

**STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION OF KNOWLEDGE
FOR EFFECTIVE SET DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION
IN NIGERIAN ARTS THEATRE**

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Abstract

Set design and construction are some of the major elements of theatre productions. These visual elements of production interpret the entire contents of the production visually to the audience. Theatre artists in Nigeria have made significant efforts to interpret their productions through the application of set design elements, in spite of some challenges like inadequate technical skills. It is based against this backdrop that this research is undertaken. The work employs survey design by using questionnaire as its instrument of data collection. Among other things, the findings revealed that the collaboration of knowledge will to a great extent, enhance set design and construction practices in Nigerian universities. This article recommends the close collaboration of stage designers with experts in other allied disciplines to achieve the desired interpretation of the meaning of a piece of drama through the visual elements of the production.

Keywords: *Collaboration, visual elements, set design,*

Introduction

Stage set is an important aspect of theatre practice. Like the other genres of art such as painting and literature, theatre tells stories about events which are situated within particular contexts, environment, era, tradition and space. These stories, in a stage play, live before the audiences. Therefore, one of the major of concerns of theatre artists is the necessity for the story to be delivered as clearly as possible. Chris Nwamuo affirms that, “the issue disturbing theatre artists is the modus operandi for theatre, the methodology, the best avenue for delivering theatre messages to the people (Nwamuo 3). Scenery is one of elements of the theatre that enhance the audiences' understanding about the stories which theatre presents. Often, theatre productions rely on the employment of conventional scenic painting or contemporary production design to create backdrops and backgrounds in order to achieve a re-creation of real-world spaces, giving visual authenticity and context against which the stories are being told. Enendu has been observed that:

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As a harbinger of meaning within the theatre, scenography seeks to develop participants on stage with the actor and together generate a wholesome experience. It approaches space as an active narrator, drawing heavily on its experiential and sensorial potentials. (Enendu 23)

Modern theatre productions depend on the application of 'true life' sets as

indissoluble dramaturgical rendition of performances. As such, the venture of scenic design as a vital component of scenography is equivalent and fundamental to the actors' interpretation of the roles in the performance. Contemporary conception of scenic interpretation therefore, goes beyond just providing attractiveness to a performance; it entails a functional visual interpretation of the productions. In this context, just like actors' performances are seen as figurations of life and human nature, so also does scenic design portray its functionality within performing spaces and locations; hence, giving the audience a complete experience in which auditory elements are inseparable from visual elements in the process of interpretation. Efakponan argues that:

Contemporary trends in scenography favour the perception or treatment of scenic investiture as performative in essence. Light, sound, three-dimensional scenic spaces are moulded in special relationship that creates a ballet of visual forms regardless of textual narrative. It therefore means that, in today's theatre, visual mechanics have come or are coming gradually and are encroaching on the area held traditionally by actor and actor himself is being considered as a part of scenographic elements. (352)

This reaffirms Teju's position that, "theatre fundamentally is a collaborative art and interdisciplinary mix of contributing artists and technicians bring depth to work and, through this creative network connects it to diverse communities and audience. . ." (44). Brown affirms that, "the legitimate theatre has survived and can survive only when there is a general *esprit de corps*, when there is enthusiasm, work, and effort far beyond the call of duty on the part of actors, director, designers and stagehands" (268).

Stage set construction demands skills of different experts like engineers, electricians, engineers, carpenters, iron benders, computer operators, and visual artists among others. Some of these skills are lacking in the Nigerian theatre practice. Yet, the collaboration with the aforementioned experts is critical to the premium appreciation of the role of set design for play productions in the explication of a play's meaning in Nigerian universities.

Conceptual Overview

The art of scenography which mainly comprises set, lighting, properties and by extension, costume, is vital to capturing a complete theatrical experience when adequately deployed. -Gbilekaa explains that scenography "implies something more than creating scenery or costumes or lights ... a connotation of an all-encompassing visual-spatial construct as well as the process of change and transformation that is an inherent part of the physical vocabulary of the stage" (23). In essence, the nature of scenography is wider and for enhancing good understanding of production, set designer needs to consider its vital involvement. This is because there are some other visual technical elements involved in providing a physical background for a performance and the entire stage, including space and shape, which also have a significant role to play. This makes such elements as the set, props, costume, light, lighting and special effects as well as the composition and careful arrangement of all the required visual effects to make the entire scenography on stage meaningful. While explaining the synergy between all scenographic

elements of theatre technology that enhance performance on stage, Ayodele reveals that these: encompass costume art (dress worn), make up art (adornment which compliments costume), property (furniture, property, decoration and handy objects utilized by actors), set or scenery art (the environment where a story is told or situated), sound art (hearing or perception that could either be incidental or dynamic), light and visual effect art (illuminate the play with the right mood and tone). When utilized, any or a combination of these would certainly garnish theatrical performances in visual interpretation and expression of author's artistic vision. (133)

From the above, set design could be considered as a meta-lingual entity whose creative media extend beyond verbal expression and as a result, it is further understood within suitable concepts. In a similar vein, a study of technical production is a necessary part of a scene designer's training and background. As the architect understands building techniques and materials, so should the scene designer know about methods of constructing and handling scenery as well as the use of theatrical materials and techniques. A logical place to begin with is a survey of the scene shop, tools and materials that are used to make scenery and an examination of the working procedures of a scenery.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The work examines the need for collaboration of knowledge among theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set constructions for productions in Nigerian universities arts theatre. It employs survey design using questionnaire as its instrument of data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part „A“ consists of three (3) items which required the bio-data of the respondents“ information such as: gender and status of the respondents. Part „B“ covers items that are related to the subject matters of the research. Questionnaire items in part; B“ was adjusted on modified four-point Likert scale as rated below that requires the respondents to indicate their levels of agreement on the topic under study as indicated below:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| Strongly Agree (SA) - 4 | Agree (A) - 3 |
| Strongly Disagree (SD) - 2 | Disagree (D) - 1 |

The mean responses above the benchmark of 2.5 means agree, while the ones below the aforementioned benchmark indicates disagreement with the opinion. Responses from the retrieved questionnaire were coded and analyzed. Frequency count, percentage and mean were used to represent the demographic variables.

$$\text{Percentage Calculation} = \frac{x}{y} \times 100 \quad \frac{x}{y} \times 100$$

x = Number of Respondents

y = Total Population

The data are presented in tables as seen below.

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents Based on their Gender

| Options | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| Male | 29 | 0.5% |
| Female | 29 | 0.5% |
| Total | 58 | 100% |

Source: Field Work, 2026

Table 1 represents the distribution of the respondents according to gender of each of the respondents. From the table, 26 (0.5%) of the respondents were male, while 29 (0.5%) of the respondents represented female. The implication of this distribution is that, the work gives equal chances to both male and female in the study area to voice out their opinions on the subject matter.

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents According to Status

| Options | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Lecturers | 8 | 0.13% |
| 400 Level Students | 25 | 0.43% |
| 300 Level Students | 25 | 0.43% |
| Total | 58 | 100% |

Source: Field Work, 2026

Table 2 represents the distribution of the respondents according to their status. According to the table, a total number of 8 (0.13%) of the respondents represented lecturers, 25 (0.43%) represented 400 level students while a total number of 25 (0.43%) represented 300 level students. This distribution equally has implications on the study. It was assumed that these classes of respondents have rich knowledge and experience about the subject under the study.

Table 3: The Respondents' Views on the Impacts of Set Design and Construction on Productions in Nigerian Universities' Arts Theatre

| S/N | Questionnaire Items | SA (4) | A (3) | D (2) | SD (1) | Total | Mean | Decision |
|-----|---|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------|----------|
| 1. | Set design and stage construction have significant impacts on productions in Nigerian universities' arts theatre | 31 124 | 22 66 | 2 4 | 3 3 | 58 197 | 3.39 | Agree |
| 2. | Set design and stage construction have enhanced the qualities of productions in Nigerian universities' arts theatre | 32 128 | 21 63 | 3 6 | 2 2 | 58 199 | 3.40 | Agree |
| 3. | Set design and stage construction have not really improved the qualities | 2 8 | 3 9 | 22 44 | 31 31 | 58 92 | 1.58 | Disagree |

| | of productions in Nigerian universities' arts theatre | | | | | | | |
|----|---|-----|----|---|---|-----|------|-------|
| 4. | To some extent set design and construction have helped in interpreting productions in Nigerian universities' arts theatre | 33 | 20 | 3 | 2 | 58 | 3.44 | Agree |
| | | 132 | 60 | 6 | 2 | 200 | | |
| 5. | To a great extent set design and construction have helped in enhancing audiences' understanding of productions in Nigerian universities' arts theatre | 34 | 19 | 3 | 2 | 58 | 3.46 | Agree |
| | | 136 | 57 | 6 | 2 | 201 | | |

Source: Field Work, 2026

Analysis of Table 3

From the above table, we observed that in the first item, 31 of the respondents strongly agreed that set design and construction have significant impacts on productions in Nigerian universities' arts theatre, 22 agreed, 3 strongly disagreed while 3 disagreed with opinion. With the mean response rate of 3.39 which have crossed the benchmark of 2.5, it is agreed that set design and construction have significant impacts on productions in the nation's arts theatre.

In the second option, 32 of the respondents strongly agreed that set design and construction have enhanced the qualities of productions in Nigerian universities arts theatre, 21 agreed, 3 strongly disagreed while 2 disagreed with the opinion. Having a mean score of 3.40, it is agreed that set design and construction have enhanced the qualities of productions in Nigerian universities' arts theatre.

In the third option, 2 of the respondents strongly agreed that set design and construction have not really improved the qualities of productions in Nigerian universities arts theatre, 3 agreed, 22 strongly disagreed while 31 disagreed with the opinion. The mean score of 1.58 which is below the benchmark of 2.5 is an indication that majority of the respondents disagreed with the opinion and this implies that set and stage construction have improved the qualities of productions in Nigerian universities' arts theatre over the years.

In the fourth option, 33 of the respondents strongly agreed that to some extent set and construction have helped in interpreting productions to the audience in the nation's arts theatre, 20 agreed, 3 strongly disagreed while 2 disagreed with the opinion. The mean score of 3.44 is an indication that to some extent set design and construction has helped in interpreting productions in to the audience in the nation's arts theatre.

In the fifth option, 34 of the respondents strongly agreed to a great extent set and stage construction have helped in enhancing audiences' understanding of productions in Nigerian universities. The mean score

of 3.46 is an indication that to a great extent set and stage constructions have helped in enhancing audiences' understanding of productions in Nigerian universities.

From the above responses it is revealed that set design and stage construction have significant impacts on theatrical productions. This finding is in line with view of Ofora Peter which explains that, “set design is very important because it helps the actors in getting their mood, on the one hand, while on the other hand it goes a long way to support the total story. In order to get this properly, the designer must know the processes of design on the palm of his hand (117).

Table 4: The Respondents' Views on the Necessity for Strengthening Collaboration of Knowledge for Effective Set Design and Construction in Nigerian universities' Arts Theatre

| S/N | Items | VHE | HE | LE | VLE | Total | Mean | Decision |
|-----|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|------|----------|
| 1. | Collaboration of knowledge among theatre artists and experts in other fields has no significant impacts on productions in Nigerian arts theatre | 3 12 | 2 6 | 20 40 | 33 33 | 58 91 | 1.56 | Disagree |
| 2. | Idea of collaboration of knowledge among theatre artists and experts in other fields as efforts towards the realization of good scenography in Nigerian arts theatre will be met with enormous challenges | 32 128 | 21 63 | 2 4 | 3 3 | 58 198 | 3.41 | Agree |
| 3. | Nigerian universities' art theatre have over the years collaborated with experts in other field in building sceneries for productions | 23 92 | 30 90 | 3 6 | 2 2 | 58 190 | 3.27 | Agree |
| 4. | To some extent collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other field will go a long way to enhance set design and construction practices in Nigerian universities' arts theatre. | 32 128 | 30 90 | 3 6 | 2 2 | 58 226 | 3.89 | Agree |
| 5. | To a great extent collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other field will go a long way to enhance set design and construction practices in Nigerian universities' arts theatre. | 23 92 | 30 90 | 2 4 | 3 3 | 58 189 | 3.25 | Agree |

Source: Field Work, 2026

Analysis of Table 4

From the above table, 3 of the respondents strongly agreed that collaboration of knowledge among theatre artists and experts in other fields has no significant impacts on productions in Nigerian universities, 2 agreed, 20 strongly disagreed while 33 disagreed with the view. With the mean response rate of 1.56 which is below the benchmark of 2.5, it is disagreed that collaboration of knowledge among theatre artists and experts of other fields has no significant impacts on productions in Nigerian universities arts theatre.

In the second opinion, 32 of the respondents strongly agreed that idea of collaboration of knowledge among theatre artists and experts in other fields as efforts towards the realization of good scenography in Nigerian universities' arts theatre will be met with enormous challenges, 21 agreed, 2 strongly disagreed while 3 disagreed with the opinion. Having a mean score of 3.341, it is agreed that idea of collaboration of knowledge among theatre artists and experts in other fields as efforts towards the realization of good scenography in Nigerian universities' arts theatre will be met with enormous challenges.

In the third option, 23 (59%) strongly agreed that Nigerian universities art theatre have over the years collaborated with experts in other field in building sceneries for productions, 30 agreed, 3 strongly disagreed while 2 disagreed with the view. The mean score of 3.24 is an indication that Nigerian universities art theatre have over the years collaborated with experts in other field in building sceneries for productions.

In the fourth option, 32 of the respondents strongly agreed that to some extent collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other field will go a long way to enhance set and stage construction practices in Nigerian universities arts theatre, 21 agreed, 2 strongly disagreed while 3 disagreed with the opinion. The mean score of 3.89 is an indication that to some extent collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other field will go a long way to enhance set and stage construction practices in Nigerian universities arts theatre.

In the fifth option, 23 of the respondents strongly agreed that to a great extent collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields will go a long way to enhance set and stage construction practices in Nigerian universities arts theatre, 30 agreed, 2 strongly disagreed while 3 disagreed with the opinion. The mean score of 3.25 is an indication that to a great extent collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields will go a long way to enhance set and construction practices in Nigerian universities arts theatre.

The above responses have revealed that collaboration between theatre artists and experts in related fields has the potentials to enhance set design and construction in Nigerian universities' arts theatre. This finding is in agreement with Enendu's opinion in John Iwuh where he maintains that:

Collaboration between the theatre and engineering has always been there and it dates back to the medieval period. In the case of Nigeria, what I'm thinking is that our own

engineers are not very comfortable working with us. But in so many other countries, it worked and still works” (158)

On the other hand, Enendu explains that he has, “did a lot more with artisans. These were iron benders, glassblowers, electricians, tailors, painters and carvers”(159).

Table 5: The Respondents' Views on the Possible Ways to Strengthen Collaboration of Knowledge between Theatre Artists and Experts in Other Fields for Effective Set Design and Construction in Nigerian Arts Theatre

| S/N | Questionnaire Items | SA (4) | A (3) | D (2) | SD (1) | Total | Mean | Decision |
|-----|---|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------|----------|
| 1. | By allowing theatre arts students to take courses from departments like engineering, fine and applied arts, computer, vocational and technical departments among others | 32 128 | 21 63 | 3 6 | 2 2 | 58 199 | 3.43 | Agree |
| 2. | By inviting artisans like carpenter, fine and applied arts artists, electricians etc to participate in building set for productions | 31 124 | 22 66 | 2 4 | 3 3 | 58 197 | 3.39 | Agree |
| 3. | By organizing workshops theatre arts lecturers on the need to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between them and experts in the other fields. | 21 84 | 32 96 | 3 6 | 2 2 | 58 188 | 3.24 | Agree |
| 4. | By providing a enough fund that could facilitate the collaboration of knowledge | 22 88 | 31 93 | 2 4 | 3 3 | 58 188 | 3.24 | Agree |
| 5. | By employing experts in the related areas | 22 88 | 31 93 | 3 6 | 2 2 | 58 189 | 3.25 | Agree |

Source: Field Work, 2026

Analysis of Table 5

From the above table, we observed that in the first option, 32 of the respondents strongly agreed that one the possible ways to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction is by allowing theatre arts students to take courses from departments like engineering, fine and applied arts, computer, vocational and technical education department among others, 21 agreed, 3 strongly disagreed while 2 disagreed with the view. With the mean response rate of 3.43 which have crossed the benchmark of 2.5, it is agreed that one the possible ways to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for

effective set design and stage construction is by allowing theatre arts students to take courses from the abovementioned departments.

In the second option, 31 of the respondents strongly agreed that another possible ways to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction is by inviting artisans like carpenter, fine and applied artists, electricians etc to participate in building set for productions, 22 agreed, 2 strongly disagreed while 3 disagreed with the opinion. Having a mean score of 3.39 it is agreed another possible ways to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction is by inviting artisans like carpenter, fine and applied artists, electricians etc to participate in building set for productions.

In the third option, 21 of the respondents strongly agreed that organizing of workshops for theatre arts lecturers on the need to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between them and experts in the other fields is among the possible ways to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction, 32 agreed, 3 strongly disagreed while 2 disagreed with the opinion. The mean score of 3.24 is an indication organizing of workshops for theatre arts lecturers on the need to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between them and experts in the other fields is among the possible ways to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction.

In the fourth option, 22 of the respondents strongly agreed that provision of enough fund can also serve as a possible way to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction in the nation's arts theatre, 31 agreed, 2 strongly disagreed while 3 disagreed with the opinion. With the mean response rate of 3.24 which have crossed the benchmark of 2.5, it is agreed that provision of enough fund can also serve as a possible way to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction in the nation's arts theatre.

In the fifth option, 22 of the respondents strongly agreed that one of the other the possible ways to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction is by employing experts in the related areas, 31 agreed, 3 strongly disagreed while 2 disagreed with the opinion. With the mean response rate of 3.25 which have crossed the benchmark of 2.5, it is agreed that one of the other the possible ways to strengthen collaboration of knowledge between theatre artists and experts in other fields for effective set design and stage construction is by employing experts in the related areas to work with the trained theatre artists.

The above has revealed a number of findings about the possible ways to strengthen collaboration between theatre artists and experts in other related field for effective set design and stage construction for productions in Nigerian arts theatre. One of these findings proposes taking courses from these

departments. This finding also agrees with Enendu's view that, "theatre design students are supposed to take electives in engineering, especially, electrical for those in lighting, while building and architecture for those in set design and construction" (162).

Conclusion

The performance space where the characters live, interact with one another and carry out their actions does not just jump out of the script; it is usually created by the set designer who under goes serious intellectual processes. In other words, set design deals with the outside appearance of a theatrical performance. It is a kind of conversion from phase to phase, and it must be done in the proper way, and the best way to do that is through appropriate groundwork in theatrical design. Only experts in the technical area are equipped to fulfil this function. Enendu adds that:

Most people begin wrongly. Design gives birth to construction. You don't give birth before getting pregnant. Design ideas must begin with conception, graphically expressed. You cannot be a good theatre designer when you cannot match a directorial style with its corresponding design; there lies the yawning gap and the desperate balance between design and directing. (154)

Enendu's opinion above has apparently reaffirms the fact that designing a performance set is a challenging task. It involves a lot of skills and tasks which can be made easy through collaboration of knowledge.

Recommendations

Based on the findings gotten from the study, the work recommends that more attentions should be given to the area of design and construction in the Nigerian arts theatre.

The necessity to collaborate with other experts in building sets for productions in the nation's art theatre should be given much attention.

Workshop on the importance of collaboration between theatre artists and experts in other fields as well as artisans should be regularly organized.

Theatre design students should be made to take courses from related departments such as engineering, fine and applied arts, computer, and vocational and technical departments.

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