

Management of Departmental Theatrical Productions in Selected Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

Every aspect of the theatre requires coordination, supervision, and organisation. These attributes resonate as management. Management is very expedient to any organisation that wants to succeed, be it profit making or non-profit making. Management is the coordination of human, financial and material resources of an organisation for the purpose of achieving desired objectives. The purpose of this study is to assess the processes and challenges of producing departmental theatrical productions in selected Nigerian universities. The research methodologies applied in this research include the sociological and literary methods. The sociological method includes the interview technique. A sample size of (5) universities were selected. This includes two (2) federal and two (2) state universities and one (1) private university. Interviews were conducted with the various heads of departments and business managers. The study discovered that almost all the universities surveyed apart from Redeemer's University, Ede (RUN) have the problem of inadequate funding and facilities. Also, all the universities studied produce Theatre workshops and only University of Benin, Benin City (UNIBEN), Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU) and RUN produce departmental sponsored productions. The study concludes that if the funding of Theatre Arts Departments in Nigeria is not improved upon, departmental sponsored productions may go moribund. It is recommended that the university authorities in Nigeria should improve drastically the funding and provision of facilities for Theatre Arts Departments. To augment the authorities'

funding, the Theatre Arts Departments should endeavour to establish a marketing unit that will seek for external support from well meaning individuals, government agencies, corporate organisations and NGOs.

Keywords: Theatre management, Departmental theatrical productions, Nigerian universities, Funding, Educational theatre.

Introduction

Management is very important to any organisation that wants to succeed, be it profit-making or non-profit making. Theatre as a discipline in its earliest beginnings, had elements of management. For instance, in African festivals, there were people who keep the village square neat, publicize the show, invite dignitaries, take care of entertainment and so forth. These are all elements of theatre management at work in a local setting. In the Yoruba travelling theatre, the same circumstances prevailed, so is the Ogunde era. As such, the art of managing a theatre is not new, but has long existed. Management is the coordination of human, financial and material resources of an organisation for the purpose of achieving desired objectives. It, therefore, requires adequate planning by the manager who must necessarily be focused and pragmatic in piloting the entire process to a successful end. Ayakoroma (2014) affirms that “management involves the effective carrying out of operations designed to accomplish the aims and objectives of a business set-up” (p. 17). This implies the supervision of the activities of an organisation to meet set down realizable objectives.

Theatre management is the effective coordination of all the available resources in the theatre to achieve the aims and objectives of the theatre. According to a renowned theatre scholar and professional Muyiwa Awodiya (2001), theatre management is “basically the crucial organizing and coordination of the efforts of various people working together in order to achieve the theatre’s goals and objectives” (p. 133). This entails that theatre management is all about coordination of the human, material and financial resources of the theatre organisation to achieve the desired aims and objectives. Furthermore, from a different perspective, Adedokun (2008) views theatre management “as the art of running the operations and activities of a theatre company or a theatre building” (p. 3). Adedokun brought another dimension to theatre management; he

mentions “running the operations and activities of a theatre company or a theatre building.” This implies that theatre management is not limited to the management of the cast and crew, but it can also be the management of the theatre building.

Educational theatre is a theatre that is managed as part of an academic institution. It is funded by such institution and most times, educational theatres make use of students and staff as cast and crew during theatrical productions. Educational theatre management, just like theatre management involves play selection, budget preparation and control, purchasing, advertising and publicity, ticket sales and house management. Educational theatre studies/ practices started in Nigeria with the establishment of a school of drama at the University of Ibadan in the 1963/64 academic session. Educational theatre has since blossomed in Nigeria resulting in forty seven (47) universities offering courses in Theatre, Performing and Dramatic Arts. Some of these universities like University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Calabar and so forth, once established profit oriented theatre companies domiciled in the institutions. All the troupes in the aforementioned universities subsequently went moribund due to artistic, management and economic problems. Currently, theatre practice in most Nigerian universities is handled by the departments; practice of professional theatre troupes has withered. It is the processes and challenges of producing these departmental productions that this study is concerned with.

Theatre Management

Theatre management handles all the commercial aspects of a theatrical production. These include publicity, ticket sales, house management, play selection and so forth. To support the above statement, Voltz (2007) as cited in Lasisi (2010) views theatre management as “the business end of a theatre which is responsible for facilitating the day-to-day operation of the theatre towards fulfilling its mission” (p. 23). Business end here, means the same as the commercial aspects mentioned above. Theatre management through the theatre manager harmoniously coordinates all these business ends (commercial aspects) to make sure that the aims and objectives of the owners of the theatre are achieved.

Ayakoroma (2014) adds another angle to the functions of theatre management. He proposes that theatre management is “the process or art of planning, organising, controlling and directing all commercial and non-artistic aspects of a theatre, or any production programme, in order to generate audience patronage, audience satisfaction, and maximum profit” (p. 23). Ayakoroma further affirms that theatre management coordinates all the commercial and non-artistic aspects of a theatre. This is a bit controversial because it is the Director that handles the artistic aspect of play production. To buttress this statement, Awodiya (2017) informs that “... practically speaking, the artistic functions of play production come under the play director” (p. 94). However, there is still truth in the statement made by Ayakoroma that theatre management coordinates also the artistic aspects of play production. This is because, the theatre manager facilitates the duties of the play director who mainly handles the artistic aspects. For instance, the theatre manager arranges for rehearsal and performance venue, he/she procures all the materials needed for the success of the production; he/she assists in play selection and so forth.

Nwamuo (1986; 2003; 2014) as cited in Enamhe (2019) conceptualises theatre administration “as the arts and science of planning, staffing, organising, motivating, directing and controlling the human and material resources in the arts of the theatre, and their interaction in order to attain the predetermined objectives of guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximizing profits” (p. 5). Nwamuo mentioned the elements to be manipulated by the theatre manager to include – human and material resources. We believe that an important element that is missing is the financial resources. So, it should be “controlling the human, material and financial resources in the arts of the theatre.”

Types of Departmental Theatrical Productions in Selected Nigerian Universities

According to the theatre manager of the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the major types of play productions produced in the department include – class productions (that is, students’ theatre workshops), private productions by the staff and commissioned productions like the convocation plays. He noted that the theatre workshops are mostly

the visible productions that are regular in the department. The theatre manager plainly informed the researcher that due to paucity of funds and lack of enough time, the department hardly sponsors a production; except if it is a commissioned production. As regards Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin, the business manager informed that the department produces the following types of productions - departmental productions funded by the department, students' theatre workshops and private productions sponsored by staff. Also, at the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Ekiti State University, the head of department averred that the students' theatre workshop productions are mainly the only type of production staged in the department. Occasionally, you have sponsored productions like the convocation play. There are no productions sponsored by the staff.

Furthermore, at the Department of Theatre Arts, Imo State University, the head of department stated that the various types of productions in the department include - command/ university convocation plays, departmental play productions, public/private organisations' sponsored plays, lecturers' written plays and students' practicals (theatre workshops). The type of play production that is unique to this department is the - private/public organisations' sponsored plays. Other departments studied do not have such type of productions. Lastly, according to the head of department of Theatre and Film studies, Redeemer's University, Ede, there are basically four types of productions in the department. They include - departmental productions, theatre workshops (students' practicals) convocation plays or commissioned productions and private productions by staff.

Publicity Techniques Employed in the Departments Under Investigation

The head of the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University Zaira informed that the department makes use of - posters, carnivals, handbills, social media and sometimes radio jingles to publicize their productions. The department does not make use of television and the print media for their publicity. This is probably because of the cost of production and placement of the advertisements in the media. As regards publicity at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin, the head averred

that the department makes use of the following techniques to publicize their productions – carnival (popularly known as ‘jungle publicity’) posters, handbills, banners, etc. She noted that they do not make use of the social media officially to publicize their theatrical events, but that it is in the pipeline.

The business manager of the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Ekiti State University stated that the department employs the use of the following publicity techniques – posters, flyers, banners, carnival and social media. They do not deploy the mainstream electronic or the print media for publicity due to the cost of production and placement. As regards the Department of Theatre Arts Imo State University, the head and the business manager noted that they embark on comprehensive and effective publicity during theatrical productions. They informed that the following publicity techniques are deployed – posters, handbills, banners, mail, interpersonal, telephone, e-mail, bulk SMS and social media platforms. It is noted that they do not make use of the mass media for publicity. Finally, the business manager of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Redeemer’s University informed that the department makes use of diverse publicity techniques to publicize their productions; which include – carnival (jungle publicity), introduction of the programme in the university chapel, in the form of an announcement, posters, banners, and social media. It is noteworthy that the department makes use of an unconventional method – announcement of the programme at the university chapel. Also, they do not make use of any of the conventional mass media for publicity.

Funding of the Departments and Facilities Available

According to the head, Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, the department is poorly funded. Only a sum of one hundred thousand naira (₦100,000.00) is budgeted for play productions annually. There are no funds meant for the upgrading of obsolete facilities. In terms of facilities, the department lacks some essential facilities. Although, they can boast of a theatre building, they are, however, clamouring for a bigger and more modern theatre facility. They also lack modern lighting, sound, media, and music equipment. Regarding the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin, the department is also poorly funded according

to the head and business manager. They posited that aside the monthly imprest provided for administrative purposes, there are no grants for provision of facilities or the sponsoring of play productions. In terms of facilities, the department also lacks good and up-to-date ones. They can boast of a small theatre hall and a dance studio. The theatre hall can only sit one hundred and eighty (180) audience members at a time. They yearn for a bigger and modern theatre facility. The department lacks modern lighting, sound, media and music equipment.

Furthermore, the head, Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Ekiti State University posited that the funding situation at the department is very poor. Apart from the money released for administrative purposes, there are no other grants released to the department for theatrical productions or to acquire new facilities. As regards facilities, the department is agitating for a purpose built Theatre Hall. The one they are currently using is a Lecture Hall converted to a Theatre Hall. They lack other theatrical facilities like – modern lighting, sound, media and music equipments. Also, the head and business manager of the Department of Theatre Arts, Imo State University, were in agreement that the department is not adequately funded. Grants are not constantly released for play productions and the replacement of worn-out facilities. As regards theatre facilities, the department has a theatre hall, but the head of department stated that they have limited facilities for theatre and media productions.

Lastly, in a different twist, the head, Theatre and Film Studies, Redeemer's University opined that the department is well funded. He said that an annual budget of one million, five hundred thousand naira is made for play productions. He, however, noted that at times, they do not release the whole money in an academic year, but the university management releases appreciable amounts for play productions. In terms of facilities, the department can boast of modern facilities. They have a theatre hall that has a sitting capacity of four hundred (400). They also have good theatre and media equipment.

Challenges Encountered in Producing Departmental Theatrical Productions

From the findings, the major problems encountered in producing

departmental productions in the departments studied are lack of adequate funding and facilities. Apart from Redeemer's and Ahmadu Bello Universities, no other university budget funds for theatrical productions. In fact, Ahmadu Bello University budgets a paltry one hundred thousand naira (₦100,000.00). Another problem encountered by most of the departments is the issue of inadequate power supply. The public electricity supply is unreliable, as such; the departments and students have to hire generating sets during productions; because there are no generating plants attached to the theatres. Also, the lack of interest shown by some students in the practice of theatre is a problem. Some Theatre Arts students found themselves studying the course by accident and not by design. Hence, they do not show much interest in the practical aspects of the theatre. Furthermore, some of the departments lack enough space for rehearsals. They struggle to utilize the few available spaces. There is also the problem of insecurity in the country which leads to audience apathy; because, some people are scared of leaving their homes in the evenings. There is also the problem of lack of enough students to stage some forms of production. This is common in private universities that have only a few students in their enrollment. Lastly, some of the departments are inadequately staffed and this affects the rate at which they produce departmental productions. This is because the staff members are over-worked and have little or no time to embark on productions.

After a thorough analysis of data, the following findings were made. It was discovered that almost all the universities investigated have the problem of inadequate funding and facilities. The only university that does not have the problem of funding and facilities is Redeemer's University (RUN). The study also showed that all the universities studied produce students' theatre workshops (practical examinations) and convocation or commissioned productions. Departmental sponsored productions are produced by UNIBEN, IMSU and RUN on a fairly constant basis every year. The other two universities do not involve in departmental productions due to lack of funds and inadequate time. Private/public organisation sponsored plays are produced by only IMSU. The challenges of producing departmental sponsored productions in the universities studied include - inadequate funding and facilities, irregular semesters, poor commitment of students, inadequate staffing and poor electricity

supply. In terms of publicity, it was discovered that all the departments studied embark on carnival publicity due to its cost effectiveness and efficiency. All the departments studied do not make use of the print media for publicity.

Conclusion

The conclusion reached is that departmental sponsored productions are not produced with the frequency they deserve due to paucity of funds and lack of time. Hence, the scare that unless adequate funding and facilities are provided for theatre arts departments in Nigerian universities, departmental sponsored theatrical productions may go extinct. Consequently, the following solutions are recommended. To avoid the unpalatable situation of departmental sponsored theatrical productions going into extinction, it is recommended that the university authorities should improve drastically on funding and provision of facilities for the Theatre Arts Departments in Nigerian universities. The university should institute an annual budget that can be accessed by the departments for play productions and replacement of obsolete facilities. Despite the odds against the production of departmental sponsored theatrical productions, the various Heads of Departments and Business Managers should endeavour to source for funds and produce at least one or two departmental sponsored productions annually. This is because departmental productions enable the staff to exhibit their skills and expertise and also allow the students to learn the arts of the theatre from professionals outside class productions. Departmental productions also allow the departments to be visible and viable in the university community by providing standard and constant productions to entertain the audience. The various Theatre Arts Departments in Nigeria should endeavour to set up a Marketing Unit in their administrative structure. The Unit should be saddled with the responsibilities of sourcing for external sponsorship of their programmes. They should write proposals and approach individuals, corporate organisations, government agencies, non-governmental organisations for sponsorship. To reduce the cost of running the unit, marketing officers can be engaged as freelancers who can be paid on commission basis. To maintain a constant stream of audience in the theatres, the publicity directors should develop a 'consistent, creative and aggressive' means of reaching the audience in a cost effective and efficient manner.

The departments that are yet to embrace the use of Social Media officially for publicity should endeavour to do so due to its present day advantages of getting to the target audience. The publicity directors should also explore more of radio jungles due to its reach and cost effectiveness; especially for universities that have educational radio stations. There should also be an improvement in the staffing of academics in departments that lack adequate staff as it affects productivity. Their being understaffed affects the production of departmental productions because the staff is overworked. Hence, there is little or no time to spare for departmental theatrical productions. It is also recommended that universities that do not have enough students should embark on special publicity campaigns to attract students to the department. They can also give a form of incentives to prospective students – like, reduction in school fees or award of scholarships to outstanding students. Finally, it is recommended that educational theatres in Nigerian universities should adopt the management philosophy of management by objective (MBO) in their management. They should integrate all the staff to willingly contribute their quota in decision making and also encourage them to work effectively towards achieving organisational objectives. The management of the various departments should motivate staff to contribute to group goals.

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