provides a platform for students to reflect on important aspects of life in the process of developing

their understandings of others' pointed of view. Quality theatre based education is therefore broad based, going beyond mere teaching of acting skills to develop students' abilities in other areas of the theatre. Theatre for learning begins at birth when children develop personal communication skills and involve in imaginative play and role-playing as components of the learning process across the curriculum.

Theatre is a primordial experience that can be traced to pre-literacy period in traditional societies before the advent and conception of western theatre (Gbileka, 1997), theatre is an activity that is useful to the society, it is not a goal in itself but a means to an end. This posits theatre as an experimental laboratory for testing human behaviour as circumstances demand (Enekwe, 2007). Theatre examines the society and promotes education, information and entertainment. On the other hand, theatre provides opportunity for children to learn by engaging their senses, spurring their imagination and encouraging interaction with others. Engaging children in education theatre, gives them the opportunity to bond for learning and at the same time creates fun (Olasupo, 2016). Invariably, theatre can be specifically designed for children to meet their needs. This is probably one of the many reasons that gave birth to 'Children's Theatre'. Children's Theatre is designed for children to help build their cognitive, affective and physiology to meet future challenges of life. Children's theatre from this perspective goes beyond entertainment but adds value to education and children learning for an all round personality development of the child.

Concept of Children's Theatre

Children's Theatre, as the name implies, is a specially designed theatre to meet specific needs of the child by taking into consideration their cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Children's theatre is a piece of performance that involves children as actors and/or as children audience either by children actors or professional adult actors or a combination of both. It is also a kind of amateur theatre group meant for children to develop their creative abilities (Novelle, 1985), Eluyefa (2019:82) views children's theatre as "a piece of performance that involves children as actors and or as audience. This establishes classification of children's theatre with main emphasis on performers and audience, theatre for children, theatre with children and theatre by children. Children's Theatre is not inferior to adult theatre as it

posses same feature. However, children's theatre is unique in approach, techniques, aesthetics, style and professionalism. In support Wood and Grant:

If we are to trigger their imaginations, emotionally involve them and give them an exciting, memorable new experiences;
if we are going to encourage them to enjoy theatre – going in their adult years; if we believe that theatre can be educative as well as entertaining then we must endeavour to give them the best (1997 p. 7).

By implication, conscious challenging and conscious efforts must be targeted at ensuring quality and standard in children's theatre. This is a determinant for accepting or rejecting a performance by children. So, a measure of professionalism is required in employing techniques and principles in theatre (Eluyefa, 2019). Focus must also be on providing the best theatre experience revolving around children's interest, expectations and perspectives. "One of the ways to provide children the best experience in theatre is to understand their world. Regardless of its form, children's theatre is based mainly around the interests of children... (Eluyefa, 2019, p.85). A major demand of children's theatre by children educators is the need to view and understand life from children's perspectives. This is in the totality of their psychological makeup of components such as, tribe, cultural values, belief system, morals, tradition, myths and so on. These components determine the extent of openness or reception to issues and ideas raised within a performance for children. This is the basis for Eluyefa's submission that children's theatre practitioners "must see themselves as researchers and not just as entertainers so that they can learn more about their audience and also improve their own practice" (2019: p. 85). Considering the educational value of children's theatre, it is often assumed that when children are engaged in drama and dramatic activities in the school environment, it becomes an easier task interacting, understanding and relating with learning materials. Olasupo, citing Owokalade buttresses this point, "Children's theatre is all encompassing; it takes on the children world and improves their thinking ability through the act of dramatization and at the same time gives enough room for learning" (2016:15).

Children's theatre helps the learner to awaken his/her senses to activities around him while learning takes place. Creative endeavours, such as drama workshops specially designed for children's learning develops their ability to explore, express and relate with others. It creates opportunities for fostering tolerance and cooperation with other for healthy relationships. Children develop their physical and mental skills through play, which is an essential aspect of childhood. Children's theatre is structured to combine play with intellectual work as a teaching method by making learning easy. Then retain more information when they are involved in drama and dramatization of learning materials. So, children's theatre goes beyond developing children's creative abilities but also enhances mental development for imagination and prompt actions in situations.

Brief History of Children's Theatre

Children's Theatre was first experienced in Russia in 17th century as 'School Theatre'. It was an aspect of children's amateur artistic activities organized in homes, clubs and schools for school children. Initially, dramatizations concentrated mainly on stories and fairies included in children's reading. Plays with contemporary themes were first written in the mid 1920's. By 1930's Soviet Union had built a repertoire of children's theatre both in literature and production, for children of different ages with bias for their interests and psychological demands. This period also gave birth to children theatre, directors, designers, playwrights, actors and composers. In capitalists' countries, children's theatres were initiatives of local communities or individuals like, traveling groups or amateur practitioners. In USA University, students in liberal arts often presented plays for children as their summer practice. By 1965, the International Association of Theatres for Children and Young People was established.

Children's theatre in the Western world made a steady progress from 1900 onwards when plays for child audience were frequently staged, plays such as *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Blue Bird*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Little Women* became popular and were enthusiastically received by children by 1915. There are also records of play productions by Alice Minnie and Herts Henigerts (from 1903- 1908) on Children's Educational Theatre, to address average and under privileged children. There was a surge of Community Theatre which included plays for children in seasons too. Grip

of Community Theatre which included plays for children in seasons too. Grip Theatre was a type of Children's Theatre used as a tool for political movement in Germany in the 60s to reach the public. It explored various themes, targeting specific age brackets. Such themes included racism, physical disability, male chauvinism and economic justice. Grips Theatre traveled to other continents like, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, Argentina and Kenya. The history children's theatre is therefore traced to Soviet Union (17th century) spread across other continents because of its impacts on children's learning.

Since the early 1960's, Nigeria embraced the concept of children's theatre for learning. Ademoroti in Olasupo affirms that "Nigerian schools are now becoming better, the reason for this is because teachers and school heads are now adopting children's theatre as a means of improving children's curiosity towards learning and this is a good idea and a better reformation for young learners" (2016:20). History would be incomplete without, mentioning the University of Ibadan, the pioneer tertiary institution in Nigeria and the first to engraft children's theatre into her curriculum. In 1962, children's theatre was conceived and designed as children's workshop known as of 'Saturday Theatre for Young People' (STYP) between the ages of six to ten (6-10). This populace of participants was drawn from children within the campus and its neighbourhood. They attended the workshop sessions under the guidance of a staff member who takes them through creative dramatics, storytelling, drawing, painting, mime, poetry, song, dance, playmaking, puppetry, music and so on. The objective of STYP was to raise funds for the handicaps and disables while also targeting at improving children's creativity (self-expression and creative imagination) and inculcate in them artistic insight and appreciation. It was indeed a meeting forum for staff, parents of the University of Ibadan and their immediate environs; it was also an avenue for socialization to foster friendship and exposure to other experiences. STYP was a conscious attempt at inculcating artistic skills, communication and self-expression and developing social awareness and sensitivity to social responsibilities. This process of learning through theatre performances yielded great results spurring interests and entertaining participants especially with the fare-knowledge of theatre performance by the guide/lead. This marked the beginning of children's theatre movement in other academic institutions in department of Theatre Arts, Performing Arts, Dramatic Arts

institutions in department of Theatre Arts, Performing Arts, Dramatic Arts and other related studies in the arts.

Department of Theatre Arts, AOCOED

The proposal for establishment of the Department emanated from the School of Languages. It kicked off with two lecturers; one, a Senior Lecturer in English Department (Femi Adedina) and the other, a Lecturer III in General Studies (Gbenga Windapo). More lecturers were employed and presently the College has employed the services of a total of six lecturers on ground. At the onset, in 1999/2000 academic session, there were only two course combinations namely Theatre Arts/ English and Theatre Arts/ Yoruba and the students' population was a paltry-eight. Five other combinations were included, such as, Theatre/Social Studies, Theatre/ Christian Religious Studies Theatre/Political Science and Theatre/Economics, although the last two were later removed and replaced with Theatre Arts/ Igbo, Theatre Arts/ French and Theatre Arts ISS. Students' population increased subsequently in preceding years as the department continues to churn out crops of well-trained theatre arts teachers and professionals.

The mission of the department is to provide qualitative teacher training education in the discipline of Theatre Arts to students both theoretically and practically so as to prepare them adequately for their chosen profession. In pursue of this objective, the department's main duty is to equip students in theory and practice in all aspects of the Theatre in preparation for the world of Arts which is highly competitive. Students are exposed to and given opportunities give to serve as students' Stage Managers, Directors Assistant Directors, Technical Directors, Costume Managers and other theatre personnel of their plays. Students are also trained to have a well-rounded and balanced theatre experience driven with a quest for professionalism, to compete favourably with their counterparts from other institutions and the larger society. Unfortunately, in the early hours of March 20, 2014, the department was reduced to rubbles by fire as everything went up in flames. The fire incident practically wiped off all the thirteen years of hard work and labour of staff and students as student records, Gadgets, Studio, books and DVD of practical works were razed. Undeterred, the department has risen above this challenge and has created new path ways in terms of exploits, relevance and achievements within and outside the College community.

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Children's Theatre Performances in AOCOED

Children's Theatre is set to explore ways in which drama can enter into all learning by communicating experiences and giving the communicator a deeper understanding of experience. In order to grasp this potential, there is need to deconstruct "Education" to find new ways to organize playful education, which is crucial to child education. This is the crux of an educationist, Friedrich Froebel, theory of 'Play Way Method' (1782-1852) made popular by Caldwell Cook, (1886-1939). The play way method is a term, to describe his methods of teaching English. Cook's play way prioritises "doing" as a better learning method than reading and listening. He encourages 'playing' as an active learning and an upshot of the art of imitation. Over the decades, play way method has become very popular and synonymous with teaching especially at elementary level (Adedina, 2016).

*It is an undeniable fact that Cook's play way predicates
DIE. Both methods
recognises the teacher's in role as a guide for subject-
centered learning where
teachers are expected to respect pupils spontaneity and
creates a learner
friendly environment for self- development and growth
Play way method
and Drama method have similarities and certain
attributes that endear them to
the child learner. The outstanding feature is their ability
at making learning
interesting. Seemingly difficult concepts are simplified in
a learner friendly
environment for optimum output (Adedina, 2016, p.)*

This aspect of playful and entertaining learning is the driving force for children's theatre. Children's Theatre practice is domiciled in a course titled Drama in Education / Children's Theatre (THA 212). For over two decades, this course has served as a platform for experimentation and execution of research projects in teaching and learning for student teachers in training. The first beneficiary of this course is the College community which runs Primary and Secondary Schools. Children's Theatre being the second arm of this course has transverse its immediate environment and has added value to

children's learning in other schools within the College location. Due to the nature and curriculum of the three years NCE programme, Students are only exposed to this course once in the first semester of their second year. This is a major challenge especially in terms of follow up, feedback and further actions. This has not in any way reduced the efficacy of this yearly performance as students teachers in training perform above board, especially during teaching practice exercise involving theatre Arts students. Part of the aims of children's theatre in this course include to

- expose students to children theatre
- evolve a production
- stage a performance

Fortunately, it can be said that this course has attained this set objectives times without number. It has successfully opened up doors and rapport between schools within the college and neighbouring schools. Indoor and outdoor children's programmes have been organised for events such as end of academic sessions, Christmas, prize giving day, special holidays like children's day, mother's day and so on. The style and extent of performance is dictated by time and available resources. Often times, the approach is theatre for children, where student teachers serve as actors during these performances while pupils serve as audience. However, the performances are fashioned in ways that they encourage contributions and active participation from the audience especially in a classroom setting.

Organizing Children's theatre performances in AOCOED

A major determinant in organizing children's theatre performances in AOCOED, is the NCCE Curriculum with specified course contents. Some aspects of the curriculum are highlighted to serve as practical after teaching in the classroom. Students are then put in groups of ten to afford equal participation for all. Furthermore, schools within the College community are identified for these performances. Stages involved in organizing these children's performance would be discussed in preceding paragraphs.

i. Setting goals and objectives

The starting point for any group of actors performing for children is to consider the benefits of such performances to the children involved. In this

instance the main goal of performances for children is to enhance teaching and learning. This is achieved by packaging the content in an entertaining manner to appeal to the senses of children audience. Student teachers are out to experiment on how to improve their teaching skills during teaching practice through the various methodologies at their disposal.

ii. Purpose

Children is to identify the purpose of their children's theatre. What do. At this stage consideration is given to the exact experience the child is to gain from this piece. Questions are raised on 'why' the performance. Only a clearly defined purpose will give credence to the project, if not it would amount to waste of time. Most times, these performances are tailored towards particular aspects of the curriculum of student teachers to afford them opportunities to try out theories and practice. Also the school curricula of pupils involved are paramount and considered in arriving at the type of performance.

iii. Audience

The next task is to identify the target group that will benefit from the project. Age categorization is very important at this stage. Age is a vital factor in organizing children's performances in achieving success. Since teachers in training are expected to render services in Primary/Junior Secondary Schools, emphasis is always on the age range of 5-13. This is further broken down to 5-7 (lower Primary), 8-10 (Upper Primary) and 11-13 (Junior Secondary School). This age categorization determines the content, style, theme and exact group of pupils that will benefit from these ventures.

iv. Strategy

At this point, the research methodology is decided upon. What is the strategy for creating a piece of theatre for a children audience? Usually, this stage starts with research to familiarize student teachers with pupils' school curriculum. Visits to the identified schools become regular to create not just a friendly but conducive working relationship and environment devoid of hostility from school teachers and pupils. Letters are written to Head Teachers and Principals, seeking permissions to execute projects with clear terms and conditions from both parties. Also, researchers gain a deeper

understanding of the children by watching, listening and talking to them. This creates a platform for acceptability from both ends. Subsequently, this serves as a period of observation of target audience to arrive at the best method that would appeal to them and accurately convey the message of the performance. At times, two or more strategies may be merged depending on the demands of the performance, availability of materials, perceived academic abilities of pupils and resources available. These may include, drama, musical presentations, dance drama, poetry performance, puppetry shows, cartoons and animation, mime and other forms suitable to convey meaning in the most suitable way.

v. Rehearsals

This stage is for preparations in all aspects before performance. Most of the scripts are based on improvisation which involves sessions of discussions, questioning and agreement for a unified mission. Student teachers are guided through this process to ensure focus during lecture periods. Rehearsals are restricted to the department only at the convenience of student teachers during their free periods. This is to prevent other schedules of equal importance, like lectures, assignments, tests and so on, from being adversely affected.

vi. Performance

Performances are held during lesson periods mainly in the classrooms, in line with the set objective of adopting children's theatre as methodology of teaching various subjects to enhance learning abilities of pupils and ultimately improve academic their achievements. Performances address not only issues within the curriculum but also practical living. Germane topics that affect the lives of these young ones, such as sex education, bullying, low self-esteem, disabilities, morals, cultural awareness and so on, are carefully analysed in simplified ways that they can comprehend and relate with. Performances adopt music, dance, puppetry, designs etc that are aesthetically pleasing to the audience. Story lines are in simple narratives and simple language spiced with humour. Performances take place in classrooms, corridors, playgrounds fields with as little set, props, costume and make-up. There is also room for audience participation through direct address, involvement, contribution and feedback.

Benefits of Children's Theatre

There are many benefits accrued to Children's Theatre. Some are highlighted below.

- Identification: Empathetic bond between the character on stage and the child's self.
- Attachment: Child may identify and 'attach' implications to various actions, e.g. not observing simple hygiene rules can be fatal.
- Change in attitude: It is my responsibility. "I now know I should..."
- Imagination: The theatre feeds a child's imagination and can inspire them in creative play.
- Aesthetics: To realize that something can be entertaining and engaging without a constant change of scenery.
- Self-control and Discipline: They will learn how to sit quietly, respect others, and pay attention.
- Morals: Performances illustrate many different lessons that relate to daily living and interactions

Conclusion

Dramatic activities exist on a continuum with **Drama in its Natural State**. This is the kind of dramatic play all children and indeed all humans engage in, Children's Theatre is an example of Participation Theatre and this is why special attention is paid to children performances. Basically, the focus of children's theatre is on the process of 'doing the work', the product 'the performed work' and its 'impact' on children audience reflecting the minimum ages at which pupils can benefit most from these activities. The inclusion of Drama in Education/Children's Theatre in the NCCE Curriculum, has created an avenue for merging theory with practice for student teachers in training thereby creating firsthand experiences on yearly basis for experimentation. Going down memory lane, the journey of children's theatre practice in AOCOED leaves a sweet bitter taste in the mouth considering the hurdles, anxieties, crops of students, achievements and recorded successes for over twenty years. There have been gradual improvements in planning and execution phases especially in recent times. Given the fact that children live in an increasingly complex world and their real concerns in a contemporary world deserve to be addressed, Children's Theatre is a strong connect for equilibrium and stability to young people.

Recommendations

There is certainly a link between involvement in drama activities for teaching and learning and academic achievement. This paper is a clarion call to policy