

The Imperatives of Physical Education in the Training of Artists in Nigeria

LES IMPÉRATIFS DE L'ÉDUCATION PHYSIQUE DANS LA FORMATION DES ARTISTES AU NIGÉRIA

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Abstract: Despite the fact that physical education plays an important role in general education, it has not been given adequate consideration in the training of actors in Nigeria. Consequently, most actors lack the physical fitness required to accomplish acting roles on stage and screen in Nigeria. In this regards, the study identifies and presents physical education as an indispensable academic disciplines from which acting instructors, actors trainees, and theatre practitioners can adapt, modify, and apply physical education instructions and programmes to the training of performing artists in Nigeria. In the process, the study applied the experimental and control group research methods to monitor and record the effect of the exercise regimes on actors' trainees over the study period. The result obtained show that the application of physical education programmes, instructions and activities to the training artists would guaranteed actor's physique and physical fitness to withstand the physical demands of acting today, so as to improved their performances on stage and screen. The paper, therefore calls on the performing artists in the academics, the management of public and private theatres in Nigeria to articulate of policies that will enable them confidently apply physical education requirements in the development of actors over a stretch of time.

Key words: Imperatives; Physical; Education; Training; Artist

Résumé: Malgré le fait que l'éducation physique joue un rôle important dans l'éducation générale, elle n'a pas été donnée aucune considération dans la formation des acteurs au Nigéria. En conséquence, la plupart des acteurs n'ont pas la forme physique nécessaires pour accomplir de rôles joués sur la scène et sur l'écran au Nigeria. A cet égard, l'étude identifie et présente l'éducation physique en tant que'une discipline académique indispensable à partir de laquelle les enseignants, les stagiaires et les praticiens du théâtre peuvent adapter, modifier et appliquer les instructions et les programmes de l'éducation physique pour la formation des artistes au Nigéria. Dans le processus, l'étude a appliqué les méthodes expérimentales et les méthodes de groupe

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de contrôle de recherches pour surveiller et enregistrer les effets de régimes des exercices sur les acteurs au cours de la période scolaire. Le résultat obtenu montre que l'application des programmes, des instructions et des activités de l'éducation physique pour les artistes pourrait assurer la forme physique des acteurs, à fin de répondre aux exigences physiques d'aujourd'hui, de manière à améliorer leurs performances sur la scène et sur l'écran. Cet article invite donc les artistes dans les académies, la direction des théâtres publics et privés au Nigeria à articuler des politiques de réforme qui leur permettront d'appliquer des exigences de l'éducation physique dans le développement des acteurs pendant une certaine période.

Mots-Clés: sexes dans les organisations arabes; organisations dans les Emirats arabes unis; praticiens de relations publiques; théorie de conflits interpersonnels

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of physical education in general education is acknowledged in scholarship. According to Charles Butcher (1975:77), physical education programs can contribute to academic performance by providing daily movement experience and instruction in selected motor activities, promoting physical fitness and good health practices toward the development of the individual. The performing artist is no exception. Movement is imbued in theatre. Various theatre events and musical performances are characterized by stylization and symbolism of movement (Wilson, 2001:109). In Nigeria, like other African countries, there are some indigenous theatres like the Yoruba *Alarinjo theatre*, which often calls for special skills in mine, juggling, somersaulting and acrobatics. To accomplish these stylized and symbolic physical movements, the performer needs to be a physical fit. Perhaps, this is among the reasons why many theatre scholars like Edwin Wilson (2001:91-113) and Robert Cohen (2000:63-68) have advocated for the vigorous training of actors' physiological and psychological instruments during the years of formal training, and during their career as professionals. For example, Wilson recommends warm-up exercises for body movement and vocal rehabilitation. He insists that, in the modern training of performers, art teachers should borrow training techniques and instructions from other disciplines.

However, a review of the training in Nigerian academic theatres shows that vigorous and intensive physical training of actors is not given due consideration. Perusal of the contents of recent curricula of our Departments of Theatre arts like the *Information Handbook for the B.A in Theatre Arts Degree Program*, shows that physical education is not given due consideration. Moreover, my experience both as a postgraduate student and a lecturer in Nigerian university theatres shows that physical education programs are not incorporated into the training needs of actors.

The worry is that our academic theatres may be producing performing artists whose physiological and psychological instruments are rigid, relatively overweight, poor adaptability to stress, neuro-muscular tension, and fatigue.

Perhaps, these conditions may render most performing artists physically unfit to engage in acting activities demanding sustained physical effort on stage and screen. Perhaps, this oversight on the part of the performing artists in the academic and professional theatre is informed by lack of awareness about the role of physical education in theatre practice. In this regard, this paper therefore explores the potentials of physical education in the training of artists in Nigeria.

This study of physical education and theatre practice in Nigeria is based on the theoretical frameworks of Konstantin Stanislavky's theory of acting, Meyerhold's biomechanics.

2. CONSTANTIN STANISLAVKY'S THEORY OF ACTING (1863-1938)

Constantin Stanislavky was a Russian actor, director and teacher who articulated series of principles and techniques of realistic acting, which today are regarded globally as fundamental to the teaching and practice of theatre (Wilson, 2001:97-113; Brockett, 436-437); Stanislavky is widely known as the father of modern actors' training because of his pioneering role in evolving the psycho-physical training of actors. These principles are often referred to as "The system" or "The method" in some circles (Inegbe, 2005:121). The Stanislavky system holds that the actor must at all time attain a state of physical and vocal relaxation. Moreover, actors must be schooled in the art of concentration and observation, as well as establish or pay attention to specifics. The system also holds that the actor must always seek inner justification for everything done on stage through the application of the "Magic IF". The system also emphasizes psycho-physical action, pointing out that the re-enactment of the most selected physical action would be the most direct physical route to revealing the characters' emotion. In order to be proficient in his role, Stanislavky recommends that the actor's physiological and psychological instruments should be thoroughly, vigorously trained and well developed through series of warm-up-exercises for body, voice, imagination and conditioning during the years of training and professional career. The aim is to enable the actor develop physical fitness and composure to respond efficiently and effectively to acting demands (Wilson, 2001:101; Brockett, 1999:437).

The implication is that Stanislavky's principles of vigorous and intensive training of actor's physiological and psychological instruments paralleled the concept of exercise physiology and psychology in physical education. It compels us to look into physical education and training that can improve the performance of theatre artists.

3. THE NATURE OF THEATRE IN NIGERIA

Our interest in the relevance of physical education in theatre practice in Nigeria, is partly influenced by the special forms of theatre. Edwin Wilson (2001:104-110) holding discussions on performer's training today argues graphically that certain types of theatre and theatre events require specific body movements and stage movements that have physical and vocal demand. According to Wilson, proficiency in physical skill performances in various theatres, therefore, requires rigorous and intensive physical training, as well as techniques from other disciplines if need arises. Of greatest interest to us are experimental, avant-garde and musical theatres. These forms of theatre require graceful, careful, precise or stylized and symbolic movements like acrobatics, gymnastics and somersaulting, sliding, swaying and miming all of which require rigorous intensive and extensive training. Writing on Asian theatre, (Beijing Opera), Oscar Brockett most vividly articulates this argument when he states:

All stage movement is related to dance, since it is rhythmical, mimetic, and symbolic. Furthermore, each word is accompanied by movement intended to enhance or explain its meaning. Such stage gesture has been fully codified. There are seven basic hand movements, many special hand-movements more than twenty different pointing gestures, more than twelve special leg movements, and a whole repertory of sleeve and beard-movements. Methods of walking or running vary with each role. The prescribed gestures and movements are combined according to character mode, situations and other conditions. (1999:6097-608)

In Nigeria, as in much of Africa, there are many indigenous performance traditions which combine highly formalized and symbolic movement with gestures like acrobatics, mime, rhythmic pattern and circus movements that require attentiveness, flexibility, speed, agility and force. This is true of the *Atilogwu* dance, the *Npokiti* dance of *Umanze*, *Ibori* performance and the Yoruba *Alarinjo* theatre (Ogunbiyi 1981:10; Eneweossie, 1991:6).

Without mincing words, for contemporary performers in Nigeria to re-enact these indigenous performance on stage and screen, they must undergo intensive physical training and exercise to assume the state of physical fitness to perform.

Beyond this indigenous performance, actor trainees and theatre practitioners in Nigeria demonstrate the contemporary art of acting characterized by “strange movements” or actions that have physical and vocal demand. These emphatically entail traveling the diagonal on the stage, moving the muscles of the body to electrify both themselves and audience. In this regard, they may walk, fall, stand, sit, run, twist, extend their limbs and snoop violently. Sometimes, they shout, spring about uproariously, hop, swing and sway. Sometimes, they may somersault, bend, stretch, curl, rise, turn, leap, skip, push, kneel, roll or kick. Again, they may take different postures and facial expressions to achieve composition, picturisation and rhythm on stage and screen. In the process, the performer’s body and kinesics enlarge, energy is released and lost, and fatigue creep in. Perhaps, it is in this light that Mathew M. Umukoro (2001:34) graphically articulates these propensities when he asserts that:

Acting in particular is a high skill art with a deceptively facile appearance. Ironically, the ultimate test of good acting is the capacity to make it look all so natural and so easy, belying the horrendous amount of physical, intellectual and psychological energies that must have gone into preparing a role.

Undoubtedly, if the performer in Nigeria and elsewhere must continue to play his or her role, then he needs to be physically fit all the time. He needs to possess the qualities of physical fitness as earlier explained. The body and mind must be completely liberated and stress-free. This, in fact, is at the root of rigorous and intensive physical training and exercise in theatre. The actor must continually strive to acquire physical education so as to be able to appreciate physical fitness and the modalities for attaining it.

In this regard, a clear cut explanation of physical education and its development objectives may be tantamount to jarring all actors seemingly impenetrable to innovations.

4. WHAT IS PHYSICAL EDUCATION?

Physical education is that of education that is concerned with the development and utilization of the individual’s voluntary, purposeful movement capabilities and with directly related mental, emotional and social responses (Nixon and Jewett, 1980:27). According to Bucher (1975:76), physical education is a phrase of general education concerned with the development of body and spirit as well as the transmission of knowledge. It places emphasis on the building of physically, emotionally; mentally and socially fit individuals and society. Generally, the basic aim of organized physical education is to create an enabling environment that generates selected movement experience and desirable responses that stimulate the optimal development of the human potentials in all aspects of life (Nixon and Jewett 1980:63). Because of its unique importance to human endeavour, many physical educators have chosen to join forces with scholars in other disciplines with mutual interest to propagate the ideals of physical education towards human growth and development of professional skills. In the United States, as in much of Europe, efforts have been intensified at the college and university levels to transfer instructional programs of physical education to other academic units such as the department of performing arts, speech and drama and that of music (Nixon Jewett 1980:4).

Synonymous with physical education and training is Physical fitness. Physical fitness refers to the organic capacity of humans to perform the normal tasks of duty, living without undue tiredness or fatigue or having a reserve of strength and energy available to satisfactorily meet any emergency demand. The attributes of physical fitness are resistance to disease, muscular strength and endurance, cardiovascular respiratory endurance, muscular power, flexibility, speed, ability, coordination, balance and accuracy (Duhu, 1978:4; Nixon & Jewett 1980:177). Physical fitness scholars believe that man is a muscular creature equipped with neuromuscular mechanism that stimulates movement of infinite variety and

magnitude. Moreso, they presuppose that man's adjustment to physical activities is induced to a greater extent by his fitness in motor abilities. The concept of physical fitness holds that all humans properly fed up, without defects or handicaps may be prone to physical deficiencies. In this regard, advocates of physical fitness argue that physical fitness test and other measurements are basic to man's survival. The concept of physical fitness acknowledges the place of the physical educator in ensuring man's physical fitness towards survival (Duhu, 1978:12).

This study identifies with the following development objectives of physical education. Our knowledge and understanding of these objectives would enable us to appreciate its implication for theatre in Nigeria.

- Physical development objectives,
- Psycho motor and movement development objectives,
- Social development objectives,
- Cognitive development objectives,
- Economic development objectives,
- Professional development objectives

Formal physical education instructions, physical fitness test and other measurements concentrate on the development and maintenance of the individual's neuromuscular skills, muscular endurance, cardiovascular endurance and the refinement of fundamental movement. The result is a physically fit person and guarantee for effective productivity and performance (Nixon and Jewett, 1980:40-41). Physical education helps to develop effective movement and motor behavioural potentials of an individual. Formal physical education instruction and physical exercise helps to develop individuals' neuromuscular skills and refinement of fundamental movement patterns to enhance performance (Nixon and Jewett 1980:41, Butcher, 1975:56)

Physical education provides for personality and character development that stimulates group alimnet. Physical education provides a variety of activities that promote group effort, loyalty to the team (team spirit), feeling of belonging, self respect and recognition as basic for achieving collective goals (group desires). Moreso, physical education provides physical exercises and other forms of social activities that lend uniqueness to a particular cultural heritage (Nixon and Jewett 1980:276; Butcher, 1975:53). These catalogues of physical education activities provide opportunities for individuals to develop advance skills, means of expression and creativity.

The cognitive development objective deals with the accumulation of a body of knowledge, the ability to think and interpret such knowledge towards intellectual self realization of an individual. According to (Butcher 1980:58-77), physical education contributes to the ability to speak effectively by means of a catalogue of special system of physical exercises. Citing Francis Delsarte's system, a French teacher of voice and dramatics, Butcher points out that Delsarte's special system of physical exercises was aimed at conditioning artists to be physically fit to enable them have better poise to command the attention of audience.

Physical education is a professional field that provides opportunities for individuals to acquire some basic professional requirements for growth and development. Invariably, physical education programs and activities are designed to prepare individuals to meet the physical demand of specific professional roles. Since theatre like physical education is a human movement profession, achieving competence in acting on stage and screen requires mastery of a wide variety of concepts relating to human movement phenomenon. These are physiology of muscular activity, neural bases of movement, human anatomy, simple mechanics of motion, kinesiology, dance philosophy and rhythmic structure of movement. In the light of the above, physical education would enable performers to develop knowledge and competence in the field of human movement phenomenon to sharpen their professional skills in movement on stage and screen. The implication for theatre is that physical education and training would enable the performer to develop basic understanding and appreciation of physical fitness programs towards improving their performance.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The needed data for this study were obtained, using the experimental and control group research method. The use of this method is informed by the fact that our study required us to show whether or not physical education and training can improve the performance of theatre artists. It emphatically implies that our study must be structured around actual performances in which physical education requirements are applied on actor trainees over a stretch of time. That means that a baseline needs be established as well as the control group to observe for effects. This is in line with Adepoju Tejumaiye's conceptualization of experimental and control group research method. According to him, the rationale for it application in research is to observe for effects (2003:18). In the light of this, a research instrument was designed to monitor and record the effects of the physical education and physical exercise regiments on the experimental and control groups over a stretch of time. To this end, the play production of Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialist* on stage becomes appropriate. The choice of this play is unique because it provides opportunity for actor trainees to demonstrate the needed movement pattern particular of seemingly wretch mendicants like cripples.

In a nutshell, Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialist* dramatically portrays wars as among the most demonstrate reflections of man's volcanism on man. In this play, Soyinka used the context of the Nigerian Civil war to make universal statement on the incidence of war vis-a-vis the human conditions in general. The play opens with the seemingly wretch mendicants which one may view at once as victims of savage wars, bad medical practices and society's indifference at non-rehabilitation of such apparent victims (Edde, 1991:124-125)

A unique aspect of the various characters in the play is their physical disabilities as manifested in their deformed bodies that suggest the needed movement pattern for the experiment. For instance, the cripple, one of the characters in the play is limbless. Aafaa tells the cripple, "the limbless acrobat will now perform his wonderful act how to bite the dust from the classic position" (Soyinka 1971: 4-5) so far the able-bodied person to enact the role of the cripple in the play, such a person must assume the desired physical posture and movement of the character being played. This poses serious challenge for the director and actor trainees. Perhaps, to meet this challenge the need to understand and apply physical education and training regiments becomes unavoidably necessary.

6. RESEARCH SAMPLE

The simple random sampling technique was used to select samples for the study. The sample population consisted of the 200-level students offering theatre workshop (THA 209), 2007/2008 academic session, in the Department of Theatre Arts, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria. Two groups of cast were randomly selected from the class, using the tryout method of casting. This method of casting involves competitive readings for parts in a chosen play. The script, Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialist* was given out for study before the readings, and the actors have opportunities of deciding what roles they want to play and so do a better dramatized reading of the part (Nwamuo, 2002:167). This was to ensure that each member of the class has an equal chance of being selected. The first cast was considered as the experimental group and included the following actor trainees

Goyi	-	Stephen Tyavmourhh
Griple	-	Samson Okpanachi
Priest	-	Joseph Nuhu
Blindman	-	Hasssan Ibrahim
Dr. Bero	-	Hilary Agbuta
Si-Bero	-	Gloria Onuh
Iya Agba	-	Victoria Audu
Ita Mate	-	Ugbede Abdullahi
Old man	-	Olorunmila Abimbola
Aafaa	-	Ayo david

The second cast was considered as the control group and include

Aafaa	-	Martin Akpa
Blindman	-	Isah Mohammed M
Goyi	-	Olayemi Olorutimi
Cripple	-	Omachi Joseph O.
Priest	-	Kelvin G. Musa
Dr. Bero	-	Isah Daniel
Si Bero	-	Zuberu Aishat
Iya Mate	-	Mary C. Aigboka
Old Man	-	Sunday N. Okwoli

The research interests is to find out whether there is a significant difference in performance between actor trainees who have been given the physical education and training and those to which such have been denied

7. RESEARCH DESIGN

The technical approach to acting was used for the study. This approach required the actors trainees to work from outside and from inside self. The actors trainees were therefore made to study the characters in the play studied, and nothing their physical disabilities and physical actions that such a character would do.

In the process, we place the experimental group (1st cast) on effective physical education and training programs and activities. A physical educator namely Omaye, Tokula Aaron was employed to administer the necessary physical education and training regiments to the cast. Presently is in the underlying assumption is that if the actor trainees being studied can get the physical actions of the characters right, and with the desired physical education and training programs administered to them, then, high performance on stage and screen is guaranteed.

To this end, actor trainees were made to perform specific physical education activities during the rehearsal schedules. The physical educator, Omaye, A Aaron was able to demonstrates and teach the actor trainees (1st cast) the following activities on fundamental movement (locomotor and non-locomotor).

A. Locomotor: Moving through space by using the feet

- Walking: Monkey walk
- Hopping: like a lame dog or lame cock
- Jumping: Kangaroo jump

B. Non-Locomotor (Axial)

- Flexion and stretching of arms at setting, standing, kneeling, squatting, lying positions
- Swinging and swaying
- Twisting and turning

We also applied specific activities in fundamental rhythms. We were able to demonstrate and teach two out of three areas of fundamental rhythms

A. Fundamental rhythms using fundamental movement patters

B. creative movement expression-imitation of animals and people

Some specific activities in fundamental rhythms were employed. This involves the application of fundamental movement patterns like walking, running with the buttocks and galloping

Secondly, actor trainees were made to perform some non locomotor (axial) movements. These are:

- swinging and swaying
- Bending and stretching

Twisting and turning
Pushing and pulling with the buttocks and knees

Each of the above movements was performed to an even local sentimental music of greatest interest to us was the creative rhythms. We demonstrated and made the actor trainees to apply creative rhythms, specifically, pantomime movements in movement training on stage. These movements were aimed at copying people and animals. Actor trainees were made to move and copy selected movement of the physically challenge persons like the cripple.

We also considered gymnastics as a vital activity in physical fitness test programs. We were aware that specific activities in gymnastic can develop greatly the muscles group in the arms, shoulders, chest and abdomen. It helps to build strength, power and improve posture (Zauhaeus, 2006:76) so we made the actor trainees (1st cast) to perform some specific activities in gymnastics. We considered basic stunts and tumbling in individuals and with partners. Specifically, we considered the following activities.

Knee walk
Crab walk
Rabbit jump
Squat thrust
Hand walking
Hand balance

For instance, the procedure for engaging in hand balance demonstrates that an individual would proceed from a squat position, palms on the mat shoulder-width apart. Let the inside of the knees rest on the elbows, then, learn forward. Keep the head and feet from the mat so that the arms maintain the balance with the aid of the fingers spread on the mat (Zauhaeus 2006: 206).

As regard the practical on physical fitness, we considered the development of muscular strength and muscular endurance. We also considered flexibility, speed, agility, coordination balance and accuracy. We made the actor trainees to perform the following activities during the rehearsal within a stretch of time.

Running continuously for 20 minutes
Rhythmic activities dance
Athletics activities like hop, step and jump
Squat jump with books
Chinning
Callisthenic on activities
Weight lifting (light objects)
Running with objects (etc).

On the other hand, the control group (2nd cast) were made to conduct the normal acting rehearsals without the desired physical education and training programs.

The intensive rehearsals involving physical education and training were conducted for a period of three months, from 16th January to 15th March, 2008. Performances took place on the 20th and 21st March, 2008 at the Arts Theatre, Kogi State University, Anyigba.

8. DISCUSSION

After the three months intensive rehearsal involving physical education and training, two days performances involving the groups studied was organized and stage at the arts theatre.

The first night performance was scheduled for the experimental group (1st cast). During the

performance, it was observed that the actor trainees, especially, David Ayo (Aafaa), Samson Okpanachi (cripple), and Joseph Nuhu (Priest) had developed a strong physique, muscular strength, muscular endurance, agility and flexibility. The actor trainees were able to control their bodies, react quickly, efficiently and easily to the desired dramatic actions and movements on stage. They were able to move with speed while crawling with their hands, knees and buttocks, twisting the spine, tucking the knees under the chin, and performing a wide variety of movements as well as change of directions on stage. Moreso, they were able to endure good static and dramatics postures required to play the part of the cripple and other physically challenged persons. Indeed, they were able to endure an hour and thirty minutes of continuous and rigorous acting on stage.

The control group (2nd cast) performed on the second night. By the end of the production, we observed that the actor trainees who were not given physical education and training lacked the physique, skills and capacity to perform a wide variety of movement pattern. They were seriously fatigued, unable to crawl with the knees, hands and buttocks as fast as possible on stage. In fact, at the end of an hour and thirty minutes of production, we recorded poor movement and change of directions as well as stage injuries.

Our major findings in this study are that physical education and training are inexorably tied to physical fitness. The findings show that physical education exercises and activities can enable the performing artists to develop neuromuscular skills, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, speed, power, agility, coordination, balance and concentration necessary for improved performance on stage and screen. Moreso, physical exercises and activities in accord with Delserte's method can enable the performing artists to develop and control their voices to provide a wider range in pitch, greater flexibilities in volume, stress and a wider variation in quality.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Obviously, physical education has the potentials to influence the training of artists in Nigeria if adequately applied. In this regard, the study recommends that:

The management of academic theatres and other private and public theatre institutions should adopt some of the physical education curricular and programs into the teaching and practice of theatre in Nigeria.

Physical educator or advisor should be employed or deployed to serve as physical training instructor in theatre institutions in Nigeria.

The curriculum of theatre arts studies should be redesigned to incorporate some of the fundamentals of physical education. Actor trainees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels should be made to take elective courses in the Department of Physical and Health Education of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Actor trainees and theatre practitioners should develop interest in physical education and training regimen. They should look forward to physical education department or agencies for opportunities to design programs and activities to improve and maintain physical fitness to guarantee high performance on stage.

10. CONCLUSION

In this study, we have tried to find out whether or not physical education and training can improve the performance of theatre artists. Experimental and control groups were the research method. To this end, actor trainees were made to perform specific activities on fundamental movements, fundamental rhythms and gymnastics. This study believes that physical education and training can improve the performance of theatre artists if adequately applied. The study believes that if the performing artists must

be physically fit to meet the physical demands of acting, then, physical education activities, exercises and programs (physical fitness) must be applied and be part of their daily training. However, the Onus lies on the management of public and private theatres to articulate reform policies that would ensure the integration of physical education into the teaching and practice of theatre in Nigeria.

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