

Socio-Cultural Competence: Why Theatre(-in-) Education is Important for Every Post-colonial Nigerian Child

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Abstract: Educational policies and curricula have integrated indigenous languages, culture, and arts for decolonising Nigeria’s formal education system. Yet, poor implementation of the practical aspect, due to ineffective pedagogical strategies, have always resulted in persistent deficiencies in socio-cultural competence among school children. Therefore, this review article is aimed at positioning theatre(-in-) education as an effective pedagogy that can potentially develop the socio-cultural competence of school children in post-colonial Nigeria. A dual-method of literature review is adopted – traditional for conceptual grounding and systematic for empirical validation through analysis and synthesis of 11 relevant peer-reviewed studies published between 2004 and 2024. The findings established that theatre offers both cognitive and affective learning benefits to students by promoting mimetic creation, dissemination and deepening of their socio-cultural knowledge and appreciation of their “self” towards the acceptance of “the other”. This is argued as the major crux of socio-cultural competence that theatre(-in-) education offers. The argument therefore has implications for the decolonisation of education and culture and the promotion of culturally responsive pedagogy in Nigeria. Educational policies and practices as well as school curricula in Nigeria should be innovated and necessary resources should be provided to accommodate (practical) theatre as a school subject.

Keywords: Education, Theatre(-in-) Education, Socio-cultural Competence, Post-colonial Education, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Education is a tool the society uses to transmit its values, culture and norms from one generation to the other. The whole essence of this transmission is to ensure the continuity and sustainability of societal values and norms. Therefore, education is society-specific because every society has its values and norms that are geared towards achieving their needs and aspirations. Education gives back to the society that owns it by equipping humans to live functionally and self-reliantly (Pitsoe & Adeyeye, 2024; Fafunwa, 1974). In essence, education sees to the all-round development of man. However, no human is totally developed without being socio-culturally competent. This puts socio-cultural competence in the heart of the development education offers to members of the society.

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As such, every post-colonial Nigerian child should be resilient about their indigenous culture and social values despite the colonial experience Nigeria had. The post-colonial Nigeria is still very much under the siege of colonialism culturally and educationally (Adeyinka & Akinsola, 2021; Orotoye, 2019). A peep through the window of history also would substantiate this. Education in pre-colonial Nigeria was traditional and informal, since it was society-based and no formal teacher was involved. Fafunwa (1974) conceptualises Nigerian pre-colonial education as the processes of developing the child's latent skills, characters, vocational skills and sense of belonging in family, community and social life and to promote the cultural heritage of the society at large. A concise way to restate Fafunwa's position is that education in pre-colonial Nigeria was geared towards making people economically, socially and culturally competent. Therefore, its contents were indigenous knowledge system, while its context is the need of the community. Also, its methods were indigenous means of transmitting knowledge such as oral tradition/literature, festivals, performances, indoctrination, initiation, modelling and so on (Adekunle & Meroyi, 2023; Fafunwa, 1974).

However, colonialism and westernisation came as a rude and affront interruption to the traditional/informal education in Nigeria. The colonial education was not so much interested in the socio-cultural competence of Nigerians but the economic benefits they got for making Nigerians literate (Adegun, 2021; Enwo-Irem, 2013). From the colonial era till date, there had been a serious shift from indigenous knowledge system through family and community-based approaches to a classroom-based teaching (Adekunle & Meroyi, 2023; Imam, 2012). Education had hitherto been delimited to the classroom and the English language is dominantly used over and above the indigenous languages (Imam, 2012). There had also been a neglect of the indigenous arts, cultures and literature, resulting in a deterioration in the practice of cultural values (Adegun, 2021; Enwo-Irem, 2013). Glaringly, products of such education are less competent socio-culturally, especially in what is indigenous to them and to their other neighbours.

In an attempt to decolonise education and culture in Nigeria, efforts had been focused on curriculum reviews and intervention studies (Okofu & Fakere, 2024; Felix, 2022). Curriculum review and innovation attempts were championed by the curriculum conference of 1969 while intervention studies were championed by Bab Fafunwa's Ife Six-years Primary Education Project in the 1980s (Akinsola & Controneo, 2023; Babalola, 2024). These two notable efforts have recognised and recommended the strong inclusion of indigenous languages, cultures and literature within the education setting so as to produce individuals that are socially and culturally competent.

Recent education policies and curricula in Nigeria incorporate indigenous languages, literature, culture and arts into education at both the primary and secondary education levels. At the primary education level, the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment is recommended as the language of instruction initially for the first four years (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004; 2013) and later for the whole six years of primary education (Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council, NERDC 2022). At both the primary and secondary education levels, Cultural and Creative Arts, Music and Indigenous Languages (Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Edo, Efik and so on) that have orthography are included in the curricula as school subjects. The curricula for Cultural and Creative Arts, and Music essentially feature various forms of Nigerian artefacts, art history and indigenous artistic performances. Similarly,

Indigenous Languages curriculum includes Nigerian indigenous arts, culture, festivals and literature (NERDC, 2022).

It is expected that an effective implementation of the Nigerian education policy and curricula should equip school children with socio-cultural competence and reduce the negative influence of colonisation and westernisation on the Nigerian cultural heritage. Despite these efforts, the influence of colonisation in Nigerian education practice is still strongly felt (Aigbe, 2023; Imam, 2012), as a result of the poor methodical implementation of the indigenous cultural, language and creative arts components of education in Nigeria (Akinsola, 2023; Akinsola, 2024). The education policy in Nigeria has always been poorly implemented (Akinsola & Cotroneo, 2023) due to many factors among which are lack of teachers' motivation, inadequate materials/resources and so on (Babalola, 2023; Akinsola & Olaosebikan, 2021). Many a time, the practical/performance aspect of the indigenous arts and culture suffer from this problem. Akinsola and Controneo (2023) observe that Arts Education teachers in Nigeria usually resort to theoretical chalk-and-talk instruction because of the difficulties involved in implementing the performance aspects of the Nigerian indigenous arts and culture. This has always resulted in poor socio-cultural competence among school children and young adults in Nigeria. This poor socio-cultural competence is evident in their poor knowledge of diverse cultural practices starting from their indigenous cultural practices to the cultural practices of neighbouring communities (Ebatamehi, 2022). It is also seen in their incapacity for cultural self-assessment, lack of consciousness for cultural dynamism, lack of cultural self-awareness, ineffective communication, values disorientation among others (Gumbo, Maposa & Bhebhe, 2022).

Scholars have empirically attributed the problem of poor socio-cultural competence, especially among Yoruba students in the Ibadan metropolis of Nigeria, to the overdominance of western civilisation in terms of arts and entertainment (Akinsola, 2025a; Akinsola, 2025b) as well as the poor teaching of cultural practices both at home and in the school (Akinsola, 2024). Such studies have offered recommendations for the integration of practical indigenous arts and entertainment teaching into language and cultural education in Nigeria. Therefore, this article attempts to conceptually and systematically project theatre(-in-) education as a means of methodically integrating indigenous theatrical arts into the education of Nigerian post-colonial children towards developing their socio-cultural competence.

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge by addressing a critical and underexplored gap in the discourse on Nigerian education – the lack of culturally responsive pedagogical strategies for developing socio-cultural competence in school children. By conceptualising and empirically supporting the use of theatre(-in-) education, this study offers an innovative, performative methodology that aligns with Nigeria's indigenous traditions and oral culture. The research has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it advances conversations in decolonial education by positioning performance-based learning as a legitimate and potent educational method rooted in indigenous knowledge systems. Practically, it provides educators, curriculum planners, and policymakers with a feasible, engaging, and culturally rooted approach to instruction – especially in cultural and language education. The study's outcomes have the potential to shape national and subnational education policies by encouraging the integration of theatre(-in-) education into teacher

training programs and classroom practice. It also lays a foundation for further research into indigenous pedagogies, cross-cultural education models, and performance-based learning.

Summarily, this study argues that the persistent socio-cultural incompetence observed among post-colonial Nigerian schoolchildren is a direct consequence of colonial educational legacies that have marginalised indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions as well as a consequence of ineffective teaching strategies. While recent educational policies in Nigeria have attempted to reintegrate indigenous languages, arts, and cultural practices into the curriculum, the lack of effective, culturally responsive pedagogical methods has limited their impact. Therefore, this study's main thesis is that theatre(-in-) education, rooted in indigenous performance traditions, offers a viable and transformative instructional strategy for fostering socio-cultural competence. By conceptually framing and empirically supporting the integration of theatrical arts into formal education, the study seeks to fill a critical gap in curriculum implementation and advocate for a more inclusive, culturally grounded model of education in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

The argument in this article is made qualitatively using literature review as a methodology. As a desk-based or literature-based study, the traditional and systematic approaches (Snyder, 2019) to literature review are adopted. Conceptual review on the subjects of socio-cultural competence, theatre, theatre education and theatre-in-education was conducted traditionally. According to the nature of a traditional literature review, the conceptual review of the mentioned subjects did not follow a particular procedure especially in terms of literature search, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for authors or articles to be selected (Snyder, 2019).

The purpose of the conceptual literature review is to understand how socio-cultural competence is indigenously conceptualised in Nigeria, drawing examples from the Yoruba anthropological perspectives from which this writer hails and has relatively high linguistic prowess. Conceptual articles were sourced traditionally from the internet and library. This internet and library search was conducted through predetermined review themes. Therefore, the thematic conceptual review aimed at conceptualising theatre, theatre education and theatre-in-education as sufficient culturally responsive means of achieving socio-cultural competence in school children. This makes the principles of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy resonate through the literature review conducted in this study.

To empirically substantiate the conceptual claim that theatre(-in-) education can make school children socio-culturally competent, a systematic literature review was conducted. The systematic review allowed for a procedural search for and analysis of empirical studies on the impacts of theatre(-in-) education so as to draw lessons for education policy and practices in Nigeria. The systematic review followed a self-made 4S approach to systematic review of literature. The 4S stands for a linear process of Searching, Screening, Selection, and Synthesis, represented in Figure 1:



Figure 1: Linear Procedure for Systematic Review of Literature (Source: Author's Creation)

For the searching stage, an extensive web-based search was conducted on databases such as Routledge, ScienceDirect, Sage, ERIC, Crossref, and Google Scholar. In conducting the search, the following key phrases were used:

- Theatre for cultural education (in Nigeria)
- Theatre in education (in Nigeria)
- Theatre education (in Nigeria)
- Drama in education (in Nigeria)
- Drama Education (in Nigeria)
- Theatre for development (in Nigeria) for classroom instruction
- Theatre for young audience (in Nigeria)
- Effect of theatre intervention in (Nigerian) classroom
- Theatre/drama in (Nigerian) schools

From this search, a total number of 89 articles were found, downloaded and screened. The screening stage thus involved the examination of the downloaded articles in line with the following inclusion criteria:

1. The article was published in a peer reviewed journal;
2. The study was conducted in the last 20 years, that is between 2004 and 2024;
3. The study was an empirical study, where quantitative and/or qualitative data were collected and analysed;
4. There was a particular emphasis on social and cultural education through theatre/drama technique(s) in the study;
5. The educational context of the study should be the primary and/or secondary level of education.

However, some articles that fulfil the above criteria could not be selected because they fit into the exclusion criterion below:

1. Articles that are not published open access. Such articles were excluded from the systematic review because they would not be freely available and accessible online for interested readers to verify the veracity of the review conducted in this study.

2. Articles whose methodology is not strong enough, especially as it relates to ethical considerations. This is to ensure that the data from which their findings emanated were gathered legitimately and did not infringe on the right or damage the emotion of the school children involved in the studies.

To examine the articles that fulfil the above criteria from the 89 articles downloaded, the screening involved three self-made cyclical steps - Title screening, abstract screening and full article screening as represented in the figure below:

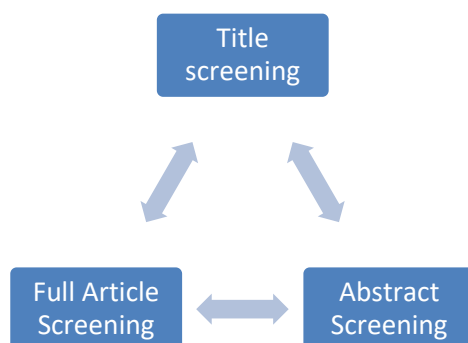


Figure 2: Cyclical Screening Procedure for Article Selection in Systematic Review (Source: Author's Creation)

The screening was carried out by two peer-assessors engaged by the researcher to maintain objectivity and reliability. The two assessors utilised the researcher-made assessment checklist in carrying out this task. The checklist comprises 10 items generated from the objectives, inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study. Each of the 10 items were rated on a scale of 1 (lowest score) to 5 (highest score).

At the first step, the titles of the downloaded articles were examined in line with the inclusion criteria. At this step, 23 articles whose titles show great disparities with the set criteria were dropped. The remaining 66 articles were moved to the next step of the screening exercise – abstract screening. Their abstracts were read and examined critically. However, only 7 articles could be screened out because the majority of the article abstracts were not structured in a way to reveal details about the study. Therefore, the 59 articles remaining were screened using full article screening. At this level, the reading of each article required moving back to the article title, abstract and the full study again. This process was repeated several times for many of these 59 articles, showing the cyclical nature of the article screening stage in the systematic review conducted in the study. After this process, 11 articles were selected.

The method adopted for the systematic review involved the thematic analysis and synthesis of the findings of the selected articles. The themes and sub-themes were arrived at through the process of qualitative manual coding (Creswell, 2010). This involved coding the findings of the selected studies using code weight and code co-occurrence – isolating findings (codes) having more emphasis and grouping findings (codes) that are similar in their emphasis (Creswell, 2010). Arriving from this process, the major two themes are that:

- (a.) Theatre(-in-) education promotes cognition of socio-cultural concepts
- (b.) Theatre(-in-) education has affective learning functions towards socio-cultural competence

These two themes inform the two subheadings presented in the systematic review section in this article. Upon the findings of the systematic review, lessons are drawn for education policy and practice in Nigeria. This systematic review is presented in this article after the conceptual review of the subjects of socio-cultural competence, theatre, theatre education and theatre(-in-) education.

This methodology follows the ethical considerations of conducting systematic review in educational research. In line with Suri (2020), ethical integrity in systematic reviews requires transparency in the selection, inclusion, and synthesis of literature to avoid misrepresentation or bias. To ensure this, a clear set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was developed and applied rigorously throughout the review process. Moreover, due credit was given to all original authors, ensuring intellectual honesty and academic integrity. Articles that did not meet basic ethical standards—such as those lacking informed consent or evidence of ethical clearance—were excluded from the review. Additionally, open-access literature was prioritised to promote equitable access to knowledge and verification of findings by a broader scholarly community. This approach aligns with ethical calls for responsibility, accountability, and fairness in the conduct and dissemination of systematic reviews in education (Suri, 2020).

This literature-based research methodology is not without its own limitations. Despite being advantageous in synthesising the existing knowledge, the methodology could be limited by publication bias – where studies with positive or significant results are more likely to be published and accessible, potentially skewing findings (Page et al. 2021) and language/culture restrictions – especially with the dominance of English language publication, marginalising indigenous perspectives and locally conducted studies published in other languages (Rethlefsen et al., 2021). However, in this study, these limitations were envisaged and mitigated by adopting a systematic search strategy that included open-access databases (e.g., Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and African Journals Online). Similarly, the search terms used in the process were inclusive terms reflecting Nigerian contexts ((e.g., “theatre for development in Nigeria,” “drama in cultural education”). Therefore, both the conceptual and systematic reviews conducted in this study consciously included indigenous and context-specific literature from Nigeria to enhance cultural and geographical inclusivity. In addition, the combination of traditional and systematic review strategies (Snyder, 2019) helped to counterbalance selection bias and ensure a comprehensive representation of relevant findings.

3. Conceptual Clarification through Literature

3.1 Socio-Cultural Competence: A problem for post-colonial Nigerian Children

Socio-cultural competence has been widely conceptualised and studied from the angle of multiculturalism and interculturalism (Mak & Barker, 2004; Mak & Buckingham, 2007; Eden et. al., 2024) with insignificant attention paid to native or indigenous cultures. The attempt has been to theorise how people form and acquire socio-cultural competence when they come in contact with other cultures, especially through (foreign) language learning. As much as this is necessary, it has hitherto downgraded the nationalist spirit with which people should hold their cultural beliefs, values and norms. In a bid to understand others, people tend to misunderstand themselves. Therefore, socio-cultural competence must strongly include self-awareness of a person's own cultural identity and values that hold one's own society.

Socio-cultural competence has been conceptualised by Maletzke, (2013) as the knowledge of both universal and native cultural values and forms and means of their manifestation in the institutions of society, behaviour pattern of people, linguistic picture of the world and acceptable speech practices. Although this point of view mentions native cultural values, much emphasis is placed on universal culture because of the need for intercultural communication. In such situations, cultures meet and what Bhabha calls ‘cultural hybridity’ occurs (Bhabha, 1994), a situation that can result in a marginalisation of one culture for another (Osundiran & Akinsola 2025). In the case of the Yoruba society in Nigeria, colonisation brought about cultural hybridity and the eventual marginality of the Yoruba socio-cultural practices (Gumbo, Maposa & Bhebhe, 2022). Hence, many individuals are not socio-culturally competent. Among school children in the Yoruba society, for instance, it is not uncommon to observe high preference for western-oriented arts and entertainment over the indigenous ones (Akinsola, 2025a; Akinsola, 2025b). This phenomenon has been empirically indicted for the poor knowledge of indigenous cultural practices among school children in the Yoruba society (Akinsola, 2025b). Cultural hybridity can on the other hand promote socio-cultural competence because it exposes post-colonial Nigerians to diverse cultures around the world. However, “charity must begin at home” when the concern is socio-cultural competence in this post-colonial time. Individuals must firstly be knowledgeable about their culture to be able to understand other people’s culture and socialise accordingly. In ensuring this in a country like Nigeria, the role of education and training cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, people who are socio-culturally competent have, through sociocultural training and education, formed the complex knowledge of values, beliefs, behavioural patterns, customs, traditions, language and cultural achievements of their own and others (Eden et. al., 2024).

From the foregoing, it is believed that it is impossible to form a socio-cultural competence without acquisition of sociocultural knowledge. Sociocultural knowledge includes knowledge of social and cultural life, the knowledge and experience of own and foreign language culture, the possession of own and foreign language, the ability to recognise and analyse the situation, to give it an adequate assessment, to find ways of solving problems and achieve set goals (Herbrand, 2010). While many Nigerians have knowledge and experience of foreign language and culture, especially their colonial language – English, Akinsola and Adeyinka (2020) reported that knowledge of indigenous language and culture was poor among secondary school children in Ibadan metropolis. This has been evident in two ways – linguistic and informational, according to Rakhimova’s (2017) report of two models of recognising socio-cultural competence.

As reported by Akinsola and Adeyinka (2020), many of the students are not linguistically proficient in the Yoruba language, which is supposed to be their native language, because of the influence of the foreign language training they have in English. Similarly, they lack cultural information such as Cultural achievements (music, literature, folklore, artifacts); Etiquette (accepted norms of behaviour at home and in society, firstly, politeness strategies); Clothes; Traditions of national cuisine and so on. This is happening despite the teaching of indigenous cultures and languages to children in Nigerian schools. There is therefore a need to interrogate how socio-cultural competence is formed through education and training vis-a-vis the current teaching of indigenous languages and cultures in Nigeria. This will help foreground the reasons for theatre(-in-) education in developing socio-cultural competence of Nigerian children.

According to Rakhimova (2017), socio-cultural competence is formed through four methods of education and training – classroom discussion, critical incidents (aimed at identifying differences in verbal and nonverbal communication), culture capsules (emphasises one of the differences in culture) and Role-playing game. By personal observation, indigenous languages and cultures are taught majorly through classroom discussions in Nigeria without much emphasis placed on role playing. However, in the Yoruba socio-cultural setting, socio-cultural knowledge is acquired via oral tradition/literature, festivals, performances, indoctrination, initiation, modelling and imitation. In the actual sense, emphasis is placed on learning by doing among the Yoruba people traditionally, since knowledge is usually mimetically created and disseminated. It is believed that such an atmosphere can be better brought into the formal school setting through the teaching of theatre as a subject and/or the use of theatre as a method of education.

3.2 Theatre and Theatre Education

The term “theatre” is etymologically derived from two Greek words “theatron” and “theaomai,” the former being “a place of viewing” while the latter being “to see”, “to watch” or “to observe” (Idogho, 2013; Cohen & Sherman, 2014). Putting these etymological meanings together, theatre could be seen, by a layman, as a place people come to see/view something. That is, theatre is a building where something is done and seen – a definition Cohen and Sherman (2014) call the ‘hardware’ meaning of theatre. However, without the ‘software’ definition – what is done and seen, the term “theatre” in its current form, and especially in the context of this present study, cannot be fully conceptualised. Therefore, a more intellectual conceptual clarification of theatre is offered in the following paragraphs.

Taking a more technical posture in clarifying the concept “theatre”, three questions could be derived from its etymology presented above. The questions, as itemised below, will be answered critically in the ensuing paragraphs:

- i. What do people come to see/view/observe?
- ii. Who put what they come to see together, or simply, who do people come to see?
- iii. Why do people come to see?

To start with, people (generally known as audience) come to see, view or observe an art, or simply put, a performance. Hence, many scholars have defined theatre as “a collaborative art or performance” (Aleshi & Iloh 2013; Idogho 2013; Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Sanders 2018). By defining theatre as a collaborative art/performance, this implies that collaboration is involved in theatre production, presentation and spectation. Apart from the fact that theatre combines all other arts such as music, dance, sound, painting, including drama among others (Idogho 2013), being a collaborative art means that many professionals must come and work together to achieve what is known as theatre. On the collaborative nature of theatre, Sanders (2018: 1) submits that:

...a piece of theatre has not come from the mind of a single creator, but from a large group of people working toward a common goal. The theatre collaboration is similar to

the function of a sports team, or even a military unit, in that many people are doing a variety of things that all contribute to the group success.

For theatre to be what it is, professionals such as script writer, director, stage manager, costumier, set designer, make-up artist, box officers, actors and actresses must walk together towards achieving the same purpose just as members of a sport team do. In addition to this, audience must be present to view and appraise the production and presentation. Hence, Cohen and Sherman (2014:6) aver that, “theatre involves those who watch and those who are watched—the audience and what is on stage” arising from “a combination of place, people, plays, and ideas—and the works of art that result from this collaboration.”

From the foregoing, it could be extrapolated that what people/audience come to see in a place is an art, a performance, or simply put an acted drama that is put together by a group of professionals. This directly links up with the second question – Who put what they come to see together, or simply, who do people come to see? What the audience come to see is put together by theatre professionals, hence, the audience come to see professional actors and actresses who are aided by other, though often invisible experts such as script writer, director, stage manager, costumier, set designer, make-up artist and so on. It is in this sense that theatre could also be defined not just as a collaborative performing art but also as a profession. Describing theatre as a profession, Cohen and Sherman (2014:6) write:

It is a vocation and sometimes a lifelong devotion. If someone says “I work in theatre,” they are using the word to conjure an entire world of meanings. They are telling you that they work in a theatre, they participate in the activity of theatre, they collaborate with other theatre artists, and—perhaps most importantly—that they are inspired by theatre. Theatre is an occupation and an art. To work in the theatre is not just to labor, but also to create.

No doubt, theatre requires a whole lot of professionalism, if it is going to be referred to as a vocation. Therefore, theatre has been and will continue to be an academic field of study in the higher institution. Theatre as an academic field of study is a practical liberal education and according to Idogho (2013:237-238), focuses on the study of Dramatic Literature, Theory and Criticism; History and Sociology of Drama; Theatre(-in-)education; Children’s Theatre-Creative Dramatic, Community Theatre; The media: TV, Radio and Film/Video, Writing and Broadcasting; Music and Sound effects; Costumes Design and Construction; Set Design and Construction; Lighting Design and Construction; Advertising and Public Relations; Publicity and Theatre Business Management; Stage Management; Dance and Choreography; Acting, Mime and Movement; Play directing (for stage, film, and radio); Playwriting, Play criticism and Author’s study; Make-up Design and Execution; and Props Design and Construction.

Most of the skills above are what is put together to produce and present a good theatre to the audience. The skills are vocational and are very useful in making graduate self-employed (Elder et al., 2008; Idogho, 2013). In this sense, theatre could be seen as the vocation of individuals who have passed through a period of schooling in the art of the theatre or related discipline at the higher institution level. However, as theatre is a vocation for schooled individuals, it is also an avocation for amateurs (Cohen & Sherman (2014). In this wise, theatre as a profession cannot be seen as what is solely born out of

schooling or academics, because many people who have not been so formally schooled have it as their avocation and, in many cases, pursue it until it becomes their vocation. In fact, Hubert Ogunde, who is generally agreed to be the progenitor of modern theatre practices in Nigeria (Clark, 2008; Alamu 2010; Ogundeji 2014; Akinsola 2020a; Akinsola 2020b; Osundiran & Akinsola 2025), was not formally schooled in the art of the theatre. Yet, he eventually made a vocation out of it. Similarly, many theatre professionals in today's Nigeria informally learnt the arts of the theatre from a troupe. Therefore, defining theatre as a profession does not just relate to being an academic field, although the study of theatre in the school has gone a long way in the development of theatre as a vocation.

The next question to answer in this conceptual clarification of theatre is “why do people come to see?” As an art, theatre has the surface goal of entertaining the audience. Therefore, at the surface, it could be said that people come to the theatre to be entertained and based on this view, theatre could be defined as a form of entertainment. However, though people may have come to be entertained, what happens to the theatre audience goes beyond entertainment, because according to Umukoro (2002), entertainment is just one of the three traditional functions of theatre – entertainment, information, and education.

Obviously, entertainment is the first thing most people have on their minds when going to the theatre, and indeed, it is entertainment that is put forward. However, entertainment is not an end but a means to an end. In most cases, the entertainment is to make the audience feel relaxed and receptive to the information the theatre conveys. This culminates into educating the audience. Hence, the audience come to the theatre to be entertained, and they are informed and educated in the process. It is based on this notion that theatre could be referred to as an educational medium. Theatre as an educational medium has developed to be one of the sub-fields of theatre arts which is called theatre-in-education.

Arising from the foregoing discourse, theatre is conceived as a creative art form that is dependent on the collaboration of the playwright, performers, technical crew, and the audience who are entertained, informed, and educated through the production. In essence, conceptualising theatre in this way shows the primacy of creativity, collaboration, and audience participation to the arts of the theatre. Hence, a theatre venture is unsuccessful until it has an audience and a box-office, both of which are the backbones of any professional theatre.

3.3 Theatre as (informal) education

Theatrical practices had been part of the community socialisation and informal education processes from antiquity through oral tradition, folklores, songs, dances, and masquerade displays (Mbachaga, 2014). For instance, initiation ceremonies in most African societies are an informal way through which new and young members of such societies are socialised in the ways of life of the people. And since theatre origin in Nigeria has been attributed to traditional festivals and ceremonies, such initiation ceremonies cannot but possess some undoubted theatrical elements.

Theatre, whether in its traditional form or as it is in this modern era, is thus an informal way of socialising and educating audiences and by extension satirising societal ills. Giving a voice to this, Umukoro (2002: 115) submits that “theatre deals freely with all sections of the human community, often to the discomfort of chagrin of a squeamish or prudish segment of the society”. Traditionally, in Africa,

inculcation of morals, values, norms, and mores is achieved informally through the instrumentality of festivals, ceremonies, storytelling, folklores, chants, songs, dance, and acrobatic displays among others which are important indicators of theatrical performances. Performers utilised the occasions and opportunities of such festivals and ceremonies to applaud the just and condemn the unjust in the society. Therefore, theatre offers, to its audience, informal education about what is just and unjust in the society where they live. As a form of informal education, theatre in Nigeria is currently being used for socio-cultural preservation, religious propaganda, and educational propagation (Umukoro, 2002). Such educational function of theatre is however based on theatre as used in the context of formal education. This is handled elaborately in the next section of this review.

3.4 Theatre in (formal) education

When theatrical entertainment is adopted in attracting the attention of school children and evoking enthusiasm in their minds to listen attentively and effectively identify the educational messages therein (Joronen et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2012; Praveen & Devi 2015), it is generally believed that theatre in formal education is at work. Theatre-in-education (TiE, henceforth), as a new form of applied theatre, began in Britain in the 1960s. Specifically the various school projects conducted by the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry in Britain in 1965 marked the beginning of the use of theatre as an educational method in Britain and culminated into the establishment of a full-time TiE unit sponsored by the Belgrade Theatre and the local authority (Jackson, 2002). These efforts were developed into a structure that was propagated to Theatres across the country. The personnel of these companies combined the works of both artists and teachers; hence, they are referred to as “actor teacher”.

Traditionally, while carrying out a TiE programme, a professional theatre troupe prepares materials relevant to the curriculum objectives and/or socio-cultural needs of school children and visits the school (usually more than once) for presentations (Wooster, 2007; O’Toole, 2009; Jackson, 2011; Idogho, 2013; Praveen & Devi, 2015; Uju, 2019). As such, a TiE programme would engage its audience and offer them a wide range of aesthetic, pedagogical and psychological values. In other words, it entertains and teaches its audience as well as aids behavioural modification by emotionally inculcating certain social and moral values into its audience. It, thus, goes “beyond the mere delivery and illustration of a message”, as it helps to engage the audience emotionally and then, intellectually (Jackson, 2011:235).

According to Redington (1979), TiE programmes can help in developing the curriculum, since its business is offering real service to schools. TiE provides the stimulus, subject-matter, climax or follow up to a project or centre of interest. Elder, Hovey, Jones, and Swann (2008) also submit that TiE is a tool for the study of and curriculum development for subjects such as history, culture, diversity, and the human experience. No doubt, TiE provides valuable opportunities for students to develop personally, socially, and physically, because it inspires, challenges perceptions, changes attitudes, improves self-esteem, motivation, and achievement, delivers key messages that are easily understood and remembered, and maximises learning (Robson, 2018). TiE performs all its roles by ensuring active engagement and participation of its audience. As such, it is a novel approach to engaging young people in education on any societal issues (Irving 2000), including developing competence in socio-cultural practices, as the systematic review presented in the ensuing section reveals.

There is plethora of studies on the growing relevance of theatre as a transformative pedagogical tool for fostering socio-cultural competence in Nigerian education. Chukwu-Okoronkwo & Ajiwe (2023) illustrate how Theatre-for-Development interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced community engagement and heightened socio-cultural responsiveness in south-eastern Nigeria, thereby reaffirming theatre's community-building function. Similarly, Aliyu (2023) advocates for the integration of TiE into teacher training programs, highlighting its potential to cultivate cultural awareness, identity, and entrepreneurial sensibilities among preservice educators. At the foundational level, Idogho (2022) demonstrates that incorporating creative drama – such as storytelling and role-play – into the primary school curriculum can significantly improve pupils' moral orientation and cultural consciousness. Extending this conversation to higher education, Ekweariri & Ejelonu (2024) examine theatre arts education in Nigerian colleges, noting its contribution to students' holistic development, particularly in relation to social ethics and cultural identity. Furthermore, Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide & Usadolo (2022) provide evidence from the University of Benin, where theatre training was found to enhance intercultural sensitivity and communication skills, positioning theatre as a conduit for building socio-cultural competence in multicultural contexts.

However, apart from the studies conducted by Chukwu-Okoronkwo & Ajiwe (2023) and Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide & Usadolo (2022), the works of other scholars (Aliyu, 2023; Idogho 2022; Ekweariri & Ejelonu 2024) were not empirical. Therefore, they were not selected for the systematic review carried out in this study. In fact, the empirical studies of Chukwu-Okoronkwo & Ajiwe (2023) and Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide & Usadolo (2022) were not also selected because they were not on primary or secondary school children. Nevertheless, these studies and many others earlier pointed at explicitly or tendentially confirm that using theatre in formal education context follows the principle of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) – a theoretical orientation that the ideas in this article resonate with. Theatre, well integrated into formal education, can serve as dynamic vehicles for engaging learners' cultural backgrounds, affirming identities, and enhancing socio-cultural competence. This is achievable since theatre(-in-) education cannot but integrate students' indigenous knowledge and cultural practices which aligns with the emphasis of CRP (Akinsola, 2025c). The systematic review conducted in the ensuing section further establishes how theatre(-in-) education promotes socio-cultural competence – stressing the major principles in the CRP.

4. Theatre(-in-) Education and Socio-cultural Competence: Evidence from Systematic Review

4.1 The Profiles of the Articles Selected

The 11 articles selected for this systematic review are profiled in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Profiles of the Selected Articles

s/n	Authors and Year of Publication	Title	Journal and/or Database	Methodology	Participants/ Data source(s)
1	Akinsola, (2024)	Theatre(-in-)education Packages and Secondary Students' Knowledge of Yoruba Orature in Ibadan Metropolis	African Journal of Teacher Education (AJOTE) Google Scholar	Quantitative: Quasi experimental design	Secondary school students and Yoruba language teachers in Ibadan metropolis.
2	Feng, (2022)	The Use of Drama Pedagogy in Teaching Morality in a Chinese Primary School.	ECNU Review of Education Sage/Eric	Qualitative Case study research approach	16 pupils in a Chinese primary school
3	Mavroudis (2020)	Drama in Education as an Educational Tool for the Management of Cultural Diversity in Primary Schools	International Journal of Learning and Development Google Scholar	Intervention/ experimental approach	Primary school learners
4	Kisida et al., (2020)	Teaching History Through Theater: The Effects of Arts Integration on Students' Knowledge and Attitudes	American Educational Research Association (AERA) AERA Open Sage	Causal experimental research design	Grade 3 to 5 students
5	Mavroudis and Bournelli, (2019)	The Contribution of Drama in Education to the Development of Skills Improving the Interpersonal Relations of Multicultural Classroom Students	Journal of Educational Issues Google Scholar	Qualitative Case study - interviews, observation, researcher's log, assessments & self-	21 children with various cultural origins, from the lowest financial strata of Greece

				assessments of students	
6	Papaioannou and Kondoyianni, (2019)	Promoting the Acceptance of the 'other' through Drama in Education	Yaratici Drama Dergisi www.yader.org Google Scholar	Qualitative Case Study	Sixteen (16) grade two students in the county of Larisa, Greece
7	Angraini and Kusniarti, (2016)	The implementation of character education model based on empowerment theatre for primary school students	<i>Journal of Education and Practice</i> www.iiste.org ERIC	Qualitative Methodology	Primary school pupils in Malang city/regency of Indonesia
8	Ejiofor and Ken-Aminikpo, (2016)	Theatre in education: a technique for effective social studies teaching in junior secondary schools' classes	<i>Journal of Education and Human Development</i> Crossref	Quasi experimental methodology	J.S.S 3 Students in Government Secondary School Kpite, Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria
9	Simsek and Elitok Kesici, (2012)	Heritage education for primary school children through drama: The Case of Aydin, Turkey	Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences ScienceDirect	Creative Drama Method through content analysis, observations and semi-structured interviews	164 Primary School children in Aydin
10	Koukounaras-Liagis, (2011)	Can an educational intervention, specifically Theatre in Education, influence students' perceptions of and attitudes to cultural and religious diversity? A socio-educational research.	<i>British Journal of Religious Education</i> , https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2011.523526 Routledge	Qualitative Case Study through Observations and recorded interviews	212 Students and 18 teachers in the Thessaloniki in Northern Greece and a town in Thrace, in the north-east of Greece.
11	Bournot-Trites et al., (2007)	The role of drama on cultural sensitivity, motivation, and	<i>Journal for Learning through the Arts</i> (https://escholarship	Mixed-methods research design	60 pupils from Elementary classes in Canada

	literacy in a second language context.	org/uc/item/4v10841	
		0)	
		Eric	

Source: Author's Creation

The articles profiled in Table 1 empirically established how theatre/drama used for educational purposes improved the socio-cultural competence of school children. The findings from the studies proven that theatre(-in-) education contributes cognitively and affectively to the subject of socio-cultural competence among school children. Only two of the 11 studies selected focused solely on the cognitive dimension (Akinsola, 2024; Ejiofor & Ken-Aminikpo 2016), six studies focused solely on the affective dimension (Mavroudis, 2020; Mavroudis & Bournelli 2019; Papaioannou and Kondoyianni 2019; Anggraini & Kusniarti 2016; Simşek & Elitok Kesici 2012; Koukounaras-Liagis, 2011) while the remaining three studies focused on both the cognitive and the affective dimensions (Feng, 2022; Kisida, Goodwin, & Bowen 2020; Bournot-Trites, Belliveau & Spiliotopoulos 2007). This shows how important affective learning is to socio-cultural competence over and above a mere cognition of the concept. However, the cognition is usually theorised as a basis for the affective learning and eventual societal display of socio-cultural competence. Therefore, attempt is firstly made in the ensuing subsection to synthesise the findings of the selected studies relating to cognition of socio-cultural concepts through theatre/drama in education.

4.2 Cognition of Socio-cultural Concepts through Theatre(-in-) education

Studies conducted by Akinsola (2024) and Ejiofor and Ken-Aminikpo (2016) mainly focused on the roles of theatre/drama on the cognition of socio-cultural concepts among school children. While Akinsola focused on knowledge of the Yoruba Orature, Ejiofor and Ken-Aminikpo focused on traditional marriage rite of the Ogoni people in Nigeria. Orature as a socio-cultural concept are the collections of verbal performances that serve the purpose of entertainment and tools of socialisation both at home and in the Yoruba society. In addition, it is an intangible cultural genre that portrays every aspect of the Yoruba/Nigerians' ways of life, including the marriage institution.

Therefore, using theatre to present Yoruba orature (Akinsola, 2024) and traditional marriage rite (Ejiofor & Ken-Aminikpo, 2016) lessons to students proven effective in improving students' cognition of their traditional cultural heritage. Akinsola reported that students taught using theatre-in-education packages had an increased knowledge of the Yoruba orature than their counterparts taught using the conventional teaching mode. Similarly, Ejiofor and Ken-Aminikpo reported that students who were taught the traditional marriage rite of the Ogoni people through theatre techniques demonstrated an appreciable understanding of the marriage culture in the context of Ogoni society.

Since theatre presents an avenue to repeatedly encounter the lesson contents through several conscious and unconscious rehearsals, students' cognition of the socio-cultural concepts in the lesson contents cannot but be deepened. For instance, in Akinsola's study, students were taken through theatre making processes that involved play conception, scripting, rehearsing, directing and staging. At every stage of the process, students must have carried out researches into the Yoruba orature, thereby gotten acquitted with the Yoruba socio-cultural practices that their orature houses. Similarly, Ejiofor & Ken-Aminikpo

reported that theatre(-in-) education mobilised students to collaboratively take part in cultural field research that increased their understanding of the Ogoni socio-cultural practices. Therefore, theatre(-in-) education provides an avenue for experiential learning that can contribute immensely to the students' cognition of socio-cultural concepts towards being socio-culturally competent especially in their indigenous cultural practices.

The studies conducted by Feng, (2022), Kisida et al., (2020) and Bournot-Trites et al., (2007) also hinted on the cognitive importance of theatre(-in-) education in improving students' socio-cultural competence. While Kisida et al.'s (2020) study directly established that theatre-based instruction increases in historical content knowledge, Feng's (2022) and Bournot-Trites et al.'s (2007) studies established that the engagement of students through theatre-based instruction developed students thinking abilities. It should be quickly added here that historical knowledge has been established by Greiving (2019) as a contributing factor to socio-cultural competence. If theatre therefore increases students' historical content knowledge according to Kisida et al., (2020), students' knowledge of their socio-cultural practices deeply rooted in their history cannot but be increased.

Theatre performs the above function by allowing students act out the past socio-cultural practices in order to understand and be versed in the present ones. Theatre also achieves this by widening the thinking abilities of the students through play creation/scripting and dialogues development. Little wonders Feng (2022) found that theatre developed students' dialogic and autonomous thinking capabilities. Similarly, Bournot-Trites et al.'s (2007) found that drama improved students' critical thinking as shown in composition writing because they scored higher in cultural content than their counterparts that were taught without drama activities. Succinctly, theatre(-in-) education potentially improves students' cognition of socio-cultural practices by engaging them in cultural field research, mimetic cultural knowledge creation and negotiation as well as critical, dialogic and autonomous thinking. This finding implies that there is a need to reorient curricula to integrate experiential and performative methods like theatre(-in-) education that allow students to embody cultural knowledge.

However, as basic as cognition is to socio-cultural competence, individuals cannot be said to be fully socio-culturally competent without a societal demonstration of their knowledge. Therefore, it is germane for theatre(-in-) education to develop students' feelings and enthusiasm about their socio-cultural practices. The next subsection in this review presents the findings of the selected studies related to the importance of theatre(-in-) education to the affective learning domain of students' socio-cultural competence.

Nevertheless, this first thematic finding has demonstrated that theatre(-in-) education enables students to critically engage with cultural heritage, thereby increasing their knowledge of indigenous practices.

4.3 Affective learning of Socio-cultural concepts through theatre(-in-) education

The selected articles established the importance of theatre(-in-) education in promoting the awareness and appreciation of "the self" and "the other". These two-prong benefits summarize the importance of theatre(-in-) education to the development of students' socio-cultural competence in the affective domain of learning. Students' knowledge or cognition of their socio-cultural practices and of others can only

result into socio-cultural competence when they are able to appreciate their culture and accept the culture of others.

On the awareness and appreciation of own self, the articles selected reported that theatre(-in-) education promoted positive self-perception, self-concept and public self-portrayal (Mavroudis & Bournelli 2019), better self-character (Anggraini & Kusniarti 2016), ethical and moral selves (Feng, 2022), awareness of own cultural heritage (Simşek & Elitok Kesici 2012) and integrative motivation (Bournot-Trites et al., 2007) among school children. All these variables are needed for a better appreciation of “the other” because it takes an individual who understand themselves to understand others. For this reason, majority of the theatre(-in-) education studies selected encouraged the use of students’ indigenous languages to talk about their socio-cultural settings and personal experiences. They through this process explored and understood who they were as a social being and what their cultural heritage is. Therefore, theatre(-in-) education developed students’ competence in their indigenous socio-cultural practices.

Towards “the other”, the articles selected reported that theatre(-in-) education promoted the acceptance of the other (Mavroudis, 2020; Papaioannou & Kondoyianni 2019) through group collaboration culture, emotional stability and intelligence, astute communication of own ideas (Mavroudis & Bournelli 2019), empathetic attitude (Feng, 2022), positive impression about others, positive and tolerant attitude towards others and knowledge of the other (Koukounaras-Liagis, 2011). The nature of theatre requires collaboration and working in group that cannot but develop the interpersonal relationship of students in terms of interaction, communication, emotional intelligence and empathy as the studies found. These variables of interpersonal relationship are towards the other especially in a multicultural setting like Nigeria where unity must maintain in spite of diversities. Therefore, an individual is only said to be socio-culturally competent in Nigeria when they can understand and appreciate their own indigenous cultural practices without despising that of the other whether it be by race, language, religion or any other indices of socio-cultural competence. Theatre(-in-) education, according to the articles reviewed, has the capacity to develop this competence and abilities in them.

However, despite the report of positive and significant outcomes in the selected studies, the extent of student engagement in theatre(-in-) education may vary based on context, teacher proficiency, and resource availability. For instance, contrasting findings may emerge where the theatre(-in-) education methods are poorly implemented or not culturally contextualised either due to teacher’s deficiency or lack of resources. Therefore, while the findings support theatre(-in-) education’s capacity to enhance socio-cultural competence, many other factors may have supported the success of such theatre(-in-) education interventions.

Nevertheless, the finding advocates for education policies that emphasise empathy, intercultural dialogue, and collaborative learning. Therefore, the results support the implementation of culturally responsive teaching policies, such as embedding theatre(-in-) education within Nigeria’s national curriculum for cultural and creative arts and training teachers in participatory pedagogy.

Summarily, this affective dimension of the thematic analysis of the selected articles reveals how theatre fosters empathy, emotional intelligence, and acceptance of cultural diversity, which are key components of socio-cultural competence. By synthesising these findings, the study affirms that theatre(-in-)

education is not only pedagogically effective but culturally responsive, and thus, an ideal strategy for addressing the deficits in socio-cultural learning among Nigerian school children.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined, through the lenses of extant literature, why theatre(-in-) education is important in developing the socio-cultural competence of every post-colonial Nigerian child. Theatre provides students with an opportunity to mimetically create, disseminate and deepen their socio-cultural knowledge and appreciate their “self” towards the acceptance of “the other”. This is the heart of socio-cultural competence that theatre(-in-) education offers. The post-colonial Nigerian child is strongly removed from their roots through the menace of colonisation and westernisation. However, theatre in the classroom helps to bring such an atmosphere back and this helps them to experience their socio-cultural practices, contributing to the cultural decolonisation process as theorised by Athiemoolam (2018). In addition to this, theatre presents “the other” to them making them multiculturally competent.

This study has a great implication for innovating education policy and practice in Nigeria. The subject Cultural and Creative Arts in the junior secondary school curriculum can be disintegrated into three separate subjects – theatre/dramatic Arts, Fine Arts and Music. Teachers of indigenous languages and cultures cannot rely on a mere classroom discussion in developing their students’ socio-cultural competence. Theatre should therefore be included into the Nigerian secondary education curriculum beyond traditional music and drama taught in the subject of Cultural and Creative Arts. Similarly, other subjects could be taught and illustrated using theatre and other art-based methodologies. Government and other stakeholders should formulate policy around this and provide will-power and resources to enforce their implementations.

This study makes an original contribution by systematically synthesising both Nigerian and global empirical studies to establish a conceptual and evidence-based link between theatre(-in-) education and socio-cultural competence. Unlike previous reviews that focused predominantly on cognitive or affective learning in isolation, this study presents a dual-perspective analysis, emphasising how theatre(-in-) education fosters both knowledge acquisition and empathetic understanding. Furthermore, it bridges theoretical frameworks (like culturally responsive pedagogy) with practical classroom interventions, offering a novel framework for policy direction and pedagogical reform in postcolonial educational contexts.

Despite the pedagogical promise of theatre(-in-) education, several barriers could impede its full adoption in Nigeria. These include inadequate teacher training, lack of instructional resources, rigid examination-oriented curricula, and limited institutional recognition of arts-based methods. To overcome these, the study recommends integrating theatre(-in-) education into teacher education programs, increasing government funding for arts education, and revising curricula to value performance-based assessment. Collaborative partnerships between schools, communities, and cultural institutions could also provide alternative platforms for theatre-based learning.

The findings open several pathways for future research. First, empirical studies should be conducted to implement theatre(-in-) education frameworks in real Nigerian classroom settings, assessing both short-

and long-term impacts on learners' socio-cultural competence. Longitudinal research could investigate how sustained exposure to theatre-based methods influences students' identity development, intercultural skills, and civic attitudes. Moreover, action research involving teachers as co-researchers could explore context-specific strategies for overcoming implementation challenges. Such studies will enrich existing literature and offer practical insights for educational policymakers.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest for this paper.

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