

CREATIVE AND FUNCTIONAL FINE AND APPLIED ARTS EDUCATION: THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN A COMATOSE ECONOMY

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Abstract

Education in all its ramifications is a tool through which a country's socio-economic, scientific and technological development can be achieved. Education must therefore, be creative and functional to achieve these goals. This paper therefore, discussed creative and functional fine and applied arts education: challenges and prospects in a comatose economy. The paper explicated ways of making fine and applied arts education creative and functional. In addition, poor teaching, inadequate qualified fine and applied art teachers, inadequate instructional materials, insufficient time allocation on the school time table among others were identified as challenges towards a creative and functional fine and applied arts education especially in a comatose economy. Students interest in fine and applied arts, desire for promotion of cultural heritage, aesthetic value the society attaches to fine and applied arts products and the economic benefits such as jobs creation, self reliance are the major prospects towards a creative and functional fine and applied arts education in a comatose economy. It is recommended that teacher training institutions should mount fine and applied arts departments for training of more teachers and that government and school proprietors should made available instructional materials for effective teaching and learning of fine and applied arts education.

The importance of creative and functional education to nation building cannot be over emphasized. Education is the bedrock for economic development, peace and stability for any society. One of its objectives is to develop the mind for the right forms of behaviour which are of positive values to the society. This can only be achieved through functional education in any society, whether through formal or informal education, as was (and still is) the case in traditional African education where functionalism was the main guiding principle. As a result, every individual in the traditional Africa society was functional; contributing positively, his own capacity, to the progress of the society, socially and economically, as no individual was without a skill/vocation.

With the coming of the British to Africa, including Nigeria, functional education in traditional African societies gave way to the British system of education where only the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) were emphasized for their political and economic interests, hence, “the school curriculum was arts-oriented, producing men who could work as clerks in the white man’s administrative establishments” (Ezeaku, 2009). This remained the situation of education in Nigeria and most African nations up to independence and beyond. However, after independence, some frantic efforts have been made to revive the educational system by giving emphasis on creative and functional education.

The term ‘functional’ has been defined by Geddes and Grosset, (2005) as practical and having useful purposes. Against this backdrop, Ali (2000) averred that functional education will ensure the availability of food for people, creation of jobs, provision of services, etcetera. In the same vein, Okon and Akpan (2014) posited that:

“Functional education should be capable of producing Nigerians who can manufacture raw materials, machines and tools needed for local and international markets, invent new designs, discover drugs capable of curing diseases hitherto incurable and transform the nation from a consumption to a manufacturing status”.

Functional education can, therefore, be conceptualised as the transmission, acquisition, creation and adaptation of information, knowledge, skills and values, for the purpose of self-reliance and sustainable development of a nation. In other words Okoli and Onwuachu (2009) simply defined functional education as education that prepares an individual for a useful living within the society. It therefore follows that functional Fine and Applied Arts education should be able to produce graduates who are useful to themselves and can contribute positively to the development of the society.

Art as a concept has been defined as the totality of a man’s creativity. While creativity is the use of one’s imaginative skills to produce a physical object or develop ideas that impart positively and bring about a radical change in an organization or society. Fine Art also known as visual art is a branch of art concerned with conception or imagination, and creation of art works employing different resources and techniques for the production of objects of aesthetic or beautification values (Adeyemo, 2014). Fine arts include works such as painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking. This category of art encompasses all activities involving the application of aesthetic designs to everyday functional objects. Applied art on the other hand, involves the conception, design and production of art objects using a variety of resources and techniques for beautification and utilitarian purposes. Applied arts include works such as ceramics, textile design, photography, architecture, computer art, industrial design, graphic design, fashion design, interior design, as well as all decorative arts. While fine art provides intellectual stimulation to the viewer, applied art creates utilitarian items such

as a plate, pot, cap, cloth, sofa, clock, chair or table using aesthetic principles in their design.

Uzoagba (2000) opined that Fine Art has to do with that branch of art which has no other function than the appeal it makes to man's sense of beauty, and this includes painting, sculpture, drawing, art appreciation or art history. Applied art on the other hand is where works of art are applied as craftwork for personal use of the artists or individuals and also for commercial purpose or for the industry and this includes areas of discipline such as ceramics, graphics, textile, glass technology, metal works among others. To cap it all in a very few words, Adeyemo (2014) summarizes Fine and Applied Arts as visual arts. The author posits that visual arts are art forms that create works which are primarily visual in nature, such as ceramics, drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, crafts and often modern visual arts (photography, video, and filmmaking) and architecture. Indeed fine and applied arts education has a role to play in the economy of Nigeria if it is functional and creative, the future of Nigeria as a country will not only be secured, fine and applied arts education will also be used to enhance job and wealth creation.

In a comatose economy fine and applied arts education can only be functional by inculcating into the learner ability to create jobs and businesses which will enable them not only become self-employed but also become entrepreneurs who are able to create jobs and employ others. Nnamani (2007) observed that many youths in Nigeria have almost lost focus of the future which has left them in a complete aberration. The author further observed that graduates in skill oriented field of study (Fine and Applied inclusive) known for its capability for equipping learners with skills that enhances self-reliance and self employment continue to search for paid employment instead of creating jobs that can employ others. The author also added that the practices promoted by school are not enough to encourage the students to look differently to the local community needs as a potential for new work opportunities.

Nigerian schools at all levels therefore must demonstrate a commitment to the development of basic skills, and the entrepreneurial skills and values needed to achieve and sustain economic goals. The role of education in providing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for Nigeria's vision 2020 as it relates to tackling the problem of unemployment would require a well-articulated and functional education. Fine and Applied Arts education can play an important part in this regard. If the rudiments of art are properly manipulated, it has the capability to fend for the youths' interest as well as providing capable hands to viable sectors of the national economy thereby creating stable and sustainable economy (Ikponmwonsa, and Ayuba 2009)

Fine and Applied Arts is valuable for enhancing the aesthetic quality of the environment. More importantly, developing skills and competencies in Fine and Applied Arts can help prepare an individual for a useful living within the society. Fine and applied arts education can create jobs in areas such as painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, ceramics, textile design, photography, architecture, computer art,

industrial design, graphic design, fashion design, interior design, as well as all decorative arts. For centuries, Art had been a means of passing on skills from one generation to the next by the process of enculturation to ensure continuous existence of knowledge and skills. Ikponmwosa and Ayuba (2009) saw the process as involving the utilization of people's creative minds in doing a thing. For them, creative minds produce originality, novelty, resourcefulness, flexibility, innovation and invention. What this connotes is that Art provides novel and new solution to problems, new methods or ways of presenting aesthetic objects or form for the development of a nation (Adedokun, 2000).

The numerous contributions of Fine and Applied Art in technology cannot be underrated. This is because Art as a tool for technological development has contributed to the development of the technology of many nations. It therefore means that without Fine and Applied Arts, there would be no technology. Any resourceful entrepreneur can therefore capitalize on the entrepreneurial opportunity in Fine and Applied Arts to make gains.

Prior to today, the teaching of art in Nigeria focused more on the provision of only practical skills without any form of entrepreneurial training to cater for the practical skills that have been provided to students. It should however, be understood that for fine and applied arts education to be functional especially in a comatose economy its entrepreneurial potentials must be tapped. Equally needed is the entrepreneurial skill which can be effectively utilized to manage these art practical skills. The basic training in entrepreneurship is important to assist the artists discover the entrepreneurial procedures so as to help them become entrepreneurs who are able to create job and employ others.

Challenges Faced by Creative and Functional Fine and Applied Arts Education

The development of a creative and functional Fine and Applied Arts education is faced with numerous challenges especially now that the Nigerian economy is in comatose. These challenges among others include inadequate funding, shortage of fine and applied arts teachers in schools, lack of interest, inadequate instructional materials and insufficient time allocation on the school timetable for effective teaching and learning of Fine and Applied Arts.

i. Inadequate funding of Fine and Applied Arts Education

Functional and creative Fine and Applied Arts education is expensive. There are materials and tools to be bought, staff to be paid and trained, yet the money allocated to Fine and Applied Arts education in the country is very little especially now that the economy is in comatose. Most schools administrators complain that Fine and Applied Art materials are very expensive and not affordable with the meagre allocation they are given. The high cost of Fine and Applied Arts tools and materials also scare students away from the course. This state of affairs has always caused the poor provision of facilities for Fine and Applied Arts teaching in schools. As a result, Fine

and Applied Arts teachers are not encouraged to carry out explorations and exhibition which helps them develop new ideas that the students can learn. In some cases the Fine and Applied Arts teacher may ask students to bring money to buy materials for practical but in this comatose economy where can parents get such money when they are not paid salaries for more than ten months.

ii. **Shortage of Fine and Applied Arts Teachers in Schools**

This is a common problem in Fine and Applied Arts Education at all levels of education in Nigeria. At primary and secondary levels, Fine and Applied Arts teachers are hardly available. As a result of this, some students that would have studied Fine and Applied Arts in higher institutions do not have the basic requirements for admission. Mamza (2007) noted this when he mentions that: “although, the National Policy on Education (2014) has recognized the teaching of art (Fine & Applied Arts) at all levels of education, the subject is faced with shortage of the supply of qualified art teachers”. In some schools, you may find only one Fine and Applied Arts teacher to teach the subject across all the classes.

In higher Institutions and Universities, there are also insufficient numbers of Fine and Applied Arts teachers. This posse a lot of challenges to students as well as lecturers. In higher institutions some lecturers will even be made to teach courses they did not specialize in. It is common to find painters and sculptors teaching art history or vice-versa. This phenomenon, in the writer’s opinion, will reduce the professional intricacies needed to develop the art students in some areas.

The problem of inadequate Fine and Applied Arts teachers is made worst by the comatose economy in the country. The economic situation is such that the few available teachers are not paid for more than ten months in some states in Nigeria. Thus, government and school proprietors cannot even think of employing more teachers to fill the existing vacancies including those in Fine and Applied Arts.

iii. **Lack of Interest**

Lack of interest can be seen in three perspectives: societal apathy, misconception and lack of good guidance. In the area of societal apathy, it is only few out of thousands of people in the society that show interest in art works. Most parents, students and the society at large do not value art works in Nigeria. This explains why enrolment into Fine and Applied Arts study in schools is very low. In the area of misconception, most people in the society believe that Fine and Applied Arts is all about drawing and painting. As a result of this misconception, some parents feel that they cannot spend their money on training their children in schools to become artists. Rather they like their children to become lawyers, Doctors, Engineers etc just because these professions are well respected in the society. Misconceptions have lead parents to push their children who have interest in studying Fine and Applied Arts to study other

courses. Any attempt to refuse their parents decision always attracts abandonment to the children.

There is also misconception on the part of students. According to a study conducted by Uhunmwango (2009) on students interest in Fine and Applied Arts, most students expressed the same opinion that Fine and Applied Arts is meant for those who know how to draw and paint. Some believes that it is meant for those who art is inborn in them, that anyone who does not know how to draw cannot study art. Some also believe that artists are not recognized in the society and so cannot waste their time studying such a course in the university or other tertiary institutions. The students prefer to study other courses that will pay them and make them recognized in the society. Some students also believe that Fine and Applied Arts is money consuming, therefore is meant for those who are buoyant enough to afford for the cost of art materials.

Lack of good guidance is another problem that scares students away from the study of Fine and Applied Arts. In this case, some students may have interest but do not have confidence on themselves and have no one to direct them. As a result, the interest just disappears. Some students also lose interest in the study of Fine and Applied Arts due to influence of their friends who do not like the subject.

iv. Inadequate Instructional Materials/Media

Fine and Applied Arts cannot be taught and learnt in abstract. For a functional and creative Fine and Applied Arts education, there must be practical exhibition that involves active participation of every student by using appropriate instructional media. Instructional media are technological devices which appeal to the senses of hearing, sight, motion and can be effectively and efficiently utilized to facilitate teaching and learning. However, in most schools the instructional materials and media needed for practical activities are either inadequate or completely lacking. Previous studies by Gofar (2000), Ubangida (2004) and Barnabas (2005) all point to the fact that “most schools are faced with the issue of lack of art materials and purpose built art studios in secondary and Colleges of Education for the effective teaching of art”. In the absence of well equipped studios as well as other art training facilities in schools, the teaching or training of art students cannot achieve the desired set goals in the nation’s education policy. This is because the student artists cannot acquire the needed artistic skills to function as an artist without the materials/facilities.

New generation instructional devices such as computer applications inform of audio-visual programmes, CorelDraw, computer painting, etc are commonly use in the advanced countries of the world like USA, Britain, Japan and Germany for effective teaching and learning of Fine and Applied Arts. The use of these media of instruction in art schools to inculcating knowledge and practical skills in art students have not been embraced by most of the school leaving the teacher, instructors and technologists in total darkness as to the use of such media in the teaching-learning of fine and applied art. The inclusion of these media of instruction in the course of teaching via discussion,

explanation, illustration and demonstration will greatly improve students' performance/achievement. These media which are self instructing can be used by individual student or groups to facilitate learning without the presence of the teacher or lecturer.

v. Insufficient Time Allocation on the School Timetable

In most primary and secondary schools, Fine and Applied Arts is offered as an elective subject and as such the time allocated to it on the school timetable is not sufficient for practical activities to be conducted. Arts works usually required time and patient, the forty minutes for lesson are not enough for any appreciable art practical work to be carried out by students in the class.

Prospects of Fine and Applied Arts Education in a Comatose Economy

All hope is not lost, there are prospects for a functional and creative Fine and Applied Arts education in Nigeria. These prospects can be seen in areas such as the economic benefits of Fine and Applied Arts such as jobs creation and self reliance, students' interest in fine and applied arts, desire for promotion of cultural heritage and aesthetic value the society attaches to fine and applied arts products

i. Economic benefits of Fine and Applied Arts

A major prospect of Fine and Applied Arts in a comatose economy is its ability to create jobs and wealth. Fine and Applied Arts is a discipline under vocational and technical education that has the potentials to reduce the ugly rate of joblessness and pave way for self-employment in the country. Fine and Applied Arts is one of the disciplines in our educational programmes that avails trainees the opportunity of acquiring appropriate skills, abilities and competences (both mental and physical) as tools for the individuals to live independently and contribute their own quota to the development of the society at large. Adeyemo (2014) also underscored the current unemployment situation in the country as dangerously very high. The author further noted that Fine and Applied Arts can generates jobs for any nation hoping to reduce or eliminate unemployment among her citizenries.

To further the course of natural values inherent in Fine and Applied Arts to reducing joblessness, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (2010) claimed that arts create jobs and produce tax revenue. It maintained that a strong arts sector is an economic boom that stimulates business activity, attracts tourism revenue, retains a high quality work force and stabilizes property values. It is therefore imperative to note that different aspects of Fine and Applied Arts have been shown to be successful and sustainable strategies for revitalizing rural areas, cities and populace struggling with poverty. As is evident from the foregoing, one may not be wrong then to say that Fine and Applied Arts is the engine of the economy for both the government and individual.

Thus, there are many areas of specialization in Fine and Applied Arts that are opened up for learning within the shortest period of time and also have the capacities to

serve as means of livelihood, especially by those who are not privileged to attend formal schools or by those who wish to learn arts as auxiliary to help themselves economically. Such areas include among others Resist dyed fabrics, Tie and Dye, batik, silk-screen, banner, sign-post, portraiture and imaginative compositions (in drawing, painting and sculpture), decorative carvings and welding. All these put together and effectively embraced have the tendencies to reduce the rate of joblessness in Nigeria and take the economy out of comatose.

ii. Students' Interest in Fine and Applied Arts: Students still have much interest in studying Fine and Applied Arts. According to Ogunduyile (2008) what actually affect students' interest in Fine and Applied Arts education is lack of instructional materials which leave the teacher with no other option than to teach Fine and Applied Arts in abstract instead of concrete terms. The author further affirmed that once the needed instructional facilities are provided students' interest will easily be captured. To support the importance of instructional materials in enhancing students' interest in Fine and Applied Arts, Ajibade and Elemi (2012) affirmed that students who were taught Fine and Applied Arts using instructional materials score higher in the Fine and Applied Arts interest inventory than those who learnt without instructional materials. 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. Instructional media arouses interest so it leaves an impression on the pupils mind. Thus, helping the pupils to concentrate on and remember their work; they share experiences and actively participate in class. According to Okpaloaka (2009) education is more effective when it is based on children's interest and when it uses these interests in a purposeful way such as providing activities that give children opportunities to practise things that they enjoy doing as in the visual art. The more a child tries to express what he observes and enjoy, the more he or she learns about it. Hence, teaching Fine and Applied Arts using concrete materials can bring back the lost students' interest.

iii. Desire for Promotion of Cultural Heritage:

Every society desire to promote and transmits its cultural heritage to the younger generations. Children learn from their parents the skills in weaving, fishing, farming, blacksmithing, carving and pottery making. All these trades are informally learnt through participatory education. The history of some societies has been written based on the evidence found by examining their works of art. For example the Nok Art, Cult art, Ife, Esie and Igbo Ukwu were examples of such societies. This implies that the society value Fine and Applied Arts education as a means of transmitting cultural heritage from one generation to another. Hence as long as there are cultural heritage to be transmitted, Fine and Applied Arts will continue to be valued in the society.

iv. The aesthetic value the society attaches to fine and applied arts products:

The society place high value for Fine and Applied Arts products. Apart from the fact that artistic skill makes life more pleasant to experience, the principles of order, unity, harmony, balance of order and beauty which are cultivated in art, will be found relevant to our leaders. In the quest of nation building as all the structural edifices in the country, sculptural figures in conspicuous functions in cities have all the artistic principles above. This has positively affected every facet of government and beautification of the country for the comfort of man.

Conclusion

The paper revealed that several challenges militate against creative and functional Fine and Applied Arts education in Nigerians' schools especially in the comatose economy. Among these are; inadequate funding, shortage of Fine and Applied Arts teachers, lack of interest and inadequate instructional materials/media for teaching and learning of Fine and Applied Arts. However, these challenges are surmountable given the fact that students still have much interest in Fine and Applied Arts education if instructional materials are made available. The job creation potentials in Fine and Applied Arts is another prospect for a creative and functional Fine and Applied Arts education in a comatose economy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to ensure creative and functional Fine and Applied Arts education in a comatose economy:

1. Teacher training institutions should mount Fine and Applied Arts departments for the training of more teachers.
2. Government and school proprietors should make available instructional materials for effective teaching and learning of Fine and Applied Arts.
3. Fine and Applied Arts teachers should look inward with the view of making use of local materials in teaching Fine and Applied Arts.
4. More time should be allocated on the school time table and Fine and Applied Arts teachers should engage students in extra lessons so as to have more time for practical activities with the students.

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