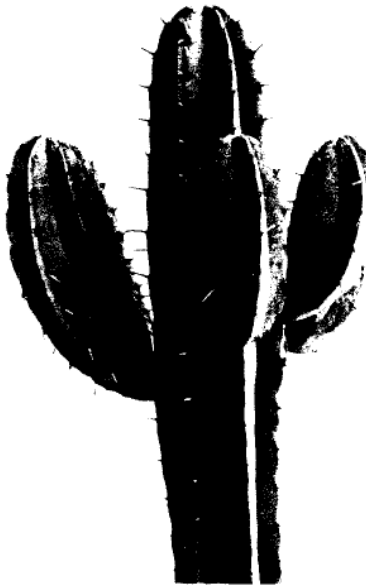


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**Drama, Girl-Child Education and National Development: A Critical  
Reading of Tor Iorapuu's *Had I Known***

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**Abstract**

Drama is a very strong instrument in the hands of playwrights. This medium has always served and still serves the functions of educating, correcting, instructing, organizing and commenting on issues that bother on human existence. This study adopts drama as pedagogy for the teaching and learning of girl-child. To demonstrate this however, the paper carries out a diachronic assessment of Tor Iorapuu's *Had I Known* as a committed drama text that empowers the girl-child. The paper justifies its argument through the adoption of Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" and Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the oppressed and forum Theatre" respectively as its theoretical framework. The two theories provides a ground for the discourse by making its stand point very clear that indeed, dramatic overtures of this kind has the potential of redefining the society and bringing to limelight and understanding of what live and healthy living connotes. A conclusion is drawn from the discourse and few recommendations are made so as to have a well-defined society that has the interest of her girl-child at heart if truly and religiously adopted for implementation.

**Key Words:** Drama, Girl-Child Education and National Development.

## **Introduction**

The adoption of drama as pedagogy for the teaching and learning process of the girl-child is paramount; this approach has produced results in all spheres of human existence. Dramas over the years have performed the functions of education, entertainment, organizing and making serious comments on the socio-political and socio-economic realities of many nations across the globe and Nigeria inclusive. The education of the girl-child is very essential and integral towards national development. For any sane society of the world over to have the needed man power that can drive her developmental strides, men and women alike ought to be given equal access to quality western education that provides the platform for human development as well as capacity building in the citizens.

The crave for the education of a girl-child stems from the fact that since Africans are traditionally patriarchal in nature, they have given less attention to girl-child education and this have had a devastating effect on the growth and development of the African continent and Nigeria in particular. In most societies in Africa and Nigeria for instance, the preference for male children over and above the female children is evident and inevitable. To this end however, male children are given more consensus and freedom to western education and personal life, the girl-child on the other hand is relegated to the background and denied access to western education. This pathetic case scenario in Africa and Nigeria in particular is capable of marring the development of the nation. This is because, the girl-child who is also the product of the society, is denied the privileges of being properly educated and as such, the country suffers from the multiple effects resulting from this unpatriotic act of denial to the girl-child.

This paper therefore, seeks to look at the primordial role that drama and theatre in education have and are still playing in the education of a girl-child. Drama and theatre in education are very serious weapons in the hands of the artist. The artist deploys this tool in teaching school children certain subjects or other related themes. Barth (1994,22) sees theatre in education as a special designed dramatic performance before an audience of

school children or any other target audience, which has an objective to impart one form of education or another. Theatre in Education is one of 20th century nomenclature which emerged from a movement in the United Kingdom and has since then been explored by different teachers and professionals alike in the effective teaching and learning in formal school setting.

The theatre has taken advantage of this medium, through the hybridization of several other elements of creativity to creatively engage its audience of school children. Rose (1980, 18) avers that: "Theatre must be turned from a monologue fostering passivity, or pseudo-therapy, into dialogues in which 'audience' are actively engaged in the production of meaning. It converts the 'audience' from passive recipients of received truth to active protagonists in creating a theatrical experience (which reflects their own sense of the situation) cruising it, and further theatrical experiences, and using the analysis in working-out political strategies and engaging struggle.

The above quotation agrees with this discourse based on the recognition that theatre provides the avenue for collective engagement. The collective engagement here is the interface between the audience and the artist. To buttress this view further Turner (1982) alludes that; By means of such genres as theatre, including suppository and shadowed theatre, dance, drama, and professional storytelling, performances are presented which probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account,... portray its characteristics, conflicts and suggests remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known world.

Turner's viewpoint captures the case scenario in most societies. In the context of this discourse on drama, girl-child education and national development, Turner's position is very apt because, through drama; the weaknesses of the society are portrayed and remedies suggested for the betterment and growth of the society. In the light of the foregoing, this paper seeks to carry out a critical reading of Tor Iorapuu's *Had I Known* as a committed work of art that empowers the girl-child through quality education towards the enhancement of National development.

## **Conceptual Clarification of Terms**

For better clarity and understanding of this paper, basic concepts need to be defined in the context they are used in this paper.

### **Drama:**

Drama is used interchangeably in this paper with theatre in education. Drama is the imitation of an action. Ola Rotimi (1991) posits that drama "implies an imitation of an action or of a person or persons in action, the ultimate object of which is to edify or to entertain". Central to Rotimi's view of the imitative ability of drama, Brian (1983, 2) alludes that drama is a type of theatrical performance in which the participants impersonate (i.e pretend to be people, beings, or things than they really are) and through a usually predetermined sequence of physical actions enacts a story for entertainment of an audience. This function that drama plays informs DeGraft's (1970,3) addition that as a distinct form, however, drama begins to bring forth, to precipitate from everyday life, only when introduced into life's normal pursuits, the elements of impersonation or role playing as a means of achieving certain ends. The above underscores the fact that drama has the central role to impersonate human action and enforce education of the people.

Jacobus cited in Abugh avers that "Drama (Theatre) is an experience in which we participate on many levels simultaneously. On one level, we may believe that what we see is really happening; on another level, we realize that serious statements about our society are being made; drama both entertains and instructs. This is to clearly show that drama as an art form has the potential to educate members of the society, make strong comments about our society and wellbeing and instruct us on how to handle such issues raised.

### **Girl-Child Education**

Education is the macrocosm of the society and as such every sane society of the world needs quality education that will empower her citizens. Afigbo (2014) sees education as "the aggregate of ideas, methods, institutions,

facilities and personnel designed and developed by society by doing or by nursing and realizing set goals". Education can take place everywhere for both in a formal and an informal manner. The rationale is always to educate members on the way they think, feel and act. Ada (2012, 7) drags the definition further by stating that: "Education as a social institution is one of man's potent and enduring instruments used for the development.... Education is capable of catalyzing for reaching transformation in the society. It's tremendous worth and contributions to the development of individual's capabilities, institutions, public and private agencies have been fully acknowledged". This is to say that education has the will power to transform society and in this context the girl-child. The girl-child needs this education which is a catalyst that has far reaching transformative capabilities that can shape the mind of the girl-child into taking proactive decisions about her welfare and that of the larger society. Dewey (1994) an educationalist corroborates the discourse by submitting that this process is enhanced by storytelling, discussions, teaching, training and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators, but learners may also educate themselves". Building on the above, one would be right to note that girl-child's education is an apt enterprise because, it will provide the girl-child with the needed platform to be able to realize set goals and be independent in her reasoning and deeds.

### **National Development**

National development has to do with the change in the status of a country, a process where the socio-political, social-economic, infrastructural wherewithal and all other paraphernalia of a nation are on the high increase. Ampe (2012) posits that national development is the changes from one point of advancement to the other. It is a step or stage in socio-political, economic and all the other rudiments that make up the total human experience.

This is to say that when the indices of growth such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Product (GNP) and Per Capital Income (PCI) e.t.c are on the increase, development is said to have taken place. Therefore, improving the quality lifestyle of the citizens in all spheres

of human existence such as; education, infrastructure, agriculture becomes apt and an agenda that every responsible government of the world should pursue with every sense of responsibility.

### **Theoretical framework**

In the context of this study, two theories are most suitable, they include Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" and Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the oppressed and forum theatre" respectively. Paulo Freire debunked the banking system of education where everything is taught to the individual by a tutor, but he rather emphasizes that education, proper education according to Freire, is that kind of education where the masses are active members in the entire process. Freire proposes a dialectical method of teaching and learning. To him, a dialogical approach to learning will give a voice to the oppressed citizens.

Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the oppressed and forum theatre" on the other hand do not create room for passive audience. It encourages that the audience can observe for a while and actively participates as the conversation progresses in solving their nagging and pressing problems. Boal's forum theatre gives ample room for exercises and games to keep the body physically and mentally alert. This pedagogical approach of learning was developed to solve the problems facing the ordinary people.

Freire's (2000) displeasure on the banking concept of education is what propels him to speak out that:

To change the world through work, to proclaim the world to express it, and to express oneself are the unique qualities of human beings. Education at any level will be more rewarding if it stimulates the development of this radical, human need for expression. This is exactly what "banking education" (as I sometime call it) does not do.

The fact of Freire's postulation is that in the banking system of education, the learner is only instructed on what to listen to and do. But the contrast is

the case with his approach where the learner is involved in the learning process in Boal's "Theatre of the oppressed and Forum Theatre", MacDold (2000) summarizes that:

There is no room for the passive spectator. Theatre is a time to observe and another to act. First, you will watch a performance, which shows a problem/issue/situation of oppression. At the end of the performance, you are invited to applaud the efforts of the educators and then sometimes discussing amongst yourselves the situation and some possible solutions for changing the series of event.

Both Paulo Friere and Augusto Boal lay much emphasis on the dialogical and active participation in the teaching and learning process of an individual. These two theorists have given us the basis of our discourse in this paper in respect to our concern on the need to provide education to the girl-child. They have been able to provide for us the riding point that girl-child education is paramount and she should be actively integrated in the system for enhanced national development.

### ***Had I Known: Drama and Girl-Child Education***

The essence of every art work is to make strong comments on issues that bother on human existence. Artists do not create in a vacuum; they are always motivated by issues that affect the progress of the society. Tor Iorapuu's *Had I Known* dramatizes the folly of young adults who are faced with the dilemma of lack of proper sex education and family education, which abruptly leads to their misgivings. Tor's dramaturgy addresses the issues of young adult's reproductive health and adolescent sexuality related issues. Egugwu in his preface to the play states that: "In effect, the play is consumable as such while in educational institutions and in non-formal settings, like in churches, associations and community based



organization it could provide the framework for consciousness raising or development action". This brings us to the thrust of this paper. This chapter seeks to carry out a holistic assessment of the play, pointing out those silent issues raised that could provide a breeding ground for the education of the girl-child, issues that affects her reproductive health and many more. In one of the situations in the play, the old man as the children calls him, tells them a pathetic story of a young girl who had died and left a letter to her parents. The letter reads:

I am sorry about this but it the only way out for me. I just couldn't understand the shame I will bring to your home--- But you left our essential things especially when I become 14. You didn't tell me how I could melt me needs as girl, the challenges of being a woman. You were all scared to discuss sex for moral reasons. Dad, for you it was a matter of culture (taboo). And mum shied away completely from basic realities. I learnt mostly from my friends and a few biology lessons. So, each time I had problems I had nobody to confide in other than my friends. And when this happened, I again followed my friend's advice to have an abortion. Had I known, Dad, Had I known, the details, the realities of being a woman I would have known belter what option to take....

The above letter shows the effects that lack of proper education could cause an individual and the entire society. The moral lesson of the above letter reveals that the writer's parents could not provide her with proper sex education on the basis of culture and share moral reasons. In the end, she resulted to taken advice from her friends which apparently resulted to her death.

This is a huge lesson to all parents, parents are required to provide their children (female) with the right sex (reproductive health) education. This

kind of education will safeguard the girl-child and enable her to be useful to herself, her family and to the society and of course her usefulness will enhance national development. Asabetu, one of the female lead characters got impregnated by a young adult who denies being responsible for her pregnancy. Asabetu narrates her ordeal to the group as thus: ... my real experience began at home. The problem broke our home. My mother left us, my father managed to tolerate me in the house. It was not easy initially. Then, one day, few months after I had my baby, I was taking my child to the clinic and some small boys jeered at me and called my child a bastard. I can't remember what I did. But it wasn't pleasant. I now remembered what my friends said' "you are on your own". The above experience shared by Asabetu is indeed, worrisome. The implication that her unwanted pregnancy had on the family in the first place was to separate the mother from the father. These case scenarios are very common in many Nigerian homes where the father blames the woes of a young female adult to her mother thereby, causing more troubles that even leads to separation in some instances.

The case of Asabetu and many other such a situations are capable of hindering the progress and unity in the family vis-à-vis the country at large. Asabetu laments further that "I wish my parents gave me proper information about this". Proper education is very paramount and every nation that wants the progress of her citizens should invest hugely in the girl-child education. An adage goes that "If you educate a female, you educate a whole nation". The first early years of a child's life is being nurtured and shaped by the mother. If the supposed mother is educated, her level literacy will unconsciously be transmitted to the child. This will return enhance the smooth growth of such a child and as such, such a child will be shaped in such a way that he or she conforms to societal norms and values.

In the last bit of the play, the old man encourages the children with the following words: "we can't continue with "*Had I known*". Children, I now understand your feelings and concerns better. It is your rights to be properly informed about your sexuality. It is your right to know what it

takes to be a man or a woman. It is also your right, my children to say yes or no to misinformation, I appeal to you youths, your future is in your hands, and you owe yourself the duty to taking the right decision. I also appeal to you, parents, teachers, the religious homes and the society that we should endeavor to educate these youths, properly and at the right time. When they ask question as useless question from useless children. They ask because they want to know. Remember that they are the cream and foundation of tomorrow, we can't allow them to waste". The above appeal is a clarion call on stakeholders, religious leaders, parents and all those involved in the modeling of a child, particularly a girl-child, so as to make them useful members of the society. Proper information, provided to the girl-child, such information will help in reshaping the life of such a female adult thereby enhancing national development.

### **Recommendations and Way Forward**

For Nigeria to meet up with the educational challenges of the girl-child, the following recommendations are made:

- ⇒ The Federal Government through the Ministry of Education should bring out a policy on girl-child education and ensure its full implementation.
- ⇒ Theatre scholars with vast knowledge in playwriting such as the play under review should be commissioned to write more plays that encourages girl-child education.
- ⇒ Non-governmental organizations in collaboration with National Orientation agency should carry out intensive advocacy about the need for girl-child education.
- ⇒ The school curriculum should be restructured so that drama, creative arts, music and dance will be included. Since this apt medium will serve a great deal in providing the needed awareness on girl-child education.
- ⇒ Traditional rulers should ensure that they abolish all forms of cultural practices that prevent their community members from educating the girl-child.

- ⇒ Parents are advised to ensure that they engage with their wards at all times. This will make them aware of the challenges that the girl-child faces. This will also provide a better platform for the proper integration of the girl-child into national development process.

### **Conclusion**

The functionality of drama towards the education of the girl-child for national development can never be over emphasized. Drama has for many years played a critical role in communicating issues that bothers on national development. No society of the world that is devoid of socio-political, socio-economic, religious, and social realities. These issues are inherent in all societies and as such, drama serves as the minor through which worrisome issues are projected in order for the society to make amends. This paper adopts drama as a pedagogical approach in the teaching and learning process of a girl-child. The paper also adopts Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the oppressed" and Augusto Baol's "Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre" respectively as theories that provides a framework for the research. The paper therefore submits that, drama is capable of enhancing girl-child education and at the same time enhancing national development through the lenses of Tor Iorapuu's *Had I Known*.

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