

# TOWARDS COMMUNITY REHABILITATION: REFLECTIONS FROM THE BWARAK COMMUNITY THEATRE EXPERIENCE

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## ABSTRACT

Most tertiary institutions in Nigeria are known influence the communities in which they are established. In recent times, scholars have observed the growing trend of negative influences in such communities and that of the Federal University of Education Pankshin is not an exception. The sudden rise in social perils in the Bwarak community has been attributed to the presence of the Federal University Pankshin formerly known as the Federal College of Education Pankshin, where thousands of students come from across the nation to attain education. Against this backdrop, the authors of this article employed community theatre pedagogy to trammel increasing social menace in Bwarak Community in the light of its proven effectiveness in stimulating community members' active engagement, dialogue and critical thinking towards social change. This will be done through interviews, observation and focus group discussions. The impact of the study was evaluated by a combination of action-based, qualitative and quantitative research. Materials required for the implementation of this project. The social menaces uncovered from the interaction between members of the community and the university include: unemployment, robbery, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and truancy. The researchers further catalyzed solutions by facilitating discussions between the university and the community representatives. It is hoped that positive changes would be encountered in the near future as the consensus of decisions spelt a harmonious working relationship and corporate social responsibility from both parties in an effort to rehabilitate Bwarak community.

**Key words:** community theatre, social perils, Bwarak, FUE Pankshin, interaction.

## INTRODUCTION

The study aims to test and explore the effectiveness of using community theatre pedagogy as an approach to address and mitigate social menace in Bwarak community. The social menaces in focus include: robbery, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, fraudulent acts and vandalization.

Social menace all over the world seems to be accelerating in societies despite the efforts of various institutions and organizations. This research recognizes that despite the efforts of different researches from different disciplines- from religious (Chibuzor, 2022), psychological (Adaeze, 2020) and sociological perspectives to stem the tide of social

perils, the scourge seems to be getting worse. The study therefore considers the significance of community engagement and participatory approaches in tackling social challenges; from recorded successes from past projects executed such as “Peacebuilding through theatre: The Agwan Rogo Experience” (Tsaku & Embu, 2012) and Project “Zaman TD (Dantala and Group 2021), among other initiatives. The sudden rise in social perils in the Bwarak community might be attributed to its being home to the Federal College of Education, where its numerous students come from across to nation to attain education. It is against this backdrop that this research proposes the use of community theatre pedagogy to trammel increasing social menace in Bwarak Community in the light of its proven effectiveness in stimulating community members' active engagement, dialogue and critical thinking towards social change. This strategy aims to provide insights to the vulnerable, foster empathy, challenge harmful concepts and practices and promote positive social change. In addition to the aforementioned perils, the study also pinpoints other specific social risks that the Bwarak community is prone to. With community stakeholders, this was done through surveys and focus group discussions. The impact of the study will be evaluated by a combination of action-based, qualitative and quantitative research. Materials needed for the implementation of this project include both human and material resources. Effective measures was taken to ensure that the data collection process was without bias. The results provided information on the underlying causes and consequences of these societal problems.

#### **Area Of Study**

Shidams in Poret (2022) states that Pankshin Local Government is one of the oldest Local Government areas in Plateau State. It has passed through various stages of political changes via military regimes or democratically elected civilian administrations. The administrative evolution of Pankshin Local Government began in 1919, when it served as the divisional headquarters for the British colonial administration. It controlled an area that comprised the present Kanam, Mangu, Kanke and Bokkos local government areas. However, in 1976, the federal government set up local government areas and Pankshin became one of the full-fledged pioneer local government areas in the country with its headquarters in Pankshin town. The local government area is home to the Ngas, Mupun, Miship, Pai, Tal, Fier, Tambes and Kadung ethnic nationalities. Bwarak village is a settlement in Pankshin.

#### **Population**

The population for this study shall be drawn from the Bwarak community and school community of Federal College of Education Pankshin. Interviews were conducted with all community stakeholders, a community meeting which will be recorded shall also hold, as well as a focus group discussions with the various stake holders. Observations and analysis of recorded speech was also carried out

To achieve the desired depth of information required, the researchers worked with a smaller sample called focal persons, but maintain a lengthy physical presence to ensure that the required depth of understanding for a case study is achieved. However, the following features were considered: age, sex, level of education and occupation. The central focus in selecting focal persons is to ensure that every group is well represented in the project.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The study aims to test and explore the effectiveness of using community theatre pedagogy as an approach to address and mitigate social menace in Bwarak community. Additionally, the research sought to: assess the current extent and impact of social perils faced by Bwarak community in areas such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and syndicate robbery; explore the potential of community theatre pedagogy as an innovative approach to addressing these social perils in Bwarak community; and investigates the potential for social transformation and positive change in community theatre through the implementation of community theatre.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The nature of this study puts it into the domain of action based and qualitative research. Burns (2015) defines action based research as an approach that is grounded in practical action (the action component) while at the same time focused on generating, informing and building theory (the research component). This is an approach to research that involves processes of collaboration, dialogue and action among participants in the surrounding social system. Ugwu and Eze (2023) posits that qualitative research is concerned with feelings, ideas, or experiences, additionally, shanks (2002) in Poret defines qualitative research as a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning. However, by systematic it means that the study follows a methodical structure and follows a procedure or plan. By empirical, it implies that the research is based on verifiable observation and experience rather than theory or pure logic.

The research design employed in this study is the case study research design Coombs (2002) defines case study as

a methodological research approach used to generate an in-depth understanding of a contemporary issue or phenomenon in a bounded system. He adds that it requires an in-depth investigation conducted into an individual, group, or event to gain an understanding of a real-life phenomenon. Measures were taken to ensure that the data collection process was without bias and data gotten was treated with utmost confidentiality. The following instruments were used for data collection for the project:

**Participant Observation:** while the researchers immerse themselves in this project, they observe the behaviors, interactions and practices of the participants.

**Focus Group Discussion:** the project also involves organizing the various target groups in the community; the men, women youths, students and the vigilantes in Bwarak community.

**Audio/video recording:** it is very important to record community theatre performances and related discussions or reflections to capture the essence and impact of the performances. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed for themes and patterns related to the trammeling of social perils in Bwarak community.

**Field Notes:** detailed field notes were taken to capture important observations, quotes and reflections that may not be captured through other data collection methods

### Gathering Data and Analysis

Data gathered from observations, interviews and focus group discussions with research team and community members can be summarized into the following listed below:

1. **Unemployment:** the community is said to have given up about 95% of their farm lands for the establishment of the college, but when it comes to employment only two slots are given to the whole community. When it comes to ad hoc employment by ventures which is a meagre salary, the college and its management rather give it out to their relations outside the community. This eventually leads to employing thieves who end up collaborating with students to vandalize the school property.
2. **Substance abuse:** the presence of the college has in a great way increased the rate of substance abuse within the community.
3. **Robbery/rape/vandalization:** community members can no longer have domestic animals in the community because they are always stolen, the college property has been constantly vandalized by thieves who steal electric cables,

sewage manholes and even breaking into offices. Female students and young girls have become victims of rape and assault.

4. **Truancy/ cultism:** young children in secondary schools have mastered the art of absconding from school to meet their senior friends who may or may not be students of the institution. They introduce them to alcohol, substances and cultism.
5. **Lack of clean water supply in the community:** the community does not have access to clean drinking water.
6. **Violations of culture and tradition:** the community always has a festival annually where by masquerades parade the community, but because of the institution, most of the students don't know how to conduct themselves during such occasions hence the outbreak of violence experienced some time in 2022
7. **Indecent dressing:** young girls within the community look up to students of the institution as role models. This translates to the increase in indecent dressing, teenage pregnancy and lack of respect for elders.
8. **Allocation of Farm lands:** during raining season, farms are usually allocated to people at a price, however, as donors of these farm lands the community members complained and expressed their displeasure on the sales of these farms before having access to their own farms. They also expressed the pains they go through to access their farm lands located behind the institution because of the newly built fence that has covered their shortest route to and from the farm.

### Scenario Building and Performance

The research team went back and analyzed the data gotten from the community and college to be able to produce a play that would serve as a recap and engage the final interactive session with the community. During rehearsals, the team ensured that the subject matter was in line with data generated from the community, with detailed attention to its security challenges and locale. The team also ensured it was a one act performance, because of time. Casting was done according to the skills, most of the casts used were students of the institution and the language used was a combination of Hausa, Ngas and Pidgin English to ensure effective communication. The play was an open ended play to allow

every one participate and contribute. Issues that the play looked at include unemployment, access to farm lands, pollution of land, theft, indecent dressing, substance abuse, rape and prostitution.

### Plot Structure

Two men (an elder and a young man) walk in lamenting about the community. The first is a titled man of Bwarak and the other a youth. As they discuss, a passerby (member of the vigilante) will join in the discussion stating his own problem. The fourth (a woman), then an official from the Development association of Bwarak Joins the discussion as they move to Tompet to have an elaborate discussion, they are also joined by a student and a staff of the institution. As they arrive Tompet, the discussion is then thrown to the larger house (that is where everyone is gathered for a thorough discussion on possible solutions to the problem).

### Discussion and Evaluation

At the end of the performance, people were willing to contribute on possible measures to mitigate this ill's bothering the society. Below is listed the summation of possible solutions suggested by the participants:

1. Corporate social responsibility: it was agreed that the community and college should come together and work in order to flush out thieves. Ironically, the community felt the school was harboring and hiding this criminals while the college too felt the community was the one hiding the criminals. The representatives of the college promised to convey the message to the management of the institution to ensure a corporate social responsibility. This could be achieved through having meetings at intervals, inviting community members to learn some skills at the centre for entrepreneurial studies of the college and working with the vigilantes of the community especially when students are on break.
2. The community will put measures in place to check indecent dressing and substance abuse within the community. As a member of the community it was suggested that "if you see something wrong, you say something"
3. The University will also continue to ensure that it notifies the students on behaviours and conduct during cultural and traditional ceremonies to avoid clashes.

### CONCLUSION

Community theatre has a lot of potential for community rehabilitation if the procedures are carefully observed. It clearly demonstrates how problems can be brought to the fore and thrashed into solutions by the same parties involved. Additionally, dramatization of the issues discussed provides a vivid reflection of the problem, driving home its intensity and calling for urgent solutions. In conclusion, the study was able to achieve rapport between the school community and Bwarak community. Community members had a sense of empowerment as they were actively engaged in addressing social perils and work towards finding solutions. On the whole, valuable insights were gained on how community theatre approach can be effectively used as an educational tool to address social issues not only in Bwarak community but also in other similar communities facing similar challenges.

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