

# THEATRE AND DISCOMBOBULATING TEACHER-LEARNER PEDAGOGY: ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES OF STUDENTS IN ALVAN INSTITUTION, OWERRI- NIGERIA IN FOCUS

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## **Abstract**

*Students are inarguably a pivotal part of a society's future, progress, growth and development. Hence the need to secure their educational and career goals becomes expedient. This study seeks to stimulate discussions about the factors, militating against the academic performance of students in selected departments in Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, in a bid to restructure the debased system which is gradually corrupting the learner's attitude towards learning. The paper employed the qualitative methodology through the use of focus group, semi structured interviews, surveys, participant observation, and performance to stimulate discussion and derive information about the factors militating against the academic performance of learners, the likely causes of these factors, employable measures to checkmating these factors and bringing stakeholders to a conscious level of the need to combat this problem. Theatre for development and the medium theory outlined by John B. Thompson were adopted to harness critical consciousness, dialogue and interactive performances, geared towards engaging participants in critical discussions about the study's focus. At the interim, it was deduced that all stakeholders comprising of learners, teachers and those at the managerial level of the institution, were contributory to the factors militating against the academic performance of students. In the same vein, stakeholders from their responses during the post-performance facilitation displayed a sense of understanding and support by making recommendations on the need for these factors to be debased and restructuring embraced for the enhancement of the academic performance of students in the institution. The study summed this by doing a follow up after two academic sessions, to ascertain the following; achievability of expected outcome, sustainability of expected outcome, change level, impact level and awareness level. The conclusion is that the study's objectives were successfully achieved because visible improvements were seen and documented.*

**Keywords:** Theatre, Discombobulating, Teacher-Learner, Pedagogy, Academic Performance, Alvan Institution

## **Introduction**

Ascertaining if an institution's educational structure has failed or succeeded boils down to its students' academic performance. Most times, the process of testing and evaluating the extent to which a student has learned overtime is by exposing the student to examination series. An examination is an organized evaluation tool used to access the acumen of students, to ascertain their comprehensibility of the curriculum structure they have been exposed to overtime. Gbenga and Akume (2014) aptly capture this in their submission:

Examination involves the setting of questions or structuring of tasks which the candidate is expected to answer or perform under a controlled environment and within a given time frame. It provides valid information on the candidates' level of competence in the given subject (p.104).

Thus to determine the success of an educational structure put in place by any institution, the performance of the students in that institution serves as the key for appraisal. If it is observed that there is a decline in the performance of students in some subjects, or courses of some departments, it becomes an issue of concern to policy planners, teachers, students, parents, curriculum developers and those at the managerial level of the institution.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to evaluate the reasons why the rate of failure in selected courses in some departments in Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education is high, especially in departments with a higher population of students, using the development communication tendencies in the Theatre for development approach to involve all stakeholder in the restructuring agenda. Furthermore, it seeks to re-evaluate the place of credible teaching methods, instructional materials, students' participation and regularity to lectures in achieving the reform agenda. The study also seeks ways of improving the teaching and learning process in these selected departments to ensure a higher level of productivity of students who are the future of the society.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate the factors militating against the academic performances of learners in the institution
2. To reconcentrate stakeholders (teachers, the management and learners) of the need to erode the rot in the educational structure of the school
3. To improve and safeguard the academic performance of students in the select departments
4. To encourage a restructuring of the educational structure operated by the select departments in the study
5. To change learners perception towards learning and building their career goals

### **Research problems**

1. Be taken to ensure an improvement in the academic performance of students What are the factors militating against the academic performance of learners in the institution?
2. Are stakeholders aware of the factors leading to the rot and imbalance in the educational structure?
3. What measures have been taken to combat these factors?
4. How ready are the tripartite (lecturers, students and management) to work towards eroding the rot
5. How can the educational structure of the departments towards teaching and learning be restructured?
6. What measures should?

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Theatre for Development**

For the furtherance of this study, it became necessary to adopt some theoretical frameworks for clarity. Theatre for development is an approach imbibed by this study because of its change attributes. Every drama has a central theme built around issues it seeks to achieve because it captures the lives of people and x-rays their problems, performed before their very own eyes. Theatre for development is a strong advocate of drama. It uses drama as its tool or process towards attaining change. According to Ediri and Teghtegh in Alachi (2003), "it is utilized in driving home intended messages" (p.22). This approach sensitizes and empowers the target group towards the change of their situation and that which affects them perhaps this is the reason why Abah (2003) describes it as "An instrument for instigating people centered development in the field outside the academe, an instrument for mobilization and for instigating participation in the development process" (p.XIV). The ability of Theatre for development to bring a group of people to a point of realization, creates motivation in them towards taking a step of change, to attain total freedom from their ailment. Nwamuo (2003) further opines this "theatre helps to maintain culture and tradition. It is a veritable tool for Education, rehabilitation, edification, entertainment and for social and political change. There is a lot more about what Theatre can do. Augusto Boal sees it as change". (p.42) From Boal's poetics in Nwamuo (2003), the efficacy of TFD towards change is further declared "theatre can be considered as a powerful language, capable of being utilized by any person, with or without talent" (p.13).

The dream to use TFD for developmental change was born out of the desire to build trust and hope in people towards accepted developmental projects and programmes. Overtime, they had lost hope in the government because they see any government created programme as a ploy to violate their traditions

and a device to extort money from them towards these same projects, which have already been funded. But because of the greed of some few people the available funds are squandered. On the other hand, many communities believe that whenever a development project is done in their community, it should enhance their finances and money should be shared. What they fail to realize is that the change they will enjoy overtime, is better than the material benefit. TFD serves as a medium through which trust in the authenticity of these projects is created again, because it employs the ethos of tradition and culture of the target group as the language to be used during all discussions and sessions held with them. Nwamuo(2003) throws more light on this in his exposition that “it is an integrated approach to rural development. Community theatre or TFD as the case maybe, is an activity that centers mostly on the culture of a society in a bid to conscientize the poor masses into a level of consciousness and reawakening in them the need to transform their society”. (p.45)

This approach uses local materials to create its intervention tool, which is drama, giving a people the opportunity to view their lives being performed before their very eyes. It gives to them the freedom to participate in the intervention right from the pre-visit done at the beginning of the intervention. The pre-visit serves as just the introductory part of the approach. After approval from key persons in the community, the activists prepare fully and go into the field, from whence they generate information amongst the people about the objectives of the intervention. From the information generated, the people, activists or both as the case may be sketched a drama skit, which is performed

The use of TFD is becoming widespread. If this study takes time to describe and analyze the numerous projects it has been used for including its weaknesses and strength, it will be inexhaustible. What is worthy of note is that it stands a better chance to ensure the success of any project that has to do with change due to its potentials and the attributes it possesses. Mbachaga (2011), agrees that part of the attributes of this approach is its ability to leave the “drama performance open-ended or unfinished to trigger and motivate the participation of the audience who are invited to complete the play or contribute to them through the discussions issues raised on the plays by the catalysts”. (p.30). Eugene van Erven in Duruaku and Ugiri (2011) also maintain that it is “a theatre of the people which uses the expressive media of the people, which looks at the actual problem of the environment; highlights them for the purpose of re-opening discussions on them and seeks solution for them”. (p.31)

To bring hitherto, hidden factors militating against the academic performance of students to limelight, adequate interactions should take pace with the target people, to collect substantive data to make it easy to understand the discourse. This study believes that theatre for development is a potent -medium and an educational process of creating awareness through conscientization.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Medium theory**

The medium theory outlined by John B. Thompson was selected for this purpose. In this theory, Thompson distinguishes between “three types of interaction; Face-to-face interaction, mediated interaction and mediated quasi interaction” (Holmes, 2010,136). But for emphasis, the face-to-face interaction will be discussed. In the face-to-face interaction, participants and catalysts have the opportunity to have interactive sessions where facial expressions are noted, questions are weighed before answers are given, and others. In this interaction model, “participants can use deictic expressions such as here, now, this, that” etc. (Holmes, 2010, 82). This theory was adopted because unlike the quantitative methodology, this interaction method is dialogic. It creates room for participants to constantly and routinely engage in comparing the various symbolic cues employed by speakers, using them to reduce “ambiguity and ensure under-standing of the message” (Holmes,2010,83). Communication only takes place if the desired message is successfully passed across and understood. Anything outside this, it means communication has not fully taken place.

Thompson's face-to-face interaction is what Theatre for development stands for. In the methodological order of this approach, the qualities in Thompson's model exist in it. This is because in theatre for development, dialogue takes place, there is mutual presence, a high degree of contextual information such as; body language, gestures, symbolic cues, etc. take place and is understood. Therefore, this model could be said to go *pari passu* with the theatre for development approach and what it stands for, giving clarity to the focus of this research and what it seeks to achieve.

### **Methodology: The Process**

The focus of this study is solely communication based thus a functional way of communicating with the target audience of this research was employed, using the development communication model, which was birthed by the Theatre for development approach. They had been complaints from students overtime, about the high rate of failure in courses that were not their departmental courses. Owing to the peculiarity in the teaching and learning process of the College of Education system and the workload of its students, it was observed that some students do well in their departmental courses but find it difficult to do well in other courses they major in.

Therefore, the desire to investigate the factors that lead to failure in students was birthed. During the Community Theatre THA-214 practicum exercise, the researcher decided to make this issue the objective of the practicum along with other colleagues and the students of the course. The success of any intervention exercise starts with the preliminary stage. At this point, visitations were made to the target departments, which were randomly selected from the school of arts and social sciences, school of languages and school of education. Letters were gotten from the Head of Department Theatre Arts, and distributed seeking approval from Deans, Heads of Departments and Lecturers to carry out the study.

After the preliminary stage had been done, two days were set aside to train participants comprising of the NCE 2 students on the methodological approach of Theatre for development, how to research into communal issues, understanding the tools available to them and how to apply them on the field to stimulate discussions on issues related to reasons why students fail.

When that had been successfully done, some days were selected when catalysts went into the field, interacting with key persons in focused group discussions such as Deans, Head of Departments, lecturers and course advisers. In the same vein, the students' bodies were not left out because they are at the receiving end. As a result of this, semi structured interview sessions were had with students using the Homestead and flooding methods respectively. Subsequently, some participatory games were employed and administered, which got the students interested in the entire exercise. Some of the focused group discussions administered in the field includes:

### **Focused Group Discussion**

1. Do you think that lack of payment for textbooks and practicum fees are enough reasons for students to fail exams?
2. What does failure mean?
3. Why do students perform differently in the same examination?
4. What are those likely factors that can make a student fail?
5. What practical measures can prevent failure?
6. Why do lecturers give some students scripts to mark despite knowing that missing scripts may occur?
7. What are the factors militating against the academic performance of learners in the institution?
8. Are stakeholders aware of the factors leading to the rot and imbalance in the educational structure?
9. What measures have been taken to combat these factors?
10. How ready are the tripartite (lecturers, students and management) to work towards eroding the rot
11. How can the educational structure of the departments towards teaching and learning be restructured?

**(Plate 1 below is a picture of an interactive session held with one of the Head of Departments).**



**Plate 2:** is the Head of Department responding to the questions he is being asked by the students.

His response to some of the questions divulged greater insight into the discourse that students are not solely responsible for failure situations rather, the school and lecturers have their own share in the blame game because they directly or indirectly contribute to the problem. He mentioned that lecturers give their scripts to students to mark and also make it compulsory for students to buy their text books in order to pass their courses. In addition, some of the Semi Structured Interviews administered on the field include:

### **Semi Structured Interviews**

1. Who do you think is to blame for why some students fail, the lecturers or students?
2. Do lecturers harass students sexually for grades?
3. Is purchase of textbook a criteria to pass a course?
4. How does college policies and academic calendars contribute to failure?

5. Is it not possible that even in the absence of antecedent factors some students are still prone to failure
6. Have you been a victim of failure before?
7. What do you think was the reason you failed or passed the course?
8. What teaching method is most suitable to aid the student to understand a course?

These questions were randomly administered to lecturers and students in some selected departments in these schools. These are represented in a tabular form below for clarity

| S/N | NAMES OF SCHOOLS                   | DEPARTMENTS                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | School of Arts and Social Sciences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political Science Department</li> <li>- Economics Department</li> <li>- Fine Arts Department</li> <li>- Religious studies</li> <li>- Geography Department</li> <li>- Music Department</li> </ul> |
| 2   | School of Languages                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- English and Literary Studies</li> <li>- French Department</li> </ul>                                                                                                                             |
| 3   | School of Education                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nigerian Language</li> <li>- Early Childhood</li> <li>- Physical Health Education</li> <li>- Vocational Studies</li> </ul>                                                                       |

Incorporating students into the entire process, was of great benefit to both the students and the study. Through their involvement, the study was able to harness sufficient information, which ordinarily would have been tedious for the researcher to do alone. Rather, pairing the students into groups and sending them into the field to dialogue with other students, was a huge respite and medium towards generating data from students. The next phase of the process was the analysis of data generated from the field. The responses were collated and formed into scenarios that revolved around the discussed factors, responsible for failure.

Some of the factors exhumed include:

1. **Non-Purchase of Text Books:** Some lecturers attach their continuous assessment to the purchase of text-books, sometimes making it a yardstick to pass students. Therefore making it impossible for students from low class homes to pass their exams.
2. **Sex for Grades:** Some lecturers harass students sexually and in a situation where a student fails to comply, they victimize them by failing them.
3. **Missing Scripts:** In Departments with a larger number of students, this at times tends to be the fate of some students. Especially when lecturers give their scripts to students to mark. Some are not careful and most times, scripts get misplaced in the process.
4. **Non-Attendance to Lectures:** Students who fail to attain 75% of the attendance policy are prevented from writing exams, which result in failure.
5. Over dependence on AI and google generated sources resulting in poor reading habits and this is a major impediment to teaching and learning

6. Mix-up in result computation
7. Lack of seriousness in students and poor studying habits
8. Poor teaching methods imbibed by some lecturers.
9. **Refusal to “sort”:** Some lecturers insist on sorting before students can pass their course. This is also an impediment to the performance of students in the examination.

Furthermore, the study carried out a performance of the scenarios created and the NCE two students performed this. The venue selected for the performance is the central point of student hostels, which made it easy for the male and female students to be part of the audience and the facilitation carried out. At some point, the performance was interrupted by a heavy down pour of rain, but the performers sought shelter at the College Pavilion and surprisingly many of the students followed them to the Pavilion and encouraged that the performance be continued.

### The Medium

The point when applying the theatre for development approach is the unifying point of the performance. It serves as the medium through which issues derived from the field are capsulated for the viewing of the aggrieved. This intervention exercise made use of short drama skits that were episodic in nature. All the pictures captured in this session comprise of students of the department of Theatre arts and they gave permission for their pictures to be used.

The performance started with an opening glee which made use of trending songs, but the lyrics were slightly changed to reflect the issues generated on the field. An example is:

*Mr. Lecturer don't get down with me  
I no go rub your back with your pot belly  
Make you pass my paper naim I need  
I no be Bimbo omoowoyemi*

Another is:

*Able God, shower your blessings  
We want to make it, no carryover*

After the songs had been sung for a while accompanied with instrumentation and dance movements, it was discovered that it had succeeded in drawing the attention of people towards the performance. When the audience had settled in, the narrator came in and introduced the play. The drama started with a classroom scene with a lecturer teaching the students. At some point he told students who had not submitted their assignments to go see him in the office. In one of the scenes, he was seen harassing a student but she refused his advances, he inturn promised to fail her.

The next skit started also with a classroom setting, where another lecturer was seen teaching some students. At some point, she inquired from the class representative about the number of students that have purchased the textbook recommended for the course. She went ahead to threaten that those who fail to get theirs, will automatically fail the course. In another scene, a student was seen lamenting about his predicament to some of hiscourse mates of how a lecturer has consistently failed him in her course. Simply, because he refused “sorting” her asother students do. He further complained that every attempt to call for the re-marking of his script, or report the lecturer has not yielded any result. While some students were encouraging him, others believed that you use what you have to get what you want. Below are some pictures from the performance:

**Plate 3: is a picture from one of the scenes that shows a student agreeing to the advances of the lecturer in order for him to allow her pass his course.**



### Facilitation

The performances were left open-ended and facilitation was carried out. This was aimed at giving the respondents ample opportunity to respond to the performance they watched. Some of the facilitation questions are:

1. What did you learn from the performance
2. What are some of the reasons why students fail
3. Who do you think is responsible, the lecturers or students
4. What are the likely solutions to some of these problems.

The responses from the facilitation carried out shows that some of the reasons why students fail include; lack of seriousness to studies, complexity of teaching methods, sexual harassment from lecturers, societal-born problems, assessment problems, and administrative problems. In most cases, these factors contribute largely to their poor performance, especially with the recent situation of things in Nigerian universities, which shows an imposition and hike in the prices of text book which students from lower class family background cannot afford, cases of sexual harassment of female students by male lecturers, the administrative flaw of the school which includes employing unqualified lecturers to teach students due to sentiments and their relationship with the lecturer. This unethical practices and others, is gradually eating into the educational system and if not abrogated, may eventually lead to its decline. Lecturers should be professional in all their duties. They should behave in accordance with teaching profession ethics and brainstorm with the school authorities on ways to direct and harmonize all academic activities. Acting outside the teaching ethics could send the wrong signal and create a sense of nonchalance in learners. There is a huge advancement to knowledge on a daily basis. Hence, lecturers should attend training and certification programs improving their performances and professionalism, this will also help in improving student's performance in school. It was ascertained from the performance and interactions that some lecturers cognitive domain is poor, thus the learner is unable to process their pedagogy.

## **The Follow up**

A follow up was done after some time to evaluate the progress of the research. The expectations include; the achievability of the expected outcome, sustainability of the expected outcome, change level, impact level and awareness level. A thorough survey along with a comparative analysis was done to evaluate and ascertain if certain objectives of the research was achieved. Interactions with exam officers from the select departments studied, showed that the academic performance of students has improved by 20percent as against the previous (responses from Education, English, Political science and geography, August 2024).

In the same vein, some faculties and departments constituted book pricing committees to review the cost of books sold by lecturers to students and the university created a bookshop unit, ensuring its smooth operation to reduce the pressure faced by students in text book purchase. Some Heads of departments made it a norm for students to purchase textbooks only if they have the capacity to and memos were sent to staff not to use that as a yardstick to fail students. Lecturers with the reputation of sexual harassment were brought before staff disciplinary committees and some suspended as lesson to others. Furthermore, members of staff known for sorting along with those at the exams and record unit known for collecting bribe to inflate student's results were disciplined appropriately. Other evident measures put in place by the university management to enhance teaching and learning in a bid to reform the system includes;

Examination monitoring committees were constituted, staff disciplinary committees were constituted both at the departmental and university level to moderate staff conduct, students were given the mandate to recall for the marking of their scripts if they suspect foul play in any course. To mention but a few, these and other viable measures were drawn from the survey which rates the research on the scale of being a success.

## **Recommendations**

It is very important to address these factors which obviously affect the academic performance of students. This study recommends that:

To improve student's performance, the school management should improve their own performance in different areas especially in the process of admission into the school. They should ensure that the applicants have the requirement and competence enough to get the admission, this will help in disqualifying poorly trained applicants who cannot meet proper educational standards.

Proper orientation and counseling should be conducted in schools to help students face campus challenges and become responsible and committed to their studies. The departmental orientation should also be encouraged and in case of large number of students, the exercise should be broken into groups so as to achieve effective results.

Orientation exercises should be organized by the school management to enlighten students on the need to strike a balance between their reading habits and internet exploration. To prevent over reliance on the internet.

Lecturers should be professional in all their duties and know when to draw the line. They should behave in accordance with teaching professional behaviors.

The school management also needs to organize training, workshop, seminars for its academic staff with a view to improving their performances and professionalism in their Conduct. This will also help in improving student's performance in school.

The stakeholders in Nigerian educational system ranging from parents, guardians, lecturers, should brainstorm over new innovations and mediums to improving the educational system of Nigeria.

## Conclusion

From all the multifarious factors exhumed from the discussions held, they all point to the fact that these problems are internally influenced and all stakeholders are responsible for them one way or the other. It is vital to address student's challenges in school and elevate their performances in order to achieve the goal and pivotal aim of education which is geared towards securing their future. Hence, this study on improving student's performance in school is timely and should remain a serious concern for government, communities, institutions, Teachers and individuals in order to beat the surge of decline witnessed around the school understudy and Nigeria at large.

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