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Exploring Internet-Based Pedagogies in Performing Arts and Film Education: The Nigerian Example

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Abstract

The paper explores the views about Internet technologies among users within the Department of Theatre Arts. It also scrutinizes the implications of the views in relation to full integration of the technology into vital sectors of Nigerian education and most especially the teaching of theatre and film. Two institutions, Lagos State University (LASU) and Lagos State University of Education (LASUED), both in Lagos State, were used as case studies. The research bases its theoretical framework on postcolonial and social constructivist theory, using these theories to interpret its findings on the pedagogical use of Internet technologies for theatre and film in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The descriptive survey research method was employed, using a pragmatic approach and a mixed methods research design. The stratified random sampling method was used to select the population sample. 100 students and 24 lecturers were drawn from the Department of Theatre Arts within the two institutions (50 Students from the respective departments) to answer the questionnaire in order to provide qualitative data. In addition, the purposive sampling technique was used in selecting 24 staff (academics), 12 each from the two institutions, who were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. Focus group discussions were also organized for additional data, in order to ensure the adequacy and reliability of the questionnaire and interview data. The study identifies the challenges associated with Internet use in the Nigerian environment, particularly for educational purposes. However, it also establishes that most of these challenges are not peculiar to that environment, but are associated with the dialectics of social change and pedagogical development across the globe. It highlights the actions necessary on the part of the relevant bodies to deal with these problems.

Keywords: Internet, Pedagogy, Performing-Arts, Film, Digital Media

Introduction

The paper addresses the challenges associated with the use of Internet technologies in developing countries, specifically in the Nigerian theatre and film educational sector. According to Odedra et al. (2017), most countries in sub-Saharan Africa face the challenges of maximizing the gains associated with the integration and use of Internet technologies in the most vital sectors. Although the facilities are important, what is needed is to discover how to derive maximum gains from the technology. This can only be

achieved through proper orientation and understanding of its workings. Development concerns the needs and the potential of people, not just the sophistication of the technology (Odedra et al., 2017).

Background to the Study

The realization of Internet technology's potential has been a major concern for many scholars and researchers (Zittrain, 2008). However, that potential has been either ignored or misunderstood because of the lack of the necessary orientation towards Internet use (Curran et al., 2012). Developed countries have made local, national and global efforts to ensure that young adults engage with the Internet for learning purposes (Anderson, Boyles and Rainie, 2012; Ramani, 2015) and particularly in incorporating it into theatre and film pedagogies. However, there has been little progress in these areas in developing countries (Ekundayo and Ekundayo, 2009), where education sectors continue to face insurmountable challenges. Anderson and Gronlund (2009) identify these as variations in the technological requirements of courses. Such challenges concern knowledge and competence; making learners' engagement with practice-oriented courses, such as Performing arts and linguistic courses, among others, both difficult and discouraging, especially at the tertiary educational level (James, 2014).

The media have played a crucial role in the development of the pedagogical techniques that formulated and conditioned culture in the educational system and in society as a whole (Goldfarb, 2002). With the evolution of the Internet, this role has become especially important in education. It has been identified with increased potential and capacity, particularly in information packaging, dissemination of knowledge and other tasks hitherto assumed to be impossible (James, 2014). The present study examines the current state of Internet technologies in Nigeria, describing the available applications, the degree of public access and the potential applications suggested by their current uses. It investigates the deployment, application and use of the Internet for Theatre and Film educational purposes, and identifies its potential to transform the nation's theatre and Film educational platform. It assesses the current level of Internet use in Theatre and film education and how relevant technologies are channeled towards attaining the national educational goal of an equitable distribution of quality in theatre (performing arts) and film education, given its peculiar requirements and the promotion of learning opportunities. The Internet plays a role in this endeavor by serving as an instrument for the enhancement of learning opportunities, as highlighted in national policies for education, information and communication technology in a way that can turn learning into a lifelong activity (NG 2013, NITDA 2002). To achieve this, the present study suggests ways of improving upon the current state of Internet use in education and how it can help in overcoming the various challenges of theatre and film studies, incorporating theoretical and practical knowledge acquisition.

The current research addresses the lack of innovative and creative approaches to encouraging the use of Internet technologies for learning. It focuses on student-centered practices, communication, and creative production that situate learning in contexts that are meaningful and formative for young students, and takes their own aspirations, interests and passions into account. The paper explores the Internet-based approaches to theatre and film education, developing new ideas and innovations.

Thus, this paper examines the way the Internet is used in advancing learning and its processes in theatre and film studies, while facilitating its proper understanding. It also makes recommendations for improving students' learning using Internet technologies in

theatre and film studies. In doing this, the study proffers answers to the following: What effects do Internet technologies have on teaching and learning processes of theatre and film?

What factors determine the use of Internet technologies by teachers in theatre and film in their teaching? What factors determine the use made of Internet technologies by students of theatre and film in their studies? What theories underpin the use of Internet technologies and their benefits to the learning processes of theatre and film?

Performing Arts

The dictionary meaning of the word 'Performance' denotes an entertainment presented before an audience; portrayal of a character on the stage; the act or manner of exhibiting an act, skill, or capacity; the degree to which anything as a machine, functions as intended, an action, deed of things done; the act of performing or condition of being performed of being performed (Hornby 2005, 704). Richard Schechter (2003), a Performance Scholar, defines Performance as a wide spectrum of artistic activities that involve space, time, the human body, and an audience.

Performance in this paper refers to 'a conscious effort of using one's talent and creativity to entertain and promote other societal functions, using the medium of drama, dance, music, and oral arts before a live audience. Performing artistes in this context are actors, dancers, musicians, and oral art performers who demonstrate their creativity to entertain, educate or mobilize their audience for social development" Akande (2012:108).

Performing arts are different from non-performance arts, which are seen as thought-based, rational, physical, and static. In contrast, performing arts are grounded in ideas and driven by rationality, imagination, and cultural viewpoints. They are characterized by live performances, physical presence, creativity, improvisation, collaboration, storytelling, emotional expression, technical skills, communication, setting context, and their cultural and historical significance.

From all indications, one could correctly aver that Performing and film Arts are action-oriented in nature and a form of creativity that is performed before an audience in a live manner for entertainment, education, socio-political cum economic protest and for religious purposes. Nigeria has a long history of theatre, including traditional forms like the Yoruba traveling theatre and masquerade performance. Roy-Omoni (2020) notes that before the founding of the University College, Ibadan, numerous performances had provided theatrical atmosphere in Nigeria, ranging from the traditional African performance genres like the masquerade, ritual displays, festivals, storytelling, and dance music, among others. Then moving to the postcolonial era, where we have pioneers like Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, and Femi Osofisan who used theatre as a tool for social commentary. John, Oladesu and Stephanie (2015) note that some of these writers bear testimonies of being inspired by growing leadership problems and a few of them were either threatened or imprisoned despite the subversive devices employed to convey their feelings about the worsening state of society. These early playwrights laid the groundwork for contemporary theatre artists, demonstrating the power of performance to address social and political issues. Their plays satirize society, advocate for change and fight for the cause of the oppressed. Notable contemporary playwrights like Ahmed Yerima with his work *Little Drops* and *Hard Ground*, Tess Onwueme, whose works majorly focus on gender, culture and sociopolitical issues such as *Tell it to Women*, Wole Oguntokun for his work *Who is Afraid of Wole Soyinka*, and other notable contemporary writers who have used their work as the voice of the voiceless.

The Film

Film is all about motion and emotion, seemingly magical images with narratives in visual images woven into stories that connect societal subconsciousness, reflecting societal values, customs, styles and life (Swetachandan, 2019). As a medium, film communicates like other art forms as it entertains, enlightens, informs and elevates society in projecting unique ideas, opinions and sharing knowledge about certain things portrayed through entertainment. The filmmakers also inform and educate the audience. He is also a creative artist who, through his work, communicates his ideas, thoughts, visions, feelings, emotions and opinions into moving images to enable society to view what he conceptualised in his mind. Through the projected pictures, messages are conveyed to the mass audience. These demonstrate the essential nature of the film as a medium of mass communication (Swetachandan, 2019).

However, the audience reactions and opinions about a specific production by the filmmaker constitute feedback, making films a two-way communication process, especially in today's world, where individuals share their views about specific creative works (Anonymous). Film production is a combination of both creative and technical skills. In doing this, cameras are used to record human and non-human objects and create animation or objects as characters using special effects and techniques. These recordings are assembled in individual frames, giving the viewers an illusion of emotion when shown in rapid succession (Ekwuazi, 1997). The glimmer between the frames is not obvious due to the effect (consistency of the speed) that appeals to the vision when the image is viewed; the elements create images of the pictures. All the materials projected in films or movies represent or symbolize passing messages to the viewers. Films are created for viewing. This differentiates them from other art forms such as novels meant for reading (Akanni et al, 2021). The film has its specialised language, and the language of film communicates through everything projected on the screen (Swetachandan, 2019). Although film may have its grammar, it does not have a system of 'codes'; it does not have a strict vocabulary, but it has a system of 'signs' that it uses. It is this system of signs and codes that constitutes the film language (Monaco, 2009). However, there have been identified areas of shortcomings; researchers have continually made efforts to ensure that film production is at the same level in practices both in the developed and other nations of the world (Uchendu, 2019). Despite the much work done by film scholars, there seems to be a wide gap in determining the treatment of the subject of politics, mainly as it affects protest culture and themes that seem to give voice to the voiceless and not to be in tandem with what the power that be desired (Adler and Mittelman, 2004).

The Nigerian film industry currently tagged 'Nollywood' has grown in leaps and bounds from the first film premiere in Nigeria that took place in 1903 at the Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos during the colonial period through the effort of the colonial film was shot in celluloid format, with cinema houses and exhibition centres owned by foreigners especially the Lebanese and Indians at the time.

The film industry, over the years, has undergone several developmental stages with experimental productions that brought about significant changes in forms and practices. These achievements cut across-border acknowledgement in patronage by Africans in other countries within the continent and those in the diaspora, especially among the blacks. It also played out among the blacks in the western countries of North America, Europe and Asia, among others (Ezeonu 2013), (Tsaaio 2018). In 1972, the Federal Government of Nigeria promulgated a decree. The Nigerian Enterprises Decree of 1972 gave exclusive privilege of distribution and exhibition of films to Nigerians (Olubomehin, 2012). The implication of this

to the focus and contents of Nigerian films is that there is a shift in attention from Western-oriented films to productions with emphasis on African culture and aesthetics.

In attesting to the success and the many giant strides of the Nigerian Film industry, UNESCO Report (2009) acknowledged that the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, is the second largest in the world after the Indian film industry, Bollywood. Similarly, Barrot (2008) described the industry as one of the key employers of labour and a significant source of foreign exchange earnings for the country, with an annual income of 320 million dollars.

Approaches of Internet Deployment for Theatre and Film Pedagogy

The application of the Internet as a teaching tool refers to the use of Internet technologies in educational tasks such as teaching, rehearsal, learning, research and management of the educational workshop process (Grouff and Mouza, 2008; Park, 2009). However, this study explores the extent to which the Internet has been integrated into the theatre and film educational sector.

In addressing the issue of approaches to teaching and learning processes in theatre and film, the NPE 2014 indicates that education and training faculties shall be improved to meet societal needs, with unconditional and affordable individual access that makes learning flexible, with the provision of a range of choices. It states further that educational activities are centered on learners for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment, with efforts made to relate education to the wider needs of the community. In line with these provisions, several approaches are being applied in theatre and film education. However, current research reveals that lecturers in these areas of knowledge involves the use of pedagogical methods that rely mainly on verbal delivery and that fail to put students at the centre of learning; instead, they promote the traditional perspective of the 'sage' with unquestionable knowledge in their field of study (Adeyinka, 2013; Kotoua et al., 2015). This situation contradicts the NPE 2014 stipulations.

The pedagogical approaches often adopted by theatre and film learning place the teacher at the centre of the learning process. Although convenient, the present study criticizes this approach because it fails to encourage growth and development in learning. The emphasis for learning, according to Adeyemo et al. (2011), is to ensure high-quality education in Nigerian theatre and film studies. The approaches, methods and resources used are explored, with some being recommended for these disciplines in the belief that their adoption will promote efficient training methods that will produce professionals sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of teaching and practices for all, both within and outside the formal school setting. This is why Weege (2006, in Adeyemo et al., 2011:235) states that a theatre and film trainer should have a good understanding of the professional and educational enterprise itself, facilities for the training, and access to the technological products used to record and store information. Such approaches as the Demonstration and Project methods are embraced in Nigerian theatre and film, more so in such specialisation as Dance, Acting, Directing, Studio management, and other creative courses, and some laboratory-based courses that involve practical and studio work, such as recording and Editing. Although the choice of approach is most often subject to the availability of the requisite facilities, which are mostly in short supply due to a lack of proper funding, the present author believes that it is approaches and methods such as this that should be emphasized, as they align with social constructivist theory, which puts the learner at the centre of learning, allowing them to be part of the processes aimed at transforming them. The Demonstration Method involves learners' direct involvement in the learning process. Here, teaching follows a number of steps that require students' use of their visual and

auditory capacities. This can be easily combined with other approaches as a technique in theatre and film education.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The research uses arguments generated by postcolonial and social constructivist theory to reinforce its position. Its multidisciplinary nature necessitates drawing on the arguments of related theories for support; innovation and diffusion theory; Postcolonial theory and social constructivism are adopted as the meta-theory that is expected to anchor all the steps taken to achieve the research's objectives and goals and interpret the findings. The media theory of innovation and diffusion is employed to explore the use of Internet technologies.

The methodology used in conducting this research is pragmatic, enabling the researcher to combine qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering and analysis and to make recommendations in line with the educational goal of this study. In this research, the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the Lagos State University (LASU) and the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Lagos State University of Education (LASUED) were used as case studies, as the two institutions combined theatre and film courses in their core curriculum, and to actualize the objectives of this study. The descriptive survey research method was employed, using a pragmatic approach and a mixed methods research design. The stratified random sampling method was used to select the population sample. 100 students and 24 lecturers were drawn from the Department of Theatre Arts within the two institutions (50 Students and 12 lecturers from the respective departments) to answer the questionnaire in order to provide qualitative data. In addition, the purposive sampling technique was used in selecting 24 staff (academics), 12 each from the two institutions, who were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. Focus group discussions were also organized for additional data, in order to ensure the adequacy and reliability of the questionnaire and interview data.

The goals of present-day education have changed from the reproduction of acquired knowledge (Czerniewicz and Brown, 2009) to empowering learners for lifelong learning in a way that helps them cope with the challenges of contemporary life (Nigeria National Conference Report, 2014). These goals are aligned with the United Nations' new sustainable development objectives, which prescribe 'a quality education that can reduce poverty and hunger, improve health, enable equality, build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation while on the other hand ensuring peace and justice' (Global Partnership, 2016; UNESCO, 2017). However, the realisation has dawned that the mere availability of the Internet is not enough, since guaranteed access to its technological resources is no assurance of its effective use at all levels of education, particularly the tertiary level, where theatre and film education is undertaken. This consideration is what informs this research, which explores the use of Internet technologies in overcoming the challenges in teaching and learning in theatre and film education, providing a seamless learning experience by combining theory with practice.

Findings

This study confirms the existence of Internet technologies in Nigeria and its use for the enhancement in conducting learning of theatre and film, albeit constrained by social factors, some peculiar to Nigeria, such as the incessant electrical power failures, and others more generally identified as associated with the dialectics of struggle between social changes and the challenges associated with such changes (Harvey, 1993; Attanasio and Giogi, 2017). The research also shows that the Internet is used by students and lecturers for both academic

and social purposes, though more for the latter. These findings are substantiated by Use and Gratification Theory, Social Constructivism, Theories (1965 and 1986, respectively). These theories help identify factors that can facilitate Internet use by learners.

The findings reveal that students' emphasis on the use of social communication technology is not unconnected with the culture that tertiary institution students exhibit, a culture that encourages perpetual contact between friends. This position is corroborated by Hall and Baym (2012). However, Kuznekoff and Titsworth (2013) and Kraushaar and Novak (2010) observe that young adults' intimate use of social communication technology has become crucial, requiring that teachers become proficient in the use of Internet technologies. The issue here is that the habit formation implicit in culture can actually be used to advantage for learning. Thus, to promote digital culture and educate the population for competence, digital technology must be fully integrated into the theatre and film' curricula. The study suggests that the current ad hoc arrangement in which lecturers and students cannot access the Internet outside their institutions' ICT Centre should be jettisoned, advocating a more concrete arrangement by which Internet access for staff and students in these institutions across the country can be facilitated.

The research also reveals that the use of digital technologies does not of itself affect the quality of teaching and learning in this sector of education in a straightforward way, nor will an increase in the number of Internet-based or other online facilities automatically lead to the improvement of learning. Saljo (2010) observes that the impact of digital technologies on learning in theatre and film hinges on the positive harmonization of several factors, among which are social, cultural and pedagogical ones. Examples are working relationships between the home and the departments, learner engagement, group participation and continual feedback. The Social Construction of Reality Theory maintains that all new ideas and innovations, such as Internet technologies, are social products emanating from the social environment that humans can use to advantage, as people generate them to make their existences worthwhile.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study focuses on the educational deployment of the Internet and its allied applications for the enhancement of teaching and learning of theatre and film in Nigeria. The study aims to address barriers faced by lecturers and students, barriers related to affordable access, threats that hamper access and use, digital literacy and confidence, and the availability of access to relevant content, applications and services. To achieve its set objective, two tertiary institutions were used as case studies: Lagos State University (LASU) and Lagos State University of Education. The choice of the two institutions was premised on the availability of these courses at the institutions and the location of the institutions in Lagos State, the economic nerve centre of the country, with a preponderance of required technological infrastructure and facilities that can support the use of the Internet.

The study recommends that efforts be concentrated on ways of educating potential Internet users about the workings of the technology through seminars, workshops and in-house training. This will help strip the Internet of the mystique woven around it by technicians and engineers who hinder prospective users from using the Internet in Nigeria. It is further suggested that the institutions adopt a 'catching the student young' policy by introducing them to digital literacy early in their education. This is considered very important in the application of online education.

To achieve this, curriculum changes in favour of technologically-driven teaching methodologies should be adopted to ensure that Internet technology becomes the teaching and learning tool it ought to be and to redirect the use of Internet technology from social to academic use by converting its tools from social to learning purposes. An excellent demonstration of this is Blackboard on Google, currently used by institutions in most Western countries. It is recommended that measures be enacted to promote public and private sector partnerships that facilitate the acquisition of Internet-based infrastructures and facilities that can help improve the quality of teaching and learning in the various departments offering courses in theatre and film studies. This effort can help make the use of this technology available in tertiary institutions, as in technologically advanced countries.

This study also recommends proper monitoring and supervision by the government of institutional compliance with EFA and UNESCO prescriptions on making educational technology facilities available to all students. However, this requires concerted efforts on the part of the government to increase funding for the educational sector. The government should endeavor to meet the UN prescription of 26 per cent of the annual national budget (EFA Monitoring Report, 2015) allocated to education, to enable the educational sector to conform to the national education policy of driving national development through education, driven by technology. These facilities are capital-intensive, and the government should commit more funds to them to demonstrate its commitment to the proper development of its citizenry through education.

This recommendation becomes essential in light of the typical state and national educational facilities. Beyond that, the government should seek to increase the amount of, and access to, up-to-date ICT equipment and Internet-based infrastructural facilities in all higher schools of learning, as well as provide adequate resources, including bandwidth in proportion to the school population. It is recommended that the colleges adopt effective strategies to enhance staff skills in the use of online facilities that can help deliver their curricula with increased access to online facilities for students, staff and parents.

The institutions are advised to digitize their activities with online checking of student results. Information about their academic programmes, assessments, reporting, monitoring and evaluation is essential for digitization. The study considers it imperative for teachers to take advantage of Internet technologies to enhance their skills in order to keep abreast of global developments. Lecturers must change their current perceptions and attitudes toward Internet technologies when these are used for their career growth and personal development. For Lecturers in our various departments of theatre and film to be able to compete with their counterparts in technologically developed nations, they must undergo intensive skills development and training in digital literacy, particularly in Internet technologies. Thus, all stakeholders in the institutions, including institution supervisory bodies and management, should make concerted efforts to ensure that the lecturers are always attuned to new global developments in their profession.

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