

VISUAL ARTS AND UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Universal Basic Education (U.B.E) which indeed is another mile stone in the history of formal education in Nigeria has been successfully launched in a number of States in Nigeria. The UBE was launched on September 30, 1999. The programme is a response by the Nigerian Government to the global effort to make education accessible to all. Unlike the 6334 system of education, the programme is aimed at equal opportunity for every child. This article investigated the place of Visual Arts in the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria to ensure its relevance in the new dispensation. It was revealed that the National Policy on Education provided that Visual Arts will be a non pre-vocational elective at the Junior Secondary School. This implies that, the subject may not qualify to receive equal attention and recognition as other core subjects such as, Mathematics and, English Language. It is also expected that facilities for teaching, supply of subject teachers, and suitable learning environment, would readily be provided in the case of core subjects. Lack of adequate infrastructures and equipment, short supply of teachers in public Schools in Edo State, lack of provision of art materials for instruction and experimentation by students were major challenges identified as facing the Visual Arts. These certainly are vital issues which the operators of the UBE programme must address, more especially as the Visual Arts are essentially studio-based and practical.

Keywords: Visual Arts; Universal Basic Education, Core, Infrastructures.

Introduction

The studio activity - based tradition of the Visual Arts often creates the erroneous impression in the minds of some people that the discipline does not go beyond drawing. This article will correct this erroneous impression. Apart from disabusing the minds of the less informed members of the society of these misconceptions of Visual Arts, effort will be made to establish the actual picture of the Visual Arts and identify the place of Visual Arts in the UBE scheme. The Universal Basic Education, though not a new concept in the history of Nigerian Education system is a mile stone in the history of formal Education particularly at the close of the last millennium. The UBE was formally launched on 30th September 1999 under the Obasanjo Democratic regime. It is important to note that the concept of basic education is not totally new in the history of education in Nigeria. Examples of such programmes are the Universal Primary Education (UPE) which was launched in 1976 with a view to inculcating numeracy and eradicate illiteracy. Obasanjo (2000) outlined the following UBE objectives

- (a) Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- (b) Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).
- (c) Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- (d) Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

He further stated that the programme was in keeping with the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Which include the educational objectives in section 18:

Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.

Government shall eradicate illiteracy; and to this, and when practicable provide; Free, Compulsory and Universal Primary Education. Free, Secondary Education. Free, University education; and Free, Adult Literacy Programme

The UBE therefore provides for a free and compulsory nine years programme of 6 years of Primary School and 3 years Junior Secondary education. Consequently, with the formal launching of the programme by the Federal Government, State Governments were expected to launch the UBE programme throughout the country. Various States for example have launched the UBE and have since taken off.

It is for this purpose that an inward look is important to ascertain the extent to which this new programme would affect the Visual Arts practice. And also need to find out if Visual Arts is recognized, taught and at what level, elective or core, and whether the nature and relevance of the subject are taken into consideration. It is hoped that by the time the aforementioned issues raised are addressed, the place of Visual Arts in the UBE programme would have been clarified.

In Edo State for example, it is also necessary to point out that, by implication, the Junior Secondary Schools have been transferred from the State Post - Primary Education Board to State UBE Board. This process involves movement of teachers' files, records, employment, transfers and salaries from State Post - Primary Education Boards to State UBE Board. As Obasanjo (1999) put it during the launching of the UBE programme in Sokoto, the UBE programme, though similar to the UPE scheme (which was equally free and Universal) in addition, the UBE was to be compulsory. Furthermore, that, UBE concerned all children in the age bracket of six 6 years and 15 years. It is clear also from the Obasanjo's declaration that while the programme is compulsory, and equally free, it goes without saying that Tuition fees and all forms of levies in the system are prohibited.

Status of the Visual Arts at the Junior Secondary School Level of Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education provided that Visual Arts will be a non pre-vocational elective at the Junior Secondary School. This implies that, the subject may not qualify to receive equal attention and recognition as other core subjects. For example, Mathematics and English Language. It is also expected that facilities for teaching, supply of subject teachers, and suitable learning environment, would readily be provided in the case of core subjects. To provide a more robust framework for the status of Visual Arts at the Junior Secondary level, the following sub-titles have been selected for discussion; The Nature of Visual Arts: Equipment, Infrastructure and Instructional Facilities and The Visual Arts Teacher and Materials.

The Nature of Visual Arts

For the purpose of clarity, a brief conceptualization of art would be necessary. Art generally has been defined by various scholars but in a rather similar way. Uzoagba (1991:26) defined Art as “a means of self expression”.

Emokpae (2001:4) similarly defined art as “the expression of one's inner mind with the use of materials in a visual way. While Wangboje (1989) projected art as both a process and product, involving manipulation of certain materials that results in producing an end result which becomes the product. Commenting on the unique nature of the Visual Arts, Ojo (2004) described the process of creativity as long and arduous, involving the expression of deep emotions. He further noted that the individual is a product of a reservoir of his experiences and acquired skills. He went on to add that the process involves the totality of the individual, his intellect, soul, culture, and spiritual being. He stressed that all these culminate in concrete forms. Visual Arts therefore is the aspect of art that could be referred to as Fine and Applied Arts. Fine Arts are; Drawing, Painting and Sculpture. They are fundamentally aesthetic, while the Applied Arts are: Graphics Design; Textile Design, Fashion Design, Ceramics and Metal Design, the Applied Arts being utilitarian. Emokpae (2001) and NERC UPE documents (1977), Adebayo (2004); Gude (2004).

Equipment, Infrastructure and Instructional Facilities

As earlier stated, the Visual Arts is largely studio-based. It is a discipline that requires specialized facilities for effective learning to take place. Facilities and equipment for teaching, according to Imogie (1999) include; classrooms; slide projector, computers, Learning carrels, audio visual equipment, such as tape

recorder, video recorder and television (monitor) Baike (1985) equally made a case for accommodation for the Visual Arts when he stressed that its unique nature of course offering requires specialized spaces and furniture arrangement. Availability of materials for teaching and learning, would therefore boost the morale of both the art teacher and student

The Visual Arts Teacher and Materials

“Teaching that does not promote learning makes as much sense as selling that does not promote buying”, is the view of Eisner (2002:67). Consequently, as a result of the nature of specialization in the arts, the calibre of teachers who should be engaged must be trained accordingly. In the past, it was fashionable for a West African School Certificate (WASC) or HSC holder who had interest in art to teach the subject in Primary and Secondary schools. Unfortunately, many schools where such volunteers were absent, the art students were left to sort out things themselves. These were common features in many schools in the late 1970's and early 1980's. The Visual Art teacher as an ideal teacher requires professional training. As Aigbomian and Iyamu (2001:108) state “the primary function of the teacher is to facilitate learning by various means” the effective teacher thus is one who is a facilitator and not a part of the problem of the learner (Imonikebe, 2010; Adebolujo, 2006);

Bel-gam (1998) sees the teacher as one who should master his subject, an “encyclopedia of his subject” and one who should master his subject. The Visual Arts teacher accordingly must be a master of the Visual Arts, and one who should be a master the subject. Thus, the Calibre of teachers who can perform this feat are those who have received professional training as teachers in the subject area. The Visual Arts teachers needed for the UBE programme must be men and women of excellent character and integrity who must have undergone formal training in the university in Art Education. These selected art teachers would have been sufficiently exposed to human psychology, different styles and methods of teaching the subject.

The type of courses taught often leaves the artist (learner) with a lot of freedom to manipulate his environment, which only a trained Visual Arts teacher can organize for the benefit of the learner. As Wangboje (1989) observed the uniqueness in art is the skillfulness in creating new things and solving artistic problems in an individual way. Art generally requires the exploration of new materials and technologies to create new forms of art. This was the view of Szekely (1988) that, creating new forms of art depends on the ability to explore new materials and technologies. Certainly the exploration of new materials is a solid foundation for originality. As Hadden (1999;48) rightly observed, “we can only make something new when we are at our optimum best”. Similar view was held by the Bureau of Labour Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (2012/2013); Diepeveen, & Laar, (1999). The morale and creative efficiency of the teacher are thus vital to the production of creative individuals.

Challenges Facing Visual Arts

Manifold (2009) observed that research in the field of Art Education is relatively new. To that extent, the challenges facing Visual Arts in the UBE must be viewed with all seriousness. This is against the backdrop of the role of Visual Arts in national development, in general and in the education system in particular. Art is a gateway to other disciplines, whose knowledge is required directly or indirectly in other disciplines. It is equally applied, supportive and sometimes a sine qua non to other professional areas. For instance, the knowledge of drawing traverses areas in the Sciences, Engineering, Medicine, Architecture, Psychiatric, Medicine and other disciplines. The same goes for the knowledge of colour and Design.

Most conspicuously, is the dominance of art in our day to day lives, for instance, the clothes we put on, curtains in our homes, offices, interiors decorations, car designs, packages of factory products, colours around us, household utensils (e.g. ceramics), jewelries, book covers and designs, calendars, newspapers, cards, industrial designs, trophies, medals, product designs and virtually everything around us is a product of art.

Adebayo (2004) outlined some functions of Visual Arts in society, noting that art is a medium of preservation and capturing events, uplifting and promotion of social, cultural and religious activities. He went further to add that art could be employed as a medium for fostering cultural understanding and capturing excesses of society.

Appraising the NPE, although Visual Arts was not specifically mentioned in the philosophy and goals of

Education in Nigeria, the broad goals of secondary education shall be to prepare the individual for a useful living within the society and Higher education. Section 1,9C stated further that “education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in response to societal needs and made progressively accessible to afford the individual a more diversified and flexible choice” while in No. 96 Government says “modern educational techniques shall be increasingly used and improved upon at all levels of the education system”. Under Secondary Education, for instance, promotion of art and provision of technical knowledge and vocational skills were specified in section 4, No. 20d and 20h. From the claims in the NPE and considering the role of Visual Arts in nation building as earlier enumerated, adequate attention needs to be given to the teaching and learning of the subject in schools. Such attention should be emphasized in the provision of instructional facilities, equipment, and materials needed.

Lack of adequate infrastructures and equipment is one challenge that is facing the teaching and learning of Visual Arts in schools. Talabi (1979) observed that the absence of rooms allocated for art teaching with specialized furniture in some schools. According to him, a well ventilated room should be made available to showcase children's work and reproductions. Talabi's observation is pertinent as it portrayed the realities of the period before the NPE began.

Recent studies in public Secondary Schools have shown that, the situation has not improved. Imonikebe (2003) revealed that public secondary schools across Edo State lack art studios. Art studios are required for optimum performance and effective teaching and learning of Visual Arts. In a situation where facilities such as Art studios are absent, Visual Arts will not have been given the proper recognition to be relevant in the UBE dispensation. Imonikebe went further to reveal that, Visual Arts teachers were in short supply in public Schools in Edo State. This, he attributed to the inability of the State Post-Post-Primary Education Board (SPEB) to recruit enough teachers. Another challenge facing the teaching and learning of Visual Arts in the UBE programme is that of the few Visual Arts teachers in the employ of SPEB, that are refusing posting to rural areas and worse still, absconding. It was also revealed that the few Visual Arts teachers are concentrated in major cities in Edo State. The problem of teacher supply thus is a challenge to the UBE programme which must be addressed promptly and aggressively bearing in mind the indispensable role of the teacher in the education process.

Provision of Art materials for instruction and experimentation by students is another big challenge. In a similar study conducted by Imonikebe (2005), It was clear that art materials are not accessible and therefore not available in schools. This certainly is another challenge which the operators of the UBE programme must address as Visual Arts are essentially studio-based, and practical. It is safe to conclude that the fundamental problem that has plagued the Visual Arts is the non- recognition of the subject as a core subject. Visual Arts (Fine Art) was grouped under the Non-prevocational electives. By implication therefore, only the core subjects are compulsory (NPE, 1989). The status of the discipline therefore explains why the subject is faced with all the challenges so far identified in this study. Usually, the needed attention cannot be forthcoming in a situation where the subject is not made compulsory, as funding, staffing, and students' participation would certainly suffer.

UBE-Disposition to Visual Arts

By the UBE compliant Visual Arts, the investigator is simply referring to the ideal situation expected in the teaching and learning of Visual Arts, the type of art programmes that are expected in the UBE regime and the wholesome discipline which will be functional and relevant in the UBE dispensation. Having said that, the focus will be on the way forward, the nature and peculiarity of the discipline and the challenges that have so far been pointed.

Recognizing Visual Arts as a Core Subject

The concept of Universal Education is not new in the history of education in Nigeria. Much as it is important to mobilize all stakeholders to ensure the success of the UBE programme, it is equally necessary for operators of the programme to accommodate useful ideas and prosecute same to present a UBE programme that will stand the test of time. As a result, efforts should be made to recognize Visual Arts as a core subject in the UBE programme and also at the Senior Secondary level. The on-going curriculum review by the National Educational Research Development Council. (NERDC) in Abuja is a welcome development. Interest groups in the Visual Arts as well as curriculum planners should make NERDC fully appreciate the unique role and usefulness of Visual Arts in nation building as earlier enumerated and

recognize the subject as core. This gesture will restore the much needed and long awaited attention by government which usually manifests in proper funding; staffing, supervision and promotion of the discipline. Besides, students will have no need to miss out, particularly the talented art students who for many years are forced to deflect to other careers where they never find satisfaction and fulfillment.

Instructional Facilities

A survey carried out in Edo State by Imonikebe (2004) revealed the state of infra-structural facilities such as studios, and suitable classrooms for teaching and learning Visual Arts. The study revealed their absence in addition to other art equipment such as: Donkeys, Tables, Easels, palettes slide projectors/computers for teacher Art History, and Computer Aided Design respectively, Kiln, Pivot Wheels for Modeling and throwing wheels, stools; spraying guns, screens for display of art works, cameras and films, iron vice; Guillotine, lightings, welding machine, Art books and Journals, Television; etc.

A host of other art materials were not also available in schools in the State. Materials such as Batik/Tie Dye, water and poster colors; acrylic colours; linoleum for printmaking; wood, cement, abrasives, lettering pens; aprons; Vanish, Yarn for weaving, sharp sand, paper gum; metal sheets for metal design, clay, chisels, silk for screen printing, Brushes; Pastels, turpentine, linseed oil, spatulas; cartridge papers, water colour papers; oil colours, printing ink; yarn for weaving, fixative and Bee wax.

From the findings it is clear that the production of professionals is not only capital-intensive but requires a lot of determination, commitment and sacrifice by all stakeholders to achieve the common goal. For example, in an ideal situation, a lot is needed to be put in place to ensure effective studio practice. As noted by Ononeme (2003) that there is need for health precautions to be taken amidst hazards in the profession. He observed that tools and materials used in the studio could inflict injuries and other forms of harm to the artist and went on to prescribe measures and antidotes for use in the studios.

By implication, the studios should be well equipped and properly furnished to specification, which should include first aid kits. The nature and peculiarity of the Visual Arts must be taken seriously to ensure that the subject is properly taught in the UBE programme. As noted by Baike (1985) Art requires longer hours of instructions, examination and supervision and has a sensitive nature which makes it distinct from other disciplines. Visual Arts should not be perceived as a theoretical subject that should end up at the cognitive domain. A conducive practical learning environment should be created to facilitate optimum performance by teachers and students in the UBE programme.

Consequently, the double-major status enjoyed by Visual Arts should be sustained. In the 6334 system, a double period is allotted for practical, while a separate single period is provided for theory. This brings the weekly periods to three. Furthermore, as a double-major subject, the Visual Arts teacher is not assigned to combine any other teaching subject with Visual Arts. The operators of the system should also resist the temptation of blocking Visual Arts with other subjects as this practice reduces the chances of students offering the subject.

The schools authorities should also ensure that, Visual Arts is not always the last subject for the day as students could be hungry and worn out at the end of the day. Government/the UBE Boards have a lot to do in resolving the crises plaguing the Visual Arts. Soge (2004) sued for Government's intervention in the sorry state of our public schools. That Government should encourage future teachers boost the standard of public schools to achieve steady development. Noting that such gesture would further encourage teachers and Government officials to patronize public schools by sending their children and wards to the schools. Soge's observation is crucial and pertinent not only that teachers play an indispensable role, in the learning situation but that public schools are the test tubes for the UBE experiment.

Conclusion

This article sought to ascertain the place of Visual Arts in the UBE programme in order to ensure its relevance for the future of the programme. The picture of the nature and peculiarity of the subject was painted to equip the relevant authorities particularly the UBE Boards with necessary information required to adequately appreciate the challenges facing the subject. Instructional facilities formed the hob on which the catalogue of challenges facing the discipline revolved. The study therefore revealed that, instructional facilities such as infra structures, equipment, art materials and instructional resources were not only inadequate but absent in public schools in Edo State.

Visual Arts teachers across the state were few with the result that Visual Arts was not being taught in a majority of schools in Edo State. The study however made it clear that the sorry state of the Visual Arts across the State was not unconnected with the status of the subject as a prevocational elective instead of a core subject which this article advocates. The author noted with dismay that in spite of the enormous role which Visual Arts plays in the society, it was not accorded a commensurate attention which should have manifested in proper funding, staffing, supervision and students' involvement. This assertion is in consonance with Adebayo (2004) when he expressed Government's negative attitude towards promotion of art in African Society. He went further to challenge Government to encourage and promote art in society. It is hoped that the UBE Board at the national level will take advantage of the findings in this study and reposition the Visual Arts in the UBE Programme.

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