
STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING SKILL ACQUISITION IN FINE AND APPLIED ARTS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOLS STUDENTS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The aspirations of federal government of Nigeria and the strong wish of the society at large remained the inclusion of practical-based and skill-oriented education in the curricula of secondary schools to curb unwarranted unemployment and national under development. It is in the light of the above effort and desire that the paper is suggesting further strategies for improving skill acquisition in Fine and Applied Arts among secondary schools students in Nigeria. This is discussed under the following sub-headings: Introduction, skill Acquisition, Fine and Applied Arts Education, National development, ways of using Fine and Applied Arts to achieve skill Acquisition, problems, strategies for improvement and suggestions.

The government both national and state levels has made conscious and concerted attempts to control increasing tempo and pace of youth unemployment, poverty and restiveness through meaningful and beneficial educational policies and programmes designed to equip the youths with skills necessary for self-actualization and sustenance. The stance of the National Policy on Education (2004) is clear on this role-development of the Nigeria youths into sound and effective citizens through acquisition of appropriate skills. To achieve these objectives, the school curriculum was diversified to cater for the different in talents, opportunities and future roles (NPE, 2004). In essence, the quality of instruction has been oriented towards inculcating skills necessary for inquiry and creativity (Jimo, 2004). Fine and Applied art education being

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skill-oriented, is among the few of its kind that could wrestle youth unemployment and idleness to the ground following laudable strategies for Fine and Applied Arts acquisition and improvement in secondary schools, but this could yield expected results if government gives assistance to its execution at appropriate quarters and time. Parent and guardians as a matter of fact, are expected to give support and encourage their children in their choice of career. This will enable the learners to achieve optimum growth and make an outstanding advancement in the chosen career.

Skill Acquisition

Skill is the capacity to do something well. Skills are usually acquired or learned as opposed to abilities which are often thought of as innate. It is great ability or proficiency; expertness that comes from training, practices, etc. It is a demonstrated personal attributes and demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and competence, (Okafor 2010). Skills as opined by Elom (2006) refer to expertness, practiced ability, dexterity or tact of carrying out an activity. It is a manual dexterity acquired through repetitive performance of an operation Hornby (2010) defined “acquisition as” the act of getting something, especially knowledge, a skill, etc. From the above definition one can deduce skill acquisition as the act of gaining proficiency, expertise and experience through learning, training and practice. Skill acquisition is an important aspect in all human endeavours and one’s survival in life depends largely upon what one does with the knowledge acquired as personal skills. The more senses that are used in acquiring knowledge, the deeper the impression made and the more the knowledge that will be retained. When skill is made in practical art and is acquired and developed in youths from inception of their secondary school education, it will enable them to be self-reliant and prospective contributive members of the society.

Fine and Applied Art

Art to a novice may be just drawing and application of colours but it is much more than that. Like other practical disciplines, Art requires skills. Uzoagba (2000) opined that Art is “human conception made manifest by the skillful use of a medium” Art typically is divided into visual and non-visual arts. Visual art can be seen and felt physically. Visual art is sub-divided into Fine and Applied Arts which could either be functional, aesthetic or serve both purposes. The non-visual arts involve performing arts like music, dance, poetry and songs among others. Fine and Applied Arts traverse artistic terrain such as drawing, painting, sculpture, photograph, graphics, textiles, craft and ceramics. (Odiye, 2009).

Drawing is the basic of all Visual Arts. It is a branch of Art where virtually all aspects of practical took their source. It is the expression of inner mind, an expression of

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individual emotion and feelings. Topics are better understood when illustrated than explained in words, so drawing is a way of communication. Sense of observation and imagination is developed through drawing. Drawing can be executed with charcoal pastel, chalk and pencil among others and the effect depends on the tools employed to carry out the work. Drawing is packaged into different types such as still-life drawing and landscape or outdoor drawing. Painting is the making of images, pictures or impressions on a flat surface. It can also be defined as a way of expressing one's feeling, mood and ideas by extending colours on flat surface such as paper, board, fabric, walls to from pictures. It is grouped into types like still-life, nature, life figure, portraiture imaginative and landscape painting (Uzoagba, 2000).

One of the several areas and perhaps, the most unique field of Africans contribution to the world of art is sculpture. A great number of the world's finest sculptures were made in Africa. The styles, methods and materials used in the production of sculptural works are wide and varied depending on the intending functions of the piece. Woods, stones, metals, cements, clay are the major media used but some of these media are more durable and are preferred.

Photography on the other hand, is the process of making pictures by means of the actions of light. Hornby (2012) also described photography as "the art, process or job of taking photographs or filming something. As course in fine and applied arts, photography involves snapping of pictures of objects, animals, scenery and human figures with professional touch. Graphic design is another concept under applied art studied to communicate ideas and information to the public. It covers practical terrains like computer graphics, billboard and calligraphy. Textile design is manifested in skills like embroidery, screen and block printing, knitting, tie-die, batik, fashion design, cloth appliqué and weaving. Ceramic entails the practical art of pottery, bowl and plate production, flower vases, tiles, bricks and earthen ware with clay and glaze materials. Craft involves the skillful use of hands to produce baskets, beads, mats, baby's cot and other art works uniquely designed to satisfy man's aesthetic and utilitarian needs.

National Development

To develop means to gradually grow or become stronger or more advanced. Developed country or society entails having many industries and a complex economic system.

Development is defined as "the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger etc (Hornby, 2010).

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National development in essence is synonymous with socio-economic, political moral, scientific, educational, technological growth and advancement of a country or a society, all working together to provide sound economic stability and welfare for its citizens in term of sustaining needs like food, shelter, health, protection, better education, good jobs and salary. These will serve to promote material well-being of the society at large, individual and national self-worth among member nations (Obi, 2005). Development does not wait for anybody a nation decides what becomes of her economy as a sovereign nation. Nigeria has to inculcate and apply good skills acquisition strategy in its secondary school system. This could be achieved through training professionals that will develop the right attitudes and aspirations in the learners for skill acquisition.

Fine and Applied Arts and Skill Acquisition

Fine and Applied Arts as stated before cuts across various skill acquisition areas like painting, sculpture, drawing, graphic design, photography, textiles, ceramics and craft. Skill acquisition opportunities abound in painting where the students can study about portraiture, landscape and life drawing. This skill when acquired, in secondary schools will help the students in their future educational career in universities and other higher institutions make them functional and productive after tertiary education and useful members of the society.

Grounded knowledge in sculptural skills as an integral part of Fine and Applied Arts acquired during secondary school career could prepare the students for career oriented and self-sustaining jobs that can make them financially self-reliant if there is no opportunity for further education. The skills available in sculpture include environmental sculptures, mural/wall decorations particularly in relief sculpture. The art teacher here trains and directs the students on the use of suitable materials to produce beautiful sculptural pieces.

Practical skills developed in drawing or draughtsmanship sustains students' good performance in related secondary school subjects such as introductory Technology, and Integrated Science where knowledge of practical drawing is of immense advantage for excellent performance. The students are taught here how to acquire proficiency in drawing of man-made objects and natural objects.

Skill acquisition could be effectively achieved in graphic design, computer graphics and photography by training the students on the art of calligraphic writing, corel draw and photo tricks, lettering, poster designs among others. The first benefit here is automatic acquisition of basic knowledge in computer (computer literacy) which is now a powerful global phenomenon for personal and national advancement. Another is

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future financial security, there is no need denying the fact that most art students train themselves while still in tertiary institutions due to the salable skills they acquire in the course of their study. They make a lot of money in the above skills for themselves and students who learn these skills in secondary schools will not look for sponsors when they gain admission for further studies in the same field. The same benefits apply for skills acquisition in textiles, craft and ceramics manifested in embroidery skills, knitting, tie-dye, fashion design, weaving, bead making (bead bags, purse etc), art of pottery, tiles and baluster making among others.

Problems of Skill Acquisition in Fine and Applied Art

- i. **Inadequate Fund:** The Government has negative attitude towards Fine and Applied Arts as a subject in secondary schools and do not allocate enough fund for provision of well equipped art studio, computers for computer graphics, costly art materials which students cannot afford to buy individually and standard art classroom for effective learning of practical arts. The study of art in makeshift classrooms and open shades may lead to insecurity and loss of art materials and student's works. This absence of physical facilities and its accessories contribute to low achievement in skill acquisition in Fine and Applied Arts in secondary schools.
- ii. **Shortage of Qualified Teachers:** The strength of qualified art teachers in the secondary schools is too small and the turnover is very minimal. Therefore admission of students to study art courses in tertiary institutions should be expanded to cope with the manpower need and government on the other hand do not encourage art teachers with remunerations and salaries that will encourage them to stay in the teaching field instead of looking for more attractive rewards elsewhere.
- iii. **Parents' Attitudes:** Parents have mistakenly understood art as simply drawing and painting of pictures and as such, do not encourage their children to take interest in art. Evidently, the foundation has been weak all along from home through the primary stage of education.
- iv. **Students' Attitude toward Art:** Students on their own part have their problems against Fine and Applied Arts as the majority of them see art as more practical oriented and burdensome while others rate it inferior to white-collar centered courses like medicine, law, engineering accounting among others. Still some artistically uninformed students out of ignorance perceived art just as drawing and painting reserved for less intelligent and unserious students which is not true.
- v. **Poor Representation of Art in School Curriculum:** There is tendency for intellectual and theoretical subjects to monopolize the secondary school

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curriculum. Fine Art on its part is being neglected in the timetable of most secondary schools, the time allotted for its studies are not enough to create artistic awareness in the learners.

Strategies for Improvement

- i. **Workshop Orientation:** Secondary school students should be encouraged to attend art exhibitions, workshops, excursions and symposia funded by government, schools and Alumni to enlighten them on benefits of studying Fine and Applied Arts. This in essence, could change students' negative attitudes and produce positive effect on the learners.
- ii. **Career Day:** Parents should also be encouraged to attend career day workshops where professionals and subject specialist should be invited to talk on the content and benefits of each subjects and also advice on the importance of encouraging individual child to pursue their individual God-given talents for self actualization. Offor (2012) advised that parents and teachers whose wards or students manifest quite early in life signs of creative tendencies, should appreciate them as prospective stars instead of scolding or flogging them.
- iii. **Teachers Remuneration:** Training of art teachers, sponsorship for seminars, conference and workshop for improved performance is essential if it also goes hand in hand with payment of good salaries as well.
- iv. **Award of Scholarship:** Scholarship and prizes should be awarded to deserving art students to sustain their interest in art beyond secondary school career.

Conclusion

Fine and Applied Art education can be effective and productive in improving skill acquisition among secondary schools if there is strong commitment on the part of students, teachers, parents, government and society at large. The short falls in progress towards achieving useful skill in functional art are not because they are unattainable but due to inadequate funding, insufficient interest and lack of motivational incentives which if properly taken care of, will yield positive results for national development.

Recommendations

Based on the above discussions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Adequate provision of art facilities, equipment and ICT facilities should be made to secondary schools for effective teaching and learning of Fine and Applied Arts.
2. Seminars workshops, art exhibitions, excursions and art competitions should be organized for art students and teachers on regular basis.
3. Fine and applied art should be made mandatory at the primary and secondary levels of the education system.
4. The students should be exposed to the use of art facilities and equipment to help internalize teaching and learning of Fine and Applied Arts in the learner.
5. Motivational incentives in form of scholarship and awards should be given to the students.
6. Better salary and sponsorship should be given to art teachers.

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