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THE ROLE OF ARTS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the meaning of Arts and Education from different perspectives. After a careful exploration of the meaning of arts, the paper highlights the role of art in Education with special reference to Nigeria. Art empowers individuals with creative skills that widen the base of participation in the society, create jobs, self reliance, identity, communicates by creating, recording and transferring ideas. It builds and perpetuates social, religious, political and economic stability. On the basis of this, suggestions are offered for developing Art Education in Nigeria. Art Education is a basic and very important aspect of our Education and should not be treated otherwise. Art should be given premium like other subjects in the school curriculum. It should reflect a study of all ages, as this is vital in the development of individuals.

Keywords: Art Education, Nigeria Education, Art Management.

Introduction

Education in Nigeria is vital and has been adequately challenged. The survival of this engine house which services the country should be a concern. According to Afigbo, “education is the aggregate of ideas, methods, institutions, facilities and personnel designed and deployed by society to teach its members how to get through life by doing or by nursing and realizing set goals” (2004). If the house is shaky, what happens to the rooms? Arts in education translate the ideas of educational system into reality. It is to be noted that, it is one thing to introduce a subject in school, and another to successfully implement it. The state of art has for many years been a source of concern due to neglect. This neglect runs across primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Art organizations are not left out of it; some of these impacted organizations are museums, cultural centres, National Theatres etc. Sharing in this plight, Uzoagba explains the situation, “if a proper understanding of art education has been made and better instructions on art followed in our schools and colleges much would have been done to redeem the subject from the neglect it has always suffered in our society (2002, 40). Art is an important aspect of culture, social, economic, political and other and other aspects of society.. Art Education enables students to become creative arts practitioners (Ajekeye, 1982, 2-3). Students learn to develop the necessary imaginative, intellectual, theoretical and practical skills to equip them for continuing personal development and professionalism (Ajibade, Enamhe and Oloidi, 2011,2006). Art informs and provides visual, tactile and more practical learning environments. In the primary and secondary level of education, art teaching is in the service of general development of the pupils, which actually starts with drawing and illustrations in demonstrations of events which are supposed to be read out. But, instead of reading out, the illustrations speak on their own and leave lasting impressions in the pupils.

Definitions

It becomes necessary at this stage to define the key terms in this study. Art is a visual language whose statement records man’s response to a multiplicity of environmental stimuli. Such stimuli can be social, political, cultural or even religious in closed or open societies (Enamhe, 2007, p. 7). Lazzari and Schlesier consider art as, “strictly human phenomenon” (2008, p. 3-4). From the above, the definitions of art cannot be absolute and may not apply to some cases, situations medium that is used to express ideas about our human experiences and the world around us” (Lazzari and Schlesier, 2008, p. 4). Art implies the quality, technique, expression, production of aesthetic significance. According to Uzoagba, “art is a human conception made manifest by the skillful use of a medium. It signifies a doing, a making, a fashioning or putting together, and it usually implies that the thing is accomplished by human skills” (1982, p. 4). Art is a broad and complex word which has defied attempts by experts to define in simple language. However from the definitions given, it therefore means that in this context, the definitions are properly conceived to take care of this presentation.

Education has been viewed from Plato in the distant past and in Schofield, linking training habits and virtue to education, whereas to Milton, education is more general. It is completeness and generosity, the capability to perform justly, skillfully in magnanimously in all offices, both public and private, in all circumstances (Schofield, 1982, p. 3). The term education can be used in three ways to mean a process, a system and a goal. It is a planned process for purposeful learning (Ukpong, 2004, p. 269).

In Nigeria, education is carried out in three levels: the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. These levels are supposed to groom pupils into realizing their potentials. Nigeria as a developing nation is interested in developmental imperatives whose goals and philosophies are associated with the importance of the system to the needs of the individuals and society. It is stated in the National Policy of Education (NPE) Section 1:7 that, “Educational activity will be centred on the learner for maximum self development and fulfillment; (and) efforts will be made to relate education to overall community needs.” These goals and philosophies are meant to develop young people into effective citizenship but have proven difficult to achieve.

The Role of Art

The significance of art in the development of a child cannot be debated, art is a tool subject. It is the child’s lingua franca, through art the child’s understanding and thoughts are made clearer. Other subjects require visuals and illustrations to back up the process of learning. To support the importance of learning from visuals, Ajibade and Elemi carried out a study on the importance of visuals in primary and secondary schools in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. They discovered that students performed better using visuals and illustrations to learn than those who learnt without them (2012, p. 161). They explained that, teaching and learning is a complex process that can be reinforced with learning aids which stimulate, motivate as well as arrest learner’s interest. Whenever the eyes and ears are used together, there are always better results recorded. Visual art arouses interest so it leaves an impression on the pupils. It helps the pupils to concentrate on and remember their work; they share experiences and active participation in class. Visual arts find practical use in other subjects in schools. Some use illustrations and experiments for clarity so the students need to know how to draw (Enamhe, 2001, p. 154). Pupils who partake in art classes seriously perform better in illustration. Ajakey explains, “Creative art is a correlation of all other subjects in school, for it influences their successful teaching through sketches or illustrations” (1982, p. 3). Art as a subject may compensate for the education of persons who are not science inclined.

The roles of art to the society are numerous: art promotes our cultural heritage and creates identity. Nigeria is known for her traditional art cultures of Nok, Ife, Benin, Igbo Ukwu, Owo, Esie, etc. Through art works the history of Nigeria is documented. Nigerian traditional arts have survived the test of time with recorded history of the oldest art discoveries south of the Saharan. Stoker, in Uzoagba confirms the skills, creativity, and dexterity of Nigerian artists, “certain periods in the cultural transition of Nigeria have a worldwide reputation of works of art created by Nigerians of centuries past. These are described in every encyclopedia of world art...” (Uzoagba, 1982, p. 90).

The challenges in life have opened a better creative instinct merging the traditional and the modern for contemporary. Art is very useful in everyday life and indeed so much with us, around us and within us. Within the past decade, there is increased interest in social activities in Nigeria’s older cultural products; for example, Argungu Fishing Festival in Kebbi and Leboku (New Yam) Festival in Cross River were reshaped to showcase contemporary ideas and realities. Before now Nigeria is a mono-causal economy centered on oil for export. To overcome the challenges of underdevelopment in the country, other sectors of the economy are forced to catch up with the demands and one of sectors is art and culture. This sector under tourism has the target of being “a major foreign exchange earner, a major employer of labour, and income distributor, a catalyst for sustainable rural development and poverty alleviation” (National

Planning Commission, 2007, p. 133). According to Aniakor, modern works of art are relevant to the potential of arts and culture for export trade and promotion primarily because they have begun to enjoy international recognition and patronage (2001, p. 17). Artifacts, art activities, festivals and art organizations are tourists' delight, so need to be harnessed adequately to meet the demand. Giant strides have been made in Nigeria especially since 2005 when Calabar and Abuja carnivals started in earnest referred to as, "Africa's biggest street party and Nigeria's tourism destinations." Art products in colors, shapes, lines, forms, and textures are exhibited in costumes, apparels, masquerades, and dances in a variety of styles, body markings, and decorations etc. The benefits of art are numerous and can be seen in all aspects of life, i.e. politics, religion, social and the economy.

Challenges of Art in Education

Although some problems facing art are already embedded in the discussion, so far, nevertheless, more need to be disclosed. Art in the past was not recognized as an important subject in schools (Ajakeye, 1982, p. 2). Parents continue to discourage their wards from studying art insinuating that art is for lazy people and for those who cannot do well in life. This continues to affect the number of students who are offered the subject in the three levels of education in Nigeria. Statistics from a study carried out by Lawson and Ajibade shows that out of the 2,866 school graduates in a selected group of secondary schools between 1998 – 2002, only 219 students took art as a subject (2003, p. 27-32). This is a clear indication of the dearth of artists in the labor market. Also in tertiary institutes some research on the population of art students in tertiary institutes also reveals a dearth of students, for example at the Bachelor of Arts program of the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Calabar, Nigeria (Ajibade, Enamhe and Oloidi, 2011, p. 203). Long term experience shows that students fear the subject because of drawing classes, which is a major course in the Art Department. Another related study affirms the fact that the drawing aspect of art programs in many institutions of higher learning nationwide remains an area of academic phobia for some students (Enamhe and Echeta, 2010, p. 83). Art is not just drawing, drawing is an aspect of it and it can be learned and understood like English language.

Silent problems faced by many students are the fact that art materials are expensive so they cannot afford to buy them. It is a practical subject which also requires materials to work with and from. Students of Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Visual Arts Department demonstrated recently for at least a week leaving the Department locked up in protest as they demanded arts materials. Students were scheduled to start examinations on the 4th of June 2012 for the first semester of the session, but they refused to do the examinations because of poor facilities (accommodation space) and lack of art materials. For students and instructors the lack of facilities, i.e. a conducive environment, such as a studio with good lighting, water, and all material requirements in an art studio is viewed as necessary for effective learning.

The students demonstrated and they expected the school authority to respond. The school authority responded by making promises of providing materials and space. With this, the students returned back to school and did their examinations. However, this is recorded as a drawback to both the students and the authority. Explaining further is the aspect of timing. Hours and days were wasted which affected the academic calendar for the semester. The students were

advised to have a proper channel of communication which will have positive results for subsequent issues.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

Art in Education is very important part of our educational system. Therefore, it should be given adequate consideration. This should start from the very beginning that is, the primary schools. The subject should be introduced in all schools and it should be a compulsory subject. With the dynamic nature of children when encouraged, success will be achieved. Improvisation of local materials is necessary. This will ease the challenge of lack of money to purchase materials. Schools should be able to train pupil's artistic experience to acquire and control local materials and tools. This can stimulate creative interest and create power of imagination. The after effect may create a forum for displaying local resources and local artists. Art materials can be supplied to students free by schools as motivation.

Exhibitions, conferences, seminars and workshops should be frequently organized for exchange of ideas and awareness. Regular art activities will stimulate people's responsive power. Through art exhibitions, the audience gets informed seeing the art objects and mingling with the artist who produced the works. When art conferences, seminars and workshops are organized, participants hear and learn more about art, which will arouse new interest in art or create new knowledge in art activities. In order to achieve results, since tertiary institutions that offer art do so with the intent of producing creative artists to sustain and revive art education.

The Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) should carry out their objectives, which among others, includes "to protect and promote Nigerian artistic heritage by fostering the understanding and appreciation of arts in Nigeria, by upholding a high standard of efficiency in art, and defending the moral and material interest of artists in Nigeria." Other Associations, like the Nigerian Society for Educations through Art (NSEA), The National Gallery of Art (NGA), and The National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) are usable vessels to promote the arts. They can organize regular exhibitions and conferences for artists.

Government should develop policy guidelines in favor of art in education. The subject should be compulsory in all primary and secondary schools. This can be supervised by the different Primary School Management Boards and the Secondary School Management Boards. The curriculum for fine arts should be structured in such a way that pupils will enjoy their classes by including participatory activities in arts. This usually resembles play activities which children will delight in. In this way art education becomes easily accepted because of the nature of activities incorporated in the scheme.

We must observe that arts has a key role to play in the growth and development of the Nigerian economy and therefore needs to remain critical in developmental processes. This means that Government needs to effectively render her commitment to arts, to enable the sector achieve its roles. Educational policies as guidelines to developing education in Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education, and all stake holders should adopt workable policies which will revive the educational sector. Art will automatically benefit if the education sector is properly provided for through the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders.

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