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Theater Arts as a Medium for Communicating COVID19 Protocols among Secondary Schools in Benue State, Nigeria

Helen Ogolekwu -Akpen

Head of Department Performing Arts,
Benue State Council for Arts & Culture, Makurdi. Nigeria

Akpen-Ageh Aondona Edward

Ph.D. Student, Centre for food research and Technology,
Benue State University Makurdi. Nigeria

Abstract:

The study surveyed theatre arts medium that could be used to communicate COVID 19 safety protocols to students and teachers in Boarding Secondary Schools (BSS) and Day Secondary Schools (DSS) in Benue state. The population comprised all the teachers and students in Boarding and Day Secondary Schools in the three Educational Zones (A, B and C) of Benue State. The sample consists of 120 teachers and 1,600 students randomly selected from 36 boarding and day secondary schools in the study area. Secondary Schools Teachers Awareness Inventory (SSTAI) and Secondary Schools Students Awareness Inventory (SSSAI) were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by two experts, one in Theatre Arts and one in Test and Measurement. The reliability coefficient of the instruments was determined using Cronbach alpha and internal consistencies of instruments were obtained as 0.70 and 0.68 respectively. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentages based on frequency count as well as mean. The findings revealed that only 41.5% and 36.6% of teachers in BSS and DSS are aware of theatre arts mediums such as; dramatic and debating clubs, cultural dance, art festivals, miming as mediums for communicating COVID 19 protocols. Similarly, only 2.5% and 2.1% of the students are aware of same medium. The study also discovered that although arts subjects are offered in secondary schools to a great extent, both BSS and DSS practice theatre arts only to less extent with total means of 2.38 and 2.14 which could not actually avail the students and teachers the opportunity to use theatre arts as a medium of communication. Based on the findings, The study recommended based on the findings that; School owners, administrators and all stakeholders in education should ensure that both teachers and students in both boarding and day secondary schools are aware of theatre arts mediums such as; drama, Quiz and debating clubs, cultural dances, music and craft festivals, miming which are not just for entertainments, but for meaningful communication when need arises. Government and other relevant agencies should ensure that teachers and students attend excursions in theatre arts outfits regularly, also theatre arts tutors should be employed in all schools with adequate provision for teaching halls and aids such as costumes of various cultures to aid the teaching/learning and practice (rehearsals) of theatre arts.

Keywords: Theatre arts, mediums, communication, teachers, students, and COVID 19

1. Introduction

The benefits of Theatre arts to all the sectors of human endeavor in 21st century cannot be overemphasized. In the global context theatre is a collaborative form of performing art that uses live performers, usually male or female actors, to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place, often a stage. The performers may communicate this experience to the audience through combinations of gesture, speech, song, music and dance. Elements of art, such as painted scenery and stagecraft such as lighting are used to enhance the physicality, presence and immediacy of the experience (Banham 1996 in Tighe, 2019). The specific place of the performance is also named by the word 'theatre' as derived from the Ancient Greek (θέατρον, 'a place for viewing'), which is from (theáomai, 'to see', 'to watch' or 'to observe'). Prominent among the ancient theatres are the Roman Theatre, Chinese Theatre and Indian theatre which date back to the 4th century.

Theatre has contributed so much in interpreting and giving meaning to different phenomena in all the sectors of human endeavors, the modern Theatre has greatly improved human perception of events and life generally. It has become the main source of livelihood in many countries of the world, as there is huge competition among cities to be the top ten (10) cities for live Theatre. The top ten cities of the world with live Theatre which has lasted for more than a decade according to Lauren (2012).include: London – England, Edinburgh – Scotland, Paris – France, Vienna – Austria, Athens – France, New York City – USA, Chicago – USA, Toronto – Canada, Buenos Aires – Argentina and Beijing – China. The types of theatre stages that could be used especially as medium for communication are; Proscenium stages, Thrust stages, Theatres in-the-round, Arena theatres, Black-box or studio theatres. Platform stages, Hippodromes and Promenade theatre which involves the audience moving from place to place following the actors and performance (Tighe, 2019).

Theatre and communication has come a long way; Theatre is a dramatic art of communication. Communication means, 'the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium' (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). Theatre is mankind's natural instinct, through theatre expressions are carried out in such a way that experiences are noticed in actions and thoughts. Thus, when any communication process continues for a considerable period of time, particular attitudes and values are inculcated in the minds of the audience which ultimately leads to building of social relationships. This exchange of experience is facilitated by communication (Kapil&Debastuti, 2013). Theatre in education (TIE) originated in Britain in 1965 and has continued to present day. Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton cited TIE as 'one of the two historic roots of applied theatre practice'. TIE typically involves teachers and students with the help of a theatre company or experts performing in an educational setting (i.e. a school) through interactive and performative moments, in form of dramatic clubs, cultural dance or performing troops, miming, and festivals with the aid of costumes.

The idea of a high-impact child-centered performance for a specifically targeted programme or project became hugely popular. Due to small audiences available at theatre arenas, students were at first encouraged to participate through; offering of theatre arts subjects that would enable active participation in drama and debate and excursion to theatre outfits. Student experimentation was very successful and was therefore supported with resource materials and training for both the students and teachers (Ajibade, & Elemei 2012). At the present time, theatre as a medium of communication encourages students' active participation in interpreting and passing sensitive information to their peers and members of the society on morals, religion and even during pandemic. Managing the masses during the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic could have been much easier if theatre was used as tool for communicating safety measures. As global public health authorities attempted and managed a novel H1N1 strain of influenza. It was after that work, experts suggested the use of school theatre to communicate safety measures and other social-distancing measures which would have significantly reduced mortality rates during the 1918-1919 epidemics (Tomes 2010).

Corona virus also Known as Covid - 19, which started in 2019 is traced to hundreds of viruses that belong to the coronavirus family. However, only six (229E, NL63, OC43, HKU1, SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV) have been reported to cause mild to severe respiratory tract infections in humans (Su, Wong & Shi, 2016). Among them are severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) reported in November 2002 and middle east respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) reported in September 2012, which emerged in human population from animal reservoirs and caused severe respiratory illness with high mortality rates (Wang, Shi & Jang 2013). Once again, a novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) has emerged, and caused an infectious disease called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The virus was first identified and reported from Wuhan city of China in December, 2019. The SARS-CoV-2 is highly contagious, spread globally in a short period of time, and was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. As of 18th April, 2020, 10:00am CEST; WHO reported more than 2.1 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 142,229 deaths in 213 countries, areas or territories (Lai, Shih & Ko 2019). The most-affected countries with more than 30,000 confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 were the United States of America, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China, Iran, Turkey, Belgium, the Russian Federation, Canada and Brazil. However, the number of cases continues to rise throughout the globe and became a serious menace to public health.

Egypt was the first African country to record a case of COVID-19. However, the first confirmed case of COVID 19 in sub-Saharan Africa was announced in Nigeria at the end of February 2020, within three months, the virus had spread throughout the continent, as Lesotho, the last African sovereign state to have remained free of the virus, reported a case on 13 May 2020. The wind of COVID 19 forced Countries all over the world including those of Sub-Sahara African governments to momentarily shut down educational institutions in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in their individual countries. The closures of schools and universities was said to have impacted over 70% of the world's inhabitants.

However, the current trend indicates that education as a major tool for sustainable development must be encouraged to go on even amidst pandemic periods. To that effect managers of educational institutions globally including Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria in particular have become fully conscious that students could be prepared to set up for a future where outbreaks for example, COVID-19 and other interruptions might become a part of our everyday lives. That means adapting effective mediums of communication for the implementation change in learning and teaching (Olaitan et al, 2020). In Nigeria on March 19th, 2020 a circular from Federal Ministry of Education has granted an approval for the closure of all schools for a period of one (1) month commencing from Monday 23rd March 2020 to prevent the spread of the Corona virus (COVID19). Nigeria reopened schools Oct. 12, six months after they were closed to curtail the spread of the coronavirus. However, not all parents believe students should be returning to the classroom.

The Nigerian Ministry of Education ordered all schools to reopen starting Oct. 12, mandating that they adhere to guidelines or protocols provided by the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC). However, one of the major problems since schools resumed in Nigeria has been the medium or tool that COVID 19 protocols could be effectively communicated to students to prevent the spread of the pandemic especially in secondary schools where the students are teenagers in the boarding and day schools. Although, government has equally provided, for the public schools, thermometer infrareds to check the temperature. Also, after due consultation, all the stakeholders in Nigeria agreed with the school resumption date of 18th January 2021 which all states were to fully comply and open schools based on COVID 19 protocols as follows:

- Compulsory wearing of Facemasks by all students, teachers and workers inside all schools.
- Temperature checks and hand washing facilities mounted at strategic locations in the schools
- Constant supply of water and sanitizers

- Maintain social distancing and stop large gatherings like assembly and visiting days.
- Avoiding overcrowding, including limitations inside class sizes and hostel occupancy.
- Provide functional health clinics available with facilities for isolation and transportation of suspected cases to medical facilities
- Observe all non-pharmaceutical protocols, restrictions and containment measures (Presidential Task Force PTF on COVID 19 & NCDC, 2020).

This development was highly welcomed by parents, school administrators, teachers, and students in all states of Nigeria. However, the federal government through PTF and NCDC have set these protocols, but the medium or tool for enforcement in all schools is in the hands of the state governments and school administrators which could only be ascertain by empirical studies in boarding and day secondary schools, especially in the critical states in Nigeria. Benue State, in the north-central, Nigeria is critical according to (NCDC, 2020) because it is a relaxation hub and overnight spot for travellers to the far north and southern parts of the country. It is officially known as the food basket of the nation. It has major farm markets like yams, oranges and goats that attract people from all parts of the country. It is expected that a critical state like Benue would have perfect channels, mediums or tools for communicating COVID 19 protocols to students especially in both boarding and day secondary schools for proper adherence.

The type of secondary school whether boarding or day is determined by the basic facilities available such as classrooms, hostels, halls, offices, water, electricity and health care (Ityav, 2013). A boarding secondary school is an institution where children live within premises while being given formal instruction. The word 'boarding' is used in the sense of 'room and board', i.e. lodging and meals (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). Students in boarding schools study and live during the school year with their fellow students and possibly teachers or administrators. Some boarding schools also have day students that attend the institution by day and return off-campus to their families in the evenings. There are also full day secondary schools where students stay with their parents and come school every day and return to the house at the end of school hours (Ityav, 2013).

Sintema (2020) investigated the Effect of COVID-19 on the Performance of Grade 12 Students: Implications for STEM Education in Zambia. This study collected data from three teachers at a public secondary school in Chipata District of Eastern Province in the Republic of Zambia. Results of this study revealed that there is likely to be a drop in the pass percentage of secondary school students in this year's national examinations if the COVID-19 epidemic is not contained in the shortest possible time considering that the school academic calendar was abruptly disturbed by the early untimely closure of all schools in the country. The study recommended school to school campaign for strict adherence to COVID 19 protocols by students and teachers. Luaraet al. (2021) examined Modelling safe protocols for reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic in France. The study explored scenarios of partial, progressive, or full school reopening. Given the uncertainty on children's role, it was found that reopening schools after lockdown may increase COVID-19 cases, yet protocols exist to keep the epidemic controlled. It was recommended that large-scale test and trace is required to keep the epidemic under control. Ex-post assessment shows that progressive reopening of schools, limited attendance, and strong adoption of preventive measures contributed to a decreasing epidemic after lifting the first lockdown.

Mari and Pawel (2020) analyzed the current situation of education in the context of the pandemic caused by COVID-19. The study used online face to face interview which were analyzed according to the responses. The study recommended optimization work for education professionals in the current context of a pandemic through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) under the novel approach to aid mediums for effective communication of safety protocols to serve as motivational processes that could contribute meaningful learning in students. The symbiosis of ICT and neuroeducation can make a great contribution to the paradigm shift that is taking place today Reddy and Gupha (2020) assessed the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups would rely in part on the quality of communication regarding health risk and danger in India. The study summarized the framework for effective communication during pandemic. Understanding and practicing various communication strategies is crucial for physicians and health care workers to develop therapeutic relationships with COVID-19 patients. Addressing psychology in all people is vital during a pandemic and effective communication network is key to it. Effective communication, if ignored, will generate gaps for vulnerable populations and result in added difficulty in combating COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Statement of the Problem

According to the Presidential Task Force, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (PTF, NCDC, 2020) and all the stake holders in education in Nigeria, the COVID 19 safety protocols remains the only assurance for operating both boarding and day secondary schools as well as other lower and higher institutions of learning in the country. It is therefore imperative that all the stake holders in education particularly school administrators to use theatre arts as a medium of communicating the prescribed COVID 19 protocols to both students and teachers to sustain teaching and learning. This study therefore seeks to investigate teachers and students level of awareness of theatre arts mediums that could be used to effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols in boarding and day secondary schools in Benue State.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine teachers and students level of awareness of Theatre Arts mediums that could communicate COVID 19 protocols to Boarding Secondary Schools (BSS) and Day Secondary Schools (DSS) in Benue State, Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- To find out teachers' level of awareness of Theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols to BSS and DSS in Benue State.

- To determine students level of awareness of Theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols to BSS and DSS in Benue State.
- To determine the extent of Theatre Arts education in BSS and DSS in Benue State

4. Research Questions

What is teachers' level of awareness of Theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols to BSS and DSS in Benue State?

- What is students' level of awareness of Theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols to BSS and DSS in Benue State?
- What is the extent of Theatre Arts education in BSS and DSS in Benue State?

5. Research Method

The study adopted a cross sectional survey design on teachers and students level of awareness of Theatre Arts mediums that could communicate COVID 19 protocols to Boarding Secondary Schools (BSS) and Day Secondary Schools (DSS) in Benue State. The population comprised all the teachers and students in Boarding and Day Secondary Schools in the three Educational Zones (A, B and C) in Benue State. The sample consists of 120 teachers and 1,600 students randomly selected from 36 boarding and day secondary schools in the study area. Secondary Schools Teachers Awareness Inventory (SSTAI) and Secondary Schools Students Awareness Inventory (SSSAI) were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by two experts, one in Theatre Arts and one in Test and Measurement. The reliability coefficient of the instruments was determined using Cronbach alpha and internal consistencies of instruments were obtained as 0.70 and 0.68 respectively. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentage based on frequency count as well as mean.

6. Results

- Question 1. What is teachers' level of awareness of Theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols to BSS and DSS in Benue State?

Theatre Arts Mediums	BSS (n = 60)		DSS (n = 60)	
	F	%	F	%
Drama and debating clubs	15	25	13	21.7
Cultural dance	3	5	5	8.3
Theatre arts arenas	1	1.6	0	0
Theatre arts festivals	1	1.6	2	3.3
Miming	5	8.3	2	3.3
Total		41.5%		36.6%

Table 1: Percentage Level of Teachers' Awareness of Theatre Arts Mediums That Could Effectively Communicate COVID 19 Protocols to BSS and DSS in Benue State
Key: BSS = Boarding Secondary Schools, DSS = Day Secondary Schools

The result revealed that only 41.5% of teachers in BSS and 36.6% in DSS are aware of theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols.

- Question 2. What is students' level of awareness of Theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols to BSS and DSS in Benue State?

Theatre Arts Mediums	BSS (n = 800)		DSS (n = 800)	
	F	%	F	%
Drama and debating clubs	10	1.3	9	1.1
Cultural dance	5	0.6	6	0.8
Theatre arts arenas	0	0	0	0
Theatre arts festivals	0	0	1	0.1
Miming	3	0.6	1	0.1
Total		2.5%		2.1%

Table 2: Percentage Level of Students' Awareness of Theatre Arts Mediums That Could Effectively Communicate COVID 19 Protocols to BSS and DSS in Benue State
Key: BSS = Boarding Secondary Schools, DSS = Day Secondary Schools

The result shows that only 2.5% of students in BSS and 2.1% in DSS are aware of theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols. Excursion

- Question 3. What is the extent of Theatre Arts education in BSS and DSS in Benue State?

Theatre Arts Mediums	BSS (n = 60)		DSS (n = 60)	
	Mean	Decision	Mean	Decision
Theatre arts tutors	1.50	LE	1.42	LE
Theatre arts showground	2.00	LE	1.80	LE
Costumes/teaching aids	2.60	ME	2.50	ME
Excursion or fieldtrips	1.80	LE	1.20	LE
Art subjects	4.00	GE	3.80	GE
Total	2.38		2.14	

Table 3: The Extent of Theatre Arts Education in BSS and DSS in Benue State

Key: BSS = Boarding Secondary Schools, DSS = Day Secondary Schools

HE = Great Extent, ME = Moderate Extent, LE = Less Extent, NE = NO Extent

The result shows that theatre arts is practice in both BSS and DSS in Benue state only to a less extent with total means of 2.38 and 2.14 respectively.

7. Discussion

The study has shown that majority of the teachers are not aware of theatre arts mediums that could be used to communicate COVID 19 protocols to students and teachers in secondary schools as low level percentage awareness of 41.5 and 36.6 was recorded in Board Secondary Schools (BSS) and Day Secondary Schools (DSS) respectively. The study is in disagreement with Reddy and Gupha (2020) who stated that effective communication, if ignored, will generate gaps for vulnerable populations and result in added difficulty in combating COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, it was discovered from the result that very few students in both BSS and DSS are aware of theatre arts mediums that could effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols with low percentages awareness 2.5 and 2.1 respectively. The findings is contrary to the report by Mari and Pawel (2020) who suggested that school administrators and education professionals in the current context of a pandemic must intensify efforts on the use of all mediums of communication including Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to pass vital information on the safety protocols to students and teachers to enhance meaningful learning in students. The result also shows that although arts subjects are offered in secondary schools to a great extent, both BSS and DSS practice theatre arts only to less extent with total means of 2.38 and 2.14 which could not actually avail the students and teachers the opportunity to use theatre arts as a medium of communication. This finding is far from the report of Luaraet al (2021) who advocated for strong adoption of effective communication mediums such that promoted the preventive measures which contributed to a decreasing epidemic after lifting the first lockdown.

8. Conclusion

It was concluded based on the findings that, only few teachers and students in Boarding Secondary Schools (BSS) and Day Secondary Schools (DSS) are aware of theatre arts mediums that could be used to effectively communicate COVID 19 protocols to students and teachers in secondary schools. On the other hand, although arts subjects are offered in both schools (BSS and DSS) to a great extent which is the basic prerequisite, theatre arts is practice generally to a less extent. This state of awareness and practice of theatre arts in secondary schools at the moment cannot significantly present theatre arts as a tool for communicating COVID 19 protocols or any future pandemic to teachers and students as well as the society at large.

9. Recommendations

The study recommended based on the findings as follows:

- School owners, administrators and all stakeholders in education should ensure that both teachers and students in both boarding and day secondary schools are aware of theatre arts mediums such as; drama, music, choral music, cultural quiz, cultural dance/miming and craft festivals, which are not just for entertainment but for meaningful communication when need arises.
- Government and other relevant agencies should ensure that teachers and students attend excursions in theatre arts outfits, also, theatre halls; costumes/teaching aids should be made available in schools for teaching and practice.

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