



## **Introducing Business and Entrepreneurial Sense in Art Programmes for Mental Health Improvement and Reintegration for Akwa Ibom State Inmates**

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### **Abstract**

The integration of business and entrepreneurship education into Art programmes for inmates in correctional facilities in Akwa Ibom State will enhance the reintegration process and improve the well-being of inmates both during and after their time in custody. This paper explores the importance of incorporating visual arts programs within correctional settings. By engaging in mediums such as painting, drawing, sculpture, and other forms of artistic expression, incarcerated individuals are given a platform to express their thoughts, process their experiences, and envision a life beyond confinement. The paper also looks at the practical aspects of implementing visual arts programs within correctional facilities in Akwa Ibom State, addressing challenges related to resource allocation, facilitator training, and the assessment of programme effectiveness. Additionally, it includes personal narratives and artwork created by inmates, providing an insightful look into their journeys of self-discovery and healing. These narratives highlight their experiences and offer a path toward breaking free from the cycle of criminal behavior. Incorporating Arts programmes into rehabilitation strategies not only improves individual outcomes but also contributes to broader societal benefits, such as reducing crime rates and enhancing community development. Therefore, this paper advocates for the integration of Visual Arts programmes as a holistic approach to inmate rehabilitation, combining emotional healing with entrepreneurial empowerment to facilitate a smoother transition from incarceration to reintegration into society.

**Keywords:** Visual Arts, inmate rehabilitation, mental health, entrepreneurship, correctional facilities.

### **Introduction**

Penfold (2017), in a study, opined that Art, as an experience, emphasizes the connection between Art and human life, promoting continuous interaction, leading to metamorphosis and intrinsic transformation. Visual Art therapy significantly improves global cognitive function and reduces depressive symptoms and anxiety in older adults, according to Masika, Yu, and Li (2020). Within the corridors of correctional facilities, where isolation and anguish often dwell, the power and knowledge of Visual Arts remain a beacon of hope and transformation. This paper looks at the possible impact of creative Arts programmes on those living within the walls of incarceration and the program's effect on the individual outside those walls.

The profound intertwining of Art and mental well-being is particularly striking when

considering its application within the correctional system of Akwa Ibom State. Inmates frequently contend with a myriad of mental health obstacles, including but not limited to trauma, depression, and anxiety. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, conventional punitive methods often fall short in addressing these deeply ingrained issues, leading to a revolving door of incarceration. However, the introduction of Visual Arts programmes could pave an alternative path, fostering a platform for profound emotional expression, heightened self-awareness, and a genuine sense of purpose, thereby offering a transformative approach to rehabilitation and personal development.

Reentering society, ex-convicts confront hurdles like being jobless, facing societal prejudices, and lacking support, all of which increase the likelihood of relapse. This phenomenon results in many former inmates returning to correctional centers within a short period after their release. To address these challenges, it is essential to implement comprehensive educational and vocational training programmes within the correctional system. These programmes play a critical role in equipping inmates with the necessary skills and qualifications to enhance their employability and facilitate their successful integration into society.

### **The Correlation between Visual Arts and the Mental Well-Being of Inmates**

Visual arts encompass a wide range of creative practices that involve creating primarily visual works. In an educational setting, future artists, designers, and art historians explore their talents in various media, focusing on art and media theory, methods, and materials. This includes art forms such as ceramics, drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, crafts, photography, video, filmmaking, literature, and architecture. These activities have evolved to include newer forms like digital art and installations, utilizing various materials and techniques to express emotions, ideas, and narratives, offering a true picture of human expression and intellectual creativity (Walmsley, & Greaves, 2021; Joshi, 2019).

Successful regulation of emotions hinges on the examination of emotional content within intricate visual compositions. Bebko, Franconeri, Ochsner, & Chiao, (2011) posit that visual arts offer a splendid avenue for the expression of intricate emotions and experiences, particularly benefiting individuals incarcerated who may encounter difficulty articulating their emotions verbally. In this context, art facilitates emotional processing, diminishes internal stress, and fosters emotional equilibrium. Observing visual artworks correlates with diminished self-reported stress and reduced systolic blood pressure (Law, Karulkar, & Broadbent, 2021). The process of creating art can be meditative and calming. Concentration on artwork serves to mitigate stress, encourage relaxation, and alleviate anxiety levels among inmates.

Visual arts education has been shown to significantly improve self-esteem and reduce caregiver burden for individuals with dementia (Richards, Tietyen, Jicha, Bardach, Schmitt, Fardo, Kryscio, & Abner, 2019). Creating art can boost self-esteem and self-worth, providing a sense of accomplishment and recognition of creative abilities, particularly beneficial for those struggling with low self-esteem. In the context of prisons, art therapy integrating cognitive-behavioral techniques with art therapy directives has been found to help develop and increase anger management skills in inmates (Breiner, Tuomisto, Bouyea, Gussak, & Aufderheide, (2012). Engaging in visual arts encourages various cognitive functions such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and proper

reasoning, fostering creative thinking and innovation, which are beneficial for the overall mental health of inmates.

### **The Therapeutic Impact of Visual Arts in Correctional Facilities, Akwa Ibom State**

The utilization of visual art methods serves as a means for individuals to express their emotions, externalize their identity, and engage in personal learning, thereby fostering interpersonal and self-connectedness conducive to mental health recovery. According to Jay, Patterson, Fernandez, & Moxham, (2022), art-based interventions, particularly those involving visual art, have demonstrated significant improvements in the overall well-being of patients managing various health conditions in Nigeria. Furthermore, the global attention garnered by the role of visual arts in promoting mental health within correctional centers, notorious for high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to their confining and often harsh circumstances, underscores the transformative potential of introducing visual arts as a form of treatment. Given the unique challenges faced by Nigerian correctional centers, the incorporation of visual arts programs stands to offer substantial benefits in enhancing the mental well-being of their inmates.

In Nigerian correctional facilities, inmates exhibit a high prevalence of psychiatric morbidity, notably depression and anxiety, attributed to factors such as isolation, inadequate mental health support, and limited access to healthcare services (Osasona, & Koleoso, 2015). Furthermore, inmates frequently grapple with heightened stress and anxiety owing to overcrowding, lack of privacy, restricted recreational opportunities, and the pervasive uncertainty surrounding their future. Depression also emerges as a significant concern, stemming from the absence of familial and societal connections, as well as the dearth of purposeful activities. Effectively addressing these mental health challenges is imperative within the context of rehabilitation and reintegration. Introducing a creative environment for self-expression and personal growth, visual arts can serve as a pivotal instrument in facilitating the rehabilitation of inmates.

In their work "Perspective of the Audiovisual Arts: On Ways and Tools of Studying Emotions in the Current Visuals," Sławek-Czochra, & Sosnowska, (2023) discussed how visual Arts provide a means for expression and emotional release by bridging the intellectual and emotional spheres. This requires viewers to have the competence to interpret the cultural and artistic code. Visual Arts offer inmates a non-verbal avenue for expressing their emotions, which can be challenging for many inmates due to stigma or fear of judgment. Through visual art, inmates can channel their emotions, leading to a form of purification and emotional release that helps alleviate stress, fear, and anxiety.

Creating Art requires attention and focus, bringing inmates into the present moment. This state of carefulness and concentration reduces rumination about past actions and worries about the future, which can contribute to anxiety and depression and engaging in artwork allows inmates to experience temporary freedom from the stressful environment. Therefore, Visual culture plays a crucial role in developing visual intelligence and promoting active engagement with the visual world. According to Kindler (2003), completing even a small Art piece can significantly boost an inmate's self-esteem and sense of accomplishment, which is especially important in correctional centers where inmates often feel a lack of control and achievement. Engaging in art can bring about a

sense of pride and motivate positive behaviour, helping to eliminate negative thoughts, anxiety, and depression.

Harvie (2012), also highlighted in his work "Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics", that recent art and performance practices address social issues such as welfare, sanitation, urban planning, and globalization. Art programmes in correctional centers foster a sense of community among inmates, with group art projects and art therapy sessions providing opportunities for social interaction and support. These connections alleviate feelings of isolation and establish a peer support network, which is crucial for mental health. Lipe, Ward, Watson, Manley, Keen, Kelly, & Clemmer, (2012) conducted a study on the effects of an arts intervention program in a community mental health setting. The study showed that arts sessions improved feelings of well-being, and member-participants reported that sessions provided fun, relaxation, socialization, creativity, and a sense of belonging. The physical act of creating art has calming effects on the body.

Activities like painting or drawing involve repetitive motions that induce relaxation of the mind, body, and soul, contributing to overall stress reduction. Using visual methods like drawing in interviews can open up participants' interpretations and allow for creative, responsive research (Bagnoli, 2009). Art helps inmates gain insight into their emotions and behaviors. Reflecting on their artwork encourages self-examination and personal growth. Understanding inmates' emotional responses through art can lead to better coping strategies and emotional regulation. Contemporary visual and social practice Art has the potential to inspire positive emotions and contribute to a more emotional and connected world. According to Schneider, & Fredrickson,(2022), engaging with art can generate positive emotions and thoughts. Creating or viewing beautiful and meaningful art can evoke feelings of joy and hope, potentially reducing the negativity present in our correctional facilities.

### **Potential Art Programmes for Entrepreneurial Purposes in Correctional Centres, Akwa Ibom State**

**The Sessions focused on the study of Art therapy:** This is a session overseen by a trained art therapists in our institutions, it involves mentoring inmates through a range of art activities designed to evaluate and delve into emotions, address trauma, and cultivate self-awareness.

**Training workshops focused on Visual Art:** This can be organised, to facilitate and create an atmosphere where inmates will study different art techniques and skills under the guidance of Art instructors. These workshops may focus on drawing, painting, sculpture, etc, providing inmates with opportunities for creative expression and self-development skills.

**Events Centered around Art Competitions and Exhibitions:** Events such as these, are meant to showcase the creative work of inmates to fellow inmates, correctional staff, and sometimes the public. The primary objective of this competition is to establish an avenue for incarcerated individuals to exhibit their artistic aptitude, divulge their personal experiences, and be acknowledged through a range of awards, with the intention of inspiring their endeavors.

**Creative Writing Facilitation:** This involves the use of texts from the Mass Observation Archive as inspiration for prisoners' poetry and ghost stories based on the prison and its history. Seal, & O'Neill, (2019). Creative writing, such as poetry, short stories, and journaling, is bound to help our inmates. They are guided through writing exercises strictly designed to stimulate creativity, self-reflection, and emotional healing. These classes will provide the opportunity for inmates to share their thoughts and experiences through the written word, which could be published for others to ponder upon.

**The Discipline of Performing Arts And Music Performance:** This activity is about creative perspectives on music and performing arts in prisons. Morris, (2022). Music and performing arts programs allow inmates to exhibit their creativity through singing, playing instruments, acting, or dancing, bringing them together to coexist in harmony and eliminating all forms of hatred amongst themselves. This activity also provides opportunities for self-expression, teamwork, and skill development. In this case, inmates may decide to participate in choirs, drama productions, or dance performances at correctional centres.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In summary, the significance of Visual Art in improving the overall well-being of inmates in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Despite the numerous challenges and constraints, visual art programs play a pivotal role in offering a transformative pathway for rehabilitation, healing, and personal development within correctional facilities. Through engaging in creative expression, inmates are able to discover comfort, purpose, and a sense of empowerment within the limitations of their environment. Visual Art programmes adopt a comprehensive approach in addressing the mental health requirements of inmates. They not only provide a platform for emotional expression and introspection but also facilitate the development of social connections and valuable skills. As a result, art initiatives significantly contribute to the comprehensive well-being of inmates.

Engaging in Art enables individuals to transcend the stigma and dehumanization associated with incarceration, allowing them to reclaim their identities as creative and entrepreneurial beings. The impact of visual Art extends beyond the individual, encompassing broader societal benefits. Art programmes in correctional facilities not only promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism but also facilitate successful reintegration into society. By embracing creativity, empathy, and positive self-expression, visual art initiatives play a crucial role in promoting social and economic development.

As Nigeria grapples with challenges within its correctional system, the implementation of visual art programs represents a forward-thinking, compassionate, and innovative approach to rehabilitation. By expanding access, enriching quality, and fostering collaboration, stakeholders can tap into the transformative power of visual art to elevate the spirits, restore dignity, and ignite hope among incarcerated individuals across the nation. In essence, the incorporation of visual art into correctional rehabilitation efforts in Nigeria embodies a profound commitment to justice, healing, and human rights. By acknowledging and embracing the spontaneous creativity and resilience of every inmate, we can strive towards a future where incarceration serves as a platform for restoration, growth, and redemption, rather than solely punishment.

The correctional facilities in Nigeria encounter frequent financial challenges, encompassing inadequate funding, a shortage of staff, and a scarcity of art supplies. Acquiring sufficient resources for Art programmes, including materials, equipment, and skilled instructors, becomes notably arduous when financial constraints exist. In this context, it is imperative for the Ministry of Interior to establish close collaboration with the State Governors to secure robust support for these programmes, which are poised to have a profound impact on the inmates within and beyond the confines of the correctional institutions.

In Nigeria, numerous correctional facilities face challenges due to the absence of appropriate spaces for Art activities. The lack of dedicated Art workshops, insufficient lighting, and poor ventilation significantly impede the effective implementation of Art programmes within these facilities. As a result, it is imperative for the state government to conduct regular visits to these correctional centers to evaluate the learning environment and the programmes designed for rehabilitation purposes. Furthermore, the process of training and retraining correctional staff to proficiently facilitate art and other programmes will necessitate a considerable investment of time, resources, and expertise. These will be possible if we work closely with the university community and art/music departments, who will fill in the gap.

The severe overcrowding in Nigerian correctional centers presents immense challenges that stem from a shortage of staff and limited resources. There is urgent need for for the Government to build more spacious facilities and ensure improved administration of justice in court proceedings, with a focus on reducing the backlog of awaiting trials and ensuring the execution of sentences for those who have been condemned.

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