

The Challenges of an Academic in Private Theatrical Productions in a Nigerian University

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to critically appraise the processes and challenges encountered when a university academic produces theatrical productions privately within a Nigerian university setting. A private theatrical production is defined here as a play produced by a lecturer using personal financial and material resources, without official funding from the host Theatre Arts Department. This study adopts a literary analysis and participant-observation methodology, drawing on the author's direct involvement in two case productions – *Operation Squander* and *Wedlock of the Gods* – staged at the University of Benin in 2023. The paper integrates literature on educational theatre management, cultural entrepreneurship, and arts administration to contextualize these cases. Key challenges identified include inadequate funding, limited rehearsal facilities, student participation issues, and time constraints due to academic workload. Despite these challenges, the findings demonstrate that a determined academic can successfully mount productions by mobilising personal savings, loans, and external sponsorship. The study discusses strategies for overcoming funding shortfalls (such as cultivating a savings culture and aggressively seeking external support) and highlights the importance of careful planning, stakeholder collaboration, and formal agreements in partnership ventures. Recommendations are offered to academics and institutions on improving support for such private initiatives. This research contributes to the discourse on cultural entrepreneurship in academia and suggests policy measures to sustain theatrical productions in educational environments.

Keywords: Educational Theatre; Theatre Management; Cultural Entrepreneurship; Arts Administration; Funding Challenges; Nigerian University Theatre.

Introduction

University-based theatre productions serve both artistic and educational purposes, providing practical training for students and a platform for research and creative expression by faculty. In Nigerian universities, formal departmental productions are often hindered by scarce funding and resources. As a result, some academics undertake private theatrical productions, financing and producing plays on their own. Such private productions allow a lecturer to experiment with creative ideas (for instance, to workshop a new play script for eventual publication) and can count toward practical requirements in staff promotion exercises. The Department's role in these cases is usually limited to granting the use of student actors/crew and venues, sometimes free of charge or at a nominal fee. In essence, the lecturer assumes the role of a producer outside the department's official sponsorship.

However, producing a play independently within a university comes with myriad challenges. These include, but are not limited to, lack of funds, inadequate facilities, time constraints due to heavy teaching loads, and inconsistent commitment from student volunteers. Despite these constraints, the author of this paper – a faculty member in Theatre Arts – successfully produced and directed two plays (*Operation Squander* and *Wedlock of the Gods*) in 2023. This paper examines the processes followed in these productions, the difficulties encountered, and how they were managed, with the aim of identifying strategies that can help sustain theatrical ventures by academics in similar contexts.

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, it provides a review of relevant literature on educational theatre management, cultural entrepreneurship in the arts, and known challenges of university theatre productions. Next, it outlines the methodology of the study. The two case studies are then presented in detail, describing planning, execution, and outcomes. This is followed by a discussion of findings in relation to broader scholarly discourse, and finally, conclusions and recommendations for academics and institutions are offered on supporting and improving private theatrical productions in universities.

Literature Review

Educational Theatre refers to theatre that is housed within and sponsored by an academic institution. Its primary purpose is pedagogical – to train students in theatre arts – while also entertaining and educating audiences. Rhine (2018) notes that educational theatre productions are often created specifically to educate audiences on particular topics. In Nigeria, educational theatre has flourished since the establishment of the first School of Drama at the University of Ibadan in the 1960s. Today, dozens of universities host Theatre Arts or Performing Arts departments, making campus theatre an important part of the cultural landscape.

Theatre management in an educational context encompasses all the non-artistic, business-related aspects required to stage a production. Bardi and Yacim (2022) observe that these commercial aspects include publicity, ticket sales, house management, play selection, budgeting and so forth. In other words, theatre management is essentially *the administration of resources and logistics* to realize a performance. Lasisi (2010) – citing Voltz (2007) – defines theatre management as “the business end of a theatre which is responsible for facilitating the day-to-day operation of the theatre towards fulfilling its mission”. This involves planning, organizing, and coordinating all supporting activities so that the artistic goals can be met and audience experience is optimized. Ayakoroma (2014) similarly describes theatre management as “the process or art of planning, organising, controlling and directing all commercial and non-artistic aspects of a theatre or any production programme, in order to generate audience patronage, audience satisfaction, and maximum profit”. Although profit maximization may not be the primary goal in university theatres, the emphasis on audience development and effective resource use is highly relevant.

A distinction is often made between the artistic and commercial/administrative sides of productions. In professional settings, a producer typically oversees financial and administrative tasks while a director handles the artistic vision. Awodiya (2017) notes that in educational or community theatres, the producer “concerns himself primarily with the commercial functions of the theatre” while the “artistic functions of play production come under the play director”. In practice, however, educational theatre productions might not have the luxury of separate individuals for these roles. Often a single person (a lecturer or staff producer) must handle both management and artistic direction, especially for privately financed projects. This dual responsibility requires a blend of managerial acumen and artistic skill. As Bardi (2021) observed, a director in such contexts often ends up coordinating auditions, rehearsals, and all creative elements and dealing with practical matters to ensure the production’s success. Thus, an academic producing a play may simultaneously be the producer (raising funds, securing venues, arranging publicity) and the director (shaping the artistic outcome).

The play production process itself is commonly divided into three phases: pre-production, production, and post-production. During pre-production, planning takes place – the play is

selected, a director (if different from the producer) is engaged, a budget is drawn, casting auditions are held, and rehearsals begin. The production phase refers to the actual live performances before an audience. Finally, post-production involves all activities after the final performance, such as striking the set, returning or storing equipment, accounting for ticket sales, and evaluating the production's overall success. An academic taking on a private production must navigate all three phases largely independently, which can be daunting in a university environment lacking dedicated production staff.

Numerous studies have documented the challenges faced by theatre productions in Nigerian higher institutions. A primary issue is inadequate funding and facilities. Many university departments receive little to no budget for theatre productions; for example, one survey noted that apart from a few exceptions, Nigerian universities do not allocate regular funds for departmental plays. Ahmadu Bello University was cited as budgeting as little as ₦100,000 (approximately \$130) for theatre productions, and others had no budget at all. Without institutional funding, basic needs like sets, costumes, lighting, and publicity become difficult to fulfil. Facilities are often subpar: theatres may be too small, lacking modern lighting and sound equipment, or even repurposed spaces (e.g. converted lecture halls) that are not fully equipped. Departments frequently have limited rehearsal spaces, forcing students to rehearse in classrooms or other ad-hoc venues, as the main theatre hall is shared by many classes and groups.

Another major challenge is the poor and irregular funding of infrastructure such as power supply. Unreliable electricity means departments must rent generators and purchase fuel to run lighting and sound during rehearsals and shows. Maintenance of existing equipment is also an issue due to funding shortfalls. These logistical challenges add costs and complexity to any production, particularly one driven by an individual academic with limited resources.

Low student interest and commitment can impede productions in the educational setting. Some students enroll in Theatre Arts not out of passion but by circumstance and thus show lukewarm interest in the practical work. Even interested students are often juggling academics and other obligations. As a result, attendance at rehearsals can be inconsistent and commitment levels vary. Bardi and Lasisi (2019) found that poor student commitment was a common problem, with some students treating departmental productions as secondary to other pursuits. In private faculty-led productions (which are not part of coursework or graded requirements), students might feel even less obligation. Lecturers producing plays privately have observed that student actors/crew may behave as though they are doing the lecturer a favour, leading to issues of lateness or absenteeism if not carefully managed.

Closely related is the workload and time constraint on academic staff. Many theatre departments are understaffed, meaning lecturers have to teach many courses, supervise numerous students, and handle administrative duties, alongside their own research. This heavy workload leaves little time to plan or direct extracurricular productions. Indeed, insufficient time was identified as a factor causing some departments to rarely mount plays beyond mandatory student projects. An academic who decides to produce a play must typically do so during whatever spare time is available, which can extend the rehearsal period or limit the scope of the production.

Audience-related issues also present challenges. Audience apathy can occur, particularly in environments where theatre culture is not firmly established or where security and transportation concerns deter attendance at evening performances. In some university campuses, students constitute the main audience and may not be willing or able to pay substantial ticket fees, limiting potential revenue. External audiences may be small due to campus location or lack of publicity beyond the university. For example, concerns about safety have been noted to reduce public turnout for campus shows held after dark. Without a reliable audience base, even well-produced shows might struggle to recover costs through ticket sales alone.

Despite these difficulties, studies have also highlighted potential solutions and the value of sustaining theatrical productions in academia. Adedokun (2008) and Ayakoroma (2014)

emphasize that regular productions are vital for skills development of both staff and students, and for keeping theatre arts programmes visible and relevant to the community. Researchers recommend that university authorities allocate dedicated funds for productions and upgrade facilities to prevent the decline of departmental theatre traditions. It is also suggested that departments establish marketing or sponsorship units to seek external funding (from individuals, corporations, government agencies, and NGOs) to supplement university funding. Bardi and Lasisi (2019) specifically advocate a "consistent, creative and aggressive" approach to audience development and fundraising in educational theatre. They argue that engaging marketing professionals or freelance fundraisers on commission could help bring in sponsorship and boost publicity.

The challenges faced by an academic producing a play privately mirror these broader issues: securing funding, managing logistics, motivating participants, and attracting an audience. Overcoming them often requires the academic to act as a cultural entrepreneur – someone who innovatively mobilises resources and people to create cultural value (a successful performance) outside the usual institutional frameworks. In the arts, cultural entrepreneurs must contend with obstacles distinct from typical business ventures. Undercofler (2010) notes that while a business entrepreneur might attract profit-minded investors, the cultural entrepreneur usually relies on a handful of public or philanthropic supporters and passionate volunteers, effectively working with shoestring budgets and a team driven more by dedication than by pay. In our context, the academic producer must persuade friends, family, or local sponsors to contribute funds, and inspire students to commit time and effort without the incentive of grades or substantial remuneration. These endeavours require creativity, persistence, and strong personal networks – hallmarks of entrepreneurial activity in the cultural sector.

One of the most significant challenges – financing – demands entrepreneurial strategies from academics. Traditional funding for university theatre projects (through departmental budgets or grants) is often lacking, so alternate avenues must be pursued. This can include personal savings, taking loans, and soliciting external sponsorship or donations. Such approaches align with what Bardi and Lasisi (2019) observed as necessary for departmental productions: they recommended that Heads of Department actively seek funds and sponsor at least one production annually by writing funding proposals and engaging with potential sponsors in the private and public sectors. An individual lecturer, lacking formal institutional backing, must do the same on a more personal level – essentially crowdfunding among acquaintances or partnering with any interested organization. External sponsorship not only provides financial relief but can also forge town-and-gown relationships and increase a production's profile beyond campus. However, as our case will show, partnerships need clear agreements and trust to succeed.

Another entrepreneurial aspect is cost containment. Academics often leverage in-kind support to reduce expenses: using university venues at little or no cost, borrowing costumes/props from departmental stores, and enlisting student volunteers instead of paid professionals. The concept of "conservative expenditure" is important in this context. For example, not paying student actors (treating their involvement as practical experience) and utilizing existing department facilities free of charge significantly lowers production costs. While these practices make productions feasible, they also highlight the implicit contributions of the university infrastructure even to "private" projects – a reminder that these ventures, though privately funded, still rely on the goodwill and resources of the academic institution to some extent.

Finally, effective marketing and audience engagement efforts are crucial. Since ticket sales from a student audience will likely be modest (prices are often kept low for affordability), the academic producer cannot rely solely on box office revenue to break even. Nonetheless, attracting a larger audience through vigorous publicity can improve gate takings and also justify the endeavour as a successful knowledge-sharing event. Adeniyi (2023) observed that theatrical performances in schools provide opportunities to practice business management skills such as publicity, ticketing, and audience engagement. Techniques like campus poster campaigns, social media promotion, and personal invitations to members of the university community can all help increase attendance. In essence, the academic must engage in

entrepreneurial marketing – selling the idea of the show to potential spectators, often leveraging personal networks and creative publicity (for instance, student-led “carnival” parades on campus to stir interest, a tactic commonly used in Nigerian university theatres).

In summary, the literature suggests that while challenges in producing theatre within Nigerian universities are considerable, they are not insurmountable. Success hinges on the producer’s ability to fulfil multiple roles: a manager who plans and allocates resources efficiently, an entrepreneur who raises and wisely uses funds, a leader who motivates a volunteer workforce, and a visionary who delivers artistic quality. The following sections of this paper examine how these aspects played out in the author’s two case studies, illustrating the practical realities behind the scholarship and shedding light on what strategies proved effective in overcoming the challenges.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case-study approach. The two theatrical productions (*Operation Squander* and *Wedlock of the Gods*) produced in 2023 by the author serve as the primary case studies. The participant observation method was used, as the researcher was directly involved as producer and/or director in the productions under review. Throughout the production process, observations were recorded regarding planning, fundraising, rehearsals, performances, and post-production outcomes. These first-hand observations provide an insider’s perspective on the challenges and management strategies.

In addition, a literature review (literary methodology) was conducted to gather information from secondary sources: books, academic journals, theses, and relevant online resources in theatre management, arts administration, and cultural entrepreneurship. This provided a theoretical framework and points of comparison for analysing the cases. The study integrates these sources to both inform the initial approach to production and to contextualize the findings within the broader discourse on educational theatre management.

Data from the productions include financial records (budgets, expenditures, and revenues), rehearsal logs, and anecdotal evidence of participant behaviour. This information is descriptively and qualitatively analysed. Given the reflective nature of the research, the author’s dual role as practitioner and researcher is acknowledged. Efforts were made to maintain objectivity in the analysis by comparing notes with a stage manager and some senior student participants, and by grounding interpretations in published literature (to avoid solely anecdotal conclusions).

The outcome is a narrative synthesis of the production experiences, supported by quantitative details (such as budget figures and ticket sales) and scholarly references. By combining lived experience with academic research, the study aims for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of privately produced academic theatre.

Case Studies: Private Theatrical Productions at University of Benin

Two productions are examined in this study: *Operation Squander* and *Wedlock of the Gods*. Both were staged in 2023 at the University of Benin (in Edo State, Nigeria) and involved students from the Department of Theatre Arts as the cast and crew. The author served as the producer for both projects, and additionally as the director for *Operation Squander*. For *Wedlock of the Gods*, an external theatre entrepreneur handled funding (as producer) while the author was the director. The cases thus offer a contrast between a wholly self-financed production and a partnership model. Key details of each play’s content and context are provided, followed by an account of the production process, challenges encountered, financial outcomes, and lessons learned.

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Operation Squander (April 2023)

Play and Context: *Operation Squander* is an original political satire written, produced, and directed by the author. The play examines corruption across various facets of society – from the family and religious institutions to academia and government. The production was conceived as a commentary on societal issues, aiming to engage and educate the campus audience through humor and poignant critique. It was performed at the Theatre Hall of the University's Ekehuan Road Campus on April 22 and 23, 2023. Two shows were held per day (2:00pm and 5:00pm), with tickets priced at ₦500 (five hundred naira) per seat. The venue, a relatively small theatre hall with approximately 200 seats, was provided by the department (no rental fee was charged). The modest ticket price was set with the student audience in mind, balancing affordability with the need to generate some income.

Planning and Pre-Production: The idea for producing *Operation Squander* germinated in January 2023. From the outset, funding was identified as a critical concern. A preliminary budget of ₦300,000 was drawn up to cover production expenses. This estimate was conservative, assuming that certain typical costs would be mitigated: the cast and crew (being students) would not be paid, the department's theatre and equipment could be used at no cost, and any sets or technical enhancements would be kept minimal. Table 1 below summarizes the main budgeted expenses for the production alongside actual expenditure:

Table 1: Expenditure Breakdown for Operation Squander

Expense Item	Amount Spent (₦)
Photocopying of scripts	15,000
Refreshments for rehearsals	49,250
Graphic designs (publicity)	4,000
Banners (publicity)	10,000
Printing of tickets	8,000
Generator hire (2 days)	26,000
Fuel for generator	10,000
Video and photography	20,000
Props (stage properties)	8,000
Set construction materials	7,000
Costumes and make-up supplies	8,000
Extra chairs (rental)	1,500
Welfare (cast/crew feeding)	12,000
Transportation	10,000
Additional lighting (rentals)	8,000
Printing of programme (playbill)	10,000
Cast and crew after-party	60,000
Total Expenditure	263,570

(Note: At the time of production, ₦300,000 was roughly equivalent to 400 USD.)

To initiate the project funding, the author (producer) had limited personal savings. Consequently, a multifaceted fundraising approach was taken:

Personal Loan: A loan of ₦300,000 was secured from a cooperative society on campus. This loan effectively provided the upfront capital to begin production activities. Loans are a common resort for academic staff due to the relatively low salaries and lack of research grants for creative projects; joining a staff cooperative allowed access to credit on reasonable terms.

Donations and Sponsorship: The producer launched an informal fundraising campaign, reaching out to friends, family, colleagues, and former students for support. Announcements about the upcoming play were posted on social media (Facebook, in particular), highlighting the production's objectives and the need for support. This strategy yielded contributions from a number of individuals, including former students (now alumni) who donated small amounts (often referred to as their "widow's mite"), family members, and even a relative abroad. In total, approximately ₦262,000 was raised through such external support. Notably, some pledged donations only arrived after the performances, which indicates the importance of initiating fundraising well in advance and the uncertainty involved in relying on personal networks.

By early February 2023, with funding efforts underway, the production moved into casting and rehearsals. A closed audition was organized – rather than a general open call, specific students who had been observed to be talented and reliable were invited to audition, though some uninvited students also showed up and were given a chance. The cast and crew ultimately consisted mainly of 100-level and 200-level Theatre Arts students (first and second-year undergraduates). A few Mass Communication students initially volunteered to join the production team, but most of them later dropped out when rehearsal schedules conflicted with their lecture times. This left the core team comprising Theatre Arts students who could more easily align rehearsals with their department schedules.

Rehearsals began in February immediately after casting and continued through March and early April. Scheduling rehearsals proved challenging due to space constraints. The Department of Theatre Arts has only one theatre hall, which was in high demand for classes, departmental rehearsals, and other activities across all four levels of study. Rarely was the theatre free for exclusive use. To work around this, the production utilized classrooms and any available open spaces for rehearsals whenever the main hall was occupied. This required flexibility from the cast and creative staging during practice, as a classroom is not an ideal proxy for a stage. It also sometimes affected rehearsal quality (for instance, limitations on set pieces or movement due to space). Despite these inconveniences, rehearsals proceeded, albeit not always as frequently or as long as desired.

Challenges and Management during Production: Several challenges arose during the *Operation Squander* production process:

Funding Shortfall: Raising the ₦300,000 budget was the first and arguably biggest hurdle. Taking the cooperative loan placed the producer in debt that would have to be repaid from salary over time. The reliance on personal appeals meant that funding came in gradually and not all by the onset of production. In fact, some donations arrived only after the show, meaning certain costs had to be fronted temporarily. Despite this, by the show dates the production's expenses were largely covered. In the end, the combined resources (loan + donations + ticket sales) were sufficient, and the financing challenge was effectively surmounted. This underscores the importance of external support: the final accounts showed that without donations from family and friends, the production would have run at a significant loss (as we shall see in the financial outcome).

Rehearsal Space and Scheduling: As noted, the scarcity of a dedicated rehearsal venue was problematic. The team coped by being resourceful – rehearsing in empty classrooms, in corridors, or outdoors when necessary. This required adjusting plans frequently and sometimes rehearsing in suboptimal conditions (noise, interruptions, limited time slots). The issue highlights a wider infrastructural gap in the university (lack of multiple rehearsal spaces), reflecting findings in other universities where

departments “struggle to utilize the few available spaces” for practice. The producer managed this by maintaining a flexible schedule and booking spaces as soon as they became available, even if at odd hours.

Student Commitment and Morale: Not all student participants demonstrated the desired level of commitment. Some were habitually late or absent, forcing the director to make phone calls to remind or coax them to attend. In extreme cases, a few particularly unserious cast members had to be replaced early in the rehearsal process. To foster better commitment, the producer/director took a supportive approach: understanding that the students were volunteering their time, he treated them less like subordinates and more like collaborators, creating a friendly atmosphere. To boost morale, the production provided light refreshments during rehearsals (e.g. snacks and drinks). This gesture of hospitality was much appreciated by the students and helped encourage regular attendance, as it made rehearsals a bit more enjoyable and showed that their efforts were valued. Additionally, maintaining open communication and advising the students on how the project could benefit their experience helped mitigate the sense that they were doing a favour – instead, they started to take pride in being part of a unique production. By the final weeks, a committed ensemble had formed, although the struggle to get to that point was evident.

Technical and Logistical Issues: Other minor issues included arranging reliable power for the performances. The University’s power supply could not be depended on, so a generator was hired for the show dates, with fuel procured to run it. There were also the usual last-minute tasks of printing programs (playbills) and securing all props and costumes, which the production team managed by pooling resources and using personal items where possible. The director also doubled as a production manager to coordinate these tasks, given no separate production manager was formally appointed.

Performance and Post-Production Outcome: *Operation Squander* was staged four times over two days and attracted a moderate audience, mostly comprising students and some staff. Ticket sales totalled 306 tickets (across all shows) at ₦500 each. This generated ₦153,000 in revenue from the box office. The financial outcome of the project is summarized in Table 2:

Table 2: Income and Profit for Operation Squander

Income Source	Amount (₦)
Ticket sales (306 tickets @ ₦500)	153,000.00
Donations from family & friends	262,000.00
Total Income	415,000.00
Total Expenditure	263,570.00
Surplus / Profit	151,430.00

As shown above, the production surprisingly ended with a surplus of ₦151,430. This profit was largely a result of the generous donations, as ticket revenue alone would not have covered the costs. It is important to note that the term “profit” in this context does not imply a commercial venture gain – rather, it indicates that the producer was able to recoup expenses and even have some funds remaining (which could go towards repaying the loan or saved for future productions). The expenditure was described as “conservative” because key cost areas were minimized by institutional support (no venue fee, unpaid cast, free use of some departmental equipment). If those had been out-of-pocket, the project would likely have been financially untenable. The outcome validates the earlier notion that external financial support is crucial for campus productions: relying solely on gate takings from a student audience is not sufficient to break even. As a consequence, one of the clear lessons from *Operation Squander* was the importance of aggressive external fundraising to subsidize production costs. Another positive

outcome was the experiential benefit to students – by participating, they gained practical experience and a production credit, and for the department, the show demonstrated continued artistic activity, contributing to its reputation.

At the end of the run, the cast and crew were rewarded with a small celebration (a post-show party, accounted for in the budget) to thank them for their contributions. An informal evaluation meeting was also held where the team discussed what went well and what could be improved. The overall sentiment was that despite numerous obstacles, *Operation Squander* was a success, having been produced against the odds. The production not only entertained audiences but also proved that a passionate academic can mobilize enough resources to create theatre, echoing the idea that resilience and creativity can overcome funding difficulties in Nigerian university theatre.

Wedlock of the Gods (August 2023)

Play and Context: *Wedlock of the Gods* is a classic Nigerian play written by Zulu Sofola. Unlike the original satire of *Operation Squander*, this play is a well-known tragedy of love, set in a traditional community. The story centres on two star-crossed lovers, Ogwoma and Uloko, whose union is thwarted by societal pressures – Ogwoma is forced into an arranged marriage with another man (Adigwu), leading to dire consequences when the lovers attempt to defy fate. The decision to produce *Wedlock of the Gods* came after the success of *Operation Squander*. In this case, the author directed the play but partnered with an external production outfit (Team Motion Theatre) which provided funding. The performance took place on August 18, 2023, at the 1000-Seater Lecture Theatre, Faculty of Education, Ugbowo Campus of the University of Benin. Only one evening show was held (4:00pm) and tickets were sold at ₦300 each, a lower price than *Operation Squander*. The ticket price was reduced in an attempt to attract a larger audience from the Ugbowo campus, where previous experience indicated audience turnout tends to be low. Despite the larger venue capacity (about 1000 seats) and the lower price, attendance remained relatively lukewarm, confirming that ticket pricing alone could not overcome audience apathy on that campus.

Production Arrangement (Partnership Model): The *Wedlock* production was initiated when the owner of Team Motion Theatre – having attended *Operation Squander* in April – approached the author with a proposal to collaborate on a new production. The informal agreement was that Team Motion Theatre would act as producer, primarily handling the financing of the show, while the author would serve as director, providing the artistic leadership and recruiting the cast and crew (mostly theatre students). This was essentially a partnership venture, albeit sealed only with a verbal “gentleman’s agreement” and no written contract. The rationale was that combining forces could alleviate the financial burden on the academic (since an external body would fund the show) and potentially create a model for sustainable productions by leveraging external interest.

From June 2023, rehearsals for *Wedlock of the Gods* commenced. The initial process of casting and rehearsal was similar to *Operation Squander* in that it involved students and encountered familiar issues of space and scheduling. However, some challenges were amplified:

Casting Difficulties: While the cast was assembled and rehearsals proceeded, the production suffered last-minute cast attrition. Two major actors withdrew from the show unceremoniously, very close to the performance date. This created a crisis as key roles were suddenly unfilled. To salvage the situation, an emergency re-casting was done: a final-year student (a more experienced actor) was persuaded to step into the principal role of Ogwoma on short notice. Additionally, a minor cast member was elevated to take on the role of Odibei, another significant character. These changes occurred in the eleventh hour, meaning the new actors had extremely limited rehearsal time to prepare. The team had to compress what would normally be weeks of character work into days. The fact that the show went on despite this is a testament to the dedication and talent of the student who stepped up, but it also reflects a recurring risk in volunteer-based productions – without contractual obligation, students (or any actors

working pro bono) might drop out if other pressures arise. This aligns with earlier observations about selecting *serious students* and the need to manage them tactically. In retrospect, more rigorous vetting or a standby understudy system could have been beneficial.

Rehearsal Challenges: The problems of irregular rehearsal venues and student punctuality persisted, perhaps even more acutely. Coming off the heels of one production, some students were fatigued or had academic catch-up, which occasionally affected rehearsal attendance. Furthermore, because the venue for the actual performance (the Education Lecture Theatre) was different from the usual Theatre Arts hall, the cast could only access the actual stage shortly before the performance for blocking and technical setup. This required adaptability on the part of actors and crew to adjust to a new space without much practice in it.

Artistic Coordination: As the director, the author was fully in charge of the artistic vision, which was executed smoothly. *Wedlock of the Gods* being a known play, the focus was on authentic portrayal and effective staging in a non-theatre space. In this regard, the production was artistically successful, and the audience reaction on the day was positive toward the performances. The real issues, however, lay behind the scenes in the management of the production.

Financial and Partnership Issues: The partnership that was supposed to ease financial concerns ended up highlighting issues of transparency and trust. Despite being the financier, the external producer (Team Motion Theatre's owner) did not share budgeting details or expenditure records with the director. Even when the author asked for information on expenses and sponsorships obtained, the producer was opaque. Up until the writing of this paper, no post-production meeting was convened by the producer to review the outcome or finances of the production. The author only learned informally that the production reportedly made a loss, but no evidence or breakdown was provided to substantiate this claim.

It later became apparent that the producer had secured some sponsorship deals (perhaps from local businesses or organizations) for *Wedlock*, but these were never communicated to or managed jointly with the director. Essentially, the academic partner was kept out of the financial loop, undermining the collaboration. Moreover, certain small expenditures that the author incurred in the course of rehearsals (likely on props or welfare) were not reimbursed by the producer as promised. The external producer, after the show, disengaged and even avoided follow-up discussions. This breached the spirit of partnership and left the author feeling that the arrangement had "gone sour".

From a financial point of view, because the author did not invest personal funds (beyond minor incidental costs) in *Wedlock of the Gods*, there was no personal monetary loss. However, the lack of transparency meant that the success or failure of the show financially cannot be accurately assessed or learned from. If indeed a loss was incurred, one can speculate on causes: possibly lower-than-expected ticket sales (audience turnout at Ugbowo was poorer than hoped, validating concerns about apathy in that campus demographic), or perhaps overspending by the producer. Without concrete data, the academic could only conclude that while partnership holds promise for funding, it carries risks if not properly structured.

Outcomes and Reflections: Despite the administrative hiccups, the author derived some personal and professional gains from *Wedlock of the Gods*. The production added a directing credit to his portfolio (Curriculum Vitae) and served as another practical research experience. Artistically, the show was well-received, and it demonstrated the feasibility of cross-collaboration between academia and an outside theatre group – had the financial side been handled ethically, this model could be a way forward for more productions. The experience underscored a vital lesson: any future partnership should be formalized with a written, legally binding agreement outlining roles, financial responsibilities, profit/loss sharing, and communication protocols. In this case, the absence of a contract allowed the external producer to withdraw without accountability. For an academic, whose primary interest might be creative

rather than monetary, it's easy to overlook these business safeguards; however, this incident shows that basic business practices (contracts, documentation) are just as important in cultural projects to prevent misunderstandings or exploitation.

In summary, *Wedlock of the Gods* illustrated a different set of challenges compared to *Operation Squander*. While the author was relieved of direct fundraising duties thanks to the partner, he lost control over financial management and had to deal with the fallout of that lack of control. The production also reaffirmed common issues like student reliability and audience engagement difficulties. Crucially, it provided a comparative perspective: when the academic was the sole producer (*Operation Squander*), he had full oversight and could ensure post-production evaluation (and learn from the financials), whereas in the partnered *Wedlock* case, that oversight was missing. This comparison is valuable for understanding how various production models can succeed or fail within the university theatre context.

Discussion

These case studies reveal a number of important insights into the challenges and possibilities for academics producing theatrical productions in a Nigerian university setting. In this discussion, we synthesize the experiences from *Operation Squander* and *Wedlock of the Gods*, and relate them to the broader scholarly and practical context outlined in the literature review. The key themes that emerge include funding strategies, management of human resources (students and partners), and the dual role of the academic as both artist and administrator.

1. Funding Challenges and Creative Solutions: Both cases underscore that funding is the foremost challenge in private academic productions, confirming what numerous sources have identified. Without departmental or institutional financial support, the onus is entirely on the academic producer to resource the production. *Operation Squander* demonstrated that a combination of personal loans and soliciting donations can indeed generate sufficient funds to mount a production. This aligns with the notion of the academic as a *cultural entrepreneur* – proactively seeking out resources from one's social capital and community. The success in raising ₦262,000 via friends and family contributions is an embodiment of what Undercofler (2010) described: cultural entrepreneurs often rely on a “meagre number of public or private foundation funders” or personal networks, as opposed to traditional investors.

It is significant that *Operation Squander* achieved a surplus, but only because of external gifts. Had the production depended solely on ticket revenue (₦153,000), it would have fallen short of covering expenses (₦263,570) by a wide margin. This confirms a key point for practice: gate takings alone are insufficient in educational theatre, where ticket prices are kept low and audience size is limited. Aggressively pursuing external funding is not just helpful but necessary for financial viability. The findings encourage academics to adopt what Bardi and Lasisi (2019) termed a “consistent, creative and aggressive” (C.C.A.) approach to fundraising. In practical terms, this could mean starting fundraising efforts early, using social media and alumni networks, partnering with campus alumni offices or student associations, and even looking for small grants or sponsorship from local businesses. The *Operation Squander* case can serve as a model: the producer tapped into a supportive community of former students and colleagues – a resource readily available to many academics – proving that people are willing to contribute to artistic projects, especially if they see educational or social value in them.

On the other hand, *Wedlock of the Gods* presents a cautionary tale about external partnerships for funding. While teaming up with an outside producer held the promise of easing financial burdens, it introduced risks that ultimately undermined the potential benefits. The lack of transparency from the partner meant that the academic lost insight into the financial outcome and possibly lost out on any financial returns. This indicates that partnerships must be entered with clear terms. The recommendation arising from this is straightforward: any collaboration should be governed by a written agreement that details each party's contributions, decision rights, and profit/loss sharing mechanisms. In the absence of such structure, the academic may end up with even less control than going solo. That said, the idea of partnership shouldn't be discarded – when done right, an external sponsor or co-producer can provide capital and

perhaps marketing clout. The *Wedlock* experience simply highlights that due diligence and formalization are essential. It also hints at another insight: the academic's goals and the partner's goals may differ (one might prioritize artistic success and student experience, while the other might prioritize financial return or branding). Aligning expectations through thorough discussion and contract is crucial so that both parties work towards a common vision of success.

2. Infrastructure and Institutional Support: The cases reaffirm well-known infrastructure issues in Nigerian educational theatres: limited rehearsal spaces and inadequate facilities (like lighting, sound, power). The difficulty in securing rehearsal venues for *Operation Squander* resonates with reports that departments often lack dedicated spaces and must "struggle to utilize the few available spaces". This impacts the quality and efficiency of the production process. The author's solution was makeshift – using classrooms – which is commonly done but not ideal. The broader implication is that universities need to invest in their theatre infrastructure. If regular departmental productions are to be sustained (whether officially funded or privately driven), providing multiple rehearsal rooms or scheduling priorities for productions would greatly help. In the interim, academic producers should coordinate closely with department heads and timetablers to negotiate rehearsal slots, and possibly collaborate with student directors to share space. The findings also indirectly support the recommendation from Bardi & Lasisi (2019) that universities should improve funding and provision of facilities for Theatre Arts Departments to prevent productions from going extinct. The success of these private productions despite infrastructural challenges is commendable, but one must acknowledge they succeeded *in spite* of these hurdles, not because the hurdles were removed. Institutional buy-in – even if not financial, in terms of scheduling support and free use of facilities – was a helpful factor and should be encouraged across institutions.

3. Managing Human Resources – Students as Cast and Crew: A striking aspect of these cases is the reliance on student participants and the challenges that come with it. Student actors and crew are essentially volunteers in a private production, which can lead to lower accountability. The *Operation Squander* experience showed that motivation and a sense of camaraderie can be built through respectful leadership and small incentives like refreshments. Indeed, the author had to transition from the typical lecturer-student dynamic to a more collegial team dynamic, which helped in getting students to commit. This reflects a necessary management skill: recognizing what drives your team. In this case, treating students as partners in the creative process (within appropriate boundaries) made them more invested in the outcome. The literature suggests that students may initially view a non-class production as doing a favour, but this can be transformed into a feeling of ownership and pride with the right approach. This finding aligns with motivational theories in volunteer management – providing recognition, enjoyment, and personal development opportunities can increase commitment.

The dropout of key cast members in *Wedlock of the Gods* further highlights the risk of student involvement without formal obligation. Real life (or fear of over-commitment) can pull them away at crucial moments. To mitigate this, a few strategies emerge: (a) Cast backups or understudies for important roles whenever possible, especially if a production timeline is long. (b) Maintain open communication – the students who quit might have signalled issues earlier (scheduling conflicts, academic pressure) that could have been addressed or at least anticipated. (c) If budget permits, even token stipends or rewards (certificates, gift vouchers) might give a sense of formal responsibility. In professional theatre, contracts bind actors; in academic theatre, grades usually ensure commitment for course-related productions. In a private production, one might consider integrating it with a course (if ethically and logistically feasible) or offering some form of formal recognition from the department to participants. The recommendation from the findings is that academics should carefully select dedicated students and "courting" them with motivation is necessary. The author's approach of providing an after-party and praise is one example of acknowledging their hard work.

Additionally, these cases illustrate that while students gain experience, the academic also plays a mentorship role, imparting practical skills in production management to them. This aligns with Adeniyi's (2023) observation that theatrical performances in schools allow students to acquire business management skills and partake in tasks like publicity, ticketing, and so on. In

Operation Squander, students saw first-hand how a production budget is managed and how publicity is done on a shoestring – lessons not always covered in classroom theory. Thus, an ancillary benefit (and argument to university administrators) is that supporting private productions can enhance student learning outcomes in arts administration, complementing their formal curriculum.

4. Academic Workload and Time Management: The issue of limited time due to academic duties was acknowledged in the findings of both the literature and by the author. While the paper did not explicitly detail how the author balanced teaching and directing, one can infer that it required significant personal sacrifice (evenings, weekends) and possibly delegation of some responsibilities to co-directors or stage managers for day-to-day tasks. The author's success in staging two productions within a year "within a calendar year" suggests remarkable personal commitment and efficient time use. However, not all academics may be able to replicate this if their workload is heavier or if they lack departmental support. The broader discussion point is that understaffing in departments contributes to a lack of time for creative projects, as noted in the literature. One recommendation, as given in the original paper, is that hiring more staff or adjusting workload can allow lecturers the bandwidth to undertake productions.

From a policy perspective, universities could formally recognize and reward faculty creative productions as part of their service or research requirements. If producing a play is counted in promotion criteria (as it is in some institutions like University of Benin, per the author's note), then faculty should be given some teaching relief or funding support to accomplish it. Otherwise, the burden might be too high for many. In essence, institutional encouragement needs to be backed by practical support.

5. Broader Impact and Sustainability: The findings also touch on why these efforts are worth sustaining despite the challenges. Departmental or private productions keep the theatre alive on campus, providing cultural enrichment for the university community and maintaining a pipeline of practical experience. As Bardi and Lasisi (2019) concluded, if such productions are not produced with some frequency, there is a danger they could fade away entirely in some universities. The author's work in 2023 ensured that in University of Benin, at least, theatre productions remained active. It also sets an example that could inspire other staff or students to initiate their own projects.

However, for sustainability, a shift from *ad-hoc* heroic efforts of individuals to more *systematic* support is needed. Some implications for policy include: establishing a Theatre Production Endowment or Fund at the faculty level that academics can apply to for seed money; encouraging alumni associations to sponsor an annual production; introducing a course or practicum where a faculty-led production is part of the syllabus (thereby legitimizing the time spent as teaching effort); or as Bardi & Lasisi suggested, creating a marketing unit or involving Business Managers to handle sponsorship year-round.

The discussion thus far paints a realistic picture: producing theatre privately in a university is challenging but possible. The author's experiences validate that with determination (and often personal sacrifice), an academic can fulfil both artistic and administrative roles to mount a show. The cases also highlight that certain problems are not unique but systemic – funding, facilities, student engagement – and thus need both individual strategies and institutional changes to address.

In connecting back to the scope of cultural administration and theatre management, these cases offer practical evidence of how theoretical principles play out on the ground. They emphasize the role of leadership in theatre management – the academic had to lead by example, inspire a team, and coordinate multiple moving parts, which aligns with modern views of arts leadership focusing on vision and people management (Rhine, 2018). They also underscore issues of ethical management – for instance, the importance of transparency and trust in partnerships, which touches on professional ethics in cultural administration. The mishandled partnership in

Wedlock can serve as a case study in ethics classes on what can go wrong when clarity and honesty are lacking.

In conclusion to this discussion, the key takeaways are: an academic can be a competent producer with the right mix of entrepreneurial resourcefulness, managerial skill, and creative vision. The challenges encountered are significant but not insuperable. Aligning with broader scholarship, this study reinforces calls for better funding mechanisms and structural support for educational theatre, while also celebrating the ingenuity and commitment of theatre practitioners in academia who keep the art form alive even under adverse conditions.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore whether and how an academic in a Nigerian university can successfully produce theatrical productions privately, and what challenges they face in doing so. Through the examination of two productions (*Operation Squander* and *Wedlock of the Gods*), several conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, despite serious funding difficulties, it is indeed possible for a determined academic to mount a theatrical production with minimal or no official support. The cases have shown that personal savings, loans, and external financial support from friends, family, and interested sponsors can be marshalled to cover production costs. In *Operation Squander*, the author effectively became a fundraiser, demonstrating resilience and creativity in finding money. This confirms that personal initiative can compensate, at least in part, for institutional funding gaps. The outcome of that production, which was completed with a small profit, buttresses the argument that resourceful strategies (like the C.C.A. approach to seeking funds) are key to success.

Secondly, the productions underscore the importance of external sponsorship and partnerships as a solution to funding challenges. However, the *Wedlock of the Gods* experience teaches that while partnerships with external sponsors are valuable, they must be handled professionally. A reliable partner and a clear, written agreement are indispensable to avoid misunderstandings. If done correctly, partnerships can inject much-needed capital and share the burden of production, potentially enabling larger or more frequent productions than an academic could do alone. But if done informally or with the wrong partner, they can lead to frustration and conflict. Thus, a conclusion is that partnering is a viable path only when proper agreements are in place – this will protect the interests of the academic producer and ensure the partnership achieves its intended benefits.

Thirdly, challenges related to human resources (students) and time are significant. The issue of student commitment in private productions is a double-edged sword: students are the lifeblood of university theatre (providing talent and labour), yet motivating them requires special effort when the activity is extracurricular. The study finds that this challenge can be mitigated by adopting a supportive management style – motivating students through personal encouragement, creating a fun and rewarding environment, and treating them with respect. Simple measures like providing meals or certificates of participation can boost morale. It's also noted that being flexible with students (understanding their academic priorities) and scheduling smartly can reduce friction. On the other hand, students who prove unreliable might have to be tactically replaced with more enthusiastic ones to protect the production. In essence, the academic must apply *people management skills* akin to those in volunteer organizations. The conclusion here is that effective team management and motivation are as crucial as financial management for a successful production.

Time constraint, largely due to academic workload, emerged as a subtle but important factor. It is concluded that without adjustments to workload or additional support, many academics simply will not have the bandwidth to undertake productions regularly. This points to a broader institutional need: to enable lecturers to engage in creative productions by addressing understaffing and workload issues. Bringing in more academic staff or graduate assistants can distribute teaching responsibilities more evenly, freeing time for creative scholarly activities

like directing a play. If universities genuinely value such practical outputs (and count them in promotions), they should create an enabling environment to make them feasible.

In summary, the experiences detailed in this paper conclude that with resilience, careful planning, and community support, an academic can overcome the challenges of producing theatre privately. The success of the two productions within one year serves as evidence that the endeavour, while tough, is not quixotic. Rather, it is a path that can yield rich educational and artistic dividends: students gain hands-on experience, the academic keeps his creative practice alive, and the university community benefits from cultural productions.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, several recommendations are offered to academics who wish to produce theatrical productions privately, as well as to university departments and administrations to support such efforts:

Cultivate a Savings and Funding Plan: Academics should develop a habit of setting aside funds specifically for productions. Even small, regular savings can accumulate to provide seed money for a show. Additionally, lecturers can explore taking low-interest loans from staff cooperative societies or other financial institutions as a means to raise initial capital, as was done in *Operation Squander*. Importantly, external funding avenues should be creatively, consistently, and aggressively sought – this means starting fundraising campaigns early, leveraging social media and alumni networks, and not hesitating to ask for support from businesses or community organizations. Building a portfolio of sponsors (even on a small scale) will ease financial pressure on the individual.

Formalize Partnerships and Seek Reliable Sponsors: If entering a partnership with an external producer or sponsor, ensure that a written agreement is in place. The agreement should outline responsibilities, financial transparency requirements, and conflict resolution mechanisms. It is advisable to partner with organizations or individuals of good reputation (ask for references or look at their track record with other collaborations). A reliable partner can greatly enhance a production, but an unreliable one can derail it – therefore, due diligence is key. Where possible, involve the university's legal office or administration in vetting and approving partnerships to give them official backing and accountability.

Improve Student Engagement Strategies: To mitigate the issue of student unseriousness during rehearsals, academics should implement motivational techniques. This could include: providing refreshments or small stipends for travel; arranging for academic credit or formal recognition (if feasible) for participation; and fostering a team spirit by treating students respectfully and making the process enjoyable. It's also recommended to select student participants carefully – identify those with genuine interest and dedication (perhaps through prior classwork or smaller projects) to form the core of the cast/crew, and consider having a few alternates or understudies in case of dropouts. Clear communication of expectations from the start can also help; students should know the rehearsal schedule and commit to it, understanding the importance of their role. In short, tactical management of student actors/crew – balancing authority with camaraderie – is crucial.

Enhance Departmental Support and Resource Access: Departments should, even if not funding the production, support lecturers by granting easy access to facilities and equipment. This might involve prioritizing the scheduling of the theatre hall for rehearsals and performances of private productions, and allowing use of costumes, props, and technical gear free of charge. It is also recommended that departments designate a staff member or skilled student as a production manager or technical assistant to the academic producer, to help coordinate logistics. Such support reduces

the one-man nature of the project and provides continuity (for instance, a department technician can ensure equipment is properly used and maintained).

Institutional Policy Changes: University administrations should consider formal mechanisms to encourage creative productions by staff. One recommendation is to incorporate private production activities into staff appraisal – for example, treat a successful production as equivalent to a published paper or as a contribution to community service. If this is clearly spelled out, academics will have institutional justification to dedicate time and perhaps even to apply for internal grants for these projects. Another policy suggestion is hiring more teaching staff or adjunct instructors to reduce teaching loads, thereby freeing time for research and creative endeavours (as already noted, many departments are understaffed). Departments could also create a Marketing and Sponsorship Committee (even a small one with interested staff or students) to continuously seek external sponsorship for departmental and private productions throughout the year. This proactive approach would implement the recommendations from prior research and ease the burden on individual producers.

Audience Development Initiatives: To combat audience apathy, especially on campuses where theatre-going culture is weak, it is recommended to invest effort in audience development. This can include organizing pre-show publicity events such as teaser performances or interactive forums on campus, engaging student organizations and clubs to attend as groups, and using modern channels (WhatsApp groups, campus influencers) to generate buzz. Lowering ticket prices (as attempted in *Wedlock of the Gods*) is one tactic, but it should be coupled with demonstrating the *value* of the experience to potential attendees. Departments might sponsor a certain number of free tickets for students in other faculties as a way to draw in new audiences who might not otherwise consider attending a play. Over time, building a loyal campus audience will make productions more sustainable financially and culturally.

Time Management and Scheduling: Academics attempting a production should engage in meticulous time management. It's recommended to plan the production timeline around academic calendars – for instance, avoid peak exam/grading periods for the intensive rehearsal phase. If possible, utilize semester breaks or weekends for concentrated rehearsals. Where academic duties are overwhelming, do not hesitate to delegate: empower students to lead certain aspects (e.g., let a reliable student assistant direct a few scenes or handle stage management tasks) under supervision. This not only reduces the burden on the lecturer but also provides valuable leadership experience to students. Essentially, practicing good project management – breaking tasks down, scheduling them, and possibly seeking temporary adjustments in one's teaching schedule (e.g., a colleague covering a class or two) – can help balance the dual responsibilities.

In conclusion, these recommendations aim to create a more enabling environment for private theatrical productions within academic settings. By applying these suggestions, an academic producer can better navigate the financial, logistical, and human challenges identified, leading to more frequent and higher-quality productions. In the long run, implementing these recommendations at both individual and institutional levels can contribute to a thriving culture of theatre in Nigerian universities, ensuring that the show, as they say, will go on.

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