

PROMOTING CREATIVE ARTS FOR YOUTH AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A EXAMINATION OF THE *RAINBOW OF PERFORMANCES* THEATRE WORKSHOP

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ABSTRACT

Arts and Entertainment in recent times have enlarged its space of emergence across different parts of the country. There is a massive entrance of Youth into the creative space of the Nigerian society who are showing great interest in pursuing vocations and careers in different arts such as dance, drama, music, modeling and event management etcetera. The renaissance of arts creativities among the Youths in Nigeria was well demonstrated by the 2018/2019 100 Level Students of English Department of Gombe State University. This was manifested in the recent performances done by the students under a course titled Theatre Workshop. The programme was tagged Rainbow of Performances. This paper will therefore give an account of the different performances the students performed. It will then further expose how it brings to bear the significant inputs of students in the exploration of the different arts creativities. The paper essentially seeks to concretely use this experience to critically argue for the potentialities of arts creativities especially in the area of job creation and Youth

Introduction:

The need for greater attention and broadening of spaces that will lead to more career and vocational opportunities, empowerment and development of the Nigerian Youths have taken a front burner for National Development. As we progress as a nation we are daily faced with the reality of a geometric increase of our population with more Youths contending for the available spaces of meaningful livelihood and careers which get shrinking every passing day. The erstwhile idea of securing a good future with a “white collar” job after graduation from tertiary institution has become nothing but a façade. As things stands there is a serious downslide in the Nigeria socio-economic development as Youth unemployment keeps getting

employment. It also addresses some of the challenges which arts creativities are confronted with for Youth and National Development. It will then make submissions on how arts creativities can be effectively explored to contribute to the development of the Nigerian Youth and by extension the Nigerian socio-economic development.

Keywords: *Creativity, Arts, Youth, Nigeria and Development.*

Worst. So many Nigerian Youths have graduated from different institutions of advanced learning who are very qualified to have gainful employment but cannot due to the scarcity or unavailability of jobs. This becomes more scathing in the midst of increasing social maladies such as kidnapping, suicide, robbery, human and sex slavery, wanton emigration and the likes bedeviling the Nigerian Youths among others. To address these social crises it becomes pertinent to proffer solutions that are creative and different from what has always been obtainable for this vital class of the society whose development is paramount for the prosperity of our nationhood. The Nigerian National Youth Policy did note that:

Youths are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The extent of their vitality, responsible conduct, and roles in society is positively correlated with the development of their country (3)

In line with the above, we cannot but explore and advance mediums that focus on Youth development and empowerment. It is on this basis that this paper explores the paths of creative arts. By creative arts, it refers to arts works such dance, music, drama, and fine arts. It examines how the uses of these arts have brought significant social growth and youth development. It further examines some of the challenges affecting Youths in the exploration of creative arts and what are the implications for national development. To give a concrete example of the commitment and impact of creative arts, this paper shall give an account of the dance and drama performances of students of English Department of Gombe State University, during their 2018/2019 theatre workshop project which was titled *Rainbow of Performances*.

The Concept of Creativity:

Creativity as a concept bears a lot of meaning within different context with a lot of references made to it when people are describing attempts to think or do something differently. Creativity can be viewed on a variety of levels:

intellectually, socially, economically, spiritually, and from the perspective of different disciplines within the arts and sciences. According to Ganga (54) "Creativity is defined as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others and entertaining ourselves as well as others". Bertlet (56) on the other hand refers to creativity as bold thinking. He states that "Creativity is bold thinking. Bold thinking means the ability of thinking beyond the mainstream, receiving new experience and adding the present relationship with that of the future". In this sense bold thinking or creativity is to work or think with new attitude by going beyond mutual thinking." Rollo (7) maintains that "Creativity is the process of bringing something new in human being". It requires passion and commitment. It brings to our awareness what was previously hidden and points to new life. Furthermore in an elaborated definition, Torrance (59) sees creativity as "a process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies and so on, identifying the difficulty, searching for solution, making guesses, or formulating hypotheses about the deficiencies, testing and retesting these hypotheses and possibly modifying and retesting them, and finally communicating the results."

In other words, it can be said that creativity is the strength or capacity to create any new object. Factors like originality, spontaneity, expansion and flexibility are inherent in the creative production of a person. Creativity is inherent in each person. Creativity started with the evolution of human society itself.

As an act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality, Creativity is characterized by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to create aesthetics, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions. Ganga (27) reveals that Creativity involves two processes: thinking, then producing. He explains that if one has an idea, but does not act on them, then one is imaginative but not creative. Creativity therefore is an ability in which innovative ideas have significance which takes the help of new methods and situations to present a proper solution for any problem as well as provide presentations that people admire and relishes. According to Ganga (67) Creativity has four components which are: Continuity, Flexibility, Originality and Expansion. By *Continuity* he means the ability to consistently change in useful manner. A person who has different types of ideas continuously, that individual is considered to be a

creative person. *Flexibility* in a person refers to self-control, foresightedness and the trait of taking care of others' likes and dislikes. Such a person brings a change in his/her thoughts according to time and circumstances. *Originality* does not love the old ideas. It always seeks something different. In this case the person is strong-willed, industrious and courageous. He is always eager to start any task by himself/herself. In each case the person's opinions are entirely different from those of others. *Expansion* makes the creative person able creatively stretch any idea or action. His/her vocabulary is very rich and has interesting way of expressing ideas.

Within the domain of the Arts, creativity demands a person to employ his or her skills and ingenuity to bring to reality works that communicates aesthetics and impacts. The creative artist is meant to affect the recipients in manners that allow them to connect with the message of the art work. They thus see realities and experiences from new perspectives. Even when they are sometimes familiar with the work they relish new feelings due to the creative inputs that the artists have brought to bear. Art creative works are well expressed in different forms ranging from acting (drama), dancing, singing, drawing, painting, designing, modeling and so on. This paper will therefore recount the use of dance and drama creative processes in a performance tagged *Rainbow of Performances* which the students of English department of Gombe State University presented to further x-ray the impacts of creativity.

An Account of *Rainbow of Performances*:

The *Rainbow of Performances* is a collection of drama and dance performances done by the 100 Level students of the English Department of Gombe State University, under a course titled Theatre Workshop. It was coordinated by the researcher who lectures with the department. The aim of the course was to expose students to different aspects of the theatre with the aim of stimulating their creative and improvisational abilities. The students were divided into four different groups. They engaged in different group meetings where they discussed among themselves on what should be performed. This was the beginning of the creative process. At this stage through dialogical interactions they were able to conceive, compose and design what is to be performed. The students in the course of these initial interactions were able to come out with creative and novel concepts of the actions and plot to be executed. This stage offered them

the opportunity to build in their mind's eye different possibilities of creative expressions that will be further translated into performative actions.

Having drawn out their agreed plot the students proceeded to the rehearsal stage. This stage involves rigorous practice sessions. The students of the different groups did daily rehearsals for six weeks every evening from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The rehearsals involved voice and the body exercises. These exercises ensured that the students gain body and mind alertness and flexibility to effectively carry out role play. The students ensured that those acting and those of them watching were actively participating in critiquing the rehearsals taking place. They played out the plot of their stories repeatedly until they were able to get the plot of the story effectively.

In the course of the rehearsals the students through their creativity ensured that the characters explored different styles of acting for particular characters, to see which best interpret the role of the character being played on stage. In the different groups, the students were very active with the rehearsals with some of them organizing rehearsals outside stipulated time to get their plot right. The enthusiasm was even more evident with the dance rehearsals. The students rehearsed for both cultural and contemporary Nigerian dances. A lot of inputs into choreographing for both the cultural and contemporary dances were done by them. The rehearsals were supervised at every given stage and in the end some of the students were selected for the performances as it was agreed by the different groups. Nevertheless the entire process of rehearsals generally brought out of the students the abilities which were inherent in them and their positive responses made them exhibit creativities which they relished. With the rehearsals done with, the students were set for performances. The performance took place from the 8th of April to 10th of April, 2019. It was done at the Multi-Purpose Hall of the School. The drama performances were generally aimed at advising new students to take their studies very seriously and to avoid dangerous vices and friends. The following were the stories of the drama performances carried out:

Group One: Crushed Hope: The play centered on a female character called Amdo who got admission to study in the University. In the course of her stay in the school hostel, she met with very bad influences who introduced her to having illicit friendship with a male friend called Duresis. The both of them at the end of the session, due to their unserious attitude to studies, were withdrawn as they could not proceed beyond their first session in school.

Group Two: Bitter Experience: The play talks about the main character Sadiya who has a poor family background. Having gotten admission to study in the University, she was determined to make sure she does well in the course of her studies. She later became distracted by the pressure of peer influence and started attending parties. At the end she became pregnant. In an attempt to commit abortion she lost her life.

Group Three: Unwise Suleiman: The play title was creatively crafted to show how the central character named Suleiman (Solomon) made himself an unwise person due to his wrong approach to his studies. Suleiman is from a very politically influential home. He came to the school with the mentality that his Parent money will make way for him and as such he did not take his studies seriously. In the course of his studies, he associated himself with bad friends and during a particular party they went to, Suleiman was involved in a fight and was arrested by the Police. When his Father was called to the station, he pleaded and bailed him with some money. However when the issue got to the school authority, he was expelled. All attempts by his Father to plead for his reinstatement did not succeed.

Group 4: Musa and Sisters: The play is set within a northern polygamous family that neglects the girl-child education. The Father who was married to three wives loved the third more because she gave him a male-child. The other two wives gave birth to female children, Khadija and Fatima. Their children were treated unfairly when it came to university education. The father only catered for the boy's education and did not bother about the two girls' educational advancement. The mothers of the girls ensured that they sponsored their daughters to school. However at the end when they all finished their studies, Musa sisters came out with very successful result, but Musa failed badly. This situation made his Father changed his orientation about the girl-child.

Outside drama performances the students also had different cultural dance performances from different cultures across northern Nigeria, as well as contemporary dances. Outside these, some of the students also decided to display some of their individual talents in stand-up comedy and song presentations. The audiences were so enthralled that for every passing day the numbers were increasing. On the last day a group of students from other departments pleaded to present a dance performance because they said this is an area they really want to pursue outside their regular academic career. They

were given the opportunity and it was quite impressive. It was the first of its kind in the university.

The Role of Creative Arts for Youth and National Development:

Creative Arts and other means of innovative enterprises are no doubt very vital for our current strive for transformation and revamping our national economy. The Youth class of the society plays a major role in this regard. Hence there is the need to have them well stimulated and encouraged to develop and harness their creative potentials. The *Rainbow of Performances* experience exposes the much impact and value that young people can offer to unleash creativities and potentialities of the arts in both self and social development.

It is very important we work towards avenues that add value to Youth development since the Youths of the society are the bedrock of any national development agenda. Odoh and Innocent clearly reveal that:

It is axiomatic to posit that there is a linkage between youth and national development. This intercourse is not only symbiotically connected; but, one depends on the other for its sustenance. Therefore, the role of youth on national development cannot be over emphasized. The wheel of development of any country lies on the shoulder of how productive and creative the youthful populations are...Interestingly, the transition of society from one generation to another is critical to the formative and developmental aspiration of such society. That, is why society that prepare their youth for the sake of future aspiration will not only secure her future development; but, will prepare her next set of leaders with the challenges of national reconciliation and development. So, therefore, the role of youth on national development is sacrosanct to the whole developmental aspiration of any society (1).

The Nigerian nation as it stands is heavily depended on oil and other mineral resources to grow its economy with little emphasis given to the development of the arts. Year in year out, our budget and strategy for growth have always depended on the extent to which the oil market is favourable or not. Many Nigerian graduates are thus subjected to think that getting an oil job is dream come true. Desired courses for them are always in the area of science and engineering. Coupled to this, is the fact that our educational system is designed in such a manner that makes arts and creative courses less attractive to students. There are so much importance and emphasis given to the sciences. Right from the cradle, in nursery and primary schools the carriers which

students are exposed to are usually science related fields such as medicine, engineering, architecture, nursing, pharmacy and the likes. There are little or nothing said about the creative arts such as drama, music, fine arts, dance and other creative and vocational courses. More scathing is the fact that in a number of States, we have secondary schools devoted to sciences but you can hardly find any devoted to arts. It is situation of these kinds that have hindered Nigeria and a number of African countries from leveraging from the huge benefits that arts and the creative industry contributes to Youths and national development as whole (Suleiman 97, Ashford 7 and UN 123). Although this paper is not dismissing the relevance of science and technology, it is however bringing to the fore the need for greater diversification of the economy especially in the light of increasing Youth unemployment and poverty which is seriously heating the today's Nigerian economy. Kingsley in an online *Guardian* newspaper report reveals that:

Encouraging creativity and innovation, particularly among Youths in the country can salvage Nigeria's failing economy and reduce the growing rate of Youth unemployment...World economy in creative arts is over \$600 billion but Africa's contribution is less than one percent of that figure...(1)

From the *Rainbow of Performances* where students of Gombe State University showed their strong potentials in creating arts works from the beginning to the end, it is therefore germane to consolidate on the gains and passion for creative arts which these young people have displayed. The performances done by the students are just one of many other creative arts productions that are witnessed across different parts of the nation. The responsibility is for government and other stakeholders to work towards consolidating on the gains of creative arts for greater economic output both nationally and internationally.

Outside consolidating on the gains from creative arts, it is important to state that there is also the need to put some checks and balances as to some of the challenges experienced in the creative arts ventures. Two particular challenges to be mentioned here are the dangers of over infusion of immoral and unhealthy foreign cultures upon the Nigerian Youths and society. A lot of artists feel that as soon as a creative work for example Music or Dance is not amorous in nature, it cannot be popular or it cannot sell much. This is erroneous because creativity in itself goes beyond sexual imaginations and appeal. It is the noble and pure expression of the dynamic nature of human ingenuity. We hinder creativity from the fullness of aesthetics and values when we over condition it to overtly

sexual appeals. Secondly there is the need to promote quality of production. This is very important because it is in this way we can advance creative arts in a manner that makes for wider acceptance and impact (locally and internationally). The emphasis on better quality in creative arts will cause the Nigerian society to produce creative works that can be internationally and globally competitive. These and other challenges when better addressed will ensure that the creative arts bring about greater output for National development.

Conclusion:

This paper has addressed the need for greater promotion of arts creativity for Youth and national development. It made practical reference to the impact of the *Rainbow of Performances* done by the English department Students of Gombe State University where they prepared and performed different drama and dance performances which brought out an endearing experience from the largely Youth audiences that became active participants as well in the performances. The experience thus reinforces how much acceptance that Youths have for creative arts. The onus is therefore on Government and stakeholders to show greater commitment in fostering creative arts. The lack of leveraging on the potentials of creative arts for Youth and National development is not just worsening the menace of Youth unemployment but also denying them the opportunity of effectively channeling the energies of young people to empowering ventures that can make a better life for them. This may attribute to the increasing rate of Youths who out of frustration for the lack of having meaningful ventures have taken to crimes and other very dangerous social vices that now plague the peace, stability and rapid development of our nation.

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