

GENDER AND ROLE-PLAYING IN THE THEATRE AND MASS MEDIA IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *This paper x-rays the role of gender on the achievement of competencies of theatre and mass medium skills. The focus is on the female gender, in relations to the organizing, structure, procedures and ideologies of the theatre and media in helping to explain why they proves so resistant to women and their interest. We studied the gender roles of the Children's Theatre Programme of the University of Port Harcourt [UCTP] to determine if gender factors constraint the performer from attaining competency in their roles. Results from the analysis indicated that there is no significant difference between the genders factors that constrain the performer from attaining competency in their roles. The assumption, therefore, is that mainstream machineries are important to create a level playing field so that the theatre and the media agents can compete on equal basis. The paper suggests that a reassessment and engagement of women with main stream policy-making institutions will improve women activism.*

Keywords: Gender, Theatre, Media, Role-Play

INTRODUCTION

The theatre and the mass media have from inception portrayed the female gender as incapable of a status. A situation has arisen from both cultural barrier and lack of relative institutional framework. The argument in essence was that the theatre and the media are a man's world that constrained women incursion principally by keeping women away from being custodians of maternal culture and the constrain was made worse by the exclusion of women from mainstream cultural policy-making processes.

The genesis of the exclusion of women from media organizations and media dynamics may be largely explained by four factors namely: discrimination from within and outside the household, the gender specific in socialization processes, the asymmetric rights between husbands and wives and finally the influence of reproductive processes on the woman.

In Nigeria in particular the woman faces several cultural inhibitions that are expressed in the above named factors. The women face several odds both in the home and outside. The preference of the male over the female creates a low value for the woman. This lack of personhood impacts severely on the creativity and drives of the woman towards material and non-material culture creation. The second limiting factor is the gender specific role that the girl child has been trained to develop. The girl is socialized to do domestic activities of low economic value while the male is trained to aspire to enjoy unlimited creativity. Boys will always aspire to be Lawyers, Doctors, and Journalists etc; at best the woman will dream of Nursing. This also impacts on the career choice of women. If women and men are to be given equitable opportunities to explore economic activities and to create images of sane world with sane sexes then, the state has to become more accountable to its female citizen. This is a process which require public action and from variety of civil groups and cohesive gender constituency.

THE THEATRE, MASS MEDIA AND WOMEN PERCEPTION OF GENDER IDENTITY

In *Gender and Performance* (2010) discourse, women were forbidden, by law, to perform in the Elizabeth theatre. There were no female actresses then. The acting profession was not a credible one and it was unthinkable that any woman would appear in any play. The parts of female characters were played by young boys. These boys were usually between aged 13- 19years of age when their voices were still high and muscles had not fully developed. The voices of Elizabethan boys were believed to break much later the modern day due to difference in diet and lifestyle which made it possible for boy actor to play women's part convincingly until they entered their late teens

Owing to the crucial role of the mass media, it does not only promote justice and equity for women but in fostering appreciation, for their specific nature. The mass media devalues women through derogatory slogans and posing techniques that make women appear inferior to men. No society has ever become developed by intensifying exclusion from social and cultural production.

Nancy Cook (2000) asserts that gender roles in the media continue to show that women have a long way to go before their voices are really heard either as guiding forces from within the news organization or as credible sources from without. This explains the role of gender in the mass media. The media has been propelled by the men at the exclusion of the women. The exclusion of the women from the media processes shapes the production of gender identity and perception of the women.

Rebecca Haydu (2008) maintains that women generally generate identity from the female images they see portrayed on stage, film, radio etc. At both the conscious and sub-conscious levels, these media images of women affect behaviour at every age and stage of life. It is obvious that these images are unrealistic, yet they exert pressure on women to conform and influence how they live. The media as an institution needs a concerted effort from the women to create a positive identity through constructive engagement of the women in media organization.

EMPIRICAL PROOF ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THEATRE ROLE-PLAY

A research carried by Ken-Aminikpo in 2012 on theatre gender role-play to determine if gender factors constraint the performer from attaining competency?, The overall purpose was to train each child in the UCTP to the same competency level and to determine if gender factors constraint the performer from attaining competency in their roles play adequately. Out of two hundred (200) registered children between the ages 5-15 were categorized into three (3) age brackets using Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Ten (10) members (5boys& 5girls) of each age group of the programme were purposively selected for this study.

Table 1: *Summary of mean% on how gender factors constraint the performer from attaining competency in their roles play adequately*

RANGE/Variables	Male					Female				
	n = 10	n=10	n=10	Over all mean%	Remark	n=10	n =10	n=10	Over all mean%	Remark
	5-7 yrs.	8-11 yrs.	12-15 yrs.			5-7 yrs.	8-11 yrs	12-15 yrs		
1. Linguistics(Lines delivery) 15%	14	12	14	13.3	Very good	14	12	14	13.3	Very good
2. Musical(singing) 15%	14	15	14	14.3	Excellence	12	14	14	13.3	Very good
3. Body kinetic(Dancing)	12	15	14	13.3	Very good	14	12	12	12.7	Very good

15%										
4. Interpersonal (Dialogue) 15%	12	12	12	12.0	Very good	15	15	14	14.7	Excellence
4. Intrapersonal (Mime) 15%	14	12	12	12.7	Very good	12	14	14	13.3	Very good

From the table above, the overall mean % of Linguistics (Lines delivery) for male and female are (13.3, 13.3) with both remark Very good, the difference in their mean is 0.0%; the overall mean% singing for male and female are (14.3, 13.3) with both remark very good. The difference in their mean is 1.0%; the overall mean% of Body Kinetic for male and female are (13.3, 12.7) with both remark very good. The difference in their mean is 0.5%; the overall mean% of Interpersonal (Dialogue) for male and female are (12.0, 14.8) with remark excellence. The difference in their mean is 2.8%. The overall mean% for Intrapersonal (mime) of male and female (12.7, 13.3) remarked Very Good. The difference in their mean was 0.6%. Thus, there was no significant difference of gender factors that constraints the performer from attaining competency in their roles play adequately.

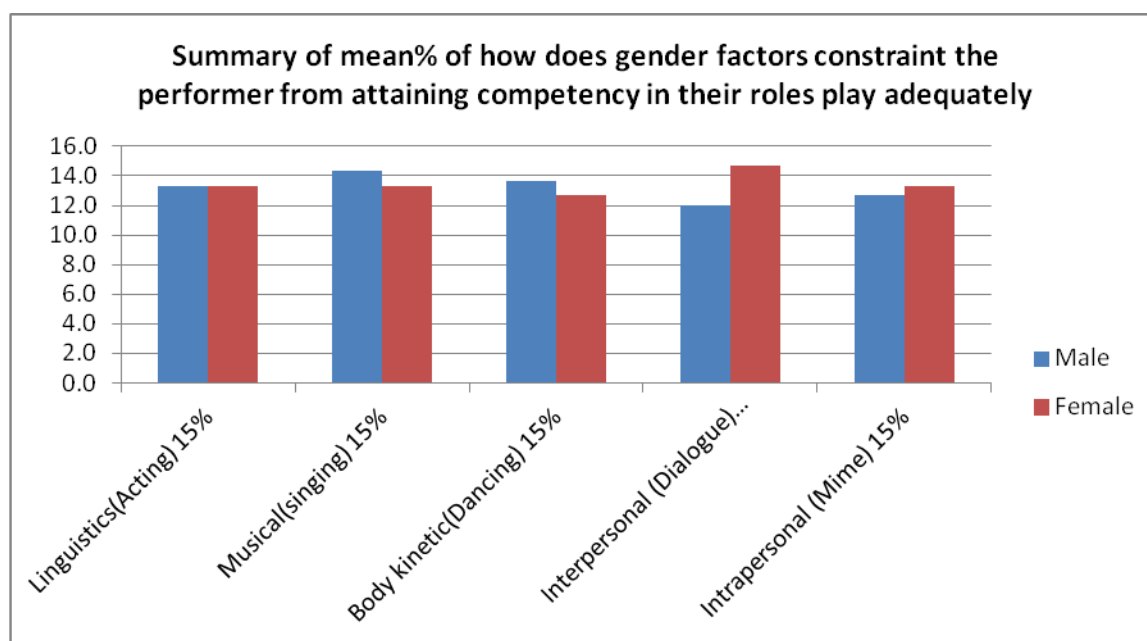


Figure 1: Graphical representation of the Summary of mean% on how gender factors constraint the performer from attaining competency in their roles play adequately

METHODS OF ROLE- PLAYING IN THE THEATRE

The traditional methods that are used to nurture and develop the skills of the children are through dramatic education. Which consist of creative dramatics and theatre in education, both are termed educational theatre. The Child is groomed through the means of storytelling, improvisational role-play, play methods, imaginative exercises, puppetry, music, poetry recitations, pantomime, mime, dance and songs. Although in

children's theatre, these forms of dramatic theatre exist for the purpose of the child audience.

According to Lease and Siks [1940] as cited in Okome (2004) explains that:

In children's theatre, actors memorizes lines of a play written by a playwright and in return, are directed through the action and interpretation of the play by a qualified director.

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Traditional, actors are trained in Voice, Speech, Movement and Text analysis for effective stage performance. The onus lies on the trainer/director/handler that is expected to be grounded on his or her creative abilities. For a sense of creativity is the vital instrument for theatre role-play and other collaboration to flourish. Competency-based training focuses to a great degree on language and technique of improvisation theatre. Improvisation is a creative process which can be spoken, written, or composed without prior preparation. Many theatre artistes also use improvisational techniques to help their creative flow.

Here are two significant methods:

- **Improvisational Theatre** is a form of theatre in which actors use improvisational acting techniques to perform spontaneously. The basic skills of listening, clarity, confidence, and performing instinctively and spontaneously are considered important skills for actors to develop.
- **Free Improvisation** is real time composition. Musicians of all kinds "improve" music; this music is not limited to particular genre. Two contemporary musicians that use free improvisation are Anthony Braxton and Cecil. Through free improvisation, musicians can develop increased spontaneity and fluency.

Both improvisation improves the thinking and acting skill of the actor, this is made by using no practice, a similar set of techniques is called Alienation since one of its many techniques uses actors that haven't rehearsed or even read the play, improvisation is an acting skill where actors make up a storyline, start and ending on the spot and actors have to try their best to keep in character. The skills of the theatre are related to the natural development of the imagination in children. *Mimicry, disguise, imitation, fantasy, and transformation are the sources of most play activity and complex games.* Theatre performance activities' are a miniature of the real world.

The engaging processes provide a practical and fertile ground for the development of many life skills among young performers including: communicating, listening, cooperation, demonstrating motor skills, setting purposes, patience, coordinating, and persuading. Learning to be competent in the different roles/skills allows children to find their place among their peers. Essentially, an actor's talents are judged by his or her ability to effectively communicate dialogue and a sense of character to the audience. Competency based-training in every role played in theatre is a multifaceted shift and the following are required from the actor or performer.

- *Elocution* (speaking style),
- *Diction* (clarity of pronunciation),

- Gesture, stage movement, and other abilities is only the first component of the craft.

Other basic skills include the memorization of lines and cueing; manipulation of masks, costumes, and stage properties; and the embodiment of character through the expression of class status, gender, age, nationality, and temperament. Learning these skills generally takes several months of practice or rehearsals. Any form of children theatre role-play is a dedicated study beginning in early childhood in order to be competent in their presentations- a stylized system of gestures, movements, and facial expressions. The player speaks and moves in the imaginary environment of the stage, and so his or her powers of pretense must be sharply focused over an extended period of time or the entire dramatic atmosphere may collapse.

The inclusion of all designated expression of the creative modes is designed to suit the needs of the child. Ward [1947] (as cited in Okome (2005) states the advantages of these creative modes mentioned above as thus:

- It develops the child's basic skills of communication, namely body, mind and voice, and increases his ability to use them.
- It helps the child to enrich his/her experience of life by stimulating him/her to enter into all kinds of situations, physically and imaginatively, thereby helping him to increase his awareness of his environment and deepening his understanding of people and situations. (221)

The area of improvisational role-play is employed to deal with imagination and creativity. The roles are assumed to add great value to the participant who is developing in the art of acting, while the dramatic modes of dance, mime, pantomime, poetry recitations and puppetry manipulations stirs the imagination of the child, enables the child to express ideas, thought, interpretations and comments about life which is expected to develop the creative ability in his or her acting skills that is well nurtured.

No matter the way people may see theatre performances, be it role-play or game activity, singing or dancing, etc, the activities are very interesting. Reputable theatre scholars and critics like Spolin [1963], Wright[1972], Fernald[1971], Brown [1971] and Hanson[1986], to mention but a few, have all attempted to discuss, criticize and propagate theories in the areas of acting and other theatre performances.

Theatre was one of many new theatrical enterprises that appeared in Moscow Art Theatre, the performers spent months each year in preparation for productions, thereby developing a unified system of acting. Stanislavsky carried out theatrical experiments in search of developing a new form of acting training for the would-be actor. He suggested that the performers' past emotional experience, if truthfully tasked to be relieved on stage, would bring out the best of acting skills in the actor (Encyclopedia Britannica).



This acting style was actually led by Strasberg, they practiced exercises in improvisation, physical and vocal conditioning, and sensory work, which schooled them in re-experiencing past memories. Strasberg's emotion-based training, later called the **Method**, was built on the belief that actors should internally share the feelings of their characters. Grotowski (1933-1999), Polish experimental theatre director, teacher, and theorist, noted for his theory of a “**poor theatre,**” which emphasizes the essence of performance without the distraction of elaborate staging or spectacle. Grotowski trained for the theater, began his directing career at a theatre in Kraków. Six years later he renamed theatre as the **Theatre Laboratory**. According to Gordon [2008]:

Many of the company have featured performers—notably Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, Robert Lewis, and Morris Carnovsky—taught their own variations on the Group's basic acting regimen. Others, especially Elia Kazan, stunned the film industry with their emphasis on truthful behavior and real emotion.

According to James M. Higgins [as cited in **Alla Zusman** [1998] *creativity is the process of generating something new that has value* .The Criterion Referenced Instruction (CRI) framework developed by Robert Mager is a comprehensive set of methods for the design and delivery of training programs. Some of the critical aspects include:

- (1) Goal/task analysis -- to identify what needs to be learned,
- (2) Performance objectives -- exact specification of the outcomes to be accomplished and how they are to be evaluated (the criterion),
- (3) Criterion referenced testing -- evaluation of learning in terms of the Knowledge/skills specified in the objectives,
- (4) Development of learning modules tied to specific objectives.

Training programs developed in CRI format tend to be self-paced courses involving a variety of different media (e.g., workbooks, videotapes, small group discussions, computer-based instruction). Students learn at their own pace and take tests to determine if they have mastered a module. A course manager administers the program and helps students with problems.

Fluency instruction approach by Chase Young, Timothy Rasinski (2009) a technique that believes that the concept of fluency encompassing accuracy, automaticity and prosody is appropriate. We also agree with the scholarly literature that posits that modeled, assisted, and repeated readings are powerful tools for improving fluency (Farrell, 1966; Chomsky, 1976; Samuels, 1979; Dowhower, 1987; NICHD, 2000; Vaughn, Chard, Bryant, Coleman, & Kouzekanani, 2000; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Rasinski & Hoffman, 2003; Therrien, 2004). However, we also believe that a more authentic approach to fluency instruction exists in the realm of performance of texts as in the performing arts (Rasinski, 2007). Students are more likely to practice or rehearse (assisted and repeated readings) if they know that they will be performing a reading for an audience. Moreover, such rehearsal is not aimed at reading speed, but at reading with meaningful expression to help an audience of listeners better understand the passage.

Readers Theatre is a performance of a written script that demands repeated and assisted reading that is focused on delivering meaning to an audience. Since there is no acting, props, costumes, or scenery in Readers Theatre, readers must use their voices to carry the meaning. Thus, the goal of this fluency instruction is aimed at improving prosody and meaning. The repeated and assisted practice involved in rehearsal will improve accuracy and automaticity in word recognition. Research has demonstrated the potential of Readers Theatre to improve reading performance (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1998/1999). Moreover, Readers Theatre has been found to be an engaging and motivational activity for students.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of research question four and hypothesis two reported differences in the amount of time taken to raise the multiple skilled competencies using the same instructional packages with respect to gender and age ranges through Multifactor Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). The total amount of rehearsal time spent for mastery for age 5-7 was 1700 hours which was equivalent to the period of 71 days; age 8-11 was 1600 hours which was equivalent to the period of 66 days; age 12-15 was 1020 hours which was equivalent of 43 days of rehearsal time. The data decomposes the variability into contribution due various factors [age range and gender (male and female)]. It determined which of the factors had significant effect on rehearsal time. The independent variables in this hypothesis are age range and gender while the dependable variable is multiple skilled areas. The P-values test the statistical significance of each of the factors. The P-value of age group equal to 0.00 is less than 0.05; this factor has a statistically significant effect on Amount of Time at the 95.0% confidence level.

This implies that there is significant difference between the amounts of rehearsal time taken to raise the MI competencies of 5-15 years children using the same instructional packages with respect to age. With this observation the null hypothesis is rejected. The p-value of gender equal to 0.3386 is greater than alpha value = 0.05. The null hypothesis is accepted. This factor has no statistically significant effect on Amount of Time at the 95.0% confidence level. Now considering significant interactions amongst the factors, the p-value equal to 0.059 was greater than alpha value = 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected; this implies that the interactions amongst the factors are statistically significant (i.e. age range was statistically significant while gender was not).

The findings of Hypothesis two (2) showed that there is no significant difference between male and female children on how sex factors constraint performers from attaining competency in their play adequately. Both the male and female acquired mastery learning successful, their high standards were articulated equally and both received equal ample time and help to meet these standards. The finding of this research was in line with the finding of Olele (2000) that mastery learning was not gender selective. That is, gender does not have any constraint on achieving mastery learning in the five theatre proficiency levels.

This study attempted to prove that even in the acquisition of theatre role-playing

1. All the students learn well if instruction is systematically approached and students are provided with sufficient help while the class timetable is made flexible.
2. Teachers should do task analysis before teaching to help the students learn better.
3. It fosters positive self-image and confidence in the students and the teachers alike.
4. Finally, the students' performance is judged only in relation to the criteria established. Thus how the student performs compared to that of his classmate is irrelevant in mastery learning approach.

Gender does not have any influence on the acquisition of theatre role playing.

CONCLUSION

Every society has the right to choose those values and ideas that are consistent with its aspirations. Therefore, the women need a pro-active role in the creation of modern culture and for the sustenance of the same world. The role of theatre and the media are vital in the sense that women fold are essential in the creation of culture. The theatre and media are very crucial in the creation of modern culture. Thus, a positive culture can only be created when both male and female genders have equal participation. This paper recommends that:

- a) Women can do much to foster better treatment in the media by sound theatre and media education programmes.
- b) The female gender should occupy positions of responsibilities and creativity in the theatre and media – not imitating males but by creating their own genus.
- c) Theatre and media women should form a very strong gender constituency that will liaise with civil groups to exert pressure on mainstream machineries to create level playing ground for men and women.

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