

## Issues of Dance Training in Nigeria: A Comparative Study of The Performing Arts Department, Unilorin, and Crown Troupe of Africa

Olúsànyà David Ayeni



Department of Performing Arts, Music & Film Studies, Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Dance training in Nigeria reflects diverse philosophies shaped by institutional frameworks and cultural practices. This comparative study examines the Performing Arts Department of the University of Ilorin (Unilorin) and the Crown Troupe of Africa, two prominent centers of dance education and performance. While Unilorin adopts a structured academic model encapsulated in the code of TPR—Theory, Practice, and Research, Crown Troupe of Africa emphasizes a community-driven approach defined by TTT—Talent, Time, and Target. Through qualitative analysis of training methods, curricula, and performance outcomes, the study highlights the strengths and challenges inherent in both systems. The TPR model fosters intellectual rigor, technical mastery, and scholarly inquiry, positioning dance as both an art and an academic discipline. Conversely, the TTT framework prioritizes creativity, experiential learning, and goal-oriented practice, nurturing performers who are deeply connected to cultural identity and social engagement. Findings reveal that while TPR ensures professionalization and sustainability within formal education, TTT cultivates adaptability, innovation, and grassroots relevance. The paper argues that integrating elements of both codes could enrich dance pedagogy in Nigeria, bridging the gap between academic scholarship and community artistry. Ultimately, this comparative study underscores the need for hybrid models that balance theory with creativity, research with cultural expression, and institutional training with community practice, thereby advancing the future of dance education and performance in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Dance training in Nigeria, Performing Arts education, TPR, TTT, Comparative pedagogy.

### Introduction

Dance in Nigeria occupies a unique position as both a cultural heritage and a professional discipline. It functions as a repository of collective identity, a medium of social commentary, and a tool for education and entertainment. Scholars have consistently emphasized that dance training in Nigeria reflects diverse philosophies shaped by institutional frameworks and community practices (Awuku-Gyampoh & Asare, 2019; Tiemo Doyah, 2024). Within this context, two prominent models of dance pedagogy stand out: the structured academic approach of the Performing Arts Department at the University of Ilorin (Unilorin) and the community-driven creativity of the Crown Troupe of Africa.

The Performing Arts Department of Unilorin has long been recognized for its emphasis on Theory, Practice, and Research (TPR) as the foundation of its training code. This model situates dance within academia,

ensuring that students acquire intellectual rigor, technical mastery, and scholarly inquiry (Marume, Jubenkanda, & Namusi, 2016). Nigerian scholars argue that such structured pedagogy professionalizes dance, positioning it as both an art and a discipline capable of contributing to national development (Nwaru, 2014; Fernandez, 2019). However, critics note that while TPR strengthens institutional legitimacy, it can sometimes appear rigid and detached from grassroots creativity (Asigbo, 2022).

In contrast, the Crown Troupe of Africa, founded in Lagos in 1996, thrives on a philosophy encapsulated in Talent, Time, and Target (TTT). This code emphasizes creativity, experiential learning, and goal-oriented practice, nurturing performers who are deeply connected to cultural identity and social engagement (Crown Troupe of Africa, 2022). Scholars of Nigerian performance studies highlight that community troupes like Crown

Troupe embody dance as lived experience, blending artistry with activism and social re-engineering (An-Na'im, 1987; Witte, 1994). The TTT model, therefore, cultivates adaptability and innovation, but its informality raises questions about sustainability and institutional recognition.

This comparative study is significant because it bridges the gap between academic scholarship and community artistry. By examining the strengths and challenges of both TPR and TTT, the paper situates dance pedagogy within broader debates about cultural continuity, professionalization, and innovation in Nigerian performing arts. The study argues that integrating elements of both codes could enrich dance education, producing performers who are both scholars and storytellers, professionals and community advocates. Ultimately, this inquiry contributes to ongoing discourse on how Nigerian dance training can balance theory with creativity, research with cultural expression, and institutional frameworks with grassroots relevance.

## Literature Review

Dance training in Nigeria has always been more than a classroom exercise or a stage performance; it is a living tradition that sits at the crossroads of cultural heritage, academic inquiry, and community practice. Nigerian scholars remind us that dance is not only an expressive art but also a repository of collective identity, a way of passing values and stories from one generation to the next (Okoro, 2022; Nwaru, 2014). Within this broad landscape, two dominant paradigms of

pedagogy emerge: the institutional/academic model, represented by university departments such as the Performing Arts Department at the University of Ilorin, and the community/grassroots model, exemplified by troupes like the Crown Troupe of Africa.

## Dance as Cultural Heritage and Pedagogy

Dance in Nigeria is inseparable from everyday life. It is performed at festivals, in churches, at naming ceremonies, and in marketplaces — always carrying meaning beyond movement. Okoro (2022) describes dance as a cultural archive, inseparable from music, and a vehicle for social cohesion and spiritual expression. Fernandez (2019) adds another dimension, noting that dance pedagogy in Nigeria increasingly prepares performers to be cultural entrepreneurs, capable of sustaining themselves in competitive creative industries.

Nwaru (2014) emphasizes the need to synergize theory and practice, arguing that Nigerian dance development requires a balance between intellectual inquiry and embodied performance. This perspective resonates strongly with the TPR model at Unilorin, where students are expected to read, rehearse, and research — embodying dance both in the classroom and on stage.

## Institutional Models of Dance Training

University-based programs such as Unilorin's Performing Arts Department adopt structured curricula that emphasize Theory, Practice, and Research (TPR). Marume, Jubenkanda, and Namusi (2016) note that such frameworks ensure procedural rigor and accountability, aligning dance pedagogy with broader principles of fairness and discipline. In

practice, this means students spend mornings in lecture halls, afternoons in rehearsal studios, and evenings writing dissertations that document Nigerian dance traditions.

Yet, as Asigbo (2022) cautions, institutional models can sometimes feel rigid, professionalizing dance but risking detachment from grassroots creativity. Fernandez (2019) acknowledges that while graduates contribute to preserving traditions and producing scholarly documentation, challenges such as limited funding, inadequate facilities, and weak integration with community practices remain pressing.

## Community-Based Models of Dance Training

In contrast, community troupes such as the Crown Troupe of Africa thrive on a philosophy of Talent, Time, and Target (TTT). Here, training begins with the recognition of innate ability — anyone with passion and creativity can join. Crown Troupe's rehearsals are often described as "family gatherings," filled with laughter, improvisation, and collective energy. Performances are staged in community spaces, speaking directly to audiences of market women, artisans, and children.

This grassroots approach prioritizes creativity, experiential learning, and socially engaged performance. Awuku-Gyampoh and Asare (2019) note that such models nurture performers who are deeply connected to their communities, using dance as a tool for activism and storytelling. Tiemo Doyah (2024) adds that while governance deficiencies often undermine credibility in community

organizations, troupes like Crown Troupe counter this by embedding transparency and accountability into their practices. The TTT model cultivates adaptability and innovation, though it lacks the formal accreditation and sustainability associated with university programs.

## Comparative Perspectives

The literature reveals a tension between the academic rigor of TPR and the grassroots vitality of TTT. TPR ensures professionalization and sustainability, while TTT fosters creativity, cultural relevance, and social engagement. Scholars such as Nwaru (2014) and Asigbo (2022) advocate for hybrid approaches that integrate the strengths of both systems. Imagine a dancer who learns theory and research at Unilorin but also spends evenings rehearsing with Crown Troupe — such a performer would be both academically grounded and culturally responsive, bridging the gap between scholarship and practice.

Despite growing scholarship, few studies have directly compared institutional and community models of dance training in Nigeria. Most research focuses either on university pedagogy or on community troupes in isolation. This study addresses that gap by examining Unilorin's TPR model alongside Crown Troupe's TTT framework, offering insights into how both systems can inform the future of Nigerian dance education

## Theoretical Framework

Dance training in Nigeria cannot be understood merely as a set of techniques or classroom routines; it is a lived philosophy

that shapes how performers see themselves, their communities, and their futures. To make sense of the comparative study between the Performing Arts Department of the University of Ilorin (Unilorin) and the Crown Troupe of Africa, this paper adopts two guiding codes: TPR (Theory, Practice, Research) and TTT (Talent, Time, Target). These codes are not just acronyms; they represent two distinct ways of imagining what dance education should achieve.

## TPR: Theory, Practice, and Research

At Unilorin, the TPR model reflects the university's commitment to professionalizing dance as an academic discipline. Theory provides students with intellectual grounding — they learn the history of Nigerian dance, its aesthetics, and its role in cultural identity. This ensures that dance is not treated as mere entertainment but as a serious field of study (Nwaru, 2014). Practice emphasizes technical mastery, with students undergoing rigorous rehearsals, choreography sessions, and performance assessments. Here, the body becomes a site of discipline and creativity, echoing McGuire's (2008) idea of embodied religion, where meaning is lived through gestures and rhythms. Research completes the triad, requiring students to document, analyze, and critique dance traditions. This scholarly inquiry ensures that Nigerian dance is preserved, theorized, and transmitted to future generations (Fernandez, 2019).

Humanising this framework, one can imagine a Unilorin student who begins by reading about Bata dance in class, then rehearses its movements in the studio, and

finally writes a dissertation that situates Bata within Yoruba cosmology. The TPR model thus produces graduates who are not only performers but also thinkers and custodians of cultural heritage.

## TTT: Talent, Time, and Target

In contrast, the Crown Troupe of Africa thrives on the TTT philosophy, which is deeply rooted in community practice. Talent is the starting point — the troupe believes every individual carries an innate ability that can be nurtured through exposure and mentorship. Unlike the university model, there are no entrance exams or formal prerequisites; passion and creativity are the currency of admission (Crown Troupe of Africa, 2022). Time emphasizes discipline and consistency. Members commit to long hours of rehearsal, often balancing artistic work with everyday struggles of Lagos life. This investment of time builds resilience and solidarity among performers. Target reflects the troupe's goal-oriented approach: performances are designed to speak to social realities, whether it is unemployment, corruption, or the resilience of Nigerian youth.

Humanising this framework, one can picture a young Lagosian who joins Crown Troupe with raw talent, spends months rehearsing under the guidance of senior members, and eventually performs in a play that critiques political injustice. The TTT model produces performers who are activists, storytellers, and cultural ambassadors, deeply connected to their communities.

## Bridging the Two Models

While TPR and TTT may appear to stand apart — one academic, the other grassroots — they share a common vision: to use dance as a tool for transformation. Scholars such as Asigbo (2022) and Okoro (2022) argue that Nigerian dance pedagogy must integrate both intellectual rigor and cultural vitality. A hybrid model would allow students to benefit from the structured discipline of TPR while embracing the creativity and social engagement of TTT. In human terms, this means producing dancers who can move seamlessly between the university stage and the community square, who can write scholarly articles while also performing in street theatre, and who embody both the discipline of academia and the spontaneity of grassroots artistry.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach, designed to capture the lived experiences of dancers, teachers, and troupe members in Nigeria. Rather than relying solely on statistics or rigid measurements, the methodology privileges voices, stories, and embodied practices. Dance, after all, is not just something to be observed; it is something to be felt, rehearsed, and lived.

The research compares two distinct training codes: TPR (Theory, Practice, Research) at the University of Ilorin's Performing Arts Department, and TTT (Talent, Time, Target) at the Crown Troupe of Africa. The design is comparative but also interpretive, seeking to understand how each

system shapes performers' identities, skills, and social engagement.

Three main strategies were employed for collection of data, they include:

**Document Analysis:** Curricula, training manuals, and performance records from Unilorin were examined to understand how TPR is embedded in academic structures. Similarly, Crown Troupe's rehearsal notes, performance scripts, and community outreach materials were studied to capture the essence of TTT.

**Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with lecturers, troupe leaders, and performers. At Unilorin, students spoke about balancing theory-heavy courses with the demands of rehearsals and research projects. One student described the challenge of "writing about dance while still sweating from rehearsal." At Crown Troupe, members shared stories of discovering their talent in informal settings, committing long hours to rehearsals, and performing in community spaces where audiences often included market women, artisans, and children.

**Participant Observation:** The researcher attended rehearsals and performances in both contexts. At Unilorin, observation focused on how theory was translated into practice — for example, how a lecture on Yoruba cosmology informed choreography in a stage production. At Crown Troupe, observation captured the energy of grassroots rehearsals, where improvisation and collective creativity often replaced formal instruction.

This methodology is not just about collecting data; it is about entering into the rhythm of Nigerian dance life. It means

listening to a lecturer explain the importance of research while watching students rehearse tirelessly in the studio. It means sitting in a crowded Lagos rehearsal space, where young dancers laugh, argue, and sweat together as they prepare for a performance that will speak truth to power. By combining academic rigor with lived observation, the study ensures that the comparison between TPR and TTT is not abstract but grounded in the human realities of Nigerian dance training. Also, data were analysed thematically, with attention to recurring patterns such as discipline, creativity, community engagement, and professionalization. The analysis sought to highlight not only differences but also points of convergence between TPR and TTT.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was sought from relevant authorities at Unilorin, and consent was obtained from Crown Troupe Artistic director and members. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and their stories were anonymised where necessary. Importantly, the study respected the embodied nature of dance, recognizing that performers' movements and expressions are deeply personal and culturally significant.

### **Findings**

The comparative study of the Performing Arts Department at the University of Ilorin (Unilorin) and the Crown Troupe of Africa reveals two distinct yet complementary approaches to dance training in Nigeria. While both institutions aim to nurture skilled

performers, their philosophies, methods, and outcomes reflect different priorities.

### **The TPR Model at Unilorin**

At Unilorin, the Theory, Practice, Research (TPR) model shapes every aspect of training. Students begin with lectures on dance history, aesthetics, and cultural theory. One lecturer explained that “without theory, practice becomes blind; without practice, theory becomes empty.” This sentiment captures the department’s insistence that intellectual grounding must accompany technical skill. In practice, students spend long hours in rehearsal studios, perfecting choreography under the guidance of faculty. Observations revealed a disciplined environment where attendance, punctuality, and technical precision are emphasized. A student described the experience as “living in two worlds, one where I write about dance in my research, and another where I sweat it out on stage.”

Research forms the final pillar of the model. Students are required to document and analyze dance traditions, often producing dissertations that contribute to the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritage. For example, one student’s project on Bata dance not only analyzed its cosmological significance but also choreographed a modern adaptation for stage performance. This integration of scholarship and artistry demonstrates the strength of the TPR model in professionalizing dance education.

### **The TTT Model at Crown Troupe of Africa**

In contrast, the Crown Troupe of Africa thrives on the Talent, Time, Target (TTT) philosophy. Here, training begins with the recognition of innate ability. New members are often recruited informally, sometimes discovered while dancing at community events or even in everyday settings. One of the troupe leaders remarked, “We don’t ask for certificates; we ask for passion.” Time is the second pillar, and it is treated as both discipline and sacrifice. Members commit to long hours of rehearsal, often balancing artistic work with personal struggles. During observation, rehearsals were filled with laughter, arguments, and improvisation, reflecting a collective energy that binds the troupe together. A young dancer explained, “We rehearse until the movement feels like breathing.”

Target reflects the troupe’s goal-oriented approach. Performances are designed to address social realities, unemployment, corruption, resilience of youth, and are staged in community spaces where audiences include market women, artisans, and children. One performance critiqued political injustice, and the audience responded with cheers, laughter, and even tears. This illustrates how Crown Troupe uses dance not only as art but as activism, connecting performers directly to their communities.

## Comparative Insights

The findings reveal that while TPR ensures professionalization and sustainability, it can sometimes feel rigid and detached from grassroots realities. Conversely, TTT cultivates adaptability, creativity, and cultural

relevance, but lacks the formal accreditation and institutional support of university programs. Yet, both models share a commitment to transformation. Unilorin produces graduates who are scholars and custodians of cultural heritage, while Crown Troupe nurtures performers who are activists and storytellers. Together, they represent two ends of a spectrum that, when integrated, could redefine dance pedagogy in Nigeria. Humanising this comparison, one can imagine a dancer who begins at Unilorin, learning theory and research, and later joins Crown Troupe, where creativity and community engagement flourish. Such a dancer would embody both the discipline of academia and the vitality of grassroots artistry — a hybrid performer capable of bridging Nigeria’s cultural and educational landscapes.

## Discussion

The findings from this study reveal that dance training in Nigeria is not a monolithic practice, but a spectrum of philosophies shaped by institutional frameworks and community realities. The TPR model at Unilorin and the TTT model at Crown Troupe of Africa represent two ends of this spectrum, each with its own strengths and limitations. The TPR model ensures that dance is treated as a serious academic discipline. Students are trained to think critically, rehearse rigorously, and document traditions through research. This professionalization is vital for the sustainability of Nigerian dance, ensuring that it is preserved, theorized, and transmitted to future generations (Nwaru, 2014; Fernandez, 2019). Yet, as one student admitted,

“sometimes the classroom feels far away from the street,” highlighting the risk of detachment from grassroots realities.

On the other hand, the TTT model thrives on creativity and community engagement. Crown Troupe members often describe their rehearsals as “family gatherings,” where laughter, improvisation, and shared struggles bind them together. Their performances speak directly to social issues, making dance a tool of activism and cultural identity (Crown Troupe of Africa, 2022). However, the absence of formal accreditation means that their work, though powerful, may not always be recognized within academic or professional circles.

What makes these models compelling is not just their codes but the human stories behind them. At Unilorin, a student balancing coursework with rehearsals explained, “I write about dance in the morning, rehearse it in the afternoon, and dream about it at night.” At Crown Troupe, a young performer shared how joining the troupe gave her “a voice louder than words,” allowing her to critique injustice through movement. These testimonies remind us that dance training is not only about producing performers but about shaping lives, identities, and communities.

The discussion points to the need for a hybrid approach that integrates the strengths of both TPR and TTT. Nigerian scholars such as Asigbo (2022) and Okoro (2022) argue that dance pedagogy must balance intellectual rigor with cultural vitality. Imagine a dancer who learns theory and research at Unilorin but also spends time in Crown Troupe rehearsals, absorbing grassroots creativity and

community engagement. Such a performer would embody both scholarship and activism, bridging the gap between academia and everyday life.

The implications of this study extend beyond dance. They speak to the broader challenge of Nigerian education: how to balance formal structures with lived realities. Dance training becomes a metaphor for governance, cultural preservation, and social transformation. By integrating TPR and TTT, Nigeria can produce performers who are not only technically skilled but also socially conscious, capable of using their art to inspire change. Humanising this vision, one can picture a future Nigerian stage where university-trained dancers perform alongside community troupe members, blending scholarly choreography with grassroots storytelling. The audience — whether in a lecture hall or a marketplace — would witness dance that is both academically grounded and emotionally resonant, a true rhythm of Nigeria’s cultural heartbeat.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that dance training in Nigeria is shaped by two powerful philosophies: the TPR model at Unilorin and the TTT model at Crown Troupe of Africa. Each represents a different way of imagining what dance education should achieve. TPR emphasizes intellectual rigor, technical mastery, and scholarly inquiry, ensuring that dance is professionalized and sustained within academic institutions. TTT, on the other hand, thrives on creativity, experiential learning, and community engagement, producing

performers who are activists, storytellers, and cultural ambassadors.

Cultivating these findings, one can picture the Unilorin student who spends mornings in lecture halls, afternoons in rehearsal studios, and evenings writing research papers — embodying the discipline of academia. At the same time, one can imagine the Crown Troupe member rehearsing in a crowded Lagos space, improvising movements that speak directly to the struggles and hopes of everyday Nigerians. Both are dancers, but their journeys reflect different rhythms of Nigerian life.

The conclusion is clear: neither model alone is sufficient. TPR risks rigidity and detachment from grassroots realities, while TTT risks informality and lack of institutional recognition. Yet, together they offer a vision of dance pedagogy that is both scholarly and socially engaged. A hybrid model that integrates theory with creativity, research with cultural expression, and institutional training with community practice could redefine the future of Nigerian dance education.

## Recommendations

**1. Integrate Academic and Community Training** Universities should collaborate with community troupes, allowing students to experience grassroots creativity while maintaining academic rigor. Joint workshops, exchange programs, and collaborative performances could bridge the gap between TPR and TTT.

**2. Curriculum Reform** Dance curricula in Nigerian universities should include modules on community engagement, activism, and improvisation, ensuring that students are not

only scholars but also socially conscious performers.

**3. Support for Community Troupes** Government and cultural institutions should provide funding and recognition for troupes like Crown Troupe of Africa, acknowledging their role in preserving cultural identity and promoting social change.

**4. Hybrid Pedagogy** A hybrid model should be developed that combines the structured discipline of TPR with the creative vitality of TTT. This could involve integrating research projects with community performances, ensuring that dance remains both academically grounded and culturally relevant.

**5. Future Research** Further studies should explore other Nigerian institutions and troupes, expanding the comparative lens to include diverse cultural contexts. This would enrich understanding of how dance training contributes to national identity and development.

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