

ARTS EDUCATION: A VIABLE VOCATIONAL AREA FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A RECESSIVE ECONOMY: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT: *Arts education with particular reference to Fine and Applied Arts, is a discipline that is yet to be sufficiently accorded its pride of place in the scheme of things in the Nigerian Educational space in spite of its usefulness and functionalities. The fact that arts permeate almost every aspect of human lives is at best, noticed but not fully appreciated. The researcher, therefore, explored more areas of utilities of this discipline on social functions, religion, industry, job creation and entrepreneurial skills. Comparative analysis emphasis were made between the arts vis-à-vis science and technology. In conclusion, the researcher recommended that more attention should be given to Fine and Applied Arts as a sure destination to employment opportunities in a recessive economy.*

KEYWORDS: Art, Education, Vocation, Recessive Economy.

INTRODUCTION

Areas of guidance and counseling include career/vocational guidance and counseling. It is in the spirit of this that the researcher decided to delve into Art Education and its implication for counselling which will benefit students who may be talented in that area in the school setting and the wider society in a recessive economy.

ARTS under discussion are visual arts which entail a careful arrangement of lines and shades of colour to create an impression while achieving a pleasing form. Uzoagba (2000) believes that art is a human conception made manifest by skillful use of a medium.

EDUCATION is a teaching and learning process aimed at improving and developing one's latent skills. According to Hornby (2005) education is the process of teaching and learning especially in school or college to improve knowledge and develop skills. Kinds of education include health education, vocational education, art education, science and technology education, etc. Education is also a process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another (Wikipedia, 2010). Ekeh and Onyekuru (2013) see education as a process of developing the innate abilities of the child.

RECESSIVE ECONOMY refers to a situation when a country is experiencing a hard time for the economy occasioned by less trade and industrial activities than usual. More people are either unemployed or underemployed and there is a fall in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus (2018), describe vocation as a type of work that you feel you are suited to doing and to which you should give all your time and energy, or the feeling that a type of work suits you in this way.

The prime status of Art education (Fine and Applied) can be better appreciated as the significant roles Arts play in our daily lives are examined while making a distinction between Fine Art and Applied Art.

Fine Art is concerned with paintings, sculpture, drawings and ceramics. Furthermore, Uzoazo and Uzoagba cited in Adeyemo, (2014) are of the opinion that Fine Art includes painting, sculpture, drawing, art appreciation or art history. The only area where the researcher disagrees with these authors is in their opinion that Fine Art “has no other function than the appeal it makes to man’s sense of beauty.”

Fine Art is categorised into two depending on its functions namely (a) Art for life’s sake and (b) Art for Arts sake. Fine Art education teaches students Art for life’s sake which gives meaning to life. Its functions are easily noticeable in religious practices whether Christian or traditional, where sculptures, holy relics, paintings, portraits are used for worship. In this case, the purpose is believed to stimulate the sensibilities of worshippers and direct their human psyche to God and other religious imagery that are either sculpted or painted. Art for life’s sake also creates an ambiance of a holy place and sanctuary. Achebe in Nwanne (2017) at the unveiling of a new museum in Lagos recently, corroborating to this belief, described art as life.

It is therefore wrong to believe that Fine Art has no other function than the appeal it makes to man’s sense of beauty. Production of religious models and paintings can serve as a money spinner to student entrepreneurs. Weird artifacts found in the shrines of diviners, traditional religion practitioners seers and mediums serve the financial needs of traditional artists who produced them.

Even the Almighty God (the first sculptor) subtly demonstrated Art for life’s sake when he “took some soil from the ground and formed a man the crown of his creations out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live” (Genesis 2:7). Nothing prevents God from commanding man to exist as he did in all other creation. But he took his time to sculpt man with clay and thereafter breathed life into him.

Art for Arts’ Sake

Some works of Art are made to appeal to man’s sense of beauty. Art for Arts’ sake emphasizes aesthetics as its function. It serves as a landmark that adorns important public buildings, road junctions and other public places. Individuals of substance commission the production of art objects which announce their social standing while expressing the beauty of nature. The presence of super statues especially those that depict the major occupation of a community such as blacksmithing, farming, trading, mining and leadership add value and beauty to places where they are positioned Fine Art demands a lot of creativity and imagination.

Applied Art

Graphic is a branch of Applied Art which is concerned with drawings, planning and design in production of printed materials such as books including brochures, magazines and manuals. Graphic makes use of lines, words, figures, alphabet, motifs and shades of colour to make a statement. Graphics also go into the production of billboards, posters, handbills, flyers, signboards and other forms of advertisement.

Skill Acquisition through Art Education

It is heartwarming to note the quest for skill acquisition that is growing not only among students but also within government and its agencies. As there is a lull in the advancement of the nation's economy resulting in job loss and lack of employment opportunities, teaching of Fine and Applied Arts in schools should go beyond rhetoric as it is now. Asking students to bring toilet tissues, detol and soap to replace handcrafts such as woven items defeats the purpose of skill acquisition.

There is now a compelling need to help students to discover their talents and potentials and develop them. Teaching of graphic design can be a starting point. Composition of posters using letters, figures, colour, motif and space are good components of printed materials. Computer graphics should complement graphics per se.

If early in life students are introduced to Fine and Applied Arts, it offers an opportunity for the teacher/guidance counsellor to discover potentials in their students. Students are groomed along their peculiar talents and stimulate their passions are stimulated for creativity.

Benefits of Fine and Applied Arts

Through formal and informal education, the potentials in the student are developed and he uses same to improve his skill, satisfy his needs and in the process render a good service to the society.

Imagine the amount of artifacts, appliqué and beads that go into the organization for theatrical displays at carnivals, annual festivals and funerals, as seen in most states in Southern parts of Nigeria. Beads are currently rendering in the Nigerian fashion scene. Tattoo, scarification and other forms of body adornment drawings are employed by troupe and sportsmen of today. A good tattooist earns a lot of income from the practice. The same practice goes for traditional title holders in their paraphernalia.

Importance of Arts Education

The importance of art education was manifested from pre-independence Nigeria when arts and crafts centre and technical institutes were established in various towns in Nigeria including Port Harcourt, Enugu, Lagos, Ibadan, Benin and Owerri. These centres were places where students and pupils from various schools were sent by their teachers to learn about sculpture, carpentry, pottery, weaving and so on.

Early in life, students were introduced to all forms of arts and crafts. The arrangement offers the opportunity to teachers to discover the potentials in their students and groom them along their peculiar talents. Passion for creativity is fired. Through formal and informal art education, these talents are developed and honed to perfection. The students use same to improve their skills, fulfill their desires, needs and render valuable service to the nation. Art education employs series of teaching and learning that are followed so as to realize a set goal. This set goal cannot be achieved by mere wishful thinking but through formal and informal teaching. Informal teaching and learning come through experience, observing activities and products of master artists. It does not require a regulated classroom teaching or apprenticeship to a master artist. The student is inspired by his passion for creativity and love for works of art.

Pope Francis underlines the importance of art as he writes in his special intention for the month of August 2017 (Back page), “Heavenly Father, we pray for the artists of our time. May the beauty of your creation be discovered through their ingenuity, gifts and talents”.

Creativity is not tangible or visible. It is a term that is associated with the arts and inventiveness. It cannot be copied as in authorship. It is an asset that if fully utilized, promotes personal esteem and inventiveness which the student can use in contributing to national development. The Artist first thinks about a product, then uses some media to achieve tangible result which he finally hones to perfection.

Formal education involves teaching and learning that are regulated and often carried out in classroom, studios and workshops. Art education teaches the student to observe objects closely with the aim of noticing form, shapes and size rather than casting a cursory glance at objects before him. Art education teaches a lesson in ‘looking’ and also ‘seeing’.

According to Uzoagba (2000), Fine and Applied Arts are branches of visual arts which are expressed by the skillful use of medium which is addressed primarily to the sense of vision. Fine and Applied Arts have the ability to properly develop the psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains of every individual. It improves on a child’s mental process and skill in performing tasks. The importance of Fine and Applied Art Education was underlined in the National Policy of Education (NPE) (2014) which states that for a nation’s education sector to have the ability of producing self-reliant citizens, Fine and Applied Arts must not be relegated to the background. The Federal Government should, therefore put in place relevant platforms as to reposition Art practice in order to make an effective impact on the students and in Nigeria.

Textile Designing is useful not only in large and well established textile industries but also to small scale outfits where the entrepreneur is the sole proprietor. Tie-dye, batik and block prints fabrics can either be customized or produced in very attractive designs that earn good income. Large textile industries employ the services of trained and creative textile designers.

Graphic Design comes readily in printing. The graphic designer plans the outlay of a book to be produced. He sees that the book cover design depicts the book contents and is captivating since the eye must first appreciate before the mind admits. He sometimes uses computer graphic and clip art which are symbols, drawings, motifs used in computer. Graphic artists can practice as a sole proprietor producing banners, posters, noticeboards, signposts, prints on surfaces such as walls, motor vehicles, house property, etc.

Having enumerated branches in Fine and Applied Arts, it is the teacher/guidance counsellor who mentor the students and identify the area the students excel and encourage them to pursue it with unbridled passion. The classroom is conducive because it promotes competitiveness and brainstorming among students to unleash their potentials. Adeyemi (2011, p.24) observed that “our quality of life can only be changed by the quality of ideas that flow through our mind.” This change can occur if those ideas are translated into action.

Fine and Applied Arts Compared to Some Other Disciplines

Fine and Applied Arts touch other disciplines such as industrial design, engineering design, medical drawing, technical design, photography, printing technology and packaging. Art teaching may have an enormous comparative advantage over the much canvassed development of other disciplines such as engineering, electricity, science and technology in Nigeria.

The researcher opines that if much attention has been given to the development of Arts in Nigeria going by the huge amount that is budgeted annually on other disciplines, the nation could have been better for it. Art teaching goes with an inbuilt check to fund allocation. Comparatively less amount of money or capital outlay is needed to promote art. In most other disciplines many projects are launched and research initiated but the desired results remain obscure after many years. Artifacts and crafts are produced from personal effort. The artifacts include sculptures, paintings, ceramics, basket work, drawings, mural, cartoons, textiles (batic, tie dye) beaded items (bags, necklaces, flower vases, troupe outfit and royal appurtenances), tattoos, calligraphy and masquerade paraphernalia. They are produced on individual efforts with comparatively small holdings. This advantage promotes Art Education, job opportunities, wealth creation and entrepreneurial skill. These are many windows of opportunities for small scale industries. From little things the greatest often grows.

Fine and Applied Arts Education Vis-à-vis Students' Relevance to National Development

The common belief is that the youth are leaders of tomorrow. A well mentored student is a potential asset to national development. Supporting this view Akinlami (2017) defined Art Education as “a professional relationship in which an experienced person, (the mentor) assists the protégé in developing specific skills and knowledge for professional and personal growth.” He further stated that from experience mentoring means promoting valuable leadership principles in the youth.

There are existing platforms for developing specific skills and knowledge for professional and personal growth in some universities and institutions which have introduced entrepreneurial education. The National Youth Service Corps orientation programme has been enriched with skill development. These arrangements are inadequate. If the desired impact is to be achieved, moribund Arts and craft centres have to be revived and new ones established especially in many towns. Teaching aids such as art equipment and materials should be provided. More trained art teachers should be engaged for proper guidance and mentoring of students. Art students are to be encouraged to provide art materials for themselves.

There is no gainsaying that education planners have neglected our culture and heritage. This implies that the students are missing what holds for our identity. In a recent gathering of important stakeholders in arts and culture, Akinwunmi in Nwanne (2017) regretted this unfortunate development. He stressed that Fine Art is an essential catalyst to national development. It not only manifests history of our cultural heritage but adds to the national income and provides job opportunities for the citizenry. He further reminded that besides promoting tourism industry and creativity and economic opportunities, museums all over the world serve as reference points for knowledge and research. This is the spirit behind the establishment of museums and the organization of the 1977 Festivals of Arts and Culture in Nigeria. Africans and the blacks all over the world gathered to showcase their arts, culture and historical antecedents in the festival. All sorts of money came into Nigeria through participants in this great cultural jamboree.

The place of the arts, culture and historical antecedents is seen in our museums and monuments. Museums house valuable art works and other objects of permanent worth. Lots of artifacts found in museums speak of our cultural heritage and civilization. Beside being a source of revenue, it is amazing holiday resort to both foreign and local tourists. The 2013 official opening of Benin Kingdom Gallery at the Boston Museum USA, lends credence to the importance of museums, Tejudeen (2013) concluded.

Counseling Implications

Having delved into the details of Fine and Applied Arts Education, it behooves the guidance counselors to organize career/vocational guidance and counseling and occupational visits for students, from time to time, so as to cover many vocational areas of their interest. There is also the implication that counselor inviting resource persons for career talks should not base them only on glamorous vocations or occupations such as Medicine, Engineering, Law and Accountancy. Some students may have passion for other vocations.

Counselors are encouraged to make their presence felt in schools and also help the students to actualize their potentials so as to contribute to national development. Prompt intervention becomes imperative for achievement of these objectives.

CONCLUSION

There is no gainsaying the belief that a well-monitored Art student is an asset to national development. Having acquired art education and entrepreneurial skill he represents a vehicle for the desired turnaround in a recessive economy. His training makes him to be self-employed, he creates jobs and contributes significantly to national development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) More Arts and crafts centres should be established at the grassroots and the existing ones fully developed.
- 2) Art Education and entrepreneurial skills should be vigorously taught in schools and NYSC orientation camps.
- 3) Financial aid should be given to Art students to help them provide art equipment including art materials for themselves.
- 4) More trained Art teachers should be engaged to handle this creative and vocational discipline.
- 5) To unleash students potentials and stimulate their passion for Fine and Applied Arts, the researcher recommends that students should be encouraged to visit Art galleries, museums and exhibitions and participate in art competitions, carnivals and other cultural activities.

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