

Towards the Restructuring and Commercialization of University Theatres in Nigeria

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Abstract: Despite the fact that theatres are economically viable nationally and globally, the potentials of university theatres in government owned universities (Federal and State) in Nigeria, are yet to be fully maximized to generate financial resources for their development and the university in general. Contextually, the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts are programmed towards academic exercise than commercial or business construct and making of professional artists. However, with the establishment of private universities and adjunct Department of Theatre/Performing Arts, the university theatres in government owned universities would be facing stiff opposition and competition in the production and sell of artistic goods and services. Perhaps, these arguments generate further questions, thus; what are university theatres in government owned universities for? How resourceful are university theatres in Nigerian government owned universities? This paper posits that theatre is a business venture and the university theatres in government owned universities have the potentials to be made economically vibrant ventures in Nigeria through proper approaches and adoption of the ideas of commercialization. In terms of research design, the paper relied on content analysis and personal observation to advance its position. The paper concludes that the university theatres in Nigeria could benefit from adopting partial commercialization by selling some artistic goods and services to generate income for its sustenance and progressive development.

Keywords: Commercialization; Restructuring; University Theatres; Public and Private Universities; Artistic Goods and Services

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* Received on March 23, 2010; accepted on June 3, 2010.

INTRODUCTION

Arguably, university theatres are basically educational theatre designed to perform educational functions among others in line with the aims and objectives of the university. University theatres manifest as the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts. They are designed with the responsibilities of training and producing high level manpower for the development of the artists and the nation (Clifford II, Langley 7-187). Ideally, university theatres, government and private owned, as part of its social commitment are expected to generate innovative ideas and provide capacity building through the combination of theory and practice towards the acquisition of knowledge and towards the acquisition of knowledge and the making of professional artists.

This paper focuses on the economic potentials of the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities theatres. Currently, there have been growing concerns among the performing artists in academics, theatre practitioners, and even among actor trainees for the resuscitating of the various Department of Theatre/Performing Arts towards commercial viability (Ola-Okoyi 216; Akinwale 94-100). For instance Ola-Okoyi avers that the incapacity of the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities could be attributed to the following; inadequate funding (low capital budget); the shift of interest from making professional artists to the production of literary artists, and the disappearance of the university performing troupes or companies. He adds:

Many of these departments have resigned to literary teaching rather than commercializing some of their practical productions or reviving their various performing companies that could and should take the theatre to willing audiences as it was done from the sixties up to the eighties (216).

He further argues that the problems of financial incapability would continue to deter the progress in the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts in all institutions so long as the huge creative human resources are under-utilized. He suggested that the entrepreneurial skills for each department must be developed to commercialize the artistic goods and services so as to secure enough financial reservoirs towards self sustenance (216).

Similarly, Ayo O. Akinwale argues that our theatres in Nigeria are potential business ventures but their resourcefulness is yet to be fully maximized. He articulates this coexistence impossibility graphically when he says:

Within the faculty of arts of Nigerian universities, the only professional discipline is the Theatre Arts discipline. This is because one can train as a theatre artists and establish his own company. But because of lack of enough awareness coupled with lack of vision and the zeal to work hard by the practitioners; we do not have enough theatre companies in Nigeria today that are founded and operated purely on commercial basis (94).

Deduced from the above arguments, we are compelled to ask further question: How resourceful are the existing Departments of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities (Federal and State) in generating funds for self sustenance, progressive development and the university in general? With the establishment of privately owned universities and adjunct Departments of Theatre/Performing Arts in Nigeria, there is a great competition between the government and privately owned university theatres. In view of this, there is need to review the method of running government owned Departments of Theatre/Performing Arts to be at par with the privately owned university theatre departments in terms

of standard and income generation. There are socio-economic justifications for resuscitating the government owned university theatres as business ventures in Nigeria.

This paper is of the opinion that the government owned university theatres would benefit from adopting partial commercialization, where they will be expected to sell some of their artistic goods and services to generate enough revenue to cover their operating expenditure, and may rely on the university authorities (government) for capital grants to finance their capital intensive theatre projects. This paper therefore considers what government owned university theatres (Department of Theatre/Performing Arts) can do to commercialize their artistic goods and services and revive their performing companies that could and should make money for self sustenance and progressive development.

ASSUMPTION AT THE BASE OF THIS DISCOURSE

The approach we have taken in this disquisition is rooted in the following assumptions.

(a) The current trend in economic development globally is commercialization and privatization. And business which is an index of economic activities has become a way of life. Theatre is business and should become a way of life in government owned university theatres in Nigeria. There is need to make and reorient Departments of Theatre/Performing Arts in Nigeria toward business enterpruenership as a panacea for self sustenance and progressive development.

(b) The Department of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities in Nigeria are designed towards academic accumulation rather than commercializing some of their practical productions for revenue generation. Theatre Arts discipline is not meant to be academic exercise alone. It is rather a professional discipline where one can train as a theatre artist and establish his or her own business enterprise. The departments in their studies should take the lead to form business enterprises or revive the various performing troupes or companies so as to commercialize their products and services.

(c) Even though theatre and performing arts departments are training ground for professionals and students in theatre and media studies, the huge creative human resources available are underutilized to produce and sale artistic goods and services. The entrepreneurial skill of each department could be developed, harvested and maximize to serve as financial reservoir.

(d) Given the necessary facilities, tools, equipments, space and conditions, the theatres and performing arts departments can operate in large capacity and challenge other business enterprises in the entertainment industry in Nigeria.

(e) If the argument that the problem of poor funding would continue to impede the progress of the theatre studies in Nigeria is accepted, then, they should be thinking of operating as business ventures so as to generate additional revenue for self sustenance and development of the department and the university in general.

(f) Commercializtion despite the criticism it has generated as an economic measure remains a viable option for revenue generation for government university theatres/performing arts since Nigeria has the market in terms of population to buy artistic goods and services. More so, with proper management practices a cutting edge standard can be achieved and sustained which will out match the products of Nigeria Home Video Industry (Nollywood).

Government funding of tertiary institutions have been discouraging resulting in avoidable industrial crises and other calamitous human resource management implications (Agba, and Agba, 113-117). Thus the need to explore other sources of funds like that proposed or suggested in this paper. Funding remains a major challenge in modern day university governance reducing the time focused on academic administration by university management. This strengthens the argument for partial commercialization of government owned universities theatre/performing arts departments in Nigeria. As Achebe (5),

advised, this funding challenge can be resolved by establishing a Business or Development Office like the case of most American universities charged with the responsibility of fund raising for the university, investment in shares, privatization and commercialization of goods and services rendered by the university, consultancy services, Alumni Fund, dialogue with the private sector for increase in support.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework for commercialization and privatization in Nigeria is the model advocated in this study. Privatization (and Commercialization) has become an international trend (Aulich and Flynn, 153). This economic model reflects the changing idea of the role of the state and public reforms borrowed from Western Countries to inject the much needed efficiency and effectiveness in the operations of public corporations. Nigeria tempted by this, joined the train in the 80s by advocating and adopting the scheme. The Federal Government of Nigeria promulgated the commercialization and privatization decree No.25 of July, 1988 to deal with issues relating to the restructuring of the national economy. The decree provided the operational framework within which enterprises classified would operate as commercial, privatize or public establishment. The decree defined commercialization as:

The reorganization of enterprises wholly or partly owned by the government in which such commercialized enterprise shall operate as profit making ventures and without subvention from government (Obadan 75).

Under the decree, commercialization is split into full and partial commercialization. To this end, full commercialization means that:

Enterprises so designated will be expected to operate profitably on a commercial basis and be able to raise funds from the capital market without government guarantee. Such enterprises are expected to use private sector procedures in the running of their business and may (be) subject (ed) to the general regulatory powers of the Federal Government (TCPC Second Progressive Report 25; Obadan 76).

In contract, partial commercialization means that:

Such enterprises so designated will be expected to generate enough revenue to cover their operating expenditures. The government may consider giving them capital grants to finance their capital intensive projects (TCPC Second Progressive Report 25; Obadan 76).

The decree further spelt out that in the spirit of commercialization, the enterprises so designated will be expected to generate funds from the following sources:

- (i) Internally generated surplus
- (ii) Local capital market
- (iii) Donation from foreign sources; and
- (iv) Government guarantee (Obadan 76)

The implication is that although the government owned universities theatres are not for profit maximization they would benefit from adopting the framework of partial commercialization, where they would be required to sell their artistic goods and services for profit to generate funds to cover their operating expenditures and meet other challenges. They may rely on the university authorities for capital

grants to finance intensive theatre projects.

THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Contextually, the curricula of the various Departments of Theatre/Performing Arts are presently engraved towards academic accumulation than having an aptitude for business pursuit. So if the argument for operating the university theatres as business venture is accepted, then, a memorandum specifying certain critical issues relating to the spirit of business entrepreneurship must be made and include the following among others:

- (a) Redefining the aims and objectives of the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts.
- (b) The role of the various departments studio as manager agent.
- (c) The role of the university management in Nigeria as sole entrepreneur and supervising agent.
- (d) The appointment, responsibility and removal of the Boards of Directors.
- (e) Redefining the condition of service of staff.

REDEFINING THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE/ PERFORMING ARTS

In the spirit of commercialization and business autonomy intended for the university theatres, the aims and objectives of the department's studio must be redesigned to integrate business behaviour and orientation. Specifically, it must incorporate the employment of all available human, material and financial resources for the production and sales of artistic goods and services for profit. This if done will assist financially in the development of the department and the university in general.

REDEFINING THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE/PERFORMING ARTS

How can the credibility and usefulness of the department of theatre/performing arts be assured in the business intended framework? This can be achieved by categorically redesigning its constitutional role to reflect business management practices. The role of the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts as managers of the intended enterprise on behalf of the principal stakeholder (University Management) is considered appropriate. The task of the managing the department must include the managerial role in business organizations, and must include the task of planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting of commercial theatre. Every member of staff must be assigned duties and held responsible for outcomes.

The theatre managers must learn to work with everyone inside or outside the organization who is in a position to help achieve organizational goals. As Osuagwu directs (34), managers in the business intended department studio must monitor information, distribute information to subordinates in the organization and transmit information to people outside their units and organization. It must be the duty of managers to define the business charter, recommend for approval and appointment of board members, directors and executives of the theatre business. As managers, the department studio must recommend for appointment, promotion, discipline and condition of service of staff. More so, it prepares and recommends for approval the annual budget of the business enterprise.

REDESIGNING THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

There is need to reconsider the role of the university management as the chief executive and as the organizational pillar. The new role of the university management should include:

- (i) Providing strategic guidance and participating in the formulation and evaluation of the plans of the enterprise;
- (ii) Act in a sustainable manner as a financier and guarantor to the management of theatre business enterprise when it desire to source for finances;
- (iii) Approval of financial and banking policies for the enterprises;
- (iv) Appointment and removal of board members and directors;
- (v) Approval of budgets and to determine the control and purchase of theatre assets;
- (vi) Rectify the appointment, discipline and removal of staff;
- (vii) Approval of the condition of services for staff, remuneration, salaries, promotion and retirement benefits to mention some.

REFINING THE APPOINTMENT OF BOARD MEMBERS AND DIRECTORS

The memorandum of understanding should define the criteria for the appointment and state the responsibilities of board members and directors of the theatre enterprise. This paper proposes the following roles for board members and directors:

- (i) Strategic planning
- (ii) Setting target goals
- (iii) Developing performance and evaluation standard
- (iv) Developing and evaluating the condition of service for staff
- (v) Developing an evaluating appointment, promotion, and discipline criteria for staff.
- (vi) Ratifying and recommending the appointment, promotion and discipline of staff
- (vii) Developing financial and banking policies for the enterprise.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION

Every business enterprise operates within an accounting and financial management framework. It has been observed that the reason for the failure of small business enterprises include lack of adequate finance among others. Significantly, the incapacity of the various departments of theatre/performing arts has been attributed to lack of adequate funding (Okoh 405). If the government owned university theatres are operated as business ventures, there is the need for financial restructuring of the department studied. We would benefit from adopting the financial options for small business enterprises which may include the following among others

- (i) Equity Financing
- (ii) Bank and Non-Banks Lenders
- (iii) Commercial Credit
- (iv) Public Offerings
- (v) Leasing

As regards equity financing and venture capital, the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts can get finances from investment companies and other financial institutions to start and expand the theatre business. They would not be required to pay interest on the capital as loans but the investment companies or venture capital would take on equity stake (part ownership). Besides, the theatre studied should borrow money from commercial lenders like banks, credit unions and other financial houses. They can also benefit from short and long term financing from commercial banks with low interest rate charged. To enhance financial relationship, the theatre studies should establish community ties with financial houses within and outside its host communities. The theatre studies should also secure finances from commercial creditors. It requires vendors, suppliers, manufacturers to deliver goods and services to the institution before payments is received from the theatre enterprises.

Beyond the start-up stage (about 1-3 yrs) the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts could also reinvest part of the proceeds from the sales of artistic goods and services by buying shares from reputable and viable companies in Nigeria. In addition, the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts could also apply for grant from the university management, federal, state and local government authorities in Nigeria and invest them into profitable areas in theatre. They can also seek financial support from endowments gift and donations from philanthropic organizations or non-governmental organizations. These funds can be reinvested to generate further revenue as Langley directs (295).

RETHINKING LEGAL IMPERATIVES

If government owned university theatres should engage in business, then, arts managers or arts administrators in the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts must be conversant with the various laws pertaining to business entrepreneurship. We are aware that business enterprises operate in a society and laws govern societies as well as influence business decisions and operations in any given circumstance. Significantly, the arts administrators or theatre managers in the government owned university theatres must be legally guided to operate theatre business without breaches or contradicting acceptable norms, and to protect the image of the organization from unnecessary litigations. Malomo writes:

One of the main responsibilities of the arts manager or arts administrators is to ensure that his/her organization is adequately protected from undue embarrassment that may be caused by the breach of law. He/she must be conversant with the various laws pertaining to the arts, not for the purpose of going to law court to defend or interpret the law, but simply to protect the image of his/her organization, it could well be an advantage if the arts managers has legal training (57).

Beside protecting the image of the organization and operating freely without breaching the law, the arts managers in government owned university theatres has the task of providing maximum legal protection for the artists in the discharge of his/her duties. In the light of the above, arts managers, art administrators, actor trainees and theatre practitioners in government owned university theatres must be conversant with the following laws affecting theatre business entrepreneurship

- (i) Statutory provisions designed to control the use and conduct of premises
- (ii) Companies and Allied Matters Decree (CAMD) No.18, 1990 and as amended Decree No.2 of 1996.
- (iii) Business Law
- (iv) Contract Law (unconstitutional)
- (v) Constitutional law
- (vi) Entertainment Law

- (vii) Freedom of Speech
- (viii) Copyright Law
- (ix) Sharia Law
- (x) Intellectual Property law
- (xi) Nigerian Broadcasting Commission Decree of 1992.

We must not glossed over these legal instruments because ignorance of the law is no plea or plays for justice and defence.

UPGRADING FACILITIES/EQUIPMENT

It has also been observed that the incapacity of the various Department of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities in Nigeria could be attributed to non-availability or poor physical facilities and digital equipment/obsolete training equipment (Okoh 402-421; Ola-Okoye; 216). Ola-Okoyi elaborates:

It is a sad case that apart from Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, and other few universities, hardly can you find other Department of Theatre/Performing Arts that have modern digital camera/editing gadget, lightening or sound equipments, which can handle video films production on their own without recourse to the private studio for assistance. In the seventies and eighties, the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts, University of Ibadan, handled the production of soap operas with modern electronic gadgets sourced within the university. It is unfortunate to see that the apparatus of those days are now obsolete and antiquated.

Consequently, the first school of drama cannot go into the production of video films as they did during the era of TV drama (21).

Similarly, Okoh argues that some of the factors infringing upon theatre practice in Nigeria, specifically, government owned universities like the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Port Harcourt, include unwholesome physical facilities. He argues that despite the expanded academic programmes, there is no improvement on the physical facility in proportion to the expansion in academic programmes and increase in students and staff population. Consequently, it has been very difficult to sustain theatre practice at the University of Port-Harcourt in Nigeria, qualitatively and quantitatively. He avers that for the University of Port-Harcourt arts theatre to perform its duty properly, it would need a well designed physical facility and functional ultra modern digital equipments (405-409). In the light of the above, there is the urgent need for all the Departments of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities to search, acquire and install the latest physical facilities and modern digital equipments, technology, methods and technicians to comply strictly with the standardization, regulations and high quality revolution in the business world, today. This is in tune with Adeoti's thesis that there is a profound necessity for changes of approach, if the universities would achieve a holistic connection with social needs. He adds:

With restricted access, the universities are in need of a re-orientation, just like the video industry... (210).

This study emphatically believes that there is a need for a re-orientation towards the upgrading of the unwholesome physical facilities and equipments in our university theatres if they must operate as business enterprises. This would enhance the production of standardised artistic goods and services to meet the needs of the customers clamoring for quality products and to remain afloat in business of

entertainment, today.

ORIENTATION TO BUSINESS MARKETING COMMUNICATION

Resuscitating government owned university theatres as business ventures in Nigeria requires exploring business to business marketing communication strategy. This is because all over the world, effective communication is critically necessary for all business organizations. The essence for this is the necessity to inform, influence, and to attract customers to the organization. More so, business organizations need to establish and maintain business relationship with a legend of stakeholders, customers, and corporate organizations. To enhance this linkage, business managers must use a mix of communication tools like advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing and personnel selling (Chris and Karan 208). This challenge must be met by the government owned university theatres desirous to operate as business entrepreneurship. There is need for arts administrators, business managers, theatre practitioners and actor trainees to have an understanding of business marketing communication tools to get messages across to customers. Specifically, they should maximize the potentials of publicity and advertising activities to inform, influence, educate the public and attract attention to theatre business enterprises. Indeed, they should work out adequate publicity and advertising campaigns to enable them create awareness of their products and pass messages across to customers.

THE PECULIARITY OF ENTREPRENEURIAL BUSINESS ORIENTATION (EBO)

If the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities must dapple into related business areas, then, they should adopt the entrepreneur strategic business orientation (EBO). It involves the willingness on the part of any business organization to be innovative in ideas, rejuvenate market offerings, take risks to tryout new and uncertain markets and be more proactive in the market place (Osuagwu 282).

The implication is that if the theatres studies should operate as business ventures, then, they should be prepared to be tireless innovators of ideas, novel, experimenters and creative to pursue new business opportunities. Beside, they should be forward looking desirous to be pioneers and explore available opportunities to maximum advantage. They must be willing to commit adequate resources to business projects, where the outcome would be unknown. It implies that the theatres studies must shift a little away from academic world to the unknown world of business construct, where they would make large and risky resource commitment in anticipation of profit.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the focus has been on the issue of the government owned university theatres being a viable business enterprise, where they will be expected to commercialize their artistic goods and services to yield income, and profit for self sustenance and progressive development in Nigeria. We also consider what the government owned university theatres can do to commercialize their artistic goods and services to generate the much needed funds for self reliance, self sustenance and development. In this new millennium, where commercialization and privatization is the song for socio-economic development, the

writers are calling on all theatre practitioners in academics to focus on the issue of restructuring the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities to enable them be viable business venture and commercialize their artistic goods and services for profit.

Finally, these writers are calling on the government owned university authorities to provide financial grants to their theatres to enable them prepare towards the tasks of operating as commercial ventures. We are also calling on financial houses, especially the banks to grant long and short term finances to the Department of Theatre/Performing Arts in government owned universities to operate as commercial enterprises in Nigeria. We believe that it is through careful planning, judicious use of funds and execution of programmes that the restructuring and commercialization of government owned university theaters towards self sustenance and development can be actualized in Nigeria. It is when this is achieved that our government owned university theatres can make a unique and different impact in the new millennium.

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