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MAINTENANCE CULTURE AND TECHNICAL THEATRE PRACTICE IN AKWA IBOM STATE UNIVERSITY FESTIVAL OF PERFORMANCES (AKSU-FEST) 2024

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ABSTRACT

Maintenance is a concept that is applicable to all facets of human endeavours as it concerns keeping in good condition for preservation and sustainability. This paper on "Maintenance Culture and Technical Theatre Practice in Akwa Ibom State University Festival of Performances (AKSU-FEST) 2024 in Focus" is aimed at examining the concept and typologies of maintenance x-raying its impact on individuals, organisations as well as governmental agencies and institutions with a view to inculcating positive maintenance culture in the holistic polity of Nigeria in particular and human race in general. The research adopts qualitative research design with observations, experimentations and participations as the primary sources of data collection while textbooks, journals and internet sources constitute the secondary. The theory adopted is known as Social Development Theory which explains qualitative changes in the overall structure and framework of a given society. This theory was propounded by Lev Vygotsky who lived between 1896 and 1934. The direct beneficiaries of this work are government at different levels, management of institutions, technical theatre practitioners, scholars, students and the general public. The summary of this work is that maintenance of facilities and infrastructures is the backbone of survival of any organisation. It concludes that good maintenance culture is inevitable in human existence and should be imbibed by government organisations, agencies and individuals. The work recommends that government institutions and private organisations should develop positive maintenance culture and institute quality assurance as a unit for maintenance awakening consciousness.

Keywords: Maintenance Culture, Technical Theatre Practice, AKSU-FEST.

INTRODUCTION

Every theatrical production has a concept and Michael Gillette (1992:2) is of the opinion that the production concept is the central creative idea that unifies the artistic vision of the producer, director and designer…. After the production concept is agreed on, the set, props, lights, costumes and sounds are designed". This is where the issue of maintenance comes in with regard to technical theatre practice in Nigeria. Maintenance is a term that is associated with all the spheres of human endeavours in all times and situations, theatre inclusive. For individuals, organisations, institutions and agencies to survive, exist and function effectively, one form of maintenance or the other is necessary within a given duration depending on the nature of the person or thing involved. In technical theatre practice, the concept of maintenance cannot be ignored. This is so because the architectural structure of the theatre house and all the known spaces together with the different attachments and accessories

require regular checks, servicing, fueling, replacement, replenishing and other activities. All these and many others constitute the scope of maintenance.

This research endeavour therefore aims at examining closely the concept of maintenance, its typologies and relevance in technical theatre practice using Akwa Ibom State University Festival of Performances (AKSU-FEST) 2024 as a reference point. In doing justice to the subject matter, the following areas among others shall be examined. The areas are: The concepts of maintenance and the different typologies as well as maintenance culture in technical theatre practice using Akwa Ibom State University Festival of Performances (AKSU-FEST) 2024 as a paradigm. At the end, there shall be summary, conclusion and recommendations to wrap up the discourse.

CONCEPTUALISING MAINTENANCE AND TECHNICAL THEATRE

Since this research endeavour hinges around the major concepts of maintenance culture and technical theatre practice, this section of the paper is specifically delineated to conceptualising these salient terminologies as to enhance sufficient comprehension and usability of this research outcome, hence the following discourse.

MAINTENANCE, TYPOLOGIES AND CULTURE

Maintenance in this context refers to the process of preserving the condition of something to ensure effective and efficient performance. In other words, maintenance can generally be defined as efforts taken to keep the condition and performance of tools, machines, equipment and infrastructural facilities in the same shape as when it was first introduced. The technical meaning of maintenance therefore involves functional and regular checks, servicing, repairing or replacing of necessary parts, devices, equipment, machineries, buildings, infrastructures and supporting utilities in industrial, business and residential installations. Over times, this has come to include multiple wording that describe various cost-effective practices to keep tools, machineries and equipment functional and operational, these activities occur either before or after a fault or failure. Maintenance in Technical Theatre is a process aimed at ensuring efficient and continuous functionality of tools, machines, equipment as well as infrastructures in organisations and other institutions like theatre houses and other functional spaces.

In Performing Arts practice, the concept of maintenance revolves around the work carried out on infrastructure, tools and equipment in order to guide against its breakdown or malfunctioning. It is regular and routine actions taken on tools, equipment, and machineries in order to prevent breakdown and loss of resources. Maintenance in general include tests, measurements, adjustments, parts replacement, cleaning and servicing performed at regular basis specifically to prevent faults from occurring or hazards.

Merriam-Webster defines maintenance as the act of keeping property or equipment in good condition by making repairs, correcting problems, etc., the act of causing something to exist or continue without changing. The act of providing support for someone or something (w.w.w.merriam-webster.com>maintenance, retrieved on Thursday 25th November, 2024, 8:30am).

TYPES OF MAINTENANCE

Maintenance as discussed above can occur in different types. The nine different types of maintenance that are quite relevant to our discourse here being Technical Theatre practice are:

(a) Preventive Maintenance (PM)
(b) Predictive Maintenance (PDM) - Predetermined
(c) Condition-Based Maintenance (CBM)
(d) Risk-Based Maintenance (RBM)
(e) Failure Finding Maintenance (FFM)
(f) Time Based Maintenance (TBM)
(g) Corrective Maintenance (CM)
(h) Deferred Corrective Maintenance (DCM)
(i) Emergency Maintenance (EM)

The above mentioned nine different types of maintenance are comprehensively discussed below:

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE (PM)

As the name implies, preventive maintenance is carried out at predetermined intervals. This type of maintenance can also be effected according to the prescribed criteria and it is aimed at reducing or preventing the risk of equipment failure or performance degradation. In this case, the maintenance cycles are planned and the incidence of operational failures are reduced or eliminated. This type of maintenance is strongly recommended rather than waiting for a fault to occur before maintenance is carried out.

PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE (PDM) - PREDETERMINED

In most cases, Predictive Maintenance may be seen as being synonymous with Condition-Based Maintenance. However, Predictive Maintenance can be seen as an extension of the Condition-Based Maintenance where potentially many processes are used to determine the functionality of all equipment. It assesses if the equipment is in anyway drifting away from the stable operational condition that may likely result in catastrophic fault. It helps to prevent unforeseen damage that would lead to work stoppage and loss of operational hours and revenues.

CONDITION-BASED MAINTENANCE (CBM)

Condition-Based Maintenance is always effected based on the performance monitoring as well as the control of corrective actions. In this case, the actual working condition of an equipment is monitored on a continuous basis and maintenance is carried out whenever there is an indication that the equipment or other infrastructures are deteriorating and that the chances of failure is probably increasing leading to occurrence of serious fault. This maintenance type is advantageous as it minimises the chances of occurrence of catastrophic faults.

RISKS-BASED MAINTENANCE (RBM)

Risks-Based Maintenance is usually to carry out the asset condition and risks
assessment on any given equipment or other kinds of infrastructure. Those with abnormal values are refurbished or replaced. One of the major advantages of Ricks-Based Maintenance

is the possibility of extending the useful life span as well as guaranteeing over time high level of reliability, safety and efficiency of such an equipment or infrastructure.

FAILURE FINDING MAINTENANCE (FFM)

There are certain equipment that their failure modes are hidden, and since their failures are hidden, they have to be traced or found out and maintained to enhance equipment reliability and functionality. This type of maintenance is advantageous because it does not prevent failure, rather it detects it.

TIME-BASED MAINTENANCE (TBM)

Time- Based Maintenance (TBM) is also referred to as "Scheduled Restoration Tasks". TBM has to do with the tasks of replacing or renewing an item in a machine or equipment to restore its reliability within a fixed duration or interval regardless of its condition. The major aim of TBM is to ensure protection against failure from known wearing parts with predictable time frame.

CORRECTIVE MAINTENANCE (CM)

This type of maintenance is carried out whenever an anomaly is detected or observed. It is always aimed at restoring normal and effective operational conditions. The cost of this kind of maintenance is always lower than the cost of procuring new ones when catastrophic faults occur. It should be noted that corrective maintenance is actually effected after a failure has occurred. It is either done as deferred corrective maintenance or as emergency maintenance.

DEFERRED CORRECTIVE MAINTENANCE (DCM)

Deferred Corrective Maintenance is actually an aspect of corrective maintenance. As the name implies, deferred has to do with delay. This type of maintenance occurs when corrective maintenance is delayed. It should be noted that it is advisable that deferred corrective maintenance should be checked because it is imperative that we should strive to reduce as much as possible the rate of emergencies that we carelessly allow into our theatre houses or other organisations.

EMERGENCY MAINTENANCE (EM)

Emergency Maintenance is associated with urgency because it breaks into or interrupts the daily or weekly plan or schedule and throws everything and everybody into disarray, therefore it should be avoided as much as possible.

MAINTENANCE CULTURE IN NIGERIA

Maintenance as used in this article refers to the art of making sure that infrastructure, equipment or any other related object or accessory is taken care of in terms of repairs, paintings or correction of errors or problems towards ensuring that it remains in good working condition. Culture on the other hand has to do with the "attitude and belief that are shared by a particular group of people or in a particular organisation" (Gadsby, Adams and others, 2007:382).

From all indications, it can be said without fear of contradiction that the maintenance culture in Nigeria is simply summed up to what can rightly be called 'below average'. The reason for this assertion is not far-fetched as profuse examples can be cited from the different geo-

political zones of the Country. From the Ajaokuta Steel Company to Kaduna and Port Harcourt Refineries to Oku-Iboku Paper Mill and Aluminum Smelting Company at Ikot Abasi that were at one time or the other great assets capable of generating robust revenue to the covers of the country, thereby contributing immensely to both the Gross National Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria as a Country are now shadow of themselves. For sometimes past, Nigeria as a country was relying heavily on importation of refined products from crude oil like diesel, petrol, kerosene and others at exorbitant cost after exporting the crude oil at ridiculously cheap price. The country is equally in the business of spending billions of Dollars and Trillions of Naira annually on importation of paper materials for her growing printing activities as well as aluminum, iron and steel required in the country, all because of poor maintenance culture in Nigeria. However, efforts have been made in recent times to revamp the Port Harcourt, Warri and other refineries in the Country though considerable impact has not yet been felt.

If the above mentioned companies and many others not mentioned here were maintained and properly too, the country would not have been where we are today in which petroleum products, building / educational materials, and other basic requirements in the country are beyond the procurement power of average citizens. All these and many others go a long way to affirm the assertion that the maintenance culture in Nigeria can simply be classified as poor.

THE CONCEPT OF TECHNICAL THEATRE PRACTICE

It is a truism that the concept of Technical Theatre practice cannot be discussed in isolation without the concept of Performing Arts and performative activities. As Okon Udofot Jacob (2024:87) expounds, " In every society of the world, there are some percentage of performative activities which take place in form of music, dance, drama, festival, storytelling and many more. These performative activities have been in existence using different languages spoken by the inhabitants of given societies since time". In Modern African theatre, the technical components are indispensable, diffusible and fundamental. This is why Robert D. Taylor and Robert D. Strickland (2005:74-75) aver that:

> Theatre is a collaborative art form, it depends upon people working together. For every act that you see on stage, there may be a dozen people working behind the scenes to create the environment and effects that support and enhance the performance. These people work in the technical areas of theatre-unmasking called tech… The tech crew are the group of people working on set construction, props, lighting, sound, costumes and makeups. Generally, a technical director or shop foreman supervises these people, collectively known as the stage crew.

In this perspective, Jacob (2024:36) further posits that, "Theatrical Design and Technology is one of the areas of theatre practice otherwise referred to as technical Theatre. It is an area of Theatre practice where the ingenuity of design and technology are applied to theatre arts activities for the sole purpose of realising the production objectives". These technical components of Modern African theatre are professionally referred to as Technical Aids. According to Sunday Enessi Ododo (1994:154), these technical aids are:

> Elements used in theatrical presentation usually to give depth and meaning to the artistic flare. These are either manually, electronically or mechanically employed. They include stage set and properties, lighting, sound effects,

> costumes and make-up. Though essential visual elements, where meaningfully handled with the aural aspects of theatre production, they help the understanding of the audience apart from their aesthetic values.

In his contribution, Jacob (2023:37) expatiates that, "The concept of design is held as being very crucial to the profession. This is because any design process has to be seen as the defining steps toward finding or trying to find answers to identified problems in given contexts". Taking the above assertion into consideration, Jacob (2018:140) also avers that, "the above five (5) mentioned different areas of technical theatre though seemingly independent, are professionally synergised because the success of one area is highly dependent on the effective functionality of others". This explain why Oren Parker, Craig Wolf and Dick Block (2009:7) posit that, "the preparation of any production requires the close cooperation and collaboration of many specialists". Jacob (2018:144) in his opinion sums it that, "this is the design approach in which all theatrical designers must adhere to".

In the light of the above discourse, it is quite glaring that Modern African Theatre Practice swings or rotates around the different constituents of technical aids in which maintenance is enveloped because it is essential to the continuous existence and success of theatre practice. After all, every stage performance has its peculiar technical challenges that must be surmounted. Technical theatre practice is therefore the pivot in which theatrical performances revolve around.

MAINTENANCE CULTURE AND TECHNICAL THEATRE PRACTICE IN AKWA IBOM STATE UNIVERSITY

Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU) is for now the only state owned University in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria though there are other tertiary institutions in the State. Maintenance in technical theatre in particular and other sectors of human endeavour in general has emerged as a major issue for consideration. Akwa Ibom State University as an institution of higher learning "was established by a law of the State dated 1st June, 2009" (Postgraduate Students' Information Handbook, Akwa Ibom State University, 2022, iv). However, "full academic activities started in the University on 1st November, 2010 with Prof. S. W. Peters as the substantive Vice Chancellor…. The University took off with 300 students as the first batch for the 2010/2011 academic year" (The Department of Performing Arts Student's Information Handbook, 2024, 10). The University started with four (4) faculties at its inception. However, during 2012/2013 session, the Faculty of Arts was added with six (6) Departments in which the Department of Performing Arts came into existence.

Students' Information Handbook of the Department of Performing Arts of Akwa Ibom State University (2015:11) clearly states that, "the first batch of students in the Department of Performing Arts was 20 in number and lectures started in March, 2013. The pioneer Head of Department was Dr. Jacob, Okon Udofot".

As a newly established Department of Theatre / Performing Arts, one of the areas taught in the Department was Technical Theatre in which maintenance is an aspect. At its inception, the Department made use of various found spaces for both rehearsals and actual performances, but in 2015, a decorous arts theatre was designed and built for the Department and the Arts Theatre was named, 'The Pinnacle Theatre' by the pioneer Head, Dr. Jacob, Okon Udofot. This

contributed in no small measure to the Department being bestowed with full accreditation status in 2016 and 2020 by the National Universities Commission (NUC).

From its inception in 2013, the Department became the hub of performative activities in Akwa Ibom State and beyond so much so that in May, 2016, a command performance for the convocation ceremony of the Akwa Ibom State University took place in The Pinnacle Theatre in which the then State Governor, Mr. Udom Gabriel Emmanuel was the Special Guest of Honour as the Visitor to the University. He was there in person and used that opportunity to perform the official commissioning of the Theatre.

Since then, several performative activities have been going on smoothly and successfully in the theatre. However, during the period of complete lockdown of the University as a result of Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and subsequent holidays and semester breaks, termites destroyed greater portions of the wooden stage in the Pinnacle Theatre and the dance studio. Wind blew off some portions of the Theatre house and it resulted in the leakages at several portions of the roof in the theatre. This has led to the destruction of many seats in the auditorium, electrical/electronic appliances like air conditioners and light/sound consoles including defacing of the beautifully designed art works on the walls of the theatre.

However, when the holidays and breaks were over, schools re-opened and teaching/learning commenced, the resumption order brought staff and students of the Department of Performing Arts of Akwa Ibom State University back to campus to face the numerous challenges in the Pinnacle Theatre. The Theatre is at present wailing and yelling for the different typologies of maintenance as discussed in this article and the management of the university is making geocentric efforts in this regard in spite of the difficult economic situation in the country.

Akwa Ibom State University Festival of Performances with the acronym of AKSU-FEST is a recent metamorphosis of Akwa Ibom State University Season of Productions which came into existence with the inception of the Department. It is an annual event that is performed every first semester of a session to exhibit the practical components of the Departmental curriculum. Therefore, the Pinnacle Theatre of the Department of Performing Arts deserves constant checks, replacement of burnt items, appliances and equipment, gadgets and tools as well as replacement of broken chairs in the auditorium and wooden floor on the stage as well as the dance studio. At present, virtually all the technical theatre equipment for set design lighting and special lighting effects, sound and special sound effects, are not functioning optimally leading to occasional unsatisfactory outcome in terms of standard of performances during the AKSU-FEST 2024 as well as other performances in the theatre. This occurrence has led to hiring of the requisite technical equipment and facilities from time to time in order to remain in the business of teaching and learning.



PLATE 1: Technical appliances in the assembled for repairs and maintenance *(Source: Researchers' Field Work, 12/9/2024)*



PLATE 2: Scattered Stage floor in the Pinnacle Theatre Pinnacle Theatre meant for repairs *(Source: Researchers' Field Work, 12/9/2024)*



PLATE 3: Dilapidated Stage by the Orchestral Pit in the Pinnacle Theatre meant for maintenance *(Source: Researchers' Field Work, 12/9/2024)*



PLATE 4: Testing of Sound control systems after maintenance in the Pinnacle Theatre *(Source: Researchers' Field Work, 12/9/2024)*

SUMMARY

In summary, it is pertinent to reiterate the fact that all theatrical performances emanate from works of literature of one genre or the other. As observed by Jacob and Effiong (2024:129), "Literature from inception has remained a predominant means of eliciting exhilarations and the sublime appreciation of man towards nature and the world around him, just as it has been a means of expression of inner thoughts and feelings, re-familiarising the complexities, apprehensions and contradictions that plague humanity". Therefore, drama as a genre of literature deserves to be performed within a properly designed and maintained space with functional equipment and infrastructural facilities, hence the issue of Maintenance Culture and Technical Theatre Practice in Akwa Ibom State University (AKSU) in particular and Performing Arts practice in general becomes imperative. Poor maintenance culture in Nigeria is one of the reasons adduced for unsatisfactory standard of performances by some directors in Akwa Ibom University (AKSU) Pinnacle Theatre in particular and other Nigerian theatres

in general hence, there is need for positive change of attitude with regard to maintenance in Nigeria with a view to actualising qualitative performances in the Country.

CONCLUSION

From the above research carried out in Akwa Ibom State University in particular and Nigeria in general, it is concluded that the maintenance culture in Nigeria, particularly within tertiary institutions of learning can simply be said to be below average. Below average because of certain outstanding reasons some of which include bureaucratic redtapism, human character and shortage of funds.

Bureaucratic redtapism leads to procrastination culminating to infrastructural and equipment decay. In the same vein, human character in this context refers to the peculiar qualities or features and attitude of Nigerians whereby government property of all sorts are seen as owned by nobody, hence nobody has interest of effecting any serious form of maintenance on them, rather, most people are always looking forward to seeing any possible opportunity to make fortune from the collapsed equipment or infrastructure in form of making new supplies instead of embarking on maintenance. All these are in most cases blamed on shortage of funds. Dilapidating and devastating equipment and facilities are left without maintenance thereby incapacitating teaching and learning processes being one of the three cardinal functions of scholarship in which Akwa Ibom State University Pinnacle Theatre constitutes the practical component. This is the conclusion drawn from the institutions used as a paradigm of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research on Maintenance Culture and Technical Theatre Practice in Akwa Ibom State University proffers the following recommendations:

1. A call for change of character in respect of maintenance culture is eminent. This should be anchored by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) of the Ministry of Information and Culture, Churches, Mosques and other socio-cultural organisations which have the onus of inculcating into the citizens the need for positive character change with particular respect to positive maintenance culture and the humongous advantages attached therewith.
2. The same approach to be adopted in number one above should also be utilised with regard to attitudinal change within the administrative machinery of our bureaucracy towards ameliorating the adverse effect of bureaucratic redtapism in our tertiary institutions in particular and our nation in general.
3. Maintenance and maintenance culture should form the core component of Technical Theatre Practice in particular and Theatre/Performing Arts profession in general so that every theatre scholar, practitioner and student should see maintenance of different typologies as part and parcel of their lives.
4. Quality Assurance Units should be instituted to carry out routine checks and inspections to theatre houses of universities including Akwa Ibom State University to ensure that subsequent Performances are performed in well-maintained theatre houses and functional equipment.
5. A Resident Theatre Manager should be employed to constantly monitor the activities of students to guide against destructive tendencies as Lecturers may be too busy to checkmate them.

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