
Revitalizing Fine and Applied Arts Education in Nigerian Schools

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ABSTRACT

Fine and Applied Arts Education believed to be an integral part of Vocational and Technical Education of which a nation's ball of development rotates is suffering an embarrassing low enrolment in some of the existing higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Based on this, the paper examined factors responsible for this ugly development and identified misconception of the subject at all levels as well as lack of knowledge of it's in-depth value to the society as principal causes among others. It also highlighted inadequate integration of the subject into the curricular of Nigerian schools at various strata of learning despite it's laudable objectives and improper harnessing of it's various channels towards desired goals as part of its teething problems. The paper revealed that organising reorientation forums, widening vocational scope and establishing artists' loan scheme among others are feasible strategies to redress the situation. It concluded that keeping the subject alive is very crucial to the sustainability of Nigeria based on its multidimensional roles and suggested among others that artists of outstanding character and proven integrity be charged with the responsibility of planning and designing a framework with which this can work effectively.

Keywords: Vocational/Technical Education, Fine and Applied Arts, Tertiary Institution, Revitalization.

Aims Research Journal Reference Format:

Ajayi, J.B. (2023): Revitalizing Fine and Applied Arts Education in Nigerian Schools. *Advances in Multidisciplinary and Scientific Research Journal* Vol. 9. No. 4. Pp 27-34. . www.isteams.net/aimsjournal. [dx.doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/V9N3P3x](https://doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/V9N3P3x)

1. INTRODUCTION

Basically, one of the aims of art education in Nigerian higher institutions of learning is to produce graduates who will be versed in this area of knowledge and will be contributing to the development of the society through expressions acquired from their experiences, creation of jobs and promotion of moral values and education among others. Art has also been noted to be instrumental in pushing the boundaries of innovation, particularly, in the digital era where development in digital art and virtual reality have positively influenced artistic creation and expanded the potentials of artistic expression (Simanjuntak, 2023). Ogunduyile (1999) opines that creative art programme in Nigeria higher institutions of learning are basically for those who are to teach art effectively at post primary schools and also use the skills acquired for self reliance and job creations.

Products of the programme are expected to inculcate, through their diverse but basic experiences on all areas of art, the necessary understanding of art teaching, strategies, processes and materials. Even in the teaching sector, the curricula, besides teaching as a career, emphasizes the production of skilled, self-reliant and enterprising craftsmen for industrial development and sustainability of the nation under vocational education Fine and Applied Arts inclusive. Art according to Isrow (2017), is viewed as a creative phenomenon that undergoes changes based on its continuous and endless creation. Talabi (1979) sees it as the fundamental and bedrock of human survival because it positions itself as the core of life and therefore, the central part of contemporary living. It is also described as a human creativity directed towards goodness, beauty and truth (Lee, 2022 and Woodbridge, 2017). Also stressing the indispensability of art in human survival and the development of the environment, Schiuma (2017), sees it as a catalyst for technological advancement as it fosters an environment where technology and creativity are fully integrated. Therefore such a subject deserves to be taught as a compulsory subject in virtually all institutions of learning, but in Nigeria, it appears government and curriculum designers are not seeing it this way. Ajayi (1995) submitted that at ordinary level certificate awarded institution, it becomes optional and selective and very few candidates opt for it in examination due to its lack of recognition.



Fig 1; An Art Studio
Source: Googlesearch

Kobiowu (1990) links the origination of art with the needs of the society, and UNESCO (1972) in its international survey on Art Education remarks that art has a prominent place in the society based on its recognition of broadening the possibility of creating beauty and enjoying it. By and large, whatever careers one pursues in life must embrace joy, interest and dignity as its prerequisites. So how do we sustain student interest in this field? (the way out). The discussion and consideration of the following practical measures arising from the discreet findings of the factors responsible for this terrible alarm will certainly give clues and help matters.



Fig 1; An Art Class in Session
Source: Googlesearch

2. WIDENING VOCATIONAL SCOPE

In my own candid view, the present economic hardship experienced in our various contemporary societies has popularized the economic theory-scale of preference and even changed it to scale of survival. In order words, after feeding and housing (household or domestic utensils inclusive) clothing is considered next before any other item could be thought of and the thought even comes to mind only if and when there is economic left-over.

This simple truth has a direct impact on the issue of discussion. Vocational education in a developing nation is saddled with the responsibility of creating job opportunities as one of its primary objectives meant for alleviation of such country's unemployment problem (Anumnu, 2001). In Nigeria, such a good gesture is facing a serious encumbrance in Fine Arts as a result of the later limited number of areas of specialization. A swift look across the various schools; curricula is met with emphasis on Painting, Drawing, Sculpture, Graphics, Textiles and Ceramic under Visual Arts and where there is additional course(s), such differential is offered in a few number of higher institutions of learning. A good example is Metal Design. At this juncture, it is considered highly appropriate to remind us that this Visual Art is categorized into two vis Fine Art (drawing, painting, sculpture) whose primary function is aesthetics and Applied Art (graphics, textiles, ceramics, fashion design, metal design) designed and produced solely for utilitarian as well as aesthetics purposes. In reference to my earlier submission, there is no gainsaying the fact that on the face of the present struggle for economic survival, the areas of Applied arts must have been exhausted first before the thought of appreciation and decoration strikes one's mind.

As a matter of fact and relief, it is obvious that widening the scope of Applied Arts to embrace crafts like Leather design, Cane crafts, Metal design, Plastic design, and Stain glass design (this is more of Fine Art) will go a long way to resolve this crisis. Taking this step is in line with Bilan et al (2019) who declares that it is a sharing news that the need for rethinking, exploring and adapting possible opportunities and prospects towards Creative industries in countries with transitional economies is witnessing an increase. Having said all these, the question that grips ones mind is how to get the required materials since they are not found in all parts of the country and the training of lecturers/ instructors that will train the students. All the scopes are briefly discussed below.

(i) Leather Design

Leather which is got from the skin of cattle is predominantly found among the Hausa- Fulanis and the Kanuris in the northern part of Nigeria. The traditional leather workers process the skin by soaking it in water solution of seed- pods of Egyptian minosa and ashes for several days before the outer hairy layer is removed. It then undergoes training process before coloured with either local or imported dyes. It is basically ornamented with dyes, embroidered with thin stripes of coloured leathers incised and punched with metals tools to create interesting patterns. Various other methods are equally used to effect patterns. This product is finally shaped to create beautiful and utilitarian forms such as shoes, sandals slippers, bags, purses, wallets, belts and the likes.

If the producers of these works do not receive formal education and still have their works patronized, what will then be the level of the craft under formal education when exposed to higher level and intellectual touches of creativity. The source of materials should not be seen as a serious problem, if students can leave Northern and Eastern part of Nigeria in an attempt to purchase art materials in the Southern part (Lagos), schools and individuals should be able to go to the north once in a while to purchase leather. Even some northerners do bring them to the south for commercial purpose. To facilitate the acquisition of skills in this particular craft work, resource persons can be invited to teach the students on the process and production techniques as this will go a long way to stimulate the interest of many students towards art as a subject and more importantly as job opportunity after graduation.

(ii) Cane Craft

Cane craft is gradually attaining a high level of popularity in Nigeria based on its practice that cut across almost all nooks and crannies of the country but with greater base in the south. Cane is found mainly among the Yoruba, Ibibio, Igbo and Urhobo' settlement areas of the Southern Nigeria and that accounts for their skillful expertise in this craft. Chairs, tables, stools, hand baskets, flower vases, caskets (for jewels), souvenirs, wall hangings are among the outstanding products from this material. The method employed under leather craft for the utilization of man - power is of relevance here too. Emphatically speaking, the only area of assistance required in terms of training is the foundation, the rest development and finishing centers on creativity which is a toothpick to serious - minded artists.

(iii) Metal Design

Metal work is an old practice in Nigeria. It embraces iron smelting, bronze casting, brass casting, goldsmithing and the rest. The focus of here is on production of jewellery and other economically viable items. Good enough a particular University (University of Benin, Benin City) is offering it as a course. Other higher institutions of learning can borrow a leaf from this institution in this respect and even organize seminars/workshops in consultation with the appropriate quarters of the institution (Uniben) to deliberate and fashion out a workable form for transfer of skill.

(iv) Plastic Design

This area might sound very odd but found very viable if given a trial. Plastic production is one of the areas noted for mass production in the country based on various existing plastic industries. This fact should not be a threat from producing graduates trained for establishing small scale industries. Textile mills have been long in existence before producing textile design graduates who are still competing openly with this existing mills with their small scale industries and yet they are surviving. In a clearer term, chemicals used for the production of this item (plastic) can be purchased and moulds of different interesting designs produced, to cast these items. Here it readily comes to mind that the moulds production is the sole work of the metal design section of the department. Various items besides the existing ones like, wall hangings, souvenirs and household utensils with special design can be produced. Also, used and discarded plastic items can be collected, reversed and reprocessed to bring out new functional forms.

(v) Stainglass Design

According to Ajayi (1994), one of the aims of art education is the development of the senses towards the appreciation of works of art. From observation it appears that art appreciation is gradually gaining ground in Africa. Stain glass work is equally going places as witnessed in the public. Works of high standards in this area are erected in strategic places in the society. This means that people have developed the habit of its appreciation. To this end, if students are exposed and allowed to specialize in this field, the enormity of our problem will witness another atom of relief.

3. REDUCING HIGH COST OF MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

According to Moholy (1947), "part of the aims of teaching and learning art is to seek out the talents, provide opportunity for creative expressions and provide the means for achieving such expressions." The most fundamental materials in the visual arts are clay and colour apart from the equipment. Clay is not so difficult to come by unlike colour" that is highly expensive these days. The solution to this problem is improvisation of materials and equipment. All other material like gum, brush, carving tools, modeling tools and other working tools can be improvised as well. There is need to make provision for necessary equipment that are quite essential for effective teaching and learning processes in the field of art. One of the strategies is to be engaged in self help projects.

As a solution to this, I did engage few of my ex-students in the production of such equipments as their projects (though a group one) and it worked. The equipment are still in use till today and have relieved us of some problems in the department. In a nutshell, I am totally convinced that if other institutions can follow this trend, we will be smiling at the end of the day.

Organising Re-Orientation Forum

As mentioned in the introductory part of this paper, many Nigerians have the misconception that the study of art is meant for intellectually deficient students. In a debate organized in my department during our last Fine Arts students' week, a student confessed that he declined offering Fine Arts as a course initially before changing his mind. Asked why, he said his parents believed and convinced him that people on this line are not rich (to use his exact word). Another one argued that the subject or course was meant for the talented ones alone. To substantiate his fact, he drew comparison between his work (performance) with that of the best student in his class. In the light of the above, we will be doing justice to ourselves by correcting these wrong impressions or notions through the organization of conferences, seminars, workshops, parents/teachers association meetings and the rest. During this forum, the new dimensions discussed in this paper (if applauded) can be used to revitalize the awkward position of art to a better place in most Nigerian schools.

Establishment of Artists' Loan Scheme

As much as we are all aware that one of the primary aims of this paper is the establishment of small scale industries and how then do we achieve this in the face of the present economic hardship? Since government has been unable to fund education effectively in this country for the past years, then it will be very unwise and utterly irrational to involve such government in this programme and if need be, its involvement should be partial.

Frankly speaking, going by serious thoughts and observations on this issue over the years, it could be concluded that the only anticipated surviving strategy is the establishment of Artists' Loan Board. This can be accomplished by constituting a forceful and high powered committee for the planning and organising of conferences and seminars tailored towards inviting renown and well to do artists, philanthropists, well-meaning individuals, art lovers, clubs, companies e.t.c. to come and buy shares with attractive interests. However, if the essence of this scheme is thoroughly explained to them and they realize what will be their likely benefit at the end of the day, they will undoubtedly give in. When students are sure and confident of obtaining loans for private establishment after graduation, then another feather has been added to the golden cap of art which will ultimately re-awaken students interest in the pursuance of the course.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It is pertinent to conclude this paper by emphasizing that revitalizing arts education in schools is very crucial to the survival of this nation based on its educational, religious, political, social, cultural and more importantly vocational roles. If this degeneration is not nipped at the bud, the future of arts maybe jeopardized and its contributions to the development of the country may suffer. One thing is clear, either we like it or not, certain percentage of the offsprings of the present generation of artists will want to succeed their parents profession- wise and any attempt to suppress this interest will amount to human jeopardy and posterity may not forgive us. Therefore, the best option is to ensure that this course competes keenly with other viable courses in the school curricula and if possible, surpasses them.

For the successful trial of this idea, the author is of the opinion that artists of outstanding character and proven integrity be charged with the responsibility of planning and designing a framework with which this can work. Artists of each institution of higher learning in the country should also write proposals along this line of thought taking a cue from this paper. The bodies charged with policy formulation like the National Universities Commissions (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) should address this issue seriously by giving it a special focus.

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