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Inadequate Use of Technology and the Future of Graphic Design Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: Advocacy for Review of Existing Curricula

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ABSTRACT

The curricula for visual arts education in Nigeria's tertiary institutions are not only old and outdated; they do not include some of the new developments in the practice and the overwhelming influences of recent technological innovations, and advancement. Graphic Design specialization is the most affected of the visual arts because it employs ever-advancing technology and probable due to its multi-faceted application to other human endeavours such as communication, medicines, manufacturing, education, information technology, printing and publishing, among others. There is the need to allow Graphic Design undergraduates and would-be practitioners to take full advantage of the benefits occasioned by new developments and technological advancement. Therefore, this paper, sought to enumerate some of the gaps in the existing Graphic Design curricula at the tertiary level of education with a view of calling for a review towards guaranteeing the future of Graphic Design education in Nigeria. Data for the paper were from secondary sources, which included curricula, journal and books. They were analysed using historical and critical analytical tools. It was revealed that there is no regular update of Graphic Design curriculum and this has led to the industry moving faster than the school.

Keywords: Curricula review, graphics design education, technology, tertiary institutions

1. INTRODUCTION

Graphic Design is one of the specialisations of Visual arts. It is defined as the art or profession of visual communication that combines images, words, and ideas to convey information to an audience, especially to produce a specific effect. (Dictionary.com, 2016). A broader definition is provided by Cezzar (2015) as follows:

Graphic Design, also known as communication design, is the art and practice of planning and projecting ideas and experiences with visual and textual content. The form of the communication can be physical or virtual, and may include images, words, or graphic forms. The experience can take place in an instant or over a long period of time.

Its major operations are design and production and it incorporates other genres such as photography; printmaking; publicity and advertising; mass communication media (print and electronic); publishing and printing; cartooning and animation; computer and video art to mention just a few. None of these can meet professional standards without the use of technology in the course of training in school and practice in the industry. Technology use in Graphic Design is huge and massive and it plays a major role in the process of designing and production of graphic works of art.

The future of Graphic Design and its allied vocations depends majorly on technology. This future is bleak and cannot be assured without functional, flexible and innovative curricula at the tertiary level of education that put into consideration rapid changes occasioned by technology. Ebert II et al (2013) describes curriculum as the means and materials with which students will interact for the purpose of achieving identified educational outcomes. Also it is defined as the lessons and academic content taught in a school or in a specific course or program (study.com, 2016). A good curriculum is therefore vital to achieving educational success.

According to Universal Design for Learning Guidance (2004) curriculum is usually designed to include four basic components:

1. **Goals:** The benchmarks or expectations for teaching and learning often made explicit in the form of a scope and sequence of skills to be addressed;
2. **Methods:** The specific instructional methods for the teacher, often described in a teacher's edition;
3. **Materials:** The media and tools that are used for teaching and learning;
4. **Assessment:** The reasons for and methods of measuring student progress and learning outcomes.

Teaching and learning in Graphic Design via the use of technology as explained above must be greatly influenced by quality of the curriculum since it incorporates the goals or objectives, teaching methods, materials to be used and assessment of students. A good curriculum must be evaluated and reviewed from time to time and further developed to meet ever-changing times. This is called curriculum development. Alviol (2015) defines Curriculum development as planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process in order to create positive improvements in the educational system. Every time there are changes or developments happening around the world, the school curricula are affected.

There is always the need to update the curricula in order to address the society's needs. Unfortunately Graphic Design specialization is the most affected of the visual arts because of its ever-advancing technology and its multi-faceted application to other fast-paced human endeavours such as communication, industrial design, information technology, printing and publishing, e-learning, etc. There is the need to allow Graphic Design undergraduates and would-be practitioners to take full advantage of the benefits occasioned by new developments and technological advancement. Therefore, this paper, sought to enumerate some of the gaps in the existing Graphic Design curricula at the tertiary level of education with a view of calling for a review towards guaranteeing and sustaining the future of Graphic Design education in Nigeria

2. ART EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Art education is not alien to our society. Prior to the advent of the Missionaries and the colonial masters, the traditional societies, in what is referred to as Nigeria today, had a robust art education. The traditional art education is described by Wingert (1962) as the education that existed as part of the cultural complex of the various tribes of Nigeria at or before the period of prolonged and continuous contact with Europe. It is worthy of note that the traditional art curriculum was highly functional and it helped the child, through apprenticeship system to possess knowledge, skill and moral for full living in the society and to take active participation in the maintenance and continuity of his or her art (Onuchukwu, 2001).

Though it was informal, the traditional art education has unwritten curriculum that was systematic and effective. The curriculum is thus an all-encompassing one that took care of the total education of the child. Fafunwa (1974) says irrespective of the level of education and training given during the pre-colonial days in Nigeria, informal education was functional because its curriculum was relevant to the needs of the society. The traditional art education curriculum was society-centred.

Regrettably, as put by Oloidi (1985) the missionary and colonial influences later descended on Nigeria and this had a deflationary effect on her traditional heritage which led to forceful re-ordering of the people's philosophy of culture to look to the west and the traditional art education gave way to modern form of art education. Modern art education has a long history in Nigeria. It actually started with the pioneering efforts of Aina Onabolu, who argued relentlessly that art should be taught as part of the educational subjects introduced by the missionaries and colonial government. His unflinching demand was granted in 1922 by the Education Department in Lagos and Onabolu formally introduced art teaching to the school system. This effort was collaborated by a Briton, Kenneth C. Murray who arrived in Nigeria in 1928 and the duo was responsible for raising the first indigenous art students who later became instructors and leaders in Nigeria and in turn accelerated the growth of art and its education, which eventually gave us a more inclusive art curriculum. Thereafter, according to Golikunmo (2015) contemporary art teaching and its activities became pleasurable and acceptable to Nigeria.

The establishment of the Department of Fine Arts at the then Technical Institute, Yaba in 1952 and the art Department at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria in 1955 and others that followed at Ile-Ife, Nsukka, Benin, among others, made art education and practice more vibrant and intense. The period that followed produced tremendous development in the arts such that a number of art workshops e.g. Mbari-Mbayo in Osogbo, Ori-Olokun in Ile-Ife and Carving workshop in Oye Ekiti, were run leading to adaptation of cultural idioms by some contemporary artists of the period.

The National Curriculum Conference of 1969 that was convened to reexamine and restructure the philosophy and objectives of our educational system later led to an educational philosophy for Nigeria published as a National Policy on Education in 1979. The policy promotes creativity in the fields of the art, ensure harmony with contemporary realities and demand of change and development and to prevent a mindless sweeping away of our cultural heritage (Golikunmo, 2015).

This policy marks the beginning of a more organized and directional curriculum of art education from primary levels to higher institutions in Nigeria. The body responsible for the review and development of curricula in art (NCE Fine Art (Graphics option); HND Graphic Design; and BA Fine arts or Industrial Design (Graphics option)), are now varied depending on the institution concerned: Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) for Primary and Secondary; National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) for Colleges of Education; National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for Montechinics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology, and National Universities Commission (NUC) for Universities. Due to paucity of funds and other reasons the bodies don't usually review curricula on time. The effect of this is that curricula in use are seemingly old and outdated especially for tertiary education where the undergraduates are prepared for the world of works and higher challenges in the society and the industry.

Since the reviews of the curricula have not always been adequately carried out, there exist a lot of lacuna especially for Graphic Design education, which is the focus of this paper. A lot of technological innovations and advancement have taken place. Such advancements do not only affect methods of carrying out tasks; techniques, media and processes have also changed. Schools of arts are struggling on individual basis to catch up and have tried to introduce local contents as stop-gap measures to take care of these inadequacies. This is a major concern to stakeholders and these efforts appears to be an aberration because they are uncoordinated, narrow and disjointed from school to school and do not serve common national interest. Thus we are not responding to the demands of our time especially that there are new technology-driven processes that have overwhelmed the Graphic Design profession in this information technology age, more than ever before.

3. TECHNOLOGY, CURRICULUM AND GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION

Shyllon (2016) posits that there is need to invigorate art education curriculum to produce scholars and art educators that can respond to the demands of their time and environment. The statement underscores the importance of curriculum in respond to the demands of their time and environment. This implies that the right curriculum will affect the quality of graduates that will in turn facilitate teaching of future undergraduates and the practice of the profession. Corroborating Shyllon, Onuchukwu (1998) writes as follows:

...when the structure and contents of the art curriculum are in harmony with the types of the society which Nigeria seeks to build, such a curriculum should put into consideration the nations perception and determination to expand her opportunities and to explore her abilities to cope with the dynamics of technological and industrial future...

From the above the importance of a curriculum that is driven with an eye on technology is always required. Little wonder why overtime, Graphic Design education curricula for various Graphic disciplines have prescribed the use of technology for both teaching and learning, such that the would-be Graphic Design practitioners will be put in a position where they are able to cope with world of life after training. The use of technology manifests in two ways – Technology for instruction and technology for learning:

Technology for instruction: This is when technology is used to support teaching and make it effective. This is highly required as undergraduates must be familiar with the way technology is used by the teachers and understand their relevance to learning. It is always the first contact point for most students who have not been exposed to Graphic Design before coming to school. This presupposes that technology must be available, up-to-date and the instructors must be able to use them to teach and expose their students to knowledge.

These technologies add value to the whole educational process, affecting both teachers and students. Such technologies include computers and their relevant applications, printing machines, printmaking presses, cameras, models, light exposing gadgets, etc. These equipment help teachers to solve a range of educational problems, such teachers must be trained and retrained as new technology is being introduced. This vast-developing phases in technological development is one reason why curriculum must be reviewed from time to time. (Alawad, 2013). The teacher's role is crucial and it is an instrumental element in the integration of technology by their choices, which relate to teaching style, curriculum objectives and the needs to the students (Strommen and Lincoln, 1992).

Technology for learning- Teaching and learning take place at the same time. Virtually all the technologies required for teaching are also required for learning but in a larger proportion. Since students are expected to put into practice the use of technology to generate more knowledge, experience and skills. The required studio time is not useful if the students will not have access to relevant technologies that may be out of their purchasing power. Therefore there should be enough technologies and other ICT-related resources to make learning outcomes realizable and achievable.

Technology increases students' excitement and interest to learn and to understand the teachers' explanation of topics. The students will also develop technological skills when they put technology in use especially after teaching has taken place. They will also develop critical thinking skills in the cause of using technology to solve problems.

3. EXISTING LACUNA IN GRAPHIC DESIGN CURRICULA

Most of the existing Graphic Design curricula in our art schools across Nigeria's higher institutions of learning at professional levels have the four basic components but are limited since they are old and outdated. A major comprehensive reviews have not been carried out for decades. That is why different art departments do have their own local contents to make up for the deficiencies in them. The existing lacuna are enumerated below:

Contains only minimum requirements – The curricula are simple and not deep and comprehensive enough in some cases. They sometimes provide only basic information about subject matter.

Not in consonance with national development and societal needs – Curriculum is supposed to be continuously developed through planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process in line with societal developments and to create positive improvements in the educational system. This is not happening because national development and societal needs are not taken care of by the curricula.

Not abreast of technological developments – There are a lot of technological development in Graphic Design not reflecting in the curricula. Such as the new image capturing devices, 3d graphics, film/television graphics, digital signage, large format printing, direct imaging, heat transfer, editing, e-publishing, web design, computer-generated or aided design and illustration etc.

References to outdated process and methods – For Example, a lot has changed in photography such that darkroom stage and process have been removed. Photographs are now instantly editable, printable, transferable unto other surfaces and media using computer among other things.. The curricula do not capture all of these.

Absence of computer graphic methodology and their applications – Introduction of computer for designing, outputting, publishing, transfer of images, cartooning and animation are not contained in the curriculum. There exists many computer graphic applications like Creative Suite: Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe InDesign, Adobe Dreamweaver, etc., CorelDraw, Corel Paint, etc. that need to appear in the curriculum.

Unnecessary repetitions– Some of the curricula are not only inadequate they are also affected by unnecessary repetition that do not add value to the subjects especially on subjects that are taken at more than one level.

Non-inclusion of new graphic media and forms – There are new Graphic Design genres that are themselves expressions of creativity in Graphic Design. They include: photographic installations, video art, digital and virtual design to mention a few.

Not guaranteeing students' improvements – Since the curricula do not reflect societal developments the students don't benefit from learning as much as they learn in the industry and the environment, and there seems to be a disconnect between the town and the gown. As a result there spontaneous improvements are not guaranteed.

4. ADVOCACY FOR TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION

The relevance of Graphic Design to manufacturing, education, information technology, printing and publishing, mass communication, advertising, etc. makes Graphic Design a highly technology-driven profession and there its future is bleak without the integration of up-to-date and adequate technology. This future can only be assured if there is constant review of existing Graphic Design curricula in tertiary institutions to facilitate the following: A profound art education that is all-embracing and can support would-be Graphic Design practitioners and teachers; professionalism in Graphic Design that is in tandem with best practices all over the world; advancement in Graphic Design technological methods and processes in the classroom and on the field; Satisfying the needs and the development of the society; Making the training and retraining of staff necessary, and leading to the purchase of more technologies and upgrades of existing ones.

The only way to achieve this is for the curriculum developing bodies viz-a-viz National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE); National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and National Universities Commission (NUC) to bring together professionals from all over the country to carry out deliberate and purposeful review of the curricular. Analysis, evaluation of and feedback on existing curricula should precede the exercise that must be coming up at intervals of at least four years.

Strategies for the implementation of such curricular should be put in place, as this can be a problem. For instance, if necessary purchase of new resources is not done and old ones are not updated, the implementation will be affected. Part of the implementation should be training and retraining of instructors in and outside Nigeria. Prompt maintenance and upgrade of resources will also help the implementation process.

5. CONCLUSION

Alvior (2015) defines Curriculum development as planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process in order to create positive improvements in the educational system. Every time there are changes or developments happening around the world, the school curricula are affected. There is always the need to update the curricula in the words of Roberson, quoted by Ajayi (2005) summarises the whole essence of art education as thus:

Art is one of the few school subjects, if well taught, can provide many useful learning experiences to the learner, it is an aid to learning, it is a source of real independence for the learner, that is, education for self-reliance.

As captured above, the existing Graphic Design contents of the Fine and Applied Arts curriculum have major lacuna due to fact they are old and not relevant to the needs of the society and its fast-paced development. Both teachers and students are set for new experiences that is useful, aid learning and that lead to acquisition and development of skills for self-reliance and other purposes. It is, however, necessary that the curricula are reviewed on time as appropriate (Adepegba, and Obayan, 2015).

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