

THE TEACHING OF VISUAL ART IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The challenges faced while teaching of visual art in secondary schools is what this paper meant to examine. The paper highlighted some of these challenges and suggestions for solving them proffered. It also emphasizes the need for art to be adequately taught in schools to prepare the citizenry for the needed national development. The stand of the piece is that, art production and appreciation contribute towards the development of all nations, just as much as science and technology.

Keywords: *Teaching, Visual Arts, Challenges, National Development,*

Introduction

Art teaching, being a skill imparting exercise goes beyond merely giving out a prepared set of knowledge. It involves developing the learner's mental, physical and emotional attributes. The learner must be taught how to perceive an object or a design and to translate this perception into concrete, visualized thing. This demands a lot of patience, enthusiasm and love.

Furthermore, it requires a lot of resourcefulness and innovation on the part of the teacher. This becomes more imperative now that teaching profession as a whole is faced with numerous challenges. The challenges are only surmountable by the art teacher, who is thoughtful, caring and committed to his work and students.

The Visual Art Teacher

The visual art teacher should not only be an artist. She/he must love and appreciate art, and understand the value of art in the life of an individual and the society in general. Since art teaching seeks to awaken and develop the potent skills in the learner, an enthusiastic, motivational and loving guide is a necessity. The art teacher should therefore, enthusiastically guide his students through a laid down programme of activities and watch them progress.

In a situation whereby a school is fortunate to have a qualified, trained and creative artist as an art teacher, such a teacher needs every support and

encouragement to succeed. The teacher must update his knowledge and skills by regularly organizing and attending workshops, art exhibitions, seminars and conferences. This will enable him to have a working knowledge of art and trends in the art world. It is important for the art teacher to know the difference between arts taught at different levels of educational systems, that is, the primary, secondary and tertiary level.

This will enable him facilitate the progress of his students from one school level to the other. If art activities are to be enjoyable to the students, the later should be guided to "Play freely with materials and to express their impulses spontaneously" (Uzoagba 1982, p.58). This means that the visual art teacher should make each lesson enjoyable, without being too rigid about the activities to be performed. The visual art exerts a gentle influence on the activities of the students without domineering or altering their individual uniqueness in style and approach.

To be a successful visual art teacher, there should be a friendly and intimate relationship between the teacher and students. Good teaching does not depend on the amount of methodology acquired nor on specific styles or techniques, plans or actions, but rather on love and concern for the development of the students. The nature of the relationship between the visual art teacher and his students will mar or make his teaching. A good teacher can improve and infact, excel in a bad system. Also, a good artistic

classroom atmosphere can be ruined by a bad teacher. When a good art teacher takes the students and their works seriously, he can motivate them to bring out the best from themselves.

Therefore, the need for art teacher to understand the psychology of growing children and indeed his students cannot be overemphasized. Though the art teacher must not necessarily be a perfect artist, it requires the following qualifications among others;

- Some basic knowledge of art history, art appreciation and theory of art.
- Some basic practical skills in visual arts
- Knowledge of human developmental psychology, philosophy and classroom management.
- Some knowledge of general education, so that he can teach visual art as an integral part of other disciplines, bringing out the relationship and interdependency.
- The love of the visual art subject and commitment to the lives of the students to be able to attract them to the subject and to put in their best.

Visual Art Teaching as a Process

Art teaching provides freedom of expression, in fact, self-expression. Through self-expression, a teacher is able to know the child or student better. According to Stanfield (1976) other aims of art teaching include the followings;

- I. It enables the child or student to think for himself/herself, thus developing the thinking faculty.
- ii. It helps students to develop his/her creative ability.
- iii. Art teaching also develops the students' critical powers for good critical judgment.
- iv. Participation in art activities lead to muscles development and control in young children.
- v. Art teaching brings awareness of things around and their importance to students.
- vi. Art teaching enable students to recognize, understand and appreciate good craftsmanship in any work, which will be useful later in life.
- vii. By getting involved in art activities, the students derive pleasure.

When these and other aims of art teaching are achieved, then the beneficiaries are on their way to contributing their quota to national development.

Students with interest and talents in art should be encouraged and supported to pursue their education in art to whatever level they desire but not forcing students to study courses for status symbol.

Challenges of Visual Art Teaching in Secondary Schools

Visual art teaching in all the levels of education in Nigeria from pre-primary to tertiary is faced with various challenges and problems. Some of these hiccups vary from one geographical environment to another and from one school to the other. In fact, the challenges vary from one teacher to another, just as the approaches to their solutions vary. This write-up enumerates some challenges which appear commonly to secondary schools in Nigeria namely;

- a. Parental and societal indifference.
- b. Lack of studios or inappropriate classrooms without the required tables, donkeys, easels etc for artworks.
- c. Lack of art appreciation by the society. This kills the morale of would be artists.
- d. Students' disinterestedness.
- e. Lack of continuity in the teaching of art throughout the duration of the student's education.
- f. Problems of unqualified art teachers who teach whatever they like through the apprenticeship system. This practice affects the educational development of the students.
- g. Inadequate or non-availability of art materials.
- h. Inadequate pay for teachers when compared to other professions.
- i. Poor students' enrollment owing to societal and leadership indifference.

Suggestions for Curbing the Challenges

To overcome this and other challenges, the art teachers must be convinced regarding the value of art education to the students and society in general. He must determine in his mind to become a good, successful, motivated and satisfied teacher.

Stated below are suggestions which may help in containing the challenges:

1. Art materials could be improvised from local materials in the community; for example, colours from leaves, flowers, coloured chalk and dye etc; charcoal may be used for drawing in place of pencils; gum from cassava paste and pap; papers could be explored/improvised from newspapers, calendars, etc.

1. If possible, the teacher should visit the parents of a talented child in art, who is being frustrated by his parents. Establishing a good rapport with the parents could help the child to succeed in attaining his desired goals.
2. The art teacher should produce some art works, which would be sold to supplement the poor salary earned.
3. Organizing exhibitions and public awareness campaigns may reduce the prejudice of some schools' administrators who deliberately frustrate the teaching of art in their schools by not giving it a space on the time table. Also, non-recognition to art teachers or students studying art by the society.
4. Disrespect to art teachers in particular is on the increase in schools and the society. Some decades ago, people saw teacher as a role model. But nowadays, reverse is the case, teachers are the targets of students unrest. Therefore, visual art should be made compulsory in secondary schools, hence it teaches respect to authorities, culture and tradition in order to check the ugly trend.

Visual Art and National Development

The teaching of visual art, just like other forms of education, is a preparation for life. The youths of the nation are to be prepared so that they can be useful members of the society and to be fulfilled individuals. For education to attain these noble objectives, it must be relevant socially and provide skills for utilitarian purposes.

Since art deals with "the Production for attainment of ends" (Uzoagba, 2000, p. 34), teaching of visual art should be encouraged if Nigeria is to attain some level of productive development. To achieve this, the wrong notion that artistic values and technology are separate from mechanical construction must be shunned. In science, technicians need knowledge in design, proportion, colour and aesthetics. These spheres of knowledge, which are very vital in industrial production can best be achieved through visual art teaching. According to Uzoagba (2000, p. 35), "the desire to make beautiful things must be strong as the desire to make useful things". Arts provide the senses of beauty and functionality which are useful in mechanical production.

Art teaching enables the learners to acquire productive skills, which make them self-reliant and also to contribute to national development.

Teaching of visual art imbibes the virtues of hard work and handwork in citizens, thereby making them ready instruments for national development. A nation whose citizens are expert consumers rather than producers is a failed one.

Art education instills the spirit of civic responsibility in people, so if citizens are exposed to art teaching early in life, they are more likely to be patriotic, which will enhance national development. Time has come when schools should de-emphasize theory and emphasize practical work by providing a conducive working environment such as art studios, materials and media for students to explore beyond measure to attain the desired national development.

The national policy on education (1981, p. 16) has one of the objectives of art education at secondary school level is to adequately equip students to effectively cope with life in this modern age of science and technology. It is also a known fact that, science, technology and art go together where there is development. Apart from industrial productions, is being used in the production of educational materials.

There are many other ways through which art education has affected technological advancement, and how modern technology has affected artistic creativity. The separation that existed between science and art technology is fast becoming a mirage. The two needs each other for survival, therefore the preference of science to art should be de-emphasized in our schools. Writing on the positive effects of science on art, Adejumo (1982, p. 18) has this to say: Scientific and industrial progress has made available now materials like new oil paints and other plastic materials, new media with which the artist could work.

On the other way round, art plays and will continue to play a vital role in the design concepts of the new technological age.

Recommendations

1. Visual art teaching should not be optional at the senior secondary school level, but compulsory subject.
2. Studios be built and made functional with art materials/tools in schools for effective teaching of visual art.
3. Aggressive exhibitions should be often organized either solo or grouped to change people's negative attitudes towards arts.

4. Visual art teachers should be given projects to execute both within and outside their schools and a percentage/revenue be retained by those teachers so as to be a morale booster.
5. Equal opportunities be given to visual art on school's timetables like other subjects.
6. Art teachers should be employed to cater for increasing number of students in secondary schools.
7. Teaching of visual art programmes should aim at creating awareness and to develop positive attitudes of exploring on indigenous materials for artistic creativity.

Conclusion

Industrial products require artistic touch to make them satisfy man's requirements for beauty and pleasure. To achieve this, all citizens need some level of exposure to art appreciation through art teaching and education. To this end, visual art teaching is vital to national development since, aesthetic needs and satisfaction are not the preserve of some few, but everyone in the society.

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