Dramatic Script Writing and Its Effect on the Performance of Actors and Actresses in Nollywood Films

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ABSTRACT

The Nigeria film industry called Nollywood is universally recognised as the third largest film industry in the world. As a film producing industry, it is important to know that the survival of such industry depends more on the quality of products produced. Scripts are the foundation of any film or video producing organisation as presentations seen on video productions come with the dynamics of a script. The Nigerian film industry, despite its record of achievements still battle with the problem of script writing which affects the performance of Nollywood actors and actresses.

This study evaluates the quality of a good dramatic script and the role of a dramatic script on the quality of films produced. The study examines how the Nigerian films industry is affected by the quality of script used in its production. It proffers recommendation on how improvement can be achieved for professional development. It clearly states the usefulness of the study to both the film industry, governments and non-governmental bodies who seek to use the medium of film for national development. As an evaluative and prescriptive study, data for analysis were generated through documentary or historical sources.

Finally, the study concludes that film industries and home vidoes generally are fundamental weapons for development in the global world. Nollywood should rise to the global challenge facing the industry and the right drive should be put in place to tackle the problems. Nollywood as a film producing institution should know that it is important for Nollywood script writers to undergo a formal training on drama script writing. Also thorough field research work must be conducted by script writers for practical improvement in the art of drama script writing.

Keywords: Scripting, Film, Performance, Actors, Nollywood

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian film industry in a broad spectrum has received a great clarion in the international film market with its achievements manifesting in the cordial relationship between the film industry and the great Hollywood film industry of the United State. Nollywood as it is called is pronounced with its voices heard and sparingly highlighting talents and creativity making the Nigerian youths to be recognized as intelligent and distinct. However, it is important to note that the survival of any production in the broadcast media comes with an existence of a script. Scripts, in line with scene design tell a story and give the audience an insight of happenings around.

A script is the foundation of any production and has an important place for the success of any production. Presentation seen on productions comes with the dynamics in script writing making viewers to be glued to the film from the beginning to the end. The definition of the term "script" assures that, dramatic scripts carefully written out, containing the audiovisual products and serve upon the filming contains an embedded message for the development of the society. (Gonzaleze, 1990).

Hernandez (2003) notes that, a script serves as the foundation, the middle, the advanced stage and the end of a production. It is an embodiment of what the writer imagines, what the writer wants the audience to see and what the writer anticipate and dream. Therefore, the conduct of dramatic audiovisual presentation must be preceded by a script; what the script writer wants to say; how the actors are going to say it; what is to be captured at the moment and what should be exposed all must be included in the script.

The Nigerian film industry, despite its record of achievements still battles with the problem of script writing which in turn affect the performance of actors and actresses in the industry. Script writing has its basics and techniques, which should be considered before production can take place. The script is the story and for the actors and actresses to perform their roles well in any production, they will have to follow instructions and directions based on the script. This research study therefore sought to explore script writing techniques and its effect on the performance of actor and actresses in Nollywood films.

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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The major objective of the study was to examine the qualities of good drama script writing in the Nigerian Film industry.

Other objectives of the study were as follows:

To evaluate qualities of a good dramatic script

To assess the roles of a dramatic script on the quality of programmes produced.

How the Nigerian film industry is affected by the quality of scripts used in dramatic production.

To proffer recommendation on how improvement can be achieved for professional development.

Significance of the study

The study would be useful to governments, communication agencies and non-governmental organizations which seek to use the film medium for stimulating national growth, and development. It would be useful to the Nigerian film industry Nollywood for improvement of the standard of their films to meet world-class standard. Academic and research institutions would find this study a useful source of information for the training of future dramatic script-writers for effective performance in the film industry.

The society, particularly movies audience would enjoy good movies that compare with those produced in other parts of the world.

Actors and actresses would find their work easier and interesting in playing their roles in the performing art industry.

A good film produced through a good script would attract foreign audience and therefore foreign exchange for the development of the society.

METHODOLOGY

This was an evaluative and prescriptive study. The method of data collection for this study was documentary or historical survey. Data for analysis were generated through visits to library for book reading, journals, newspapers and other documents available to the researchers in the subject area. Interactions with professionals in the area were also useful in the process of generating data for analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is the need for Nollywood to improve on script writing in order to beat the list and rise to the top just like their fellow counterparts in Hollywood. Script writing has a great effect on actors and actresses performance and on the audience who are the final consumer of Nollywood products. There are quite a number of theories that explains the concept of communication in the film making industry. It was imperative to look into the audience theory in this research work as the audience remains the major judge of Nollywood productions.

THE AUDIENCE THEORY

According to McQuail (2000:384), effective communication will be better achieved by considering audience perception and tailoring the information accordingly. The audience should be considered before a story is written. The society makes up a story therefore, before getting into the art of production; the people that make up the society should be appreciated, informed, educated and entertained. A script that does not work in conformity with the environment and the tradition of the Nigerian society and does not seek to tackle a bad situation should be avoided.

Despite the attention and applause given to the Nigerian film industry, the audience still has complaints on Nollywood films. Some of the major complaints stem from script writing. There is the need to develop effective, professional script writing that would produce positive effect on actors and actresses in order to build the confidence of the viewers.

Nollywood industry recently organized the African magic viewer's choice award in Lagos. It was shown on African Magic on DSTV cable on March 9, 2013 in Lagos. The award given ceremony commanded a lot of attention as the world became interested and glued to the ceremony organized by the industry. After the event, the audience still feels there is a sharp difference between Hollywood and Nollywood films and much still have to be done. This is not in terms of high technology that Hollywood possesses but due to the problem of script writing. The script is the first step in a production and it should be the first to be considered as far as filmmaking is concerned. Nollywood was given a high rating by the intentional film body due to the fact that Nollywood story lines are in consistent with the developed countries culture and ways of life. The Western world style is dominant on the Nigerian films. The actors and actresses can only perform best in their roles if the techniques of script writing are properly considered and the audience sense of reality is worked into the script by the script-writer. This will result in positive change, as the audience would appreciate the industry better.

PERFORMANCE OF ACTORS AND ACTRESSES BASED ON SCRIPTS

Scholars and film analysts have written more on the art of production, historical perspectives of the Nigerian film industry and the impact of modern technology on Nollywood, but the art of script writing and its effect on the performance of actors and actresses has not received serious attention.

The problem of script writing in the Nigerian film industry is a cancer that has eaten deep into the industry fabric. The resultant effects of these are poor story lines, faulty scene design, poor themes and not too impressive performances of actors and actresses. There has been wide release of Nollywood films that still didn't match the happenings of the situations in the country. Great heroes make a change especially when they write stories of their environment and solve problems that make the society stagnant of development. Nollywood script-writers are mostly near unprofessional and have been turning a blind eye to the current situations in the country. The utilization of drama to pass sensitive messages and to advance a change in the society is immeasurable and until attention is given to this, the nation would continue to go round in circles.

Isiaka (1996) notes that in drama production, the visual impact makes the information a real life experience. Learning readiness is stimulated, attention is pricked and its span is sustained, while perception is heightened. The result is that the rate of retention is high, recall is high, comprehension of the content of the message is enhanced and it lingers in the memory for a long time. Isaiaka's definition as stated above applied only to productions that are properly scripted. The audience's attention is attracted and retained when the actors and actresses go through the characters they represent, learn and absorb the message to be passed and have a proper perception of the story as it lingers on.

Actors and actresses are the ingredients of productions and people get to pick their role models from these valuable ingredients. The problem of script writing always makes actors and actresses to misinterpret their roles and as such accurate message are not being passed to the audience. Dramatic productions can be very effective in training, as they touch the sense and emotions of the audience to tilt them towards the agenda that have been set.

It is in the realm of this that much attention has to go down to script writing so that the audience can be emotionally attached to the film. With this, a change can be realized, after all the aim of any production is to pass a message to the audience that would bring a change to the society.

Technicalities of writing drama script is of various categories, among them the script writer must be specific and clear about the information he uses there should be detail relationship between image and sound; this must be followed by techniques of writing a drama script which the writer must understand clearly.

It is however saddening that despite the recognition of Nollywood at the international film making centers, the problem battling script writing in the industry has not received significant focus. Relevant materials that center on the art of script writing, the rules and guidelines on script writing can mostly be obtained from Hollywood script writers, teachers, and researchers from international film institutes. There is still a lot of work to be done in the Nigerian film industry on script writing for the Nigerian actors and actresses to perform up to the expectation of the Nigerian audience.

Fresness, et al (2003), mention the requirements for the preparation of dramatic script. The first step in writing a dramatic script is to acquire an idea of a story; write the story; develop the story; arrange the plot; (sequences); the presentation of conflict and its development is accompanied by a stage of investigation on the topic, and these overall contribute greatly to the final product quality. The kind of audiovisual programme to be conducted have their characteristics and this aspect cannot help but be taken into consideration.

Investigation into a topic gives actors and actresses the platform for internationalization of the role they have to play. Stanislavsky (1936) states that actors and actresses should act in an original form so that the audience can get attached to the movie, Without a good script, the audience gets bored even though the actors and actresses are good. Research is very crucial to the attainment of success. An in depth research has to be carried out about the culture, the language, the personality and carriage of a character. This is done by the script writer.

LACK OF PROFESSIONAL SCRIPT WRITERS

In Nollywood, it is noticed that there are script writers that have not gone through training in script writing. The scripts are given to the producers to handle and producers already have a lot of portfolios they control. This attitude is obviously wrong. Script writing is said to be an art as well as a craft. The exploration of the environment, great stories of heroes past, making use of superb dialogue all are major constituents of a good script.

Therefore, it is imperative for a script writer to be properly trained and the producer and the director should know that there are techniques involved in script writing and until these techniques are followed strictly it is only then that a good production can be achieved. It is always important to note that nothing good comes easy. There are some basic requirements that a good script has to follow. It is truly important to take note of the fact that

what applies to Hollywood film may not apply to Nollywood. The culture and tradition of these countries are significantly different from each other. In this case however, the rules guiding script writing remain the same. The script should be clearly specific and directional. This will allow the actors and actresses to understand the story very well. Some actors and actresses take up a role just for financial gains while they may not be committed to the roles they have to play as well as the entire production itself. The information the script carries should be clear, and the image and sound should go in line with the story line. Professional terms should be employed in script writing and only a professional that is into the art and craft of script writing can achieve it.

The script serves as the foundation for the performance of actors and actresses. In western countries, it is observed that the actors and actresses go through the processes of training in characterization. This has made western movies to always be highly rated. In Nollywood, the actors and actresses don't go through such training and if they do, it doesn't reflect on most films produced by the film industry. Actors and actresses training is different form rehearsals. Each actor or actress should be engaged in training by the producer from the onset before a movie is produced. Voice training, the use of the five sense organs (eyes, nose, ear, tongue and skin), the training on facial expressions are very important for actors and actresses to get into character and perform well in their roles.

A script is a document. Nigerians generally have problem with documentation. Things are not properly documented. Despite the advent of digitalization, the country still battles with the problem of documentation. Most times, scripts are often mixed with each other and that may be why the same story lines in movies are often acted over and over. All these are avoided in Hollywood film industry. The resultant effect of this on Nollywood actors and actresses is boredom as viewers see that watching these movies amounts to deriving nothing tangible. It has been observed that the film medium can be very useful for educational purposes due to its audio-visual nature and some other inherent advantages.

THE CHALLENGES IN THE NIGERIAN FILM INDUSTRY (NOLLYWOOD)

The greatest challenge facing the Nigerian film industry is script writing. Script-writers like Ben Akponine, Joe Dudun, Reginald Ebere, Ken Oghenjaba have to quit the art of writing for Nollywood due to the problem of poor remuneration, problem with producers and the lack of appreciation and recognition.

Emedolibe (2012) states that the remuneration of script writers is not fantastic and producers have the perception that writing is easy and can be done by anyone. This has led to poor scripting pervading the industry. In Emedolibe's observation producers do not see writers as essential to a successful production and this has downplayed the significance of quality scripting.

Engaging writers to write scripts and the refusal to pay their remunerations leads to a culture of poor script writing. Nollywood script writers are not happy with such situation pervading the industry. The film industry has gone through development and as such the problem of script-writers should not be relegated to the background or in any way ignored. Script writers in Nollywood sometimes feel that there is no respect or future in the carrier of script writing therefore some abandon it and go into the business of producing and directing. It is imperative to know that script writing, producing, directing even in technical theatre are aspects of production that requires formal training and specialties and not a field that anyone can just gets engage in. This situation in Nollywood leads to poor quality films which actors and actresses at the end always look unprofessional.

Orewere (1998:52) states that "the low quality in content and techniques employed in the production of Nigerian home videos implies that either producers or directors do not carry out researches on themes before productions or that directors and producers are not knowledgeable in the art of film packaging.

Film makers in Nollywood need to realize that script writing affect the performance of actors and actresses. American Hollywood stars are able to perform well due to the high quality in their scripting. Americans have been concerned with the fact that their movies must be properly produced. Extensive research is carried out and the watch words of these foreign movies are quality. This is why some Nollywood viewers prefer to choose Hollywood stars as their role models and not their fellow Nigerian actors and actresses.

It is always marveling in Hollywood films when one sees an actor or an actress in a series film and in the first series, the actor or actress would look younger but before the end of the whole episode, such an actor or actress in such film would appear older or more matured. The timing for extensive research that takes place in Hollywood can get close to a year and half or almost two years. This makes Hollywood actors and actresses to get themselves into their character and perform perfectly well. Thorough research would result in good scripting. A script is the life blood of a performance.

It is quite unfortunate when marketers dictate the kind of story to be written to producers. A writer sits down and creates a story, more importantly, stories that are of positive impact to the environment, but only for marketers to reject them and come up with different stories. Even though this may help to fight the ills of the society such stories may end up giving the country a bad image. Stories on witchcrafts, cultism, bribery and corruption, failure on the part of law enforcement agencies always end up tarnishing the country's image. Scripts that are not well written bring a total failure of performance on the part of actors and actresses as their acting from such scripts are always fake and does not reflect the true nature of someone that is truly affected by the story line.

It is very important to say that some Nollywood film makers are trying to change the norm in the industry. They spend time on research, finance and also believe passionately in employing qualified script writers before engaging in film production. The likes of Tunde Kelani, Kunle Afolayan, and most recently Tony Abulu are major film producers that believe in a well coordinated work. Tunde Kelani's campus queen, Kunle Afolayan's the Figurine, and Tony Abulu new film Dr. Bellow are all good examples. Few producers in Nollywood find time to deal with issues of locations, costume, make up and dressing. These important technicalities are all included in the script and professionals should be hired in all these aspects.

IMPORTANT SCRIPT WRITING TECHNIQUES

Graham (2012) ascribes the problem of Nollywood to script writing. He is of the opinion that Nollywood films are badly written. He states that screen writing is not respected in Nollywod and of course it is the general knowledge of viewers that Nollywood films are rushed to be produced and this is indeed true. He state that the producers rush to produce when the scripts are not properly written. Nigeria's economic situation affects the industry badly and this obviously affects the contents of Nollywood scripts.

He additionally states that Nollywood producers are always in a rush to get their written scripts from writers. The problem here is that there is always a rush to produce and the quality of film expected from this situation is better imagined. How would the actors and actresses perform using such scripts? This rhetorical question is likely to flow in the mind of viewers.

Producers and directors should be able to enlist the services of script writers instead of handling aspect of script writing themselves when they know that they are not in a better position to do so. The script writer should be highly respected and should be treated like a professional and this is where the art of training comes into play. It is however, unfortunate that most research work on script writing are derived from Hollywood achieves.

Colleen (2005) sees a writer as a person who is compelled to write, a person who finds out the right word and the right order of every written line in order to make meaning. She further acknowledges that a writer is one who is sensitive to his environment, slightly socially awkward and not distracted by thinking about other things.

Hinze (2003) argues that liberating dramatic writing, comprises real world writing which possibly and more importantly, only few individuals are interested to pay real attention to professional drama script writing. The genres and the nuances involved in drama scripts are important to good performance and writers should consider this aspect before dwelling in any aspect of writing they may like to engage in. Writing should have a clear focus, as the rules and authenticity are important. Thesis should be drafted in a rough sketch of what the story is all about which must be followed by a clear focus.

Hinze suggests that in writing, the techniques of narrative are powerful. The narratives are instruments that help us know about ourselves and others and to solve problems. Narrative techniques include characterization, plot, detail and figurative language. A writer should consider the fact that his or her work must reflect evidence of happenings around and conclusion should also be drawn. It is important to know that writing is a craft as well as an art. The craft of writing requires the writer to be disciplined and motivated and a little obsessive-compulsive.

Landrum (2007) says that a clear language is most important in writing as it helps to ensure the understanding of the content written. Good style and diction with accurate content is important for a story to communicate the message. Clarity and simplicity with unique style and diction also complements a good drama script. Precise and technically accurate language complements the story, gives it clarity and sense of direction.

CONCEPT OF DRAMA SCRIPT WRITING

What do we refer to as script? A comparative study of F+W media Inc. (2012) shows that dramatic script writing is a document that outlines every aural, visual, behavioral, and lingual elements required to tell a story. This study uses the holistic features to define the importance of drama productions and its scene design. Drama script writing is a highly collaborative medium and the director, cast, editor, and production crew are expected to interpret the story when it is filmed. A dramatic script should be interesting to read just like one is so involved when reading a novel. It just has to be captivating and the scene design should conform to its script.

Allen (2001) says that, the concept of dramatic script writing and scene design for the screen must conform to standards involved in film- making. The formats should go in line with film layout, margins, notation, and up to date convention. Allen also noted that the screen is for the visual medium as such, the audience should not be told the story but watch them. A screenplay should be written visually. It is expected that what should be seen and heard must be clear and fully written out and shown in order to enhance message grasp and reaction by the audience.

Frences (2003) adds that a character that makes up best dramatic international television show sweeps the audience off, captivates emotions and gets the audience involved.

The audience viewing a drama production, not only wants to be interested in and care about the people they see on the screen, they also want to be passionate about them. Great heroes and heroines inspire the audience.

The characteristics of the dramatic script writing is the good story that drives the character quest, it gives a hero a super human strength. The story should be powerful and grow more desperate as the story unfolds in order to stimulate the audience interest. Fleming (2012) points out that conflict is the heart of drama. Someone wants something and people and things keep getting in the way of their achieving the goal. Conflict and obstacles can be physical or emotional. This is what makes the story. The protagonist will also have an inner obstacle, some mental or even spiritual problem that will be resolved by the time he or she reaches the outward, physical goal of the story.

Dramatic script writing should not be like documentaries. A story should be written and reflect the surrounding challenges and the way forward. Some scholars have noted that drama script writing should be unique and script writers should be thorough as the audience knows a good idea and can sieve out a good story from bad ones thus negative thoughts should not be injected into the society.

Allen (2001) says that a good script should adhere to the convention of how many pages should the script be, and the font size it should carry. Finance, producers, and the director should be taken into account. Also the people behind the scene should be accustomed to standard format. Abbott (2012) observes that a drama scriptwriter should check his or her schedules and watch as much TV drama as possible, the genres, the format, what works and what doesn't work, what grips and inspires and entertains should be noted so also what leaves the audience cold. He believes that the originality of ideas, and studying of current and previous shows gives the script writer a universality of approaches in writing drama script for the television medium.

In dramatic production, replication or duplication should be avoided as the story should be unique in some way. He further says that the script writer should write on what he or she is passionate about. A novel or fiction style of writing cannot make up a television story. Abott (2012) is of a similar opinion that the drama script writer should be specific, drama script schedule should fit into the kind of audience expected and their reach.

Timing the script for television drama production should never be ignored. If it is a serial programme, the shape and tone of the story should relate in many ways to the format and slot. Good script writers believe that the story should open or start dynamically and hook the interest of the audience from the first scene as quick as possible so that they would stay tuned and in the case of more episodes to come, the audience would keep tuning in. This therefore signifies that there should be strong sense of character, drama, and effective storyline to sustain the audience's engagement.

Allen (2001) says that engaging characters is the heart of all good television drama script. No matter how mainstream or unusual the idea may be, the characters should be believable even if they in an incredible situation. The main character should be empathetic and engaged. This situation must be provided by the script writer though script structure. Audiences don't really care about passive characters even though they may help serve as fillers at some point in time. Therefore characters should be mostly active in order to keep the audience alive. A story is about dealing with challenges and difficulties and the script writer should provide a good platform for characters to deal with these situations; scripts are rarely interesting if the writer is too easy on or too nice to characters.

In film production, the dialogue should serve the story rather than relate it. Dramatic script structure brings about a good drama presentation. The most common problem faced in the Nigerian television drama is that the structure is too episodic as conflict is fast introduced and quickly resolved or resolved half –way. Another challenge is that the story telling is too undynamic. A dramatic production should portray events as a consequence of, and not merely what has happened before. Redundant scenes should be avoided; every scene should move a story forward as each scene should correlate with each other.

NOLLYWOOD AT PRESENT

The conduct of the African Magic Viewers choice by M net on DSTV in Lagos was another giant stride in Nollywod's history. After the event, several Nollywood workshops were held and the one that served as a turning point was the project that implemented the partnership of Nollywood in a non-governmental organization. This move was aimed at empowering independent film making worldwide and to bring about research in foreign institutions including Harvard University.

The theme of the project is Nollywood Up Training". Here, Nollywood film makers and Hollywood film experts in the industry and other film industries were to collaborate with each other in various aspect of film-making. Different training on film productions was offered. Productions on script writing, acting, cinematography, Directing, Editing, Production Design, and Business of film distribution. The training witnessed participants and Nollywood veterans all came together to provide the way forward.

Significantly, Hollywood script writers were around and were highly respected. The outcry by Nollywood script writers was that of recognition. Hollywood script writers only engage in script writing alone unlike Nollywood script writers who work as producers, script writers and even as marketers. Writers like Lee Zlotoff, and Robert Capulo were present. On the part Nollywood, finest producers like Tunde Kelani, Kunle Afolayan, were also present. These unique Nollywood personalities write, produce, and directs in the film medium. Specialties are important in Nollywood if their writers must be outstanding and recognized. Script writing should be able to stand alone in Nollywood. Actors and actresses cannot act without the script. Hollywood script writers were invited due to the specialty in their own field. It is important for Nollywood to take a cue from this. The Nigerian film script writers should be encouraged and award should also be given to outstanding ones.

CONCLUSION

It is observed that the film industry and home videos generally are fundamental weapons for development in the global world. The contents of Hollywood movies are rich and the qualities of films produced in this sector always stand the test of time. In Nollywood the stories are too shallow and the scenes mostly are rushed to be produced and can easily fade away with time.

Nollywood has to rise to the global challenge facing its industry and the right drive should be put in place to tackle these problems. Producers and directors should not claim that they can do it all by themselves. Script writing is very important and should be taken as such. Responsibilities should be shared and experts should be such made to carry responsibilities in their area of specialiasation in every production. The major problem facing Nollywood industry is that of the conduct of extensive research.

Script writing affects actors and actresses performance as a good scripting would enable actors and actresses to internalize their roles and get into character. The good the quality of script, the better the actors and actresses performance.

Films analysts believe that a successful film has to keep the audience interested and the director should employ a suitable order of treatment for the action in the script. Good script is a prerequisite to a good performance, therefore actors and actresses should be selected based on unique style of performances and with this a better production can be achieved.

Nigerian scholars have written on the contents of Nollywood film, the general perception of Nollywood film industry and how to improve significantly on it. Notable scholars like O. S. Onabanjo, M. 'Bayo, Matt Graham, Israel Udomisor, and others, are all concerned about Nollywood and how the industry can be useful to the country. It is important that there should be a formal training on drama script writing and how to conduct a thorough field work which would lead to practical improvement. Nollywood is known all over the world as the third largest industry after Hollywood and Bollywood. The aspect of script writing which is very important has continuously been the problem of the industry right from its inception in 1992. After twenty one years of Nollywood, and with the advent of modern communication technologies and the increase in formal education there is need for specialty. Nollywood film makers need to be specialized in one form in their different portfolios and these specialties need to be taken seriously. It is important for film makers in Nollywood to start seeing the industry cum actors and actresses as professionals. The script affect the actors and actresses performance, therefore, much needs to be done in the area of script writing. Nollywood writers should go through the training in scripting and scene designing. This would enable them to be recognized as professionals just like other professionals in other film industries of the world.

RECOMMENDATION

Good scripting can be achieved when adequate and extensive research is conducted. A research institute should be established and back up with adequate funding for effective professional performance.

Writers in dramatic script writing should be made to undergo professional training as well as engage in effective research.

New and interested members of the dramatic script writing profession should be asked to undergo formal education in script writing methods and techniques. With this, the industry can attain its goals and retain its rightful place among its peers in the performing art industries of the world.

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