

Contending Issues and Prospects of Theatre Facilities in Selected Nigerian Universities: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This paper takes a critical look at the state of facilities and types of theatres in selected Nigerian universities, underscoring their profound influence on performances staged within these spaces. More so, the careful deployment of scenic and other technical elements has facilitated captivating productions, garnering considerable scholarly attention and documentation over the years in Nigerian university theatre parlance. However, a worrying trend has emerged in this line which is characterised by a marked decline in the availability, insufficient provision and poor maintenance of technical facilities in these Universities thereby hindering the optimal realisation of theatrical productions. The paper therefore investigates the current state of theatres at the Departments of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria and Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Oyé-Èkiti (FUOYE)³. Using the tool of comparative analysis, this paper is fore grounded in Vitruvius triad theory considering both qualitative and participant-observation methods. In its findings, the paper affirms that despite the persisting insufficient facilities across Nigerian university theatres; there exists the distinctive features of these theatres that the designers in the theatre need to fully explore to facilitating aesthetically pleasing performances.

Keywords: scenic design, theatre and performance, technical facilities, University theatre, Vitruvius triad theory

Introduction

Beyond the actors that the audiences have come to see in the theatre; the architectural design and distinctive types of the theatre equally becomes an important factor in any performance environment. The physical setting in which a performance takes place has a great impact on the audience experiences because a performance's aesthetic and creative impact are equally influenced by the technical and design

elements of the theatre. A careful balancing act between form and function is necessary in designing theatre. Both the theatre's structural soundness and its capacity to facilitate effective and productive operations must be given top priority in its design. However, it is important to note that the quality of performances at Nigerian university theatres has been seriously affected over time. This is because there has been a notable decrease in the use of the requisite technical elements, which has been made worse by poor or insufficient theatre facilities. The inadequacy, which has garnered significant attention from designers, scholars and other stakeholders including Enna (2000, pp.67-8), Oni (2004, p.109), Musa (2005, p.28) and Nwadike (2008, p.41); has ultimately had a detrimental impact on the expected robust teaching and learning outcomes of theatre technology in Nigerian universities. Consequently, this paper takes a look at the current state of theatre and available technical facilities at the three selected universities, namely: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU) and Federal University Oyé Èkìtì (FUOYE) with a view to understanding the challenges and implications for scenic design and performances in these institutions. More importantly, the three universities are carefully selected due to where they are located – Southern, Northern and Western parts of the country respectively and they are all federal government established higher institutions.

Moving forward, this paper considers its adoption of Vitruvius architectural theory necessary to aid its investigation, which focuses on theatre (structure) and the implications of the theory's attributes in relation to the selected university theatres. For instance, Brady (2018, n.p), simply submits that “architecture is shelter before it's anything else”; as such, structure, and in this context, theatre is “a fundamental societal need”.

Theoretical Perspective

This paper employs Vitruvius's triad theory (that is fore grounded in architectural theory) as a major instrument for the analysis and discussion of its subject matter under consideration. From a brief historical perspective, it is stated that Leon Alberti towards the late 15th century (1485), conceived the concept of architecture as the art of building. Therefore, he expresses that architectural theory is “the act of thinking, discussing and writing about architecture” (Fadhi, 2022, p.5). However, a former military engineer and an architect of the 1st century BC, Vitruvius, as one of the first architectural theorists, developed *Vitruvius's triad theory* from Alberti's architectural theory. Also, Vitruvius has written and established a foundation for classical architecture in “De Architectura” or “Ten Books on Architecture” around 15th century BC. The books focus on theoretical knowledge and aspects concerning architecture, ranging from music to other disciplines. For instance, one of his works - *The Life, Principles, and Architecture of Vitruvius*, Stephens & Muscato (2022), captures Vitruvius's perception of architectural theory in line with his conviction that since

“architecture is a reflection of our place in nature”, it should therefore be designed to reflect “the realities of our lives and society”.

Consequently, the theory has been upgraded severally by some architects and building engineers to suit the ever-changing demands of the modern architectures. Hence, in modern building, designers still give optimal attention to Vitruvian triad theory; the reason being that the application of its rules is highly essential for the construction of durable and aesthetically functional structure (*vitruviuss.com*). Considering the synergy between the theatre and architecture, Rufford (n.d, p.2) explains further that:

both theatre and architecture can be seen as powerful embodiments of human affairs and as complementary art forms designed to articulate the place of people within a social and spiritual totality. Theatre and architecture have enjoyed an artistically and socially productive relationship during later historical periods as well.

Additionally, as an architect, Vitruvius believed that architecture should pick some forms of aesthetics (beauty) from the 'truth of nature', because, he observed that nature's designs were based on universal laws of proportion and symmetry. The structures may be for diverse purposes such as homes, halls, churches, theatres and other edifices. From the human body structures, which serve a good model of perfection in nature, he was able to develop three attributes as guiding principles for architectural design. These are:

- i. “Firmitas” - which refers to as the “firmness” and “durability” of a structure. It supposes that for any structure to stand the test of time, it must be built on firm foundation that can stand strong for many years. Therefore, the structure must remain in good condition.
- ii. “Utilitas” is the second one which reflects the “utility” - usefulness and suitability of building. It also reveals how beneficial the building to its users. On the value attached to a structure, Morris Morgan in *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture*, reiterates Vitruvius's belief that “a building must have purpose and be used” (n.d, p.45).
- iii. “Venustas” as the third attribute, is the “beauty” in the building which should be delightful to behold. With this, Vitruvius is of a strong view that building should attract its beholders and users, which then raises their spirit, as in the case of theatre.

Wilson (2004, p. 69), while relating the theory to the theatre for meaningful theatrical experience, admits that: “whether the theater space is indoors or outdoors, large or small, the space of its stage and the relationship, of stage to audience will help determine the nature of the experience”. This invariably suggests that when a theatre is built, the main purpose is to serve its users well and the way its stage is designed matters a lot, because of its affinity to the theatre goers (audience).

Despite the importance of the three characteristics listed in Vitruvius's architectural theory and its relevance to theatre architecture, it is noteworthy that the

theory seems to ignore a number of important factors, particularly the upkeep, re-modelling and upgrading of already-existing structures, which may be jeopardised over time by wear and tear or other types of degradation. This limitation, albeit considerable, does not diminish its usefulness as a framework for the comparative study in the subsequent sections of this paper.

Research Methodology

This section highlights the efforts taken to address the research design, sampling method, study population, data collection and analysis techniques used will be further discussed in the paper. To ensure a thorough and organised analysis, these methodological issues are analysed to arriving at cohesive submission. While explaining further the significance of research methodology, Oyelekan (2019, p.1) submits that: “research is a systematic process which involves some laid down procedure to be followed for its conclusions to be acceptable”.

Meanwhile, the primary tool adopted for this paper enhances the entire discourse that is premised on qualitative research method. The latter is also supported by participant-observation approach which allows the author to have direct interview two designers and an artistic director in the selected theatres and gain access to their theatre facilities in order to have more insights into some of their challenges. Through this approach also, the photographs that are taken during the investigation equally aided our discussion and comparative analysis.

Therefore, in order to have a fair representation of all university theatres in Nigeria, the paper carefully considered the three federal universities which are situated in South Eastern, Northern and South Western Nigeria. This method provides the author the opportunity to examine the existing theatre structures, the types and unique features of their theatres and the conditions of the facilities in these selected Universities.

Literature Review

The theatre provides a wide spectrum of experiences, with each scenario representing a distinct voyage. As a thriving hub of entertainment and culture, theatre encompasses diverse creative and technologically enhanced talents, which serve as a catalyst, propelling audiences into new and exciting realms of enjoyment and involvement. This happens when theatre functions as a performance and could take place either in a dedicated place or media such as film, television, radio and others. When it comes to theatrical performances, the stage, which perhaps appears as either physical, anywhere or unseen, is a gathering place for a variety of audiences who are bound together by their common experience of seeing and participating in the performance. The audience is immersed in a shared experience that encourages emotional involvement and deep engagement. It means the coming together of people with different backgrounds and viewpoints produces a special social convergence in which the distinctions between personal experiences are temporarily suspended and a sense of oneness and mutual understanding is established. Being an essential part of the theatrical event, the overall effect and resonance of the performance are, the audience,

engages their combined attention and emotional response as the performance progresses. Hence, it is crucial to acknowledge the audience's pivotal role in enhancing the overall value of theatrical performances. Abdulmalik's (2020, p.49)'s assertion further lends credence to the notion which underscores the significance of audience engagement in the theatrical experience: "what people see in the theatre mostly forms their judgement and they perceive that what they see contributes to the impression they have about a performance at the end of the day". Interestingly, in Adeoye (2021, p.16)'s comprehensive study of "psychosocial theatre", he "identified fourteen forms and variants"; none of these can thrive without an audience. Since theatre performances are elevated from mere spectacle to a meaningful and impactful experience by the audience's collective energy and response, without an audience, these performance forms would be meaningless. It is the involvement of the audience that allows performances to transcend its component elements and take on a unique identity towards a responsive and receptive setting. Further clarification on this point highlights thus:

this is to say that irrespective of the type of venue or environment, be it any given space, formal or informal, originally conceived, oriented, structured, planned and equipped for production; be it an architectural masterpiece or an ad-hoc, created or found-space, the moment the performer steps into a performance before **an audience**, theatre is formed (Enendu 2019, p.7). [**emphasis mine**]

Meanwhile, scholars such as Ododo (2006, p. 27), Oni (2010, p. 15), Fosudo (2011, p.110), Iwuh (2017, p. 1), Enendu (2019, p. 7) and Amali (2020, p. 112) have recently explored the collaborative aspects of theatre. This growing body of research highlights the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of the field, where multidisciplinary experts converge to share knowledge, advance their skills and optimise performance. For example, Okeke (2019)'s essay identifies a few of them: "the respective artistes involved in the making of theatre include the playwright, the director, the stage manager, the actor(s), the costumer, the set designer, the light designer, the properties manager etcetera" (2019, p.134). Others include the make-up artist, special effects and sound designers. Thus, in order to make theatrical experience worthwhile, all the specialists must work in harmony with a concept to facilitate their creativity. Fosudo (2011, p.110), who explicitly notes that despite differences in their areas of expertise: "what is important however, is that all these designers work together for a single purpose and their designs and concepts must be in consonance with the director's overall vision for the play". Consequently, to create a meaningful and impactful theatrical experience, they work to facilitating a collaborative environment that enables the fullest expression of their collective creativity.

Part of the reason people put on plays and visit the theatre is to inform, educate and entertain the audience, especially when immersed in beautifully and functionally crafted scenery. The experience of seeing a creatively packaged performance in a well-equipped theatre can occasionally be more interesting, particularly if the audience

considers the theatre and the show to be one and the same. Because of this, theatre designers - such as scenic artists, costumiers, makeup artists, sound designers, lighting designers, props managers and special effects managers - rarely have the ability to function effectively without the support of adequate technical facilities. This connotes that plays are usually more successful when performed in a theatre that is adequately provided with all the required facilities. These include appropriate lighting fixtures, scenery pieces, props, and scene docks; a functional technical workshop; costume and makeup rooms; cast changing rooms; sound; a projector room; and so forth. Moreover, proper deployment of theatre designs enhances the quality of performances. Some of the designs in the theatre include sound, special effects, lighting, costume and make-up, properties and scene design. While, it is expected of the design to thrive in representing the exact locale which the script specifies; its ability to define and re-define an environment that the characters live in may be impeded where the provision of required facilities are not adequate in that theatre. Expectedly, all theatre designers need to work in collaboration to project the concept of the production; while the required tools and facilities which are meant to enhance their artistry should be in place. On scenic design, Eregare and Akpobome (2008, p. 144) concede that set “is not created for creation sake but directed toward the general unity of the performance”. To support this notion, Oren Parker, K. Smith and Craig Wolf, also maintain that “scenic design concerns itself with the total visual effect of a dramatic production” (Parker, Smith & Wolf 1990, p.14). Accordingly, the vintage point of scenic representation in play production is implied as in what enhances harmony in design is achieved when set designer works with appropriate and adequate tools in a theatre that is purposely built. Essentially, the theatre structure as a given space has a significant role to play in facilitating the quality of performances to be produced.

Furthermore, since theatre is defined by its form or shape which possesses diverse qualities; if these are carefully harnessed by designers, they are capable of enhancing theatrical performances being presented on them. While planning a performance, the qualities and inherent uniqueness of theatre forms should be given consideration to by the designers. More so, the following common stage types - Proscenium, Thrust, Arena/Theatre-in-the-round, Amphi-theatre, Open-Air theatre and so on. Presently, other types of theatres are also emerging as a result of numerous demands of ever-changing performance modes in contemporary times. Knowing the qualities of these theatre stages by the designers go a long way in fostering functional deployment of their specific works.

An Overview of Nigerian University Theatre and Facilities

The emergence of formal training in theatre as a discipline in Nigeria is traceable to the School of Drama at the then University College, Ibadan (now University of Ibadan) since 1948. This has paved the way for equipping of students with required trainings and acquisition of skills in the arts of performances. Thus, from 1962, it gave birth to awards of certificate, diploma and higher degrees at the Department of

Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan. The study of Theatre Arts then began to spread to other Universities with different appellations such as Dramatic, Creative and Performing Arts with the main purpose of equipping students both in theory and practice various skills in drama, play writing, acting, dance, music, theatre designs, theatre administration and management, directing, make up, even fashion designing and by extension, media arts and film studies/arts. However, it the base of the emergence of the study is the Western theatre influence which later advances reasons for the inclusion of robust stage designs, especially in stage performances at the University theatres. What further enhanced the training of students in this discipline was the provision of Theatre structures in different forms. Nevertheless, this as a major challenge confronting many universities that offer theatre courses still struggle to have their own designated theatre for the teaching of their students as well as for performances. In this direction, one could point out few among the Nigerian universities which have their own performance venues (theatres) which are well equipped with the required technical facilities. At the beginning, the Theatre Arts departments of University of Ibadan, Ibadan (UI), University of Lagos, Lagos (UNILAG) and University of Calabar, Calabar (UNICAL), fall into this category. With the availability of the technical equipment and facilities, the training enhanced the productivity of the manpower and students of the universities which helped prepared them for the future explorations in the field of Theatre Arts. Moving forward, many other Universities that are offering the course either made provision for theatre structures and equipped them or have on ground their own theatres with equipment that would enhance teaching and learning process. It is however appalling to note that more than six decades of the existence of the first university theatre, the technical facilities there are at the deteriorating condition, while many other theatres could hardly boast of any viable theatres.

Meanwhile, the theatre, as in any architectural piece, is said to be: “a reflection of our place in nature, which reflects the realities of our lives and society” (Stephens & Muscato 2022, n.p). The quality of a theatre is more appreciated when it is designed to function optimally while aesthetically reflecting its utility. Painting a panoramic view of how the theatre structure with design and performance synthesises, Iwuh (2017, p. 13) submits that “architecture plays a part by providing models of dwellings replicated as settings for dramatic action. The essence of theatre architecture, therefore, is to provide comfortable environment for the practice and the enjoyment of dramatic performances”. The theatre that has space to accommodate enough audiences and permits diverse performance forms, magnificent scenic design, adequate sound and special effects, make-up, costume, props and lighting facilities, as highlighted above, is desirable. The degrading condition of the available facilities however, has been a major barrier to the teaching of Theatre Technology and Design in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The issue has been receiving serious attention of many scholars in their essays. One of them is a leading Nigerian theatre technologist, Sumbo Marinho, who raises concern about the negative effect of inadequate technical facilities and ill-

equipped theatres has on the teaching and skill transfer to the new generation of designers in the theatre thus: “we still cannot raise too many technicians to succeed those of us who are getting old” (Ododo, 2017, p. 547). Since theatre technology requires competence, it is highly imperative for the upcoming designers in the university theatre to properly train with adequate facilities for them to take over from the older technologists. In the same vein, it is a fact that: “while so many schools offer theatre studies, not all of them have adequate manpower and equipment for the training of students in technical theatre and design technology” (Okeke 2015, p.103). This is also corroborated by Olaide (2022, interview):

for instance, when our students graduate and come across some modern theatre equipment, they are usually amazed and be wondering how these equipment work. Why? This is because, when they were in school, they don't see, not to talk of knowing how the equipment functions.

Theatre and Technical Facilities in Department of and Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

The Department of Theatre and Film Studies was formerly referred to by the founding father of the University as the Robeson College of Dramatic Arts, being one of the pioneer disciplines at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. However, due to staffing problems at its inception in 1960, the discipline was attached for a long time to the Department of English; but beginning from 1982/83 academic session the Dramatic Arts was upgraded to run its own programmes and administration. This marked the commencement of its award of a degree in Dramatic Arts. The Department has achieved its full departmental status since 2000s (*theatreandfilm.unn.edu.ng*). The Department has an old Paul Robeson's Open-Air pavilion, which is a mini stadium type of open-air theatre that is situated in the Department. It was built and fashioned to reflect the Greek staging structure, which is used for the training of students in the department and for staging different theatrical performances. The structural design of the theatre allows its audience to either sit around or sideways or directly while watching performances.

Fig. 1: Paul Robeson's Pavilion Open Theatre here provided the Department with opportunities for different staging techniques. Its close affinity to the Department makes it more functional and useful for students' workshop performances and other creative events. The stage is adaptive to changing from proscenium-like staging and performances in-the-round. **Photo: The author - 18 July, 2023.**





Fig. 2: The Arts Theatre currently being used by the Department. It is a proscenium theatre type is equipped with some lighting and technical facilities that facilitate aesthetically pleasing performances. The structure also has rooms for storage of old lanterns, newly acquired lighting equipment and properties. **Photo: The author – 18 July, 2023.**

There is also an Arts Theatre (**Fig. 2**) which is used for major Departmental and university productions and is a Proscenium stage model built in 1990s with its seating capacity of Five hundred (500) for audience. Being equipped with some technical facilities has made the theatre more effective in serving the purpose for which it is built. The beauty of the structure is further projected by its durability and utility. The theatre has incorporated rooms for scene dock, props and costumes keeping and technical workshop. The availability of technical equipment enhance quality of the teaching and learning of Theatre technology courses in the department.

Thirdly and within the Department is also a mini-proscenium theatre structure that is being used as for student's lectures, seminar, workshop/practical classes and this remains one of the oldest structures standing in the university till date. In size, it is a smaller model theatre that could still be used for performances meant for restricted member of audience.



Fig. 3: This is a miniature proscenium theatre available in the department. The depth and height of the stage create a vintage position for the audience to see performances clearly. This indeed enhances its beauty. **Photo: The author - 19 July, 2023.**

Despite the fact that the Department has three different theatres for performances, they are still inadequate. For instance, the main Arts Theatre cannot contain more than 500 people at a time and this is considered limiting at the moment that the number of students studying the course keeps increasing. As a matter of urgency, something should be done, in order to preserve the beauty, usefulness and durability of the structures. This calls for provision of a bigger and well-equipped theatre to accommodate minimum thousands of audiences at a time.

Theatre and Technical Facilities of Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

The university is the oldest tertiary institution and university to be established in the Northern Nigeria since 1962. She has over eighty (80) academic programmes (courses) with more than ten (10) faculties and runs her programmes on three campuses such as Samaru, Kongo both in Zaria and her School of Basic Studies in Funtua. However, towards the realisation of the objective of the study, attention is focussed on the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts' Studio Theatre. The Department has five academic staffs who are specialists in theatre technology with the following areas of interests: set and lighting, costume and make-up and sound. There are other supporting staff that assist in workshop, building of flats and carpentry who work with the staff and students' technical crew during Departmental productions.

The ABU Studio Theatre which was built in 1976 is flexible in nature and has its design through the innovativeness of the architect, Steve Erlich - a foreigner, who explored his understudy of the ancient Hausa culture. The construction of this unique and flexible theatre earned him the traditional title of a specialist in building - 'Tsarkin Maginan Tsarkin Zazzau' (Liman & Zaure, 2020, p. 96). The Studio Theatre which also has unique features is known by many practitioners and researchers with different appellations. For instance, it is referred to as "Courtyard Theatre" Asomba (2001, p. 178) and "ABU Studio Theatre" Zaure (2022 interview) due to its design which is a reflection of the northerners cherished cultural heritage and architecture. The uniqueness of the theatre stands it out among other theatres in the Nigerian universities. It is comprised of four thatched huts in cyclical form, which is linked by compound walls that are constructed to further establish a circular central performance area. This arrangement admits a wide range of scenic manifestations and other design transfigurations, possibly from the traditional proscenium stage to theatre-in-the-round. The four thatched huts are able to allow flexible seating placement for the audience, adaptable performance spaces and students' and individuals' studio workshop.



Fig. 4: The entrances into the renovated ABU Studio Theatre revealing its cyclical nature with roofs to simulate traditional grass patterns.

Photo: Abdulmalik Abubakar, 2023.

Since its commission, it has hosted many plays that were either produced by the Department or brought from outside/other tertiary institutions. Presently, the ABU Studio theatre still remains strong despite that the structure has been built for over four decades now. The structure possesses the three attributes of *firminess*, *utility* and *beauty* as found in Vitruvius triad theory. The structure reflects its unique cyclical performance stage, which could be transformed into audience seating arena, depending on the nature of plays being performed; while the nature of the theatre structure also enhances audience-actors relationship which is the hallmark the trado-African theatre norms.

Though it is an Open-Air Theatre that is fashioned towards theatre in-the-round, the theatre has capacity to accommodate up to five hundred (500) members of audience during productions. Also, the studio theatre is dynamic for multi-faceted staging which can be converted into a proscenium, thrust or round staging, or hybrid depending on the director's choice of presentation per time. With this unique feature, the studio is effectively being used for its intended purposes of playing host to performances of diverse cultural backgrounds and has remained strong till date. This uniqueness notwithstanding, it has been observed that the background of the theatre often creates a conflicting visual impression on audiences whenever any other production that is different from those with Northern settings. In order to reduce the reflection of the latter on other play settings, a lot of creative energy is often exerted through the use of backdrops by the scenic designer to transform the stage.



Fig. 5: The inner side of the ABU Studio with different seating arrangement and how lanterns are rigged for performances. The stage allows different staging patterns. This is the unique part of this kind of theatre.

Photo: Franklin Zaire, 2022.

Also, the open nature of the theatre constitutes a major impediment to full enjoyment of theatrical experience by the audience whenever it rains and lack of sufficient lighting equipment creates another setback. For instance, Ola Ifatimehin, the artistic director of Eliagwu Ameh's "Displaced" that was produced in 2018 at the ABU Theatre studio also expresses his reservation on this:

in term of the available lighting equipment in the drama village (ABU Theatre studio); I think it's an area that needs serious and special intervention. The lighting equipment in the drama studio is poor. Usually when I have performances that I have to stage in ABU, I have to bring my lights (Ifatimehin, 2022 interview).

Theatre and Technical Facilities of Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Oyé-Èkìtì

Federal University Oyé, Èkìtì, (FUOYE) was founded in 2011 located within Oyé community and was one of the nine Federal Universities that were established by the Federal Government of Nigeria, through an executive order made by the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR. FUOYE has two campuses at Oyé-Èkìtì and Ìkòlè-Èkìtì with seven (7) Faculties and Department of Theatre and Media Arts is one of the 49 Departments in the institution. Few years later, the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, located at Oyé-Èkìtì has its modern Theatre of Proscenium model commissioned for use in 2016. The Theatre is equipped with some lighting equipments and it is spacious. The availability of catwalk system makes impossible for anyone not permitted to tamper

with the lighting installation at will. In addition, the system allows only the technicians to have access to re-focusing the lanterns when the need arises. The three attributes of the adopted



Fig. 6: The magnificent 1,500 capacity Theatre at FUOYE which has proscenium stage. This theatre stands as one of the biggest theatres in Nigerian Universities where Theatre Arts discipline is studied. **Photo: The author – 16 June, 2023.**

theory are applied to this theatre in terms of firmness, utility and beauty. The expansive nature of its stage makes exploration of diverse scenic design possibilities practicable and can also play host to numerous styles of performances. Despite the aforementioned possibility, in the face of inadequate facilities that many Nigerian University theatres are plagued with, the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, FUOYE is not an exception. Nevertheless, the large modern theatre has a great impact on the training of the students of the Department. Also, its aesthetic value speaks volume from its look both inside and outside. The spacious inner area adds to the beauty of the structure. To some extent, in accordance with one of the attributes of Vitruvius triad theory, the intended purpose of building the structure which was mainly for theatrical performances and provision of required trainings for the students of the Department subsists.



Fig. 7: The FUOYE's Proscenium Theatre has capacity for expansive scenic designs due to its size. Photo was taken during the performance of Tracy Utho's "Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again" by the author.

Date: 14 July, 2023.

Considering its expansive size, the theatre still has enough space for future development and additional facilities such as projector room, sound facilities room, workshop and scene dock. However, the distance between where the lanterns are installed and the stage is an area of impediment in connection with the throwing of light whenever there are actions on the stage. This often creates shadows on the actors during stage performances and reduces the aesthetics input of lighting design on many occasions. Whereas, the improvisational techniques often put in place to arrest the situation through mounting of some lanterns on iron stands that are closer to the stage both left and right of the auditorium hardly solved the problem.

Comparative Analysis of the state of Theatre and Technical Facilities in the selected universities

In this section, it is necessary to provide some comparative analyses of the current state of theatres and technical facilities at the selected three University theatres – UNN, ABU Zaria and FUOYE respectively. Attention is being paid to their areas of similarities and differences, first in relation to the peculiarities of their theatres (stage) and secondly as the paper examines these in line with the three attributes of *Vitruvius triad theory*: *firmitas* (durability), *utilitas* (utility) and *venustas* (beauty).

Theatre: Department of Theatre and Film Studies - UNN

- i. Theatres: Paul Robeson's Pavilion Open Theatre - since 1960's – (Capacity: 120)
- ii. New Arts Theatre/Proscenium - since 1998 - (Capacity: 500)
- iii. A Mini Proscenium theatre - since 1960's – (Capacity: 90)

Technical staffers are six (6) comprising three (3) academics with specialisations in set and lighting, costume and make up and three (3) Instructors. The following **Technical Facilities** are currently available: Scene Dock, Dimmer (Control and Racks), two Controls equipment – DMX 512 for COBs and other LED lanterns and old Dimmer Board for par can 1k, 2k and 575 Fresnels, Spot lantern, Smoke effects and strobe lanterns. The equipments are inadequate, as the theatre has no projecting facilities at the time. Furthermore, there are other available lighting equipments with some effects creation lanterns for flame and so on which engenders the usefulness (utility) of the theatre. Some old lanterns that are no longer functioning are lying fallow without repairs. This is also applicable to the selected and almost all the University theatres in Nigeria.

The Arts Theatre is also used as Workshop (for practical scenic design and props building and for Scene Dock), There is a Store for keeping the Scenic and Lighting equipment in the theatre. Each of the three theatres in this University has its peculiar architectural beauty (Venustas compliant), but ineffective (Utilitas Deficient), while the theatres still stand strong, with rooms for refurbishment (Firmitas Compliant). However, the absence of raised stage for acting in the Arts Theatre is defective area of this theatre. It reduces from its functionality, knowing specifically well that this is one of the major characteristics of a Proscenium theatre that separates the stage from the audience.

Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, ABU- ZARIA

Type of Theatre: Open-Air/Theatre-in-the Round - since 1976 – (Capacity: about 500)

Technical staffers are seven (7) comprising five (5) Lecturers with specialisations in Set, Lighting Costume and Make up, design and Sound with two (2) Supporting Technical staff.

Technical facilities available are: Scene Dock, Workshop for scenery /Carpentry and props building, Dimmer (Control and Racks), Parcan, Fresnel, LED (Wash lights), Dynacore made LED lights, LED Panels, Clog 5 panels lights, LED lights, LED Panels, Clog 5 panels lights, LED Slim, Sound system, Local instruments Spotlight. The Lanterns are still inadequate and just as found in UNN, the studio theatre has no projecting equipment also.

The Theatre is architecturally beautiful and a reflection of the immediate environment (Venustas compliant); the theatre still stands strong (Firmitas compliant) despite its age. It undergoes periodic maintenance and refurbishing. However, there is hardly any viable space for future expansion/development. To some extent it is Utilitas deficient in terms of its being used for other plays with different cultures and exotic designs or buoyant scenic involvement. This is because of its background architectural design.

Theatre: Department of Theatre and Media Arts, FUOYE

Theatre type is Proscenium and was built in 2016 – (Capacity: both Gallery and Main Auditorium occupies 1,500).

Technical staffers are Five (5) Comprising 4 Lecturers with specialisations in Costume and make up, Set design, Lighting and Props with 1 Supporting Technical/design and painting staff.

Available Technical Facilities at the Theatre include: Scene Dock, Dimmer (Control and Racks), Parcan, Fresnel, LED, Follow Spot, Strobe, Special Effects Lanterns for water, fire and river simulation. As applicable to the other two theatres, the stage lanterns are inadequate and there is no equipment for projecting. In addition, the theatre has no Technical Workshop (for practical scenic design and props building), Scene Dock is located within the structure, but ineffective due to its small size. The theatre is big and architecturally beautiful (venustas compliant), which makes it good to behold for different users. It remains strong (firmitas compliant) to this day, with the exception that the distance between the stage and the audience's front row is a negative aspect, as it affects the “beauty” of the structure in providing the audience with a complete aesthetic experience as enshrined in traditional African theatre. In buttressing this, Nda (2011, p.147) citing Mielziner (1976) expresses concern that “large auditoriums and usage are inimical to intimate drama”. However, the theatre has a great advantage over other two because it still has enough space for future expansion/development, unlike what is obtainable at the Studio theatre of ABU Zaria (See Fig. 7).

Among the three Theatres, ABU Studio stands out as a viable example of theatres as it equally promotes cordial relationship between the performers and the audience better; whereas, this kind of relationship is lacking in the structural arrangement of the other theatres with modern Proscenium Theatre structures.

Generally, to a greater length the attributes of *firmitas*, *utility* and *beauty* are found in the selected theatres, though in varying degrees. These are discovered from their years of establishment, their design structures and patterns including the purposes for which they are built and so on. Looking at the designs of the Open-Air theatres at Nsukka and ABU, they seek to fulfil the main purposes of providing platform for

teaching, practical training for their students, as well as being used for performances. In considering the beauty of an architectural piece, the design of ABU Studio Theatre is unique as a special attention is paid to the cultural ambience of where their theatre is situated (Northern Nigeria). To this end, Awam (2007, p.108), corroborates that: “to be well appreciated, a theatre form must understand the dynamics of aesthetics within its cultural praxis. A theatre form becomes popular among a people when the aesthetic consideration of the people is accommodated”. From this view, the architectural design of ABU Studio is as viable and aesthetically accommodating to staging different plays of different cultures, especially those outside Hausa/Northern Nigerian settings. The studio theatre however has limited functionality. This is because, Roger Scruton's 1975 once argues that a theatre's functionality lies in serving its users conveniently and providing them adequate covering and protection. This he maintains shield the audiences “from elements of sun, rainfall and other climatic changes and conditions” (cited Marinho 1997, p. 178). The absence of this results at ABU studio theatre is a significant limitation which include climatic conditions that often disrupt live performances at the ABU studio, highlighting its vulnerability.

Conclusion

In an effort to analyse the qualities that make each Nigerian university theatre distinct, the paper enshrined in comparative analysis has examined the state of the theatre and technical facilities available at the three selected universities: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Federal University, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU) and Oyé Èkitì (FUOYE) respectively. Focusing on the uniqueness of their theatre forms; it is observed that the technical facilities in these theatres still fall short in certain areas. Nevertheless, the discussion is hinged on Vitruvius triad theory and despite the declining state of the selected theatres and insufficiency of the available facilities, there are areas of uniqueness that support the performances being produced in these theatres that encourage audience patronage.

Notes

³. An investigation into the technical facilities of theatres was conducted in the selected universities during the author's research tour in 2023.

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Interviews

- Dr. Laide Nasir** (now Professor) – a Senior Technical Director, the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, FUOYE. Date: 27th March & 30th December, 2022.
- Dr. Ola Ifatimehin** – a Senior lecturer, Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Bayero University, Kano, who directed Eliagwu Ameh's "Displaced" in 2018 at the ABU Studio Theatre. Date: 17th March, 2022.

Mr. Franklin Zaure, a Scenic design lecturer at the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, on February 27, 2022.