

THE TEACHING OF ARTS EDUCATION IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The Arts today competes with the sciences in a technological driven world. The advent of innovations in the science world had made the arts look like the archaic knowledge with no present and future relevance. The contemporary Nigerian society silently adapts this believe system. This so bad that being a doctor, engineer or scientist is considered to be more of social value than being an artist. Treated like the African perspective of a woman, the arts play the second fiddle.

In Nigeria, 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 break down 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.

Mamza (2007) asserted that the misconception in the society that because art is a practical work and not academic, has affected in art teaching. It has also leads to the non-availability of trained art teachers with experience. Also, the lack of recognition of the subject of its importance by the populace and even the government is another problem facing the subject.

In the midst of the search for acceptance in the world today, the Arts face stiffer challenges in our tertiary institutions. This articles examines the general history of university education, History of Arts and Design Programmes and finally reviews the Challenges.

Literature Review

University education generally right from its inception is dynamic and has been evolving. The Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia (2005) noted that the university as an organizational form was a European phenomenon, while other analogous institutions existed in other cultures in the form of religious schools. The first universities were established in the High Middle Ages, from the 12th century onwards and were closely linked to the church (Encarta Encyclopedia, *ibid*). it added that first spectacular changes in the objectives of the universities was in the mid 19th century when the Industrial revolution, the emergence of professional society and the growth of modern state stimulated the demand of university graduates (Encarta Encyclopedia, *ibid*). From there onward, universities diversified from its initial function, which was centered on the study of ancient philosophy. Nigeria did not enjoy the landmark until after 1945. At this time the developed nations were still grappling with how to regain their political and economic aspirations which had been battered by the Second World War. This led to demands for expansion in higher education to provide the necessary manpower. (Encarta Encyclopedia *ibid*).

The first indigenous Nigerian tertiary institution came up shortly after 1945, when university education the world over were expanding to embrace a wider range of disciplines. Thus, the first generation of Nigerians universities where Fine Arts were taught emerged in the early 60s and had Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A) program as one of its highest educational degree in studio art.

Although the degree was terminal but was adequate at that period and could take teachers of art in the universities to the topmost positions of Professors. Today, the need to meet up with demands of modern society and the urge for higher degree is taking a dramatic and aggressive dimension. In a newly reformed university education in Nigeria which gave birth to specialized Universities of Technology and Universities of Agriculture, there are structuring in the curricular of Art programs.

The programs have been made to focus more on functional aspects of Fine Arts necessitating the adoption of new nomenclatures such as industrial design, industrial arts, product design and applied arts as currently used in many parts of the world. This restructuring requires that art teachers obtain doctoral degrees to be at par with their

counterparts in other disciplines. Any negotiation for waiver by art teachers or their professional bodies is usually frowned at by the larger university body, which sees such request as attempts to avoid academic rigor that is a strong part of the doctoral degrees. More often than not, the Fine art-related departments are in the minority in such academic environment.

Overview of Higher Education in Nigeria

Nigerian higher education system is comprised of universities, polytechnics and colleges offering programmes in almost all sphere of learning. It is the largest and most complex higher education system on the continent. The other higher education institutions (Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education) are estimated to be over 139 in number (Obasi, 2008). The Federal Ministry of Education has responsibility for all federal higher institutions in Nigeria. The remaining higher education institutions are primarily controlled and funded by the State Governments, although private higher education is now getting started. Issues raised are mainly issues affecting the university system. It is assumed that the trends observed in the Federal universities are similar to those that are found in State universities and other components of the higher education system. The university sub-sector in itself is diverse and complex due to its organization into institutions funded by the Federal government and institutions that are funded by the State governments.

Major reform initiatives such as the World Bank (Saint, Hartnet & Strassner, 2003) project in the early nineties targeted the Federal universities only. The main objective of the project was to improve the effectiveness and relevance of university teaching and research and to encourage the universities to be more cost-effective. The project was successful in bringing about changes in operational matters such as management efficiency and limited quality improvement but encountered difficulties in bringing about changes in areas that needed policy changes by the government, such as growth in the system and funding arrangements.

The system has expanded rapidly in terms of the number of institutions established, new programmes, and the number of students admitted at higher education institutions. Nigerian higher education institutions operate at a higher capacity than they were originally established for, yet the demand for access continues to rise. The demand for greater access to higher education continues unabated due to its social benefit, especially in a society in which social mobility depends largely on the level of education acquired. High unemployment rates of graduates, particularly in their specific fields of training, remains a problem, but this has not served as a deterrent to those seeking admission into institutions of higher learning.

The need for higher education is partly based on the fact that those with higher education qualifications have a better chance of securing a job in a tough market compared to those without higher education qualifications.

History of Art and Design Programs and Prospects in Nigerian Universities

It has earlier been stated that Nigerian Universities have various art and design programs, it is therefore necessary to add that the curricula in these institutions could be viewed from two perspectives; the curricula of conventional art department of the first generation universities which were established as far back as 1960 with emphasis on students having art background and science at secondary level, and that of the new generation universities where science at secondary level, and that of the new generation universities where science subjects such as chemistry, physics and mathematics are prerequisite for admission into art and design programs. The first generation universities with art programs include Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. These three Universities and two others – University of Ibadan and University of Benin became the fountain from which other art departments drew. (Akolo 1982, Ogunduyile 1999). The art and design programs offered in the first generation universities as described by Ogunduyile (1999) laid emphasis on the production of objects which were admired for their beauties without much consideration for functionality and the industrial processes required in mass production. The art and design programs in the few second generation universities – university of Maiduguri, University of Benin, Delta State University, Abraka, University of Uyo, University of Lagos, University of Port Harcourt, Abia State University and Olabisi Onabanjo University were not too different significantly from those of the first generation universities. Emphasis was also laid on Art subjects – English Language, Fine Art and three other art subjects.

The establishment of Art a Design degree awarding institutions in Nigeria had its base in the cultural policy of Nigeria as expatiated by Aig-Imoukhuede in the 1991 National Education Policy. Section 3.3 of the policy states:

The policy shall promote an educational system that motivates and stimulates creativity and draws largely, on our tradition and values namely: respect for humanity and human dignity for legitimate authority and the dignity of labor and respect for positive Nigerian moral religious values.

While section 6.1.6 gave the go ahead to the Nigeria nation to establish institutions and programs, for preservation, promotion and development of literacy, performing and visual arts. The visual arts in this sense embraced all aspects of arts. In order to provide appropriate education at all levels, several institutions were established. The institutions have their objectives tailored to suit the need of their environments. Between 1960 and 2009, Nigeria had 65 degree awarding institution. (Joint Admission Matriculation Board brochure of 2008 -2009). The following is the breakdown:

- 16 Conventional Federal Universities
- 5 Federal Universities of Technology
- 3 Universities of Agriculture
- 15 Conventional State Universities

- 4 State Universities of Technology
- 6 Private Universities and
- 16 Other Degree Awarding Institutions

In pursuance of the policy (section 6.1.6), government established and approved considerable number of art departments in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The list below shows the names of universities offering Fine art/Industrial design/creative arts, duration and the type of degree awarded.

The Industrial Design program commenced fully with the establishment of Universities of Technology. The philosophy behind its establishment was to enhance the development of the Nigeria nation to move from a consumer nation to technological oriented one. The industrial design program was therefore expected to teach product design, mass production processes and to bring about improvement in local crafts so as to make its recipients self-reliant. In order to do this more effectively, the Universities of Technology considered it very important to admit only students with science and technology background. Subjects such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and another two science subjects are considered important.

Those with fine art background are considered to have added advantage. Students admitted into these Universities take general courses in the 100 level while fine art and designs are gradually introduced to them at the 200 level. The objectives of art and design program in the Universities of Technology are similar in that they all sought, among others to:

- Provide students with appropriate training and intellect in the acquisition of skills and technological proficiency necessary for effective translation of creative designs to finished products;
- Raise the level of aesthetic and cultural awareness in the students; and
- Guide students to use their creative skills to enhance and add breath to the quality of living. (The Federal University of Technology Academic Calendar, 2005).

The philosophy of the new Universities of Technology as seen from the above objectives, require artist-teachers who are well grounded in both studio practice and research methodologies. The teacher-artists through their training often embraced both studio practice and research and are often willing to go beyond the MA program. While the artist-teacher whose trainings were studio oriented often feel that their practice degree MFA should be adequate to take them to the peak of university teaching career.

Challenges for the Art Education in the Nigerian Universities

The requirement for the acquisition of a teaching certificate in the teaching of art seems to me a recent development in Nigerian educational system. Larmola (2004) noted that when the law on basic education in the arts was first being drafted in the early nineteen-nineties, attention was focused on the art teachers' formal qualifications. However, before this period, it was observed that great masters of art who taught art in

schools did not possess teacher's certificate. Walter Gropius who taught in Bauhaus School of Design in 1919 was an Architect, designer and craftsman. He founded the Bauhaus School of Design to synthesize technology, craftsmanship were Wasily Kandisky and Paul Klee who were inventors and art teachers in various art schools. Another German who did not hold a teaching qualification was Wachen Wilhelm. However, Bohm-Dunchem and Cook (1991) noted that after Wilhelm had gotten his silversmith certification from a drawing academy in Germany went to Bauhaus to take up the job of an Art Instructor. It is appreciated that these artists had broader background or training since they were art philosophers and critics. Their philosophies were reflected in their art and design practice.

Presently in Nigeria, for art teachers to reach the peak in academic, he or she has to face many challenges and cross many hurdles. One of these is the 'publish' or 'perish' syndrome. What this translates to is that if there is no required number of publications in reputable local and international journals, then, there is no promotion. Another academic exercise that has currently been introduced into the visual arts, and which is putting artist-teachers and teacher-artists on their toes is "get a PhD" sagacity. But as a matter of opinion, a lot of questions, which require rational answers, need be asked as to the issue of relevance and purpose. Also close to that is that whether the journey to acquiring higher degrees is artificially frustrating or not. Notwithstanding, artists and designers who are visionary in the academics see every demand of the job as a challenge. At the moment, force and choice seem to combine together to proliferate the rush for enrolment into a PhD. Program. The increase in the number of those pursuing doctorate degrees has its sound reason in compliance with the 'rules of the game' as set up by the universities. If you have to be in the game, you have to master the rules of the game. Beyond learning the rules of the game. One has to know how to apply the rules accordingly. In other words, most university authorities are now mandating a doctorate degree for assessment, appointments and promotions into certain cadre of the academics. In a particular instance, to become a Reader (or even Senior Lecturer) without a PhD. May be practically impossible in most universities nowadays (example from FUTA). Therefore, failure to comply with the dictate of the times is failure to make upward progress. In which case, defaulters of the rules of the game are usually declared academically unproductive and are consequently forced out of their jobs.

Conclusion

There are quite a number of teachers, who, because of their knowledge in art, teach the subject. It is however realized that they dwell more on the theoretical aspects of the subject matter. The artist-teacher tends to solve the theoretical aspects of their teaching when they are on the job.

It is noted that more of those in the artist-teacher category in Nigeria often preferred to pursue the studio MFA program, which is a terminal degree. The teacher-

artist in the other hand, because of their reading and writing, often found it easier to face the challenges of pursuing higher degree programs. Now that the Nigerian Universities Commission is insisting that all teaching staff must be PhD. Holders, one could understand the reasons why those with terminal degrees in the studio areas are ready to counter any call that would undermine their MFA degrees. Their rejecting the call might have been based on the precedence that had earlier been set in some universities in Nigeria and abroad where teaching staff with MFA degree had been promoted to professional cadres.

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