

Pains and Gains of Studying Theatre Arts in Nigeria: Ambivalent Voices of Theatre Arts Graduates

[AGHOGHO LUCKY IMITI](#)

DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

This study contends that Theatre Arts as a professional discipline in the humanities should be regarded as other disciplines, and its graduates be given equal opportunities as their counterparts from other fields in Nigeria. The study dispels the numerous misconceptions about the discipline. Although the study of Theatre Arts might be quite enjoyable, it has received a lot of scorn in Nigeria. While prior studies have exposed society's misconceptions about the field, this study presents a nuanced perspective of Theatre Arts graduates on the discipline in Nigeria. The data for this study were collected using mixed research methods. Primary data were derived from a group discussion on a WhatsApp group of Theatre Arts graduates in 2022. Out of the 202 members in the group, 22 participated. The result indicates ambivalence. It is recommended that individuals, companies, and the government optimise the potentials of Theatre Arts graduates in

Nigeria by giving them equal opportunities as others.

INTRODUCTION

One of the academic disciplines, if there are others, that has generated much ridicule in Nigeria, is the Theatre Arts discipline. While studying Theatre Arts could be a rewarding experience in other climes, (de Bernard, Comunian, Jewell, Salvador, & O'Brien, 2024; Higdon & Chapman, 2020; Listengarten & Di Benedetto, 2021; Reinelt, 2014), the reverse seems to be the case in Nigeria. Just as actors were seen as nonentities, vagabonds, clowns, or jesters, no-serious entities and their activities banned in the ancient period (Brockett, 1974), so they appear to be in Nigerian society. Often times they are derided and described as "good-for-nothings," "social misfits and mad men," "those people who make plays and jokes on television, radio, and such." (Anyanwu, 2018a, p. 20). In his study, Imiti (2021) reveals that Nigerian parents and relatives rebuke their wards who seek to choose Theatre Arts as a choice course at the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, JAMB, examination. Uche (1991) corroborates Imiti when he maintains that there was a time when it was inconceivable to consider Theatre Arts as a career option. He maintains that about ten years before him, one would probably have been rebuked, if not slapped in the face, by one's family member for mentioning Performing Arts (some institutions refer to Theatre Arts as Performing Arts) as a career one wanted to pursue.

To some, Theatre Arts is a "play-play" department meant for jokers, unintelligent people, and non-do-wells. To others, it is an acting and dancing discipline, and those who study it are never taken seriously. They are sometimes referred to as "*Theatre Rats*," a corruption of Theatre Arts. Such was the case when this author visited a high-class monarch, the late Owhorode of Olomu, HRM Richard Layieguen Ogbon, in his palace for a reference letter. When the latter sought to know the discipline of the former and was told it was Theatre Arts, he then remarked, "*Oya, act for me*" (do a performance). Such is the misconception about the discipline. Though acting is a core area of Theatre Arts study, there are other areas of specialty where a Theatre Arts graduate may excel without being a "good" actor. Society is oblivious to the nuances the discipline offers. Besides acting, Theatre

Arts as a field of study provides students with the opportunity to learn about the culture and history of their society and offers them the chance to hone their craft as well as generate income from independent production/performances (Idogho, 2013; Kisida, Goodwin, & Bowen, 2020; Thakur, 2022). In the past, at the University of Ibadan, taking a course in Acting in Theatre Arts was compulsory for law students. It helped them gain confidence in public speaking, overcoming stage fright, and learning articulation and pronunciation, among others. Thakur (2022) supports this assertion by stating that Theatre Arts enhance communication skills by enabling practitioners to utilise appropriate vocal pitch in speechmaking.

Another common inquiry from members of society is, "What are the chances of employability of Theatre Arts graduates?" This question stems from the fact that, whereas other disciplines such as Law, Medicine, Accounting, Pharmacy, Nursing, Mass Communication, Political Science, to name a few, are given preferences in some recruitment exercises, Theatre Arts is, most times, not listed (Imiti, 2021). Recently, in a 2023 Delta State Bursary application portal for indigenous students, Theatre Arts was conspicuously omitted. There was no explanation for the oversight, if it was one.

The foregoing necessitated this study. Also, it was undertaken in response to a mortifying statement tossed at a job-seeking Theatre Arts graduate who, like the author, sought assistance in a recruitment exercise and was asked, "Why Theatre Arts instead of Mass Communication?" This question and a response from another alumnus on a WhatsApp group triggered the debate that birthed the data for this study. The former colleague who was confronted with the above question emphatically maintained and concluded that none of her offspring would ever repeat such a gaffe. Hence, this study presents the ambivalent voices of Theatre Arts graduates on the gains and pains of studying Theatre Arts in Nigeria. The question then arises: what is the place of the Theatre Arts graduate in Nigerian society?

This study argues that, as a professional discipline in the humanities, Theatre Arts deserves the same respect and opportunities accorded other disciplines, given its obvious connections to other disciplines. In addition, it aims to enlighten Nigerians on the tapestry of the Theatre Arts discipline. Above acting, it refines and prepares those who study it for a complex task ahead. Scholars have confirmed the self-reliability of the discipline, where the artist carves a living for

himself or herself and becomes an employer rather than an employee (W. Adedeji, Akinsipe, & Afe, 2014; Ogbonna & Mohammed-Kabir, 2022). While this is true, this should not be a yardstick to deny Theatre Artists the right and opportunity to be engaged in government institutions on the unfounded claim of being a “lousy” discipline. After all, other disciplines could as well be self-reliant. The Theatre Arts graduate, like every other graduate, can fit into any organisation. Therefore, what is good for the goose should equally be good for the gander!

THEATRE ARTS AS A DISCIPLINE

Theatre beginnings cannot be categorically ascribed to a particular period. Several arguments about its origin abound. The most common of these is evolution theory. This theory holds that theatre evolved from ritual and festival ceremonies. At first, man considered the natural forces of the world, even the seasonal changes, to be unpredictable and sought, in various ways, to control these unknown and fearsome forces. Measures that seemed to yield the desired results were kept and repeated until they translated into permanent rituals. Storytelling was introduced, and sacrificial rituals involving human sacrifice were eliminated as humans progressed in knowledge (Uzoma, 1991). There was also the use of dance, costumes, music, and masks in primitive ritual, and there was a performance area or venue for the ritual.

Another theory points to the origin of theatre for humans' penchant for storytelling. These stories were derived from man's activities, such as hunting, war, or other feats, and were usually told after the day's job. This is done by one person narrating while others (actors) assume responsibility for each role through impersonation, action, and dialogue. A foremost philosopher, Aristotle, in Dukore (1974), affirms that humans are instinctive imitators. According to him, imitation is the main method by which humans learn about their world, such as when children learn to speak and behave by imitating adults.

In modern theatre scholarship, the Greeks hold the credit of the first creators of drama and theatre because they were the first to develop the shape as it was known in the Western world (Brockett, 1974, 1979). The first record of drama in Greece was found in 534 BC, when the city of Dionysus was recognised and a contest for the best tragedy was held. The only surviving playwright of this period was

Thespis, the first, unarguably, actor to win the first prize for drama. Records have it that he disengaged himself from the chorus, single-handedly changed his identity, and played different characters with the aid of a mask (Brockett & Hildy, 2010).

Based on the evolution theory, theatre practice is believed to have evolved and developed along various trajectories—from the Greeks to the Mediaeval to the Renaissance, which saw the transformation of theatre. The Renaissance introduced several conventions of theatrical performance and architecture that have dominated Europe and other continents to date. Not even the birth of the avant-garde movement has eroded these hallmarks. It is imperative to note that the study of Drama and Theatre in school started with the Elizabethans. The stimulation of interest in classical learning that had begun in the Italian Renaissance crept into England in the sixteenth century. As a result, drama was taught in schools, and plays (drama texts) were studied and produced in institutions of learning (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023; Gurr & Karim-Cooper, 2014; Howard, 2019; Leach, 2008). It could be argued that it was after the institutions of learning produced such dramatists as John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, and Christopher Marlowe that English drama flourished.

In Nigeria, the teaching and learning of drama in institutions of higher learning started in 1962/63 at the University College Ibadan, Nigeria's foremost university (J. A. Adedeji, 1998; Adelugba, 1984; Ogunbiyi, 1981; Duro Oni, 2008). Since then, the discipline has been re-emerging in new forms at many of the country's universities, both public and private. These institutions take on different nomenclatures such as Theatre Arts, Dramatic Arts, Performing Arts, and Creative Arts, or name combinations such as Theatre and Film Studies and Theatre and Cultural Studies, among others, all geared towards the training of Theatre Artists (Duro Oni, 2008).

Among the universities that offer the programme is Delta State University (DELSU), Abraka, whose graduates make up the population of this study. Immediately after the take-off of the State University in 1992, when it ceased to be a campus of the defunct Bendel State University, Ekpoma, Theatre Arts became one of its foremost programmes. It was formally known as the Department of Performing Arts, made up of Theatre Arts and Music units, but was later unbundled. The programme started in the 1992/1993 academic session just as the university took off.

Since it took off, the department has produced prominent graduates in all walks of life—academics, entertainment, banking, and business, to mention a few. Ayodeji Makun (AY), Bovi Ugboma (Bovi), Justice Nuagbe (Usher), Harrison Ijeenwere (actor), Ann Isioma Ekwusama (actress), Jerry Kekeghe (film director, Secretary Association of Movie Producers, Delta State Chapter), Drs. Emily Jitokun (Academic), Mudiaga Akpughe (Academic), Chijioke Iyamah (Academic), Josephine Odunze (Academic), and the author, to name a few, are products of the DELSU Theatre Arts. Like elsewhere, theatre study/teaching is not different at DELSU in terms of curriculum, presentation, discipline, and ethics, as the National University Commission (NUC) provides the framework that guides the universities. Its study has, however, generated mixed feelings amongst its graduates; hence, the study on the ambivalent voices of DELSU Theatre Arts graduates on the gains and pains of studying Theatre Arts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used mixed research methods. This approach enabled the researcher to investigate the numerous intricacies of the subject. This is justified by the fact that the data for the study were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. While the secondary data were garnered from existing published research, the primary data were gotten through direct participant observation by the author in a WhatsApp group chat of DELSU Theatre Arts graduates. The chat/conversation took place in February 2022. These unplanned chats predated and actually motivated this study. These chats were exported from the WhatsApp application to a Notepad on the researcher's personal computer and are available on request. The resort to collecting data through this method arose from the fact that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, social media have become a formidable source of information, both for research and other purposes, as it exposes so much, knowingly and unknowingly (Anyanwu, Anyanwu, & Imiti, 2023; Shem, Gambo, & Abel, 2023).

The WhatsApp platform, created on July 7, 2016, by Dr. C.Y. Iyamah, has a total of 202 active and inactive members. 22 out of the 202 members participated in this discourse. For anonymity purposes, participants are coded as Discussant 1—Discussant 22. The study did

not consider the demography of participants. However, a common factor is that all participants are Theatre Arts graduates. The data, in the form of opinions, in favour of and against the study of Theatre Arts were critically analysed and yielded the discussed results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On a tranquil evening of February 16, 2022, a member of Theatre Arts graduate WhatsApp group quizzed, "What is your greatest mistake in life?" Like a time bomb, responses erupted. The resonated debate reveals the relevance and irrelevance of the Theatre Arts discipline to its graduates. The first response was, "I regret studying Theatre Arts...." This set the pace for further discourse as discussants either agreed or disagreed. 13 discussants, representing 59.1%, maintain the view that Theatre Arts is not worth a discipline of study. In contrast, 5 of the discussants, representing 22.7%, believe Theatre Arts is worthy of a discipline, while 4 others, representing 18.2%, were neither for nor against, as they expressed opinions for and against the discipline.

When asked if Theatre Arts was a dream career and a choice course while they took the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination, most discussants indicated it was not a choice course but was only an afterthought when they could not beat the cut-off for their desired course, which includes Law, Mass Communication, Political Science and English and Literary studies. Only 4 of the discussants affirmed that they chose Theatre Arts and that it was Theatre Arts and nothing else. This buttresses the cliché that when the purpose of a thing is not known, abuse is inevitable. Hence, those who did not primarily choose the course only later did to satisfy their curiosity of attaining a university degree. Thus, they passed through the discipline without being dedicated.

A further interrogation as to whether they would allow their ward(s) and sibling(s) to study Theatre Arts, the majority of the discussants vehemently said no. Discussants 1 and 3, who could not contain their emotions, responded with a deafening "God forbid!" However, discussants 8, 9, 19, and 20 responded in the affirmative, stating that if their wards desired to study Theatre Arts, they would encourage them. They, however, noted that "Theatre Arts in Nigeria should be improved on to catch up with the trend of the time. What they simply mean is that emphasis should be placed on filmmaking with a view to producing

Nollywood divas since theatre/stage performances are waning due to economic, security and sundry challenges. In the same vein, Discussant 5 agreed with a proviso of, "None of my children will study Theatre Arts in Naija, *Nigeria* (emphasis added), because I will discourage them." Towing the same line, Discussant 6 states, "I would love my child if he or she so desires, but not in Nigeria because it is not about the course of study but the relevance of the course in Nigeria." Discussant 10, who detests the Theatre Arts discipline, says it was a juvenile mistake to have studied it, and he was quick to quote Paulo Coelho that, "A mistake repeated more than once is a decision."

When asked if given the opportunity to study another course, what would that be? The most anticipated choice courses were Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Law, Political Science, Accounting, Mass Communication, English and Literary Studies, etcetera. These responses are indicative of how Theatre as a discipline has been painted in bad light, even by those who studied it. These vociferous but ambivalent views were borne out of a lack of prospects for the Theatre Arts graduate in Nigeria. According to some of the discussants, opportunities are slim for graduates of the discipline. Narrating their ordeal, Discussants 1 and 3 recall how they lost employment opportunities due to their course of study. "I have lost some opportunities because it's Theatre Arts. They said, "Why don't I go and act?" They prefer Mass Communication graduates (Discussant 1). Lamenting his frustration, Discussant 3 states:

Most times, when you tell people you read Theatre Arts as a course of study, they will look at you with disdain and query, "Theatre Arts?" It sounds funny to them. Sometime ago, my mum approached a certain politician in my village to help me secure a job. The man put a call through to me, and we discussed. I told him my discipline after he demanded to know. When he dropped the call, he told my mum that he does not know that course and that I was not suitable for the job I sought.

The discipline should be scrapped, or better still, there should be a change of nomenclature. My reason is simple: if employment opportunities exist and Theatre Arts is not recognised, why study it?

The above unedited view confirms earlier studies and findings made by Anyanwu (2018a), Imiti (2021), and Uche (1991), where they present how society views and treats the Theatre Arts and its practitioners. Parents and relatives, as earlier noted, rebuke their wards who seek to choose the discipline as a choice course at the JAMB examination, coupled with the prospects of securing a good job. At job openings and calls for applications, where other disciplines in the Arts and Humanities would be specifically advertised for, Theatre Arts is, most times, never mentioned and often times grouped as “others.”

Discussants 12, 13, 15, 17, and 18 agree with Discussants 1, 3, and 4, as they maintain that their study of Theatre Arts was a mistake never to be repeated. Discussant 4 vehemently states:

Ask yourself: how many of any DELSU Theatre Arts graduates act in movies, dance, or do music and are renowned in the entertainment industry? Apart from a few of us who furthered their education and are in the academic field, how many of us here are employed?

He went further to reel out names of course mates who went on to pursue careers in fashion and design, makeup, photography/videography, and businesses, among others, after school to eke out a living.

In difference to Discussant 3, Discussants 6 and 8 insist that the university attended has nothing to do with the plight of Theatre Arts graduates. Discussant 6 interjects:

No, not the school. Yeah, the schools have their own big problems, but I blame it on the nation and the leadership. I want to completely disagree with most of what has been said. The fact is that Nigeria is the problem. In many nations, every course you studied is relevant. They practice what they studied, but in Nigeria, a medical student ends up as a banker, and so on. What has an engineer got to do with being a Teller in a bank? We put the square pegs in the round holes.

Interestingly, both Discussants 4 and 6, who hold divergent views on the subject of discourse, are domiciled abroad (Canada and U.S), employed and not practicing their discipline. However, the salient point

to note from the above assertion is that the Nigerian government has failed to provide a conducive environment for theatre practice to thrive. Theatre artists create jobs and wealth by themselves (Haunschild & Eikhof, 2009). All they needed was just an enabling environment.

Similarly, in their arguments, Discussants 9, 19, 20, and 21 agree with Discussant 6's view shared above, as they believe that studying Theatre Arts is not a guarantee to secure a job but a means to prepare one for the labour market, and that whatever one studied does not matter. This buttresses Akinwale's (2007) view that 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 society. Thus, the growth advocated by Akinwale could enable man to be economically emancipated or self-reliant. Discussant 9, corroborating the above view, states:

I have said it before here that some of us are too complacent, "Waiting for Godot." Whereas, the Strong Breeds are making waves. I tell you, everyone who has put in the extra effort is yielding results, no matter how small. What we studied is not what makes us, as it is evidenced by most of us.

In the same vein, Discussant 19 adds, "A Theatre Arts graduate should be leaving the school with something to do even when there is no ready employment like their counterparts in some other fields."

When Discussant 4 was reminded of the likes of Ayodeji Makun (AY), Bovi Ugboma (Bovi), Justice Nuagbe (Ushbebe), and other Theatre Arts graduates making waves in the entertainment industry, he swiftly countered that these were exceptions and that they were not contributing to the growth of the discipline by grooming or honing students of the department but rather scouting for talents outside their field and alma mater. This brought another dimension to the debate about which data could generate another study.

Nonetheless, most discussants agree that the plight of the Theatre Arts graduate, which is not peculiar to them, is a result of bad leadership, wrong economic policies, and an un-conducive environment, which make theatre practice not to thrive in the country. First, they noted that there is no legislation guiding the profession, as every talented Dick and Harry can just leap on the entertainment industry, especially Nollywood, and begin to perform, thereby denying

its professionals (Theatre Arts graduate) opportunities. Discussants are of the opinion that, just as Lawyers are the only ones legally allowed to practice in court, which is their domain, Theatre Artists should be given the leverage of the entertainment industry—their domain. This point is also noted by Anyanwu when he contends that, “Just as lawyers or engineers specialises in his (sic) discipline of law or engineering, even so, a theatre artist specialises in playwriting, acting, scene-designing lighting...and so on” (2018b, p. 5). The point to note here is that the Theatre Artist is never allowed to practice in the aforementioned professions. Why then is the field of theatre open to all and sundry?

Also noted is the lack of passion by those who studied the course in “error.” These categories of persons studied the course for the sake of merely acquiring a degree. In this regard, efforts were not expended on self-development. Hence, Discussant 20 notes:

When the purpose of a thing is not known, abuse is inevitable. That's the problem with theatre arts Education and Practice. Another question we should all bear in mind is: how many of us had a passion for theatre arts and its allied industries before we paid acceptance fee to study it?

The discussion so far has revealed differing opinions about the value and efficacy of the Theatre Arts discipline in Nigeria. A minority of the discussants disagree with the majority, who think the discipline in Nigeria is not sellable because it is not accorded proper recognition like other professional disciplines in the country. Furthermore, while a few of the discussants chose the course out of passion, others “stumbled” on it when they could not beat the cut-off for their desired course. One could argue that those making waves in the field are those passionate about it. The majority of the discussants are likewise pessimistic about the discipline; nevertheless, others are hopeful that prejudice against the discipline will soon be a thing of the past. They maintain that no knowledge is lost. “One day, it will be put to good use” (Discussant 8).

FACTORS CONFRONTING THEATRE STUDY/PRACTICE AND THE WAY FORWARD

Theatre practice in Nigeria has weathered the storm and still is. So many aspersions have been cast on its practitioners. Although Theatre Arts is one of the most sought-after disciplines in the Faculty of Arts or Humanities (Ayakoroma, 2012), results have shown that it is condescendingly looked at by members of society. As noted earlier, in Nigeria, Theatre Artists are derided and described as unserious people, "good-for-nothings", "social misfits and mad men", "those people who make plays and jokes on television, radio, and such" (Anyanwu, 2018a, p. 20). Based on these descriptions, parents and guardians deprive their wards the right to choose such a discipline, as noted by Uche (1991). The unedited screenshot in Figure 1 on the following page shows a comment by a social media user about Kenneth Okonkwo, a Theatre Artist and a renowned Nollywood actor, buttressing the afore-shared views.



Figure 6: A screenshot of a derogatory comment on the character of Kenneth Okonkwo.

Aside from such ridicules, which dampen the artist's enthusiasm, there is a high rate of unemployment and the deliberate or unintentional omission of the discipline from job recruitment advertisements. As noted by one of the discussants, "if employment opportunities exist and Theatre Arts is not recognised, why study it?"

While the above are basic factors militating against the discipline, there is also a lack of interest in live theatre or stage practice (Bamigbola, 2024), the primary constituency of the trained Theatre Artist due to its relegation by modern technology and taste derived from radio, television, film, and other modern media of entertainment, as noted by Bakare et al. (2017), Imiti (2022), Eni (2012), and Ayakoroma (2012). This is in addition to the high level of insecurity, bad roads, and soaring cost of transportation that hinder movement to watch live performances. In theatre history, theatre going in ancient Greek, according to Brockett (1974), was a matter of civic obligation. Public holidays were declared so that every healthy Athenian citizen of any gender and status was expected to attend the theatre. Corroborating Brockett, Vargas notes:

A theatregoer in those days would be prepared to spend the whole day in the theatre. If he were wise, he would bring some food and wine with him, and join the hurrying crowd of fellow Athenians and visitors at dawn, anxious to secure the best seat possible (1960, p. 26).

In the situation above, actors were venerated and regarded as figures to behold and reckon with. The same scenario cannot be replicated in our current Nigerian society, where citizens are battling to surmount the aforementioned challenges in addition to economic depression and austerity. Thus, the screen and modern media have become better alternatives (Imiti, 2022).

To this end, pragmatic changes are needed to meet up with what is in vogue. It is imperative to design the Theatre curriculum to incorporate courses and dynamic elements associated with dealing with social and economic realities as they emerge in society. Emphasis should be on acquiring skills and knowledge in the use of modern-day technology. This could be in filmmaking and the new media to make Theatre Arts graduates relevant in the entertainment business (Bakare et al., 2017; Imiti, 2022). Universities' Theatres should make changes

to reflect new trends in the industry. Even in the face of a tough economic meltdown, members of society still clamour for entertainment to take them away from their everyday boredom and worries. Thus, in the view of Oni decades ago, there is a need for theatrical repackaging (2005). It must be reemphasised here that the theatre has to leverage the opportunities Nollywood and other digital platforms offer in the contemporary epoch. Unfortunately, the newly introduced National University Commission Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS) is overtly fraught with inadequacies, as the screen medium is still de-emphasised over the stage.

Nonetheless, the Theatre Arts graduate should be optimistic. A popular cliché states that when the desired is not available, the available becomes the desirable. This should be a watchword for those who find themselves in the discipline in “error” to make judicious use of the opportunity to allow the discipline to pass through them just as they pass through the discipline. It should be a case of liking what you do. In light of this, Österlind (2011) affirms that theatre does more for one than s/he believes

It is interesting to note that a bill on the Theatre Arts Professional Regulatory Council, which prohibits non-adherents from usurping the place of the theatre artist in the industry, has scaled through a third reading at the National House of Assembly. When passed into law, it would address the imbalance in the entertainment industry where the untrained outnumber the trained and the concept that anyone can act without any form of training. This would be a thing of history. According to Effiong (2001), in this communicative age, the dramatic arts, like other professions, require professional training through formal education and, in this regard, theatre study.

The Theatre Artist is a jack of all trades and master of all. When given a job opportunity, he or she is likely to do better than his or her counterpart. Theatre education and training equip the graduates with vast knowledge (Abramson, 2017). The Theatre graduate is all-round: an actor, administrator, manager, technician, singer, dancer, communicator/broadcaster, etcetera. Thus, their place in society should be recognised and accorded due respect just as other professions; for what is good for the goose is equally good for the gander.

CONCLUSION

The relevance of theatre in society cannot be overemphasised. It plays a critical role and deserves its place in society. However, it is often marginalised. While most studies highlight societal misconceptions about the Theatre Arts discipline, this study focused on the misunderstandings held by Theatre Arts graduates through their ambivalent opinions. The survey conducted on a WhatsApp group chat indicated a sense of despair, pains, and gains. The majority of the participants expressed regret and maintained that Theatre Arts is not worth a discipline of study due to limited career opportunities and also a subject of mockery. The study argued that while studying Theatre Arts in Nigeria may be both gratifying and demanding, students must be aware of these nuances to make informed decisions regarding their studies. It was further stressed that Theatre Arts alumni and prospective ones can make the most of their experience and achieve success. This could be attained through dedication, hard work, and passion, as demonstrated by the likes of AY and Bovi. It is noted that the discipline has enriched many who are passionate, and it is possible that this will continue. However, the discipline has to evolve to keep up with modernity—deemphasise stage production and encourage screen productions. Today, most parents encourage and look up to their children and wards to be screen divas, but they do not want them to opt for Theatre Arts. Little did they know that theatre was and still is its precursor. Theatre has been misconstrued and endured over the years, and it will most likely continue to if it does not evolve to redeem its battered image and to also meet the yawning taste of the Nigerian audiences, who have jettisoned the theatre in favour of homebound entertainment. This study therefore calls on individuals, companies, and the government to maximise the full potential of the Theatre Arts graduates by giving them the same rights as other graduates.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Imiti, A.L. (2025). Pains and gains of studying theatre arts in Nigeria: Ambivalent voices of theatre arts graduates. *ArtsPraxis*, 12 (1), pp. 23-42.

REFERENCES

- Abramson, N. M. Y. (2017). [Transformative power of theatre in education and learning the 21st century](#) (Master's Thesis). Bethel University, Indiana.
- Adedeji, J. A. (1998). *Nigerian theatre: Dynamics of a movement* (H. Ekwuazi, Ed.). Ibadan, Nigeria: Caltop Publications.
- Adedeji, W., Akinsipe, F., & Afe, A. (2014). [Performing arts and economic self reliance in Nigeria: The Elizade University experience](#).
- Adelugba, D. (1984). The professional and academic theatre: A twelve-year relationship at Ibadan 1963-1975. *Maske Und Kothurn*, 30 (3-4), pp. 341-356. <https://doi.org/10.7767/muk.1984.30.34.341>
- Akinwale, A. (2007). The theatre and the educational process. In F. Adedina, E. Anigala, B. Adeniyi, & B. Ezekiel (Eds.), *Theatre and Nigerian school (a Book of Reading)*. Lagos: Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education.
- Anyanwu, C. (2018a). Broken image. Ibadan, Nigeria: BWright Integrated Publishers Ltd.
- Anyanwu, C. (2018b). The relevance of theatre arts in Nigeria. *LIWURAM: Journal of the Humanities*, 19, pp. 67-78.
- Anyanwu, C., Anyanwu, C. J., & Imiti, A. L. (2023). Twenty-four hour seduction: WhatsApp status and the communicative force of fleeting memory in a digital diary. *Online Media and Society*, 4 (3), pp. 23-35.
- Ayakoroma, B. (2012, March 27). Theatre practice in Nigeria: To be or not to be? pp. 1-16. Cyprian Ekwensi Cultural Centre, FCT Council for Arts & Culture, Abuja.
- Bakare, R. O., Adeseye, B. O., & Balogun, O. K. (2017). The contemporary Nigerian theatre practitioner in search of market: The new media to the rescue. *Lwati: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 14 (2), pp. 190-204. <https://doi.org/10.4314/lwati.v14i2>
- Bamigbola, B. (2024, April 3). [Theatre: Practitioners lament dwindling fortunes, remember Ulli Beier, others](#). Punch Newspapers.
- Brockett, O. G. (1974). *The theatre: An introduction* (3rd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.
- Brockett, O. G. (1979). *The theatre*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Brockett, O. G., & Hildy, F. (2010). *History of the theatre* (10th ed.).

- New York: Pearson.
- de Bernard, M., Comunian, R., Jewell, S., Salvador, E., & O'Brien, D. (2024). The role of higher education in sustainable creative careers: Exploring UK theatre graduates and theatre careers. *Industry and Higher Education*, 38 (1), pp. 14-26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222231186366>
- Dukore, B. F. (1974). *Dramatic theory and criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Effiong, J. (2001). Play production processes. Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd.
- Encyclopedia Britannica*. (2023). [Renaissance](#).
- Eni, K. E. (2012). Global technological advancement and the challenges for the Nigerian theatre. *The Quint*, 4 (3), pp. 59–74.
- Gurr, A., & Karim-Cooper, F. (2014). *Moving Shakespeare indoors*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Haunschild, A., & Eikhof, D. R. (2009). Bringing creativity to market: Actors as self-employed employees. *Creative labour: Working in the creative industries*, pp. 156-173.
- Higdon, R. D., & Chapman, K. (2020). A dramatic existence: Undergraduate preparations for a creative life in the performance industries. *Industry and Higher Education*, 34 (4), pp. 272–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422220912979>
- Howard, C. (2019). *English travellers of the renaissance*. Glasgow: Good Press.
- Idogho, J. A. (2013). Drama/theatre in education and theatre as an academic discipline: A question of nomenclature, techniques and effects. *AFRREV: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2 (3), pp. 228–248.
- Imiti, A. L. (2021). Chukwuma Anyanwu: Dramatic reflections on the Nigerian society. *International Review of Humanities Studies*, 6 (1), pp. 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.7454/irhs.v6i1.294>
- Imiti, A. L. (2022). Nigerian theatre in a digital era and environment. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 3 (1), pp. 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.25082/IJAH.2022.01.002>
- Kisida, B., Goodwin, L., & Bowen, D. H. (2020). Teaching history through theater: The effects of arts integration on students' knowledge and attitudes. *AERA Open*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858420902712>
- Leach, R. (2008). *Theatre studies: The basics* (1st ed.). London:

Routledge.

- Listengarten, J., & Di Benedetto, S. (2021). *The Cambridge companion to American theatre since 1945*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Ogbonna, K. S., & Mohammed-Kabir, J. I. (2022). Entrepreneurial theatre in a pandemic era: “The Graduates” experience. *Nigeria Theatre Journal: A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists*, 22 (2), pp. 1–16.
- Ogunbiyi, Y. (1981). *Drama and theatre in Nigeria: A critical source book* (1st ed.). Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.
- Oni, Duro. (2005). [Towards the development of theatre practice in Nigeria](#). *Nigerian Theatre Journal : Journal of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artistes*, 8 (1).
- Oni, Duro. (2008). Theatre training in the Nigeria university system: A critical assessment of selected design and technology courses at Ibadan and Lagos. *African Performance Review*, 4 (1), pp. 82–89.
- Österlind, E. (2011). ‘What theatre is all about’: Students’ experiences of the Swedish theatre arts program. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 25 (1), pp. 75-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08929092.2011.569473>
- Reinelt, J. (2014). What UK spectators know: Understanding how we come to value theatre. *Theatre Journal*, 66 (3), pp. 337–361.
- Shem, W., Gambo, S., & Abel, B. G. (2023). Social media use for decision making during politics in a multicultural society: A case study of Nigeria. *The Journal of Society and Media*, 7 (2), pp. 281–299. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsm.v7n2.p281-299>
- Thakur, S. K. (2022). Theatre arts and its importance in education. *Arts Academy*, 2 (2), pp. 173-185. <https://doi.org/doi: 10.56032/2523-4684.2022.2.2.173>
- Uche, U. (1991). The Nigerian theatre: An appraisal. Lagos: *Theatre Forum Magazine*.
- Uzoma, E. (1991). Theatre and society. Lagos: *Theatre Forum Magazine*.
- Vargas, L. (1960). *The teach yourself guidebook to drama*. London: The English Universities Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Aghogho Lucky Imiti is a scholar in the Department of Theatre Arts,

Faculty of Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. He lectures theatre and media courses. His areas of interest include, but are not limited to, media arts, film theories and criticism, theatre and cultural studies, as well as dramatic literature and criticism. He has authored and co-authored several articles, published both locally and internationally.