

Reviving Igala Traditional Theatre for Youth Employment

Mohammed Attai Yakubu,

Department of English, Federal University Gashua, Yobe State.
adukanyaagbodo@gmail.com

Sani Isah,

Department of English, Federal University Gashua, Yobe State

Gambo Jinjiri

Department of English, Federal University Gashua, Yobe State
DOI: 10.56201/ijelcs.vol.10.no1.2025.pg22.31

Abstract

It is the need to minimize the rate of youth and graduate unemployment in Nigeria that gives rise to this research. A number of researches in literature are critical works which are contributions to the existing literature with little attempt on the application of literary genres, especially the African oral forms to cases of unemployment in Nigeria. This research is a paradigm shift from the above tradition. Its purpose is discovery of oral forms and traditional performances as a treasure trove waiting to be harnessed for monetary purpose. The concern of the researchers is reduction of the rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria. The methodology adopted in this research is sampling technique to determine the population of the respondents. Questionnaire was administered on the sampled respondents. The answers to the questionnaire provided the data from which the findings were generated. Igala trado theatre has the potential to generate employment for youths. A lot of people are interested in seeing/watching Igala traditional drama.

Key words: *Igala traditional theatre, youth employment, legends, myths, folktales*

Introduction

African culture has a lot of potential for entertainment. This has not been fully exploited by Nigerian youths whom, after graduation from schools keep searching for the white collar jobs with little prospect of getting one. The African oral forms and traditional performances studied in African oral literature: folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, chants, heroic poetry, panegyrics, incantations, festival observances, masquerades, etc. are potential sources of drama that can be transmuted for performance on the stage. They form the traditional theatre. Little amount of money is needed for the realization of this. Therefore, the focus of this research is to identify interesting and stimulating oral forms and traditional performances that are in existence in the Eastern Senatorial District of Kogi State, Nigeria, that can be harnessed for stage performance.

It is high time youths were orientated and made to see the abundant materials for traditional theatre that are lying untapped. Negative attitudes towards cultural practices need to change. Some youths, given their religion and western education see certain cultural practices as fetish and heathen. Before the advent of the white man, African oral performances were the major means of entertainment. Folktales were used to entertain, educate and mold the character of the younger ones; proverbs were used to flavor conversation, praise, advise, warn, and scold; myths and legends served educational and entertainment purposes; festivals and masquerade dance were meant for entertainment; incantations and rituals were for religious purpose. All these aspects of African folklore are studied in oral literature and they can be calibrated for stage performance as traditional theatre.

African oral literature provides a lot of resource materials for the African written literature. Many African writers have discovered the vitality and utility of the oral forms. This is evident in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*; Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*; Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*; Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child*, *The River Between*, *Devil on the Cross*, etc; Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horse Man*, J.P. Clark's *The Ozidi Saga*, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*, and other works of African authors too numerous to mention. The adaptation of these oral forms in the works of African authors, apart from projecting the culture of the people, enhances the entertainment and aesthetic values of those works. Further transmutation of these forms into stage performance will generate financial benefits.

African folktales, myths, legends, etc. are a plethora of stimulating and interesting stories. Apart from their dramatisation in a traditional theatre, they are potential raw materials for Nollywood video industry. They are valuable raw materials for script writers for film production. The people that know the stories and those who do not will be interested to see their performances on the stage. African oral forms are an embodiment of wisdom and anybody who has the knowledge of these forms can develop them with fully fledged themes to meet critical standard. For example, an Igala proverb: *owo ki gwura nwe ejo alo* (it is the hand that digs the hole that is bitten by the snake) can be transmuted with characters, themes, plot, and setting to the stage for performance. The abundant oral forms in the Igala language are raw materials for traditional theatre. We should encourage dramatisation of these oral forms to improve their entertainment value. Youths that can venture into it have a good role to play. Every festival has a purpose. The purpose provides the themes of the festival.

The business of traditional theatre that is being advocated here is not capital intensive. It is a project that is feasible which can be executed by one person or a group of persons. What it requires mainly are: the knowledge of oral forms and traditional performances; the knowledge of the English language or any other language that will be used for translation if the need arises; selection of casts to form the performing troupe; a theatre (class room, town hall, a fenced open field or market place, the premises of the local government secretariat, etc.) and other paraphernalia of theatre. This theatre can operate as a mobile one, especially at the beginning. The essential qualities for a practitioner of this entertainment business are dedication, commitment, hard work, resilience, perseverance, and determination.

Entertainment or relaxation is part of what makes society work effectively and sets people in the right frame of mind. And it is a thriving business. Entertainment is effective in stress management. It calms down the nerves; releases tension and comforts the soul. People love entertainment and they are willing to pay for it. Literature or any serious means of entertainment has the capacity to make people reflect on their lives. Drama induces laughter. It sometimes confronts people with complex human situations and experiences. Stories with these attributes abound in our society as well as in folktales, legends, myths, festivals, etc. that when collected, translated and transmuted will be a good stage spectacle. This research will provide youths the kind of orientation that can gear them towards self-employment.

Problem Statement

Unemployment among Nigerian youths has assumed a dimension that requires collective effort and collaboration with the government, private organizations and individuals. It is a hydra headed monster as it is one of the causes of social ills like armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, etc. in Nigeria.

The Ministry of Education and curriculum designers have attempted curriculum reviews to make the products of Nigerian educational institutions employable or be self-employed yet statistics have always shown an alarming rate of unemployment. Researchers have in different ways carried out studies to mitigate rising case of unemployment in Nigeria but we seem to be where we are without any significant improvement.

Oral African Literature is a course in the Department of English in Nigerian universities. But the objective like most of those of other courses in Nigerian educational institutions is to fulfill the credit requirement for the award of B.A. honors and it ends there. The course is not designed to equip students with the requisite skills needed for employment creation. Moreover, most of the contributions by Oral African Literature scholars are appreciation and criticism. The present research is a paradigm shift from this general practice. It seeks to reveal the entertainment value of African traditional theatre and its potential for employment generation. It as well seeks to discover the resources for stage performance that abound in the African oral forms. Furthermore, the research seeks to stimulate a paradigm shift in curriculum design in Oral African literature from literary appreciation and criticism to stage performance given the present challenges in the labour market.

Literature Review

A brief conceptual and empirical consideration maybe necessary at this point in order to define the focus of the research and put things in the right perspective. First of all, according to Brockett, drama is “the script of a play, the written work that is used as the basis for theatrical performances”, while theatre is the building (2). Of course, theatre is the physical structure with the paraphernalia of theatre for performance. Drama is the story written on the script or that which is memorized by actors and actresses ready for stage performance (2). The traditional theatre which is the concern

of the researchers in this work has adaptation of folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, incantations, festivals, etc. as the script which is similar to Brockett's idea of drama or story. The adapted oral forms should be memorized for performance. Theatre as defined by Brockett and theatre as conceived as a traditional one are one and the same thing because it is a place with a stage for actors and a place for the audience to sit or stand. It may be an open field or a building. But it should be noted that Brockett's idea of drama and theatre is western in orientation therefore this research is slightly different from Brockett's conception. Brockett's work is a contribution to literary appreciation and practical criticism which is the way of several literary scholars. The focus of the present research is a shift from criticism to practical application of oral forms for job creation in Nigeria.

Yakubu's "Drama as a Source of Job Creation in Nigeria: An Example of Emmy Unuja Idegu's *The Legendary Inikpi*" (79-82) is closer to the present study in its aim and objectives. However, the research is a scratch on the surface as the work is just an overview of drama as a source of job creation. The methodology of the research ends at the descriptive level. No questionnaire and interviews to obtain the opinions of stakeholders and people who are key players in job creation, and no field work. The present research seeks to investigate the feasibility of adaptation of African oral forms for theatrical performance and their potential for monetary benefit.

In a research on Tiv oral poetry, Jija observes that "an examination of African oral poetry reveals vast traditions, concerns and styles of performance, which employs a range of devices" (29). Jija's research is on criticism of oral poetry, not a calibration of oral forms for theatrical performance which is the concern of the present research. Similarly, Jenkwe notes that Tiv oral verse is just like those of most peoples of Africa which are integrated into their ways of lives. They deal with day to day issues and problems of life and poetry, as an aspect of the communal way of life is enjoyed by everybody (1). His article provides an insight into Tiv oral poetry and those of other Africans and thus it can be of use in the process of galvanizing oral forms into trado theatre. But generally, the work is descriptive for the purpose of appreciating Tiv oral poetry which does not suggest adaptation for theatrical performance.

Amase and Ikyer's research which "seeks to show how the Tiv use *Ivom* dance songs as effective tools for social engineering, mobilization and reformation" (98) comes close in its practical orientation to the present one. But the gap is that the work does not explain how *Ivom* dance festival can be harnessed for youth employment. Furthermore, Amase in another research identified *Inyamtswan* dance among the Ikurav-ya, Navev, and Ishangev-ya clans of Kwande Local Government Area which is accompanied by masquerade dance. This research on *Inyamtswan* dance festival is descriptive which does not seek to provide any solution to the problem of poverty in Tiv land in general and Kwande Local Government Area in particular.

Moreover, a review of Usman, Auwal, and Lamido's contribution reveals that their study is just for academic exercise which does not steer towards employment generation using Bura folktales. This is not the target of the present research. They analyze "the forms of wisdom embodied in

folktales and the benefits such renditions bequeath on society” (166). What they have done is a contribution to the existing literature on African oral forms.

However, the present research is charting a new course different from the practice in literary criticism within which the studies reviewed here fall into. This research is a shift from theory, criticism, and appreciation to application and adaptation of oral forms and traditional performances for theatrical practice for gainful youth employment.

Methodology

This section presents the research methodology adopted for the research. The presentation is under the following headings:

- (i) Study Samples
- (ii) Research Instrument
- (iii) Method of Data Collection and Analysis
- (i) **Study Samples:** In this research, the Kogi East Senatorial District is the entire population from which samples of respondents were taken. The senatorial district has three axes which are: the Idah axis, Dekina, and Ankpa axis. From these axes, Idah, Anyigba, and Ankpa towns were sampled for the study. One of the reasons for choosing these towns is because they are the major areas of the senatorial district. Secondly, these areas attract large population and they are semi-cosmopolitan. Their large population has economic advantage for theatrical production. Furthermore, the tertiary institutions in the district are located in these three areas. The Federal Polytechnic Idah and Kogi State College of Health Technology are situated in Idah; Prince Abubakar Audu University is situated in Anyiga, and Kogi State College of Education at Ankpa. We believe that the findings from these areas will be reflective of other areas of the senatorial district.
- (ii) **Research Instrument:** The researchers made a list based on the questions on the questionnaire (see appendix 1) administered on the respondents. The arrangement is in two segments: the bio-data of respondents and information on Igala traditional theatre which is in tabular form. The research instrument with the data collected is displayed under Method of Data Collection and Analysis. The purpose of this research instrument is to help the researchers identify the only aspects of theatrical production that are considered relevant to this study. The list was validated by Dr Amase Emmanuel L and Dr Tijani Muhammad.
- (iii) **Method of Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for this research were collected based on the information drawn from the questionnaire administered on the respondents. Below is the detail of the data collected followed by the analysis.

Bio-Data of Respondents

- A. **Age Bracket:** 18 - 30, 31 - 40, 41 - 50, 51 and above
- B. **Status:** employee, employer, unemployed, student, business
- C. Can you speak the Igala Language fluently? Yes, No

Igala Traditional Theatre

	No. of Respondents		Total Number of Respondents	% Score		Total %
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
1a. Those interested in Igala drama 1b. Those not interested	142	8	150	95	5	100
2a. Those interested in Igala folktales 2b. Those not interested in Igala folktales	138	12	150	92	8	100
3a. Those who have seen/watched Igala drama 3b. Those who have not	132	18	150	88	12	100
4a. Those interested in the dramatisation of Inikpi legend 4b. Those who are not	146	4	150	97	3	100
5a. Those interested in seeing/watching Omodoko/Myth of River Inachalo 5b. Those who are not interested	144	6	150	96	4	100
6a. Those interested in seeing/watching Ameh Oboni drama 6b. Those not interested	141	9	150	94	6	100
7a. Those who are interested in seeing/watching folktales 7b. Those who are not interested	144	6	150	96	4	100
8a. Those interested in the production and dramatisation of Igala stories 8b. Those who are not interested	130	20	150	87	13	100
9a. Those interested in acting as a profession 9b. Those who are not interested	98	52	150	65	35	100
10a. Those who know some Igala folktales, myths, legends, etc. 10b. Those who do not	109	41	150	73	27	100

The above is the research instrument designed based on the questionnaire used for data collection. It is divided into two parts which comprise the bio-data of respondents and the table with the

information needed on Igala traditional theatre. Every response on the questionnaire ticked by a respondent was counted and recorded accordingly. The questions required yes or no answers.

The research sample covered a total number of 150 respondents with fifty from each of the three axes of the Kogi East Senatorial District. The respondents cut across ages, genders, religions, and occupations. 98 respondents, representing 65% of the total number of the population sample (respondents) fall between the age bracket of 18 and 30. This shows that youths form the preponderance of the population of the respondents. This is followed by 29 respondents between 31 and 40 age bracket, representing 19% of the total population. Responses by the respondents in the above two age brackets are germane to the findings of this research.

Out of the total number of respondents, 101 are students, which is 67% of the total population. As students, the responses from this group present a remarkable contribution to the findings of this research.

The yes or no answers ticked by the 150 respondents to the questionnaire on Igala traditional theatre reveal their interest or otherwise as follows:

The answers to the first question reveal that 142 respondents, representing 95% of the total number of the respondents are interested in seeing/watching Igala drama while the non-interested ones are 8, representing 5% of the total population. Similarly, a good number of respondents as revealed by the second question like to listen to Igala folktales. 138 respondents (92%) indicated interest in listening to folktales while 12 (8%) of them are not interested.

Answers to question three reveal that most of the respondents are acquainted with Igala drama. This is encouraging as it will stimulate production and expansion of Igala drama. Furthermore, a good number of respondents indicated interest in seeing/watching the dramatisation of Inikpi legend. 146 (97%) respondents are interested while those who are not are 4 (3%). Similarly, those who are interested in seeing/watching Omodoko legend/the Myth of the River Inachalo are 144 (96%) while only 6 (4%) are not interested. Moreover, the dramatisation of the legendary Ameh Oboni has 141 (94%) of the total number of the respondents who are interested while the non-interested respondents are 9, representing 6% of the total population. As for the Igala folk tales, 144 (96%) respondents are interested while 6 (4%) are not.

Questions 8 and 9 are related to expertise. It is related to those who are interested in choosing theatrical as a profession. It is not everybody that maybe interested in this but those with the skills or those who are ready to acquire the skills for a livelihood. Therefore, those who are interested in the production and dramatisation of Igala stories are 130: which is 87% of the total population while those who are not interested are 20, representing 13% of the population. For acting, there are 98 (65%) respondents that are interested with 52 (35%) who are not.

Finally, 109 (73%) respondents have the knowledge of Igala folk tales, myths, legends, etc. while 41 (27%) of them do not have. With this, the present research has the potential to broaden the

horizons of those with and without the knowledge of Igala traditional stories. From the above analysis, there is the need for the revival of Igala trado theatre for job creation.

Summary of Findings

- A lot of job opportunities abound in Igala trado theatre.
- A good number of youths are interested in acting, production, and dramatisation of Igala traditional stories.
- A good number of speakers and non-speakers of the Igala language like to see/watch Igala drama.
- A good number of the respondents like to listen to Igala folktales.
- A lot of people like to see/watch the dramatisation of Inikpi, Omodoko, and Ameh Oboni legends as well as the Myth of the River Inachalo.
- People are interested in the dramatisation of Igala stories.
- A good number of people in Igala land have the knowledge of Igala folktales which form part of the raw materials of Igala trado theatre.

Conclusion

Igala traditional theatre should be revived. A good number of people are interested in Igala traditional drama, therefore, youths should be provided with incentives to consider the choice of theatrical as an occupation. Igala traditional theatre is a good source of wealth creation. It is a gold mine lying dormant waiting for exploration. Traditional theatre is a venture that does not require a huge amount of money to operate and thrive but commitment and expertise. And it should be stressed at this point that the findings of this research are applicable to every part of Africa and can replicate anywhere in Nigeria.

Furthermore, graduates of English, Literature, and Theatre Arts as well as those interested in acting should be encouraged and given the necessary incentives to practise the occupation. Oral literature is the background of traditional drama. Therefore, its curriculum should be redesigned to stimulate students into theatrical practice. They should be made to realize the job opportunities that abound in the trado theatre. Attention to trado theatre will significantly reduce unemployment and dependence on white collar jobs thereby increasing national productivity and GDP. Meanwhile, another research is necessary as a follow up to this for an exposition of the paraphernalia of the Igala traditional theatre.

Works Cited

- Amase, E. L. and Ikyer, Godwin A. “Tiv Oral Forms as Archetypes of Social Engineering: A Study of Ivom Dance Songs”, *Dutsima Journal of English and Literature (DUJEL)*, vol. 1, no1, 2018, pp. 98-108.
- Amasa, Emmanuel Lanior. *Tiv Heroic and Satirical Poetry*. Aboki publishers, 2013.
- Brockett, Oscar G. *The Theatre: An Introduction*. Holt, Rinehart and Wilson Inc, 1969.
- Jenkwe, Toryima and Yanmoel Yasi: *A Study of Tiv Oral Poetry*. AAU Vitalis Book Co. 1998
- Jija, Terseer. “Stylistic Devices in Tiv Oral Poetry: The Yanmoel”, *Dutsima Journal of English and Literature (DUJEL)*, vol. 1, no1, 2018, pp.29-38
- Usman, Mshelbwala Comfort, Dr Mohammed Auwal and Ahmad Lamido. “Analysis of Selected Folktales in Bura Language: Uses and Functions”, *Yobe Journal of Language, Literature and Culture (YOJOLLAC)*, vol. 7, 2019, pp. 166-178.
- Yakubu, Mohammed Attai. “Drama as a Source of Job Creation in Nigeria: An Example of Emmy Unuja Idegu’s *The Legendary Inikpi*”, *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol.4, no. 3, 2015, pp. 79-82

Appendix 1

REVIVING TRADO- THEATRE FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

TICK AS APPROPRIATE PLEASE

BIO-DATA

- A. Age Bracket: 18 - 30, 31 - 40, 41 - 50, 51 and above
- B. Status: employee, employer, unemployed, student, business
- C. Can you speak the Igala Language fluently? Yes, No

IGALA TRADITIONAL THEATRE

1. Do you like to see/watch Igala drama? Yes, No
2. Do you like listening to Igala folktales? Yes, No
3. Have you ever seen/watched Igala drama? Yes, No
4. Will you like to see/watch the dramatisation of Inikpi legend? Yes, No
5. Will you like to see/watch the dramatisation of Omodoko legend/the myth of the River Inachalo? Yes, No
6. Will you like to see/watch the dramatisation of the legendary Ameh Oboni? Yes, No
7. Will you like to see/watch the dramatisation of Igala folktales? Yes, No
8. Are you interested in the production and dramatisation of Igala stories? Yes, No
9. Are you interested in acting as a profession? Yes, No
10. Do you know some Igala folktales, myths, legends, etc? Yes, No