



## The Children Theatre Artist's Perspectives On Child's Rights And Child's Labour In The Digital Age.

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### ABSTRACT

A child is a minor, younger person being under the age of infancy and puberty. According to the Nigeria rights act of 2003 a child is a human being under the age of 18 years that is under the strict control and protection of parents/guardians. He/she have legal rights accrue to him/her, such right cut across the social, economic, cultural, and religious duties; they are beneficial to the growth and development of the child. These rights are undermined daily; therefore, the child is subjected to child labour given a demeaning job and inhuman treatment. The theatre as the third eye that mirrors the society, creates awareness and correct vices in the society, through this research hereby exposed how children's right is being violated daily and they are being coerced to do a degrading job. The ability of the theatre to communicate complex issues; and its high creative skills were the tools employed to create plays, dramas, dance sketches, playlets, that advocate for child right and child labour. The quantitative research methodology and community play production were employed. Findings shows that many children were going through this trauma even though the child right laws have been in existence for so long its awareness and implementation level were very low.

**Keywords:** Child right, Child labour, Digital Age, Children theatre Artist

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### AUTHOR'S BIO



AKPODIETE, Hannah Modupe, PhD, was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1970. She had her early education in Delta and Ondo State respectively before proceeding to the University of Ibadan for her First degree, Masters and PhD. degrees in Theatre Arts. She is a Lecturer in the department of Theatre Arts, Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria. Hannah specializes in Children Theatre, Cultural Studies, Costume Design, and Theatre Management. A Fellow of Ife Institute of Advanced Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University. A member of the Society of The Nigeria Theatre Artist (SONTA). A member of the American Family Therapy Academy (AFTA). A member and Team leader of the Workshop and Adjudication Committee of 2024 DELTA INTERNATIONAL THEATRE & ARTS FESTIVAL (DITAFEST). **Modupe** is a prolific and versatile writer, an astute and eloquent public speaker and a researcher of high insight. Some of her recent works include: *-Mythology and Culture: Implication of Female Genital Mutilation in Urhobo Land, Navigating Children's Drama into Instilling Discipline on Children Within the Family and Society. Child Right and Amiede Soup: A Delicacy of Cultural Identity and Association in Uduophori Community of Delta State*

## INTRODUCTION

Child right has to do with special protection and provision that covers various areas of life of a child. Though it is backed up by the law of the land, however it is often neglected and relegated to the background. Many are ignorant of such laws; therefore, no protection is given to the children, as they are exposed to abuse and neglect. Others see it as rhetoric, so no attention is given to children they still go through a demeaning condition daily without adequate implementation of these laws. This right is the state obligation towards children's growth and development. Children need special care and assistance which ought to be provided by the family. The family is the first port of call for children; thus, it serves as their natural environment where their right as human is to be protected for proper growth and well-being. The child is integrated into the family circle from infancy for a congruous development of the child's personality. The family environment is to provide for the growth; an atmosphere of peace, happiness, love, tolerance, dignity, understanding that ought to set the child on the route to growing up to be a responsible adult in the society. Many children are living in an inhuman and difficult conditions, their welfare is not taken; care off. So, they are vulnerable to vices, and negative influences. Child labour is a pervasive act that has attracted global concern; it robs children of their innocence and potential. Artists wield the power of creative storytelling to bridge the gap between complexity and accessibility. Through their performances, they evoke empathy, transport audience into the lives of those affected by child labour, and spark crucial conversations among educators, policymakers, and communities. They offer solutions and inspiring hope, and become advocates for change, amplifying the voices of those whose stories need to be heard. This paper employed the transformative potential of children's theatre artists, showed how their artistry creates a space where child rights and child labour cease to be abstract concepts but become pressing matters that demand attention and action, thereby paving the way for a brighter future for all children.

### Child Rights

Child rights refer to the fundamental entitlements and protections that are recognised for every child, ensuring their well-being, development, and safety. According to Aprozan(2009), child's rights are a subset of human rights with particular attention to the rights and care afforded to minors. These rights are based on the understanding that children are individuals with their own needs, interests, and potential, and they deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Child rights are deeply ingrained in the principles of human dignity, signifying a strong dedication to safeguarding the well-being of our most vulnerable and youngest members of the society. At

the core of child rights lies the recognition that every child's life holds inherent worth. These rights guarantee essential privileges for children, creating a robust protection around them. These rights include physical health, emotional wellness, intellectual development, and social progress. Child rights affirm that each child has the right to live without harm, while also having the opportunity to explore their potential and make positive contributions to their communities. The scope of child rights is extensive, touching on various vital aspects crucial to children's wholesome growth. These encompass access to proper nutrition, healthcare, and sanitation - foundational to all other rights; education - empowering children with knowledge for success; safeguarding against exploitation or neglect - fostering and nurturing environments that facilitate growth with utmost attention. These universally accepted ideas have gained worldwide agreement through international agreements such as The United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child, where nations pledge their commitment to ensuring these fundamental human rights for every child, regardless of their race or nationality. Essentially, child rights serve as the foundation upon which this study is built Bourke(2023).

### Child labour

Child labour is a universal global problem where children under the age of 18 are subjected to hazardous work that possess danger to their health and development. According to the latest global estimate, 160 million are victim of child labour. 63 million boys and 97 million girls which means that one out of ten children's lives worldwide are being endangered. These children are subjected to slave-like jobs, drug trafficking, prostitutions etc. which have resulted to death of many children; it has affected the health and social life of other children. This act has deprived many children from acquiring education and the enjoyment of childhood experience. Thus, made many children bread winners in their family hence, violating their right as children. In the developing countries, child labour is operational more in the informal sector. This is majorly an unofficial business but with agreement between the employer and the parent/guardian. Thus, without the child's consent, though the country labour law is against such act in theory; practically children are made to do hard work, maltreated, and go through inhuman treatment all in attempt to satisfy their employers. Also, in urban cities many child labour activities occurred because of migration, poverty, and the population explosions. Thus, in the cities there are many children garbage scavengers, domestic workers in hotels, restaurant shops, vendors and helping hands to the rich and educated families. Many of these families who allowed their children to engage in these labourious job

live in slums and in some insalubrious environment. Most of these children's workers do not keep their earnings, they are usually used to support the family. The consequences of being a child worker is not only immediate but has a long-time effect on the child, the family, and the society. It robbed the child of childhood experience and create in the child's mind an adult mind with a child body which is a form of pseudo development and growth. Many of such children suffer from physical, emotional, and physiological trauma because of the abuse, mental harassment, stress, lack of proper care, verbal dehumanisation, ill-treatment, isolation, and stigmatisation. Some even have scars to show for the demeaning nature of their work Lamotte,(2014). Child labour can be seen as the employment of children in an industry or business, that is illegal or considered exploitative. Thus, exploiting children through any form of work that deprives them of their childhood experiences, interferes with their ability to attend regular schools, and that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally harmful Emezue,(2021). It is a pervasive issue that has been a concern for societies and policymakers for centuries. The most disturbing aspects of child labour is that it robs children of their innocence and potential. Instead of enjoying their formative years through play learning, and exploration, these children find themselves engaged in labour that is often physically demanding and mentally exhausting. This can have profound psychological effects, leading to feelings of resentment, powerlessness, and low self-esteem. Child labour is rooted in complex socioeconomic factors, with poverty being a significant driver. Families facing financial hardships often resort to sending their children to work to supplement household income. Additionally, lack of access to quality education, especially in impoverished areas, perpetuates the cycle of child labour. When education is out of reach, children have limited opportunities to break free from the cycle of poverty and attain better prospects for their future. Child labour is a deep concern issue that infringes upon the rights and well-being of children. Addressing child labour requires a combination of legal action, education, social support, and collective efforts from governments, international organisations, and communities to ensure that children are protected, educated, and given the chance to reach their full potential.

### **Child labour in Nigeria**

In 2021 the Nigerian government officially accepted the national policy on child labour and the national action plan for elimination of child labour. Thus, it was agreed as a document to span through 2021 – 2025 to stop the illicit business called child labour. In other to achieve this, the ministry of labour and employment instituted a

new programme to cater for the vulnerable households by funding new businesses for them. Nigerian children have undergone diverse forms of child labour such as sexual exploitation, armed robbery, work in quarry, work in mining sites, and kidnaping. Even though it was officially launched as a working document, only 29 States out of the 36 States adopted this document to eradicate/reduce child labour syndrome. As of 2022, Nigeria recorded the highest out of school children in the world. According to UNICEF 10.5 million children are out of school in Nigeria especially in the Northeast where there is kidnaping, insurgence, cattle rustling, many children are out of school, while many schools are still closed in 2024. According to UNICEF 440 schools are closed in 2024 because of the problem of insecurity Gatuyu,(2015).

### **The Digital Age**

Digital age is a term used to describe the era in which the access to computer and free flow of information is the order of the day. This era started around mid-20 century whereby the world was revolutionised with the invention of different information outfit that do not only make life simple but also made the world a global village. By this, information is accessible to everybody, internet, different types of mobile devices, cloud information system, all made information available. This age was credited to Claude Shannon a Bell Labs mathematician who laid the foundation of what is termed digital age today. Through his theory, *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Hence it has had a great influence on the information system worldwide, electronic transfer of anything, global economy, global acceptance of goods and services. The wave of digitalisation has a dramatic effect on both the learners and the teacher. It has introduced a new learning and teaching method that has enhanced the act of using learning to answer some basic question such as when, where, what and how. This age placed more importance on developing the skills of the learner than the traditional method. The learners of this age are astute in practical, so they are vast in the use of technology and all its apparatus. Thus, the free flow of information and eagerness to explore has both negative and positive impacts on children and adult alike. According to the National survey carried out by the common-sense media in 2019, 53% children have smartphone, 94% children of between the ages of 3 to 18 are exposed to the use of technology using smartphone, television, computer etc. These has brought about a change in parenting styles and method. Adversely excessive use of technology can reduce a child's social skills, encouraging isolation, creating a health problem by affecting the child problem solving skill and reduce the child's ability to focus because of possible distractions Hartnet, Brown & Anderson,(2014).

### **Children's Theatre Artists**

Amid these formidable challenges surrounding child

rights and child labour, a group of individuals emerges as transformative catalysts—children's theatre artists. These artists possess a remarkable ability to channel their creativity and talents into a force for change. Their artistic endeavours transcend conventional boundaries, weaving a narrative that speaks to the hearts and minds of their audience, compelling them to re-evaluate their perspectives on crucial societal issues. Children's theatre artists wield a unique and compelling tool in creative storytelling method. Through their craft, they bridge the gap between complexity and accessibility, rendering intricate issues understandable and relatable. By crafting narratives that centered on child rights and child labour, these artists open avenues for dialogue that might otherwise remain unexplored. Their stories resonate not only with young audiences but also with adults, rendering the issues tangible and stirring general awareness and consciousness. The power of engaging performances lies in their ability to evoke emotions and foster empathy. Children's theatre artists, through their artistry, transport audiences into the shoes of those affected by child labour. They create characters that embody the struggles, hopes, and dreams of these children, allowing spectators to witness their hardships and aspirations firsthand. Beyond the theatre curtains, children's theatre artists become agents of change by facilitating discussions that might otherwise remain unspoken. Their performances serve as catalysts, sparking conversations among audience, members, educators, policymakers, and communities. This transformative effect generates awareness, promotes dialogue, and eventually compels action to address the pressing issues of child rights and child labour. It is worth noting that children's theatre artists do not merely present problems; they offer solutions through their narratives. They portray instances of resilience, determination, and triumph, showcasing the strength that children possess in the face of adversity. By doing so, they inspire hope and motivate individuals to become advocates for change, contributing to a collective effort to safeguard child rights and eliminate child labour. The realm of children's theatre is a reservoir of creative potential that holds the capacity to create transformation. Through innovative storytelling, powerful performances, and the ability to foster discussions, thus, children's theatre artists shape a space where child rights and child labour cease to be abstract concepts and become pressing matters that demand attention and action. These artists are more than performers; they are advocates who utilise their artistic skills to drive change, amplifying the voices of those whose stories need to be heard.

**Methodology**

The research employed the qualitative research methodology. The data and the acquired information were gathered from the primary and secondary sources such as

interview, publications, journals, books, articles, and reports on the subject matter. The total population for this study comprised of 60 persons: 40 children ages 10-25, (males and females) and 20 parents (couples). Also, a short drama that was based on child right and child labour was performed to elicit reaction from the audience and determine the audience acceptance level.

**The Method of Data Collection**

The data collection used for this study was the survey method. The questionnaires were designed and made up of A, B, C, D and E sections. 60 copies of questionnaires were administered among 60 respondents; 20 children ages 10-17 and 20 young adults ages of 18-25 and 20 couples. A drama titled “*This must stop*” was performed in Oria village in Abraka town as a *community theatre*. The questionnaires were administered and collected by the researcher, analysed by a simple percentage.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

SECTION A: This section was based on the AGE, GENDER, AND MARITAL STATUS of respondents. A total of 60 questionnaires were distributed and they were retrieved. These questionnaires were administered to 40 children, 20 ages 10-17, and 20 ages 18-25 and 20 married couples; to get a comprehensive and generalised perspective from both children and adults.

**Section B**

This section dealt with the **concept of child right, child labour and the children's theatre artist.**

Table 1

Have you ever heard of the term child right	Respondent	Percentage
No	40	66.67
Yes	15	25
Maybe	5	8.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

source: field survey, 2023

The table above shows that 40(66.67) respondents have not heard about the term "child right" while 15(25%) respondents have heard of the term "child right" and 5(8.33%) were not sure they have ever heard of the term "child right". This implies that the term "child rights" is new to many of the respondents.

Table 2

Are you familiar with the term child labour?	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	20	33.33
No	30	50
Not sure	10	16.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

source: field survey, 2024

The table above shows that 20(33.33%) of the respondents claimed that they were familiar with the term child labour. While 50(50%) of the respondents were not conversant with the term. 10(16.67%) were not too certain they know anything about the term. This implies that 40 (66.67%) of the respondents were not knowledgeable about the term.

Table 3

How many children theatre productions have you watched?	Respondents	Percentage
More than 20 children drama	12	20
No	40	66.67
Maybe	8	13.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

source: field survey, 2023

In the above table 12(20%) respondents have participated or witnessed more than 20 children theatre productions that focused on the issue of child labour, 40(66.67%) respondents have not participated or witnessed any children theatre production that focused on the issue of child labour. 8(13.33%) respondents are not sure they have participated or witnessed any children theatre production that focused on child labour. This implies that 48(53.33%) respondents have not participated or witnessed any children's theatre production that focused on the issue of child labour.

Table 4

Do you regularly patronised the theatre to watch performances?	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	20	33.33
No	40	66.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

source: field survey, 2024

The table shows that 20(33.33%) respondents do patronise the theatre regularly to watch production, 40(66.67%) respondents do not patronise the theatre to watch production. This implies that (66.67%) of the respondents have not in anytime patronise the theatre to watch productions.

Table 5

Do you believe that children's theatre artist can effectively raise awareness about child labour?	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	40	66.67
No	12	20
Maybe	8	13.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

source: field survey, 2024

40(66.67%) respondents believe that children theatre's artist can effectively raise awareness about child labour, 12(20%) respondents do not believe that children theatre's artist can effectively raise awareness about child labour issues 8(13.33%) respondents were not decisive of their opinion. This implies that more respondents believed that the children theatre artist has the capacity to effectively raise awareness about child labour issues.

Table 6

Do you believe that child's right is what being advocated for?	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	35	58.33
No	15	25
Maybe	10	16.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

source: field survey, 2024

The table shows that 35(58.33%) respondents believed that child's right is a potent issue that should be advocated for. 15(25%) respondents do not believe that child's right is important enough to be advocated for, 10(16.67%) respondents were not sure if child's right should be advocated for. This implies that more people see child's right as important enough to be advocated

for.

Table 7

Have you seen/heard of anyone prosecuted for violated child right and child labour law?	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	15	25
No	45	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

source: field survey, 2023

The table above shows that 15(25%) of the respondents have seen people who were prosecuted for violated child right and child labour laws. 45 (75%) respondents affirmed that they have not seen anyone prosecuted for violating child right and child laws at any time. This implied that many people were not aware that violation of child right and child labour laws attract stiff penalty.

Table 8

Have you seen or heard of children who suffers from extreme maltreatment?	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	60	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

source: field survey, 2023

The table above shows that all the respondents agreed that they have in one time or the other seen children and wards who suffer maltreatment from their guardians, parents, custodians and from those they live with.

Table 9

Do you see the theatre as an agent of change?	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	50	83.33
No	10	16.67
	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

source: field survey, 2023

The above table shows that 50(83.33) respondents agreed that the theatre is an agent of change. 10(16.67) respondents were not sure that the theatre can effect

tangible change therefore they answered no. Going by the table, more respondents settled for the fact that theatrical performance can effect a change in the society

Table 10

Do you see the theatre as a vehicle that can disseminate information to the nook and cranny of the society?	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	42	70
No	10	16.67
Not sure	8	13.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

source: field survey, 2023

Table 10 shows that (70%) agreed that theatre can disseminate information to the interiors while (16.67%) didn't agree and (13.33%) were not sure of their stand. This implies that the information from productions can be far reaching than mere words.

#### SECTION C

This section considers the causes of child labour.

Responses gathered showed that the respondents considered poverty as a major factor for child labour. They believed many children became victim of child labour due to low family income, the inability of Parents to cater for their children and Illiteracy. Many uneducated parents allowed their children to live with educated and rich friends who end up treating the children as house helps with tasks that were beyond the children's ability. They believed children theatre artist through drama performances that are relevant, expository, and educative can create awareness about the causes of child labour and how it can be handled. Instead of putting the children's life on the line, allowing them to go through pain and traumatic experiences, fend for the family the theatre can expose the audience to an alternative measure. To achieve these, the issue of child labour must be taken down to the villages. Respondents were also of the opinion that enforcing the law that prohibits child labour is one of the societal changes that is necessary for the eradication of this menace.

#### SECTION D

This section considers the impact of child labour.

Respondents believed that child labour can lead to physical and emotional stress on the child. There were also of the opinion that child labour has potential long-

term consequences on the society, the child, and the family. The consequences ranges from hatred for parents and family members as they grow up, deformity because of injury, social exclusion, withdrawn syndrome, health problems, inequality, lack of education and the inability to thrive in the future. Respondents were also of the opinion that children theatre artist can highlights these negative impacts through the use of different genres of the theatre such as Comedy, Tragedy, Musical theatre, Melodrama, Farce, Tragicomedy, and storytelling. Respondents agreed that using performances children theatre can contribute to the rehabilitation of victims; and provides support for survivors by offering artistic therapy programme.

## SECTION E

This section considered how children theatre Educate the audience on child right and child labour.

It was deduced that the ability to communicate complex issues to both adult and the young audiences; and the exhibition of a high creative skills were the qualities of children theatre that makes it a relevant tool for advocating for child right and child labour. Majority of the respondents believed that children theatre can advocate against child labour by creating plays and performance that are engaging playlet, dance drama etc. These productions can be presented as a Street theatre, community theatre, children theatre from village to village with a small cast and crew. Lastly Children theatre artist has the artistic and creative capacity to guide children in making important life decisions using drama performances to offer a form of workshop on life skills and career choices.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

According to section B Table 1 shows that (66.67 %) which was majority of the respondents have not participated or watched theatrical performances in which the main theme is on child right. Table 2 shows that the term child labour was conversant among 33.33% of the respondents. This implies that majority of the respondents were not knowledgeable about the term child labour. Table 3 shows that 53.33% of the respondents have not participated or watched performances that focused on child labour issues. This implies that performances on child labour issues were not as prominent on the theatre stage as it ought to be. Furthermore Table 4 expresses that 66.67% of the respondents have not patronised the theatre to watch performance. This simply means that many of the respondents were not theatre goers. Table 5 indicates that 66.67% respondents believed that children theatre

artist have the capacities and abilities to create awareness through their productions. In table 6, 58.33% unanimously agreed that the issue of child right is very sensitive and important to the development of the child, families, and the society therefore it should be advocated for. Table 7 shows that 75% of the respondents have not seen any culprits prosecuted for violated child right law. In table 8 all the respondents claimed that they have seen children who were victims of maltreatment and child abuse. likewise, in table 9, 83.33% of the respondents affirmed that theatrical productions could instigate changes in the society. Section C which dealt with the issue of child labour itemised poverty, illiteracy, social and cultural practices, and gender discrimination as some of the major reasons why parent allow their children to get involve in child labour. Section D delved into the negative impact of child's labour on the child, society, and family. Responses showed that child labour placed physical and emotional stress on children, lead to depression, cause anxiety, Low socio-economic status, and resources, lack of security and protection. The adverse effects on the children include bad health issues, poor educational outcome, social isolation, sexual abuse, and stigmatisation, low family income, overpopulation, illiteracy among parents and lack of government regulation. Section E concentrated on method employed by children theatre artist to educate the audience. The theatre employed its ability to communicate complex issues and creatives kills to transport the issues into drama, dance drama, storytelling, sketches, playlets etc. for the consumption of the audience. Thus, the productions were presented as a street theatre, community theatre, children theatre, as an itinerant performance. With a small cast and crew, an open-air performance no fee was charged so the audience was massive. However, the study highlighted that there is still need for more awareness to intimate the respondents with. Thus, more performances that focus on child rights and child labour are needed for enlightenment. In conclusion, children theatre artist can advocate by collaborating with the government and NGO'S to reach the rural areas with their performance. Thus, they can serve as therapy for victims, use theatre as a platform of self-expression, and healing, thereby guide children in making important life decisions. Offering workshop on life skills and career choices, provide mentorship and guidance through characters and narratives their productions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proposed:

**Increased Awareness and Participation:** Theatre practitioners should collaborate with the government-Federal, State, and local Government, NGO'S such as (WOTCLEF) Women Trafficking and Child Labour

Eradication Foundation, (ILO) International Labour Organisation etc. Thus, combine efforts to enhance awareness and take productions to the nook and cranny of the Nation.

**Advocacy theatre:** Children's theatre artists should actively engage in advocacy drama, and productions that will amplify the impact and influence of child right and child labour. There can be a collaboration between artist and the secondary schools whereby plays can be taken to schools for performance. This will enhance a direct contact with the youth who are the target of child labour, whose right is being infringed upon.

**Artistic Therapy Programmes:** performances for child labour survivors that can provide a platform for self-expression, healing, and rehabilitation for affected children should be paramount.

**Education on Child Rights and Child Labour:** Children theatre artists should use their productions to educate the audience on child rights and child labour. Create plays that highlight the consequences of child labour, offer workshops on life skills and career choices.

**Mentorship and Guidance:** Children's theatre can guide children by providing mentorship and guidance through characters and narratives in productions. Thus, empower children to make informed decisions and strive for a better future.

**Implementation of Laws:** It was gathered that the laws enacted by the government, were not implemented. If they were implemented and culprits punished it will deter perpetrators and reduced the acts of child labour if not totally eradicate the acts.

These recommendations aim to maximise the potential of children's theatre in addressing child rights and child labour issues. By implementing these suggestions, significant progress will be made in raising awareness, supporting survivors, and advocating for change in the society.

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