

PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONS THROUGH ART EDUCATION

Dr. (Mrs.) Rose Ayaka Nkom

Abstract

The early man was a very creative individual in all aspects of his endeavours. Despite the fact that, education was given informally, it was however, structured in such a way that it equips the individual for life. This traditional method of education was replaced by formal system of education. The missionaries introduced formal education in order to facilitate the spread of the gospel. Children were found to be more valuable in this purpose than adults, Fafunwa (1974). The paper discusses the apprenticeship system, which was not only meant for education but also as a means of cohesion within the family, clan and society. The healthy relationship and learning with ease that existed through the apprenticeship system has been replaced today and Nigeria is faced with the influx of foreign cultural influences and different teaching methods. Art education is learning about culture, societal order or values through the various artistic activities. The writer's position is that, for Nigeria to free herself from continual usage of foreign cultural influences is to take steps or rebuilding its fast dicing traditions. The rapid changing role of the family has attributed no small measure in this regard. Parents who are the first teachers are failing in their duties thereby bringing up children without emphasis on their traditions. Art and traditions are a key term that is used to promote and understand a people. Efforts should be geared towards ensuring the survival of traditional arts.

Introduction

Man is distinguished from other animals because of his capacity to reason. The reasoning in man guides him to make a living and to cooperate with other members of his society. No wonder, the man from the beginning of his development established values and cultures, both material and non-material cultures, which has continued to guide him in his day-to-day activities. Culture is a way of life evolved by a people, in an attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment. These challenges could be social, political, economics, aesthetics and religious beliefs, which distinguish a people from its neighbours.

The man in his intelligence came up with the power to solve problems, which arises as a result of his interaction with the environment. The drives in man pushed him to come up with various artistic activities mostly utilitarian in nature in order to cope with the challenges of his environment.

In the traditional Nigerian society, despite the fact that, education, was given informally, it was structured in such a way that, it equips the individual for life. Fafunwa (1974), states that, "the purpose of education was clear, because functionalism was the main guiding principle. Traditional education generally was a preparation for life.

When the missionaries came to Nigeria, they recognized traditional arts as a very crucial part of the peoples' traditional religion. Therefore, conversion efforts were targeted towards those traditions basic to culture. This they did by trying to eliminate all Nigeria ceremonies and the various art works that were used in those events. The focus point of the Nigerians has always been his traditions, which gave him an identity through his arts. The role of the traditional artistic in his community cannot be overemphasized. The traditional Nigerian artist was famous as far as the affairs of his community were concerned. Art in Nigeria should be seen as the basis of existence.

Traditions in Arts Education

One cannot talk about the role of art education without talking about the history of apprenticeship system. Through this system, traditional artists and craftsmen were introduced to, and trained in art activities very early in life.

This system was not only for the purpose of education but also as a means of cohesion within families, clans and the society at large. Traditional method of teaching art centered on observation as

far as the apprenticeship system was concerned. Admissions were given to those who expressed interest, and had the abilities or those whose parents insisted should pursue training in certain areas as an inheritance. It was a very convenient system, because duration of training depended to a large extent on how fast the learner could learn. The process of learning in this system was strict and with it a high level of discipline. Respect and order was the guiding principle. Children who were not in conformity with the above were sent back to their parents.

The development of factors that enter into the present-day problem in art education are not unconnected with the behaviours of the Christian missionaries. The opened schools and used them as-means of conversion, in this regard children were found to be more valuable than adults. If children in their growth process are captured early in life then success can be sure to be achieved in whatever-, endeavours. The missionaries viewed and treated Nigerian traditional arts with contempt, which resulted in a general breakdown of traditional apprenticeship system. No efforts were made to provide substitutes for it. The healthy relationship that existed through the apprenticeship training system has been replaced today, Nigeria is faced with a major problem arising from the influx of foreign cultural influences. Even after forty-six years of Nigerian independence most ideas and instruments of development are from outside sources. Also, for social and cultural demands to be made through books, cinemas, magazines, television outputs and teaching aids most are still completely imported.

However, this paper is not trying to shut the doors against foreign cultural influences in Nigeria but to see how best other cultures can be used to improve on our present cultural situations. A cultural policy is necessary which should aim at improving the standards of traditional arts. Leaders of this country and other African countries both dead and those who are still alive fought so much to gain independence but failed to think about the future of their various traditions. The African continent generally, does not seem to have a focus; because those aspects of life that are not politically inclined received little or no attention. In the area of planning for educational policies, emphasis is not given in regard to teaching traditional arts. Emeji (2001), states that, "the right to culture has consequently been acclaimed a human right, not only as a matter of justice, but because it reflects an irresistible need of man".

From the ongoing, it is clear that, there is a need for Nigeria to take a look at the overcrowded nature of those amenities that it has continued to borrow and used, and thereby valuing less who they are and what they are capable of doing. Despite educational attainment, experiences of most people who occupy leadership positions in the presentation of Nigeria culture are themselves culturally handicapped in terms of their own culture. We should remember that, "charity begins at home". Nigeria should start using its independence to improve and redress the balance between the traditional arts and imported arts so that a better and positive behaviour can be set in the minds of Nigerians in general.

Trends and Outlook in Art Education

Art education is as old as man himself. Vocational education in Nigeria was traditionally character training and job orientation before the introduction of art in the formal school system by Aina Onabolu in 1923. Art education was actually introduced early into the school system. However, art education is still not receiving adequate attention in formal education. A major problem could be attributed to the rapidly changing role of the family. Many traditional family functions that acted as agents of unity are no longer in use. The family, which is the most important unit of training the future generation, is gradually giving way to schools to perform such important initial functions. The growing child is loosing out in terms of good art traditional training at the initial stages of life. Despite the fact that the area of the family relations and childcare is one that still remains regarding training traditionally, yet, it has been a reality affected by modernization. Little wonder what hope there is for the future generation. Azeez (2001) says that, "most countries of Africa lost their sovereignty and were also exposed to other cultures". We know obviously what exposures to other cultures will bring about, either lost in the original culture or a mix.

A people's worth is known by how much they value their traditions. This can be seen on how much they are doing as far as teaching is concern, especially, at those initial stages of children at the primary school levels. As interest has shifted to well structure art programmes in our schools thereby, ignoring traditional art and the apprenticeship system of training, it is important to draw from the

former to see how the later can be improved upon.

The nature of the African continent as a pluralistic nation has made it difficult to formulate a policy that is all embracing. Though, educational policies are formulated on the peculiarities of each nation. In Nigeria, looking at the different types of cultures, that exist among communities, definitely difficulties will be experienced as far as cultural policy is concerned. The many cultural backgrounds of the Nigerian people can actually be used to regulate and make the people productive for better living. Osuman (1997), point out that, "a fundamental fact of human existence is the tension between the pull of the past and the forward surge into the future". Formal art education does not destroy culture, but should be seen as building up a cultural base.

Recommendations

1. There is the need to re-examine the lukewarm behaviours as exhibited by government, parents, school administrators and the general public towards the preservation of tradition through art education.
2. Educational policies for the country should consider factors that serve as discouragement against preservation of traditions.
3. Intensive awareness campaign should be organized by artists and all arts council as advocacy strategy.
4. Nigerian traditional rulers should ensure that cultural activities are taken seriously at their various localities.

Conclusion

From the discussion in this paper, it is obvious that, the preservation of traditions through art education have not been fully utilized. The paper has tried to look at man in traditional setting his methods of training the young. The apprenticeship system of training had with it respect, dedication to studies and above all a well-structured method with discipline as the watchword. Man in his wisdom used the environment to be creative. Many artists were produced through the apprenticeship system in traditional arts.

It is also argued that, the search for freedom which gave Nigerian independence due to colonization opted more for political freedom than cultural freedom. Nigeria has suffered as a result of illegal exportation of artifacts to foreign lands and art destruction as a result of ignorance. The contention of this paper is that, the Nigerian artist should see in what way both traditional art can be blended with formal art. Artists should try to address the contemporary issues of the society using both traditional and contemporary arts. Art and traditions are a key term that is used to promote and understand a people. The important role played by traditional Nigeria art has enabled some level of achievement. It is necessary that efforts are geared towards-ensuring the survival of traditional arts. Traditional education methods of teaching through observation and imitation made a lot of impact as far as learning was concerned. It is necessary therefore, to examine ways through which those traditional methods of teaching could be used to enhance better understanding in formal classroom activities.

References

- Azeez, A. (2001). Art/culture and the politics of identity in Africa. In *A Discursive Bazaar*. The Pan-African Circle of Artists, Enugu.
- Emeji, M. J. (2001). In search of community arts policy and animation in Africa: Agenda grassroots arts and resource development. In *A Discursive Bazaar*. The Pan-African Circle of Artists, Enugu.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1974). *History of education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd-London.
- Osuman, G. I. (1997). *The education of women in development countries*. Makurdi, Nigeria: Osuman and Co.