

Achieving Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education in Nigeria: The Role of Fine Arts Education

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Abstract

This paper discusses art education extensively as a field of study that develops the creativity, craftsmanship and dexterity of an individual and how the acquisition of such knowledge makes a disabled but creative mind self-reliant and easily employable thereby eradicating unequity syndromes among our teeming youths. But unfortunately, this field of education suffers a glaring setback because of wrong notion people have about it which deters their interest. Furthermore, it clearly identifies and discuss the roles of fine and applied arts education in achieving inclusive and equitable quality education to all Nigerians. The paper concludes that utilization of Arts education will facilitate achievement of inclusive education in Nigeria. The paper also recommends that emphasis of art education should be channelled towards integrating knowledge of arts among inclusive settings.

Keywords: *Inclusive, Equitable, Quality, Education, Fine Art and Applied Arts*

Introduction

The fundamental principle of the inclusive education is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Lately, the necessity for inclusive early childhood education programme is becoming more real and stakeholders in the educational sector are demanding for inclusive education at all levels of education in Nigeria. However, a need for contemporary practice of inclusive is relevant and geared towards providing educational services to children with special needs and also providing this opportunity in an early stage in life is of utmost benefit to the child with or without disability (Akos, Bodang & Amwe, 2017). To achieve inclusive education in Nigeria, providers must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating

both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities (UNESCO, 1994).

Ajuwon (2008) makes it clear that, in recent years the debate about inclusive education has migrated from high-income countries like the United States and Canada to a low-income country like Nigeria, where the government policy on educating children and youth with disabilities amidst their peers without disabilities in ordinary schools has been adopted. Ajuwon further said there is a growing recognition that engaging students with disabilities in general education can provide them with the opportunity to learn in natural and stimulating settings, which may also lead to increased acceptance and appreciation

of differences. Thus, the debate continues among educators, local, state and federal policy makers, parents, and even people with disabilities in Nigeria regarding the efficacy of inclusion and the inevitable restructuring of general education that may need to occur to make learning meaningful in an inclusive visionary environment.

To achieve a new vision in transforming lives through education and recognizing the important roles of art education as a main driver of development and in achieving the other proposed agenda towards 2030, the sense of urgency to a single, renewed education agenda that is holistic, ambitious and aspirational, leaving no one behind must be religiously pursued. This new vision is fully captured and showcased by the relevant agencies so as to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all and its corresponding targets (World Education Forum, 2015).

Furthermore, quality education fosters creativity and knowledge, and this ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical, problem-solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills. Creativity is the translating of our unique gifts, talents and vision into an external reality that is new and useful. It is believed that creative qualities can be found in any form of human activity. We can be creative in almost anything; cooking, carpentry, playing football and even making love. Creativity is an invisible asset which when adequately utilized has the capacity of making an individual academically vibrant and when well harnessed by a nation ensures her

irreproachable quality education. Creativity has utmost relativity with Fine and Applied Arts, a field that is devoid of plagiarism.

Art is a human conception made manifest by the skilful use of a medium. Uzoagba (2003) opined that art signifies a doing, a making, a fashioning or putting together, which is accomplished by human skill. Besides, Ogunmor (1993) states that, “art is the ability and desire of man to improve upon the world by modifying and adding to nature.” It is also an innate endowment bestowed onto man which unfolds his creative ingenuity and ensures his comfortability in life. Fine and Applied Arts is a discipline that its immense benefit towards achieving inclusive and equitable quality education cannot be over emphasized. In view of the above, this paper highlighted the following concepts:

The Concept of Inclusive Education

As currently implemented in the industrialized world, inclusion or inclusive education can be interpreted as the philosophy and practice for educating students with disabilities in general education settings (Bryant, Smith, & Bryant, 2008; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Rogers, 1993; Salend, 2001). The practice anchors on the notion that every child should be an equally valued member of the school culture. In other words, children with disabilities benefit from learning in a regular classroom, while their peers without disabilities gain from being exposed to children with diverse characteristics, talents and temperaments. Lipsky and Gartner (1996) went further to define inclusive education as the provision of services to students with

disabilities, including those with severe impairments in general education classes, with the necessary support services and supplementary assistance for the child or the teacher to ensure the child success in terms of academic, behavioural and social life. It could also be seen as a place to prepare the special children to participate as a full student to acquire knowledge and skills to contribute to the development of the society through engaging in entrepreneurial practices (Ochai, 2011).

Nevertheless, the above definition by Ajuwon (2008) opined that there is a growing recognition that including students with disabilities in general education can provide them with the opportunity to learn in natural, stimulating settings, which may also lead to increased acceptance and appreciation of differences. Thus, the debate continues among educators, local, state and federal policy makers, parents, and even people with disabilities in Nigeria regarding the efficacy of inclusion and the inevitable restructuring of general education that will need to occur to make learning meaningful in an inclusive environment. The perception has been that the debate has resulted in pressure greater than ever before for most students with disabilities to access the general curriculum and attain the same standards as typical students.

In the words of Shaw (2009), inclusive education is all about the children coming together to learn in the same classroom, using materials appropriate to their various needs, and participating in the same lessons and recreation. In an inclusive school, children with disabilities do not study in separate classes; instead, the teaching methods, instructional aides,

textbooks, and the school environment are designed in such a way that girls and boys with a range of abilities and disabilities including physical, sensory, and intellectual and mobility impairments can be included in the same class. Shaw went further to say that, inclusive education includes all learners, but it may be interpreted differently according to the context. For example, it covers children excluded on the basis of language, gender, ethnicity, disability and other factors. The term inclusion captures in one word, an all-embracing societal ideology.

The Concept of Art Education

Art signifies the employment of one's creative ability in the formulation of new ideas which are demonstrated through the use of media. According to Ikpi (2014), Art is the creation of beautiful or thought-provoking products such as drawings, paintings, sculptures, music, dance, writings, movies, photographs, drama and fashion etc. Also, Aladenika in Ikpi sees Art as a symbol, an expression, a skill or ability. Furthermore, Art is absolutely necessary and unavoidable subject especially to a growing child considering its importance to the child's general growth. And these include Cultural awareness, Language development, motor skills, Visual learning, inventiveness, Decision making and Improved academic performance. On the other hand, according to Ocho (2002) education is a process through which man realizes his potentialities and uses same for self-fulfilment in the service of him and others. This realization of one's potentials does not come through dreaming. It manifests through formal and informal teaching and learning.

Based on this, education entails the activities of nurturing an individual which lead to the manifestation of his true self for the purpose of making him useful in the society. This is to say that education helps in bringing one out of one's shell so that one can function as a productive creature. Education is a sphere of life that any nation that admires development must not toy with. Encyclopaedia American (1995) defines education as any process by which individual gains knowledge, insight, develops attitude or skill. A nation's approach to education determines to a large extent the level of development such nation will witness. Education enlightens the citizens of a nation, reduces parasitic pattern of living and encourages self-reliance.

Based on the definition of art and education above, art education then designates the process through which the creative potentials, in an individual is revealed and developed which enables him to skilfully produce aesthetic and utilitarian objects with the use of media. These artistic objects produced by individuals that are knowledgeable in art make them economically viable. It makes them self-reliant and independent. It removes them from the legion of job seekers and eliminates unemployment in their lives.

According to Palmer in Ikpi (2016) define Arts Education as the training to develop individual's physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and moral capabilities, so as to realize his potentials as individual who participates and contributes to his society. Art Education as a field of study has ample branches which create rooms for the accommodation of various individuals so

long as the will, dedication and determination are developed in those individuals. These branches include Painting, Sculpture, Drawing, Graphics, Ceramic and Textiles. When adequate knowledge of any one of these areas is acquired by an individual, he is sure of contributing positively to welfare of himself and the development of the nation. These six branches are broadly classified into two; these are Fine and Applied Arts. Fine art is the area that produces works of art that perform aesthetic function while Applied art is the branch that creates works that perform utilitarian function. The branches that fall under fine art are Drawing, Painting and Sculpture while branches under Applied Art are: Graphics, Ceramics and Textiles.

Therefore, Fine and Applied Arts Education is the process of imparting into individuals the knowledge of effective dexterity, craftsmanship and creative reasoning. The proper development of the citizenry educationally from the cradle would be appropriately taken care of if the teaching and learning of Fine and Applied Arts Education is given adequate attention. Fine and Applied Arts Education is a discipline that has the ability of properly developing the psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains of every individual. This is to say that the production of works of art irreproachably trains a child's dexterity. Besides, no work of art is produced without effective mental reasoning. Hence, for the nation's educational sector to have the ability of producing self-reliant citizens as entrenched in the national policy of education, Fine and Applied Arts Education must not be relegated to the background.

Fine and Applied Arts have diverse ways of solving societal problems through its different branches. All the branches are very imperative for achieving quality and inclusive effective education for national development. According to Uzoagba (2002),

Fine and Applied Arts is the art of expressing, reproducing, interpreting and communicating nature as perceived, experienced and felt through painting, molding, carving and drawing patterns and figures out of human experiences, ideas, observation and imagination of things and life, it uses forms, lines, colours, textures and materials in an organized way.

The Concept of Equitable Education

The term equitable connotes fairness, impartiality, even-handed or something characterized by justice. Equitable education therefore means impartiality and fairness in the distribution of access to quality education. Johnson, James, Cummings, Jay *et. al* (2013) concur that, equitable education matters significantly especially to those living with one disability or the other. In education, the term equity refers to the principle of fairness, while it is often used interchangeably with the related principle of equality; equity encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programs, and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal. It has been said that “equity is the process; equality is the outcome,” given that equity is what is fair and just but may not necessarily be in the process of educating students, or what is applied, allocated, or distributed equally.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD (2012), viewed equity in education in many different ways. Building on the conceptual framework defined in the OECD Report No More Failures, equity in education can be seen through two dimensions: fairness and inclusion (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007). Equity as inclusion means ensuring that all students reach at least a basic minimum level of skills. Equitable education systems are fair and inclusively supporting their students to reach their learning potential without either formally or informally pre-setting barriers or lowering expectations. Equity as fairness implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not obstacles to educational success.

An equitable education system can redress the effect of broader social and economic inequalities. In the context of learning, it allows individuals to take full advantage of education and training irrespective of their background (Faubert, 2012; Field, Kuczera & Pont, 2007; Woessmann & Schütz, 2006). The highest performing education systems are those that combine equity with quality. They give all children opportunities for a good quality education.

Equity in education has two dimensions; the first is fairness, which basically means making sure those personal and social circumstances such as for gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential.

The second is inclusion, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all, these imply that

everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The two dimensions are closely intertwined: tackling school failure helps to overcome the effects of social deprivation which often causes school failure.

The Concept of Quality Education

Nigerians do not only have right to education, but the education must be qualitative. What does quality means in an educational setting? The term quality has various definitions when discussed in Education. Terms such as Efficiency, effectiveness, standard and quality have often been used interchangeably. Quality education has to do with the attainment of set standards; these standards are usually derived from societal aspirations to which the education system must conform, (Humphrey & Crawford, 2015). Quality education also means attainment of the highest or finest standard of education. Bamisaiye (1983) defined quality as “the sum of composite of the properties inherent in a material or product. Quality according to Babalola (2007) is most often defined as fitness to purpose in relation to the user and customer needs. He further explains that it can also be taken to mean that the product conforms to standards, specifications or requirements.

Quality education on its own can be seen as relative term because what constitute quality education vary from country to country based on their economic resources, value system, educational goals and philosophies among others. Quality education improves the quality of the work force by raising the levels of its skills and efficiency. Quality education gives a nation access to the

world’s body of knowledge, hence the adoption and adaptation of the reigning technology to specific environment is facilitated. By and large the general outcome of quality education is a progressive increase in productivity and efficiency.

Branches of Arts and their Roles in Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education

There are two broad branches of art, namely: Fine Art and Applied Arts. Fine art means the art of beauty. Ornamentation is the sole reason behind the production of fine art works. The sub-branches obtainable in fine art are: drawing, painting and sculpture.

Drawing

Drawing is very vital in inclusive and quality Education in the world today. Apart from its decorative value, it is the basic area of art that is employed while developing a child’s psychomotor domain. Besides, most of our school subject topics could have been so vague to the students without the aid of drawing. Drawing illustrations help in elucidating the facts involved in a lesson. Consequently, most qualified trained teachers choose drawing as one of the most effective instructional materials. Apart from the role of drawing for aesthetic purposes, most art teachers made drawing in facilitating teaching and learning especially in an inclusive classroom setting. This has gone a long way towards projecting the innate artistic quality in them thereby infusing in them the feelings of equality among their contemporaries.

Painting

Painting is another branch of fine art that plays significant role in the achievement of inclusive and equitable quality education among the children with disabilities, thereby making them self-reliant and also serves as an instructional aide during teaching and learning. As interesting as playing around with different shades of colour is to a child in an attempt to showcase his/her talent, colour remain one of the most vital material used by a painter to produce an artistic piece that can speak to individual consciousness, the disables inclusive. Colour does not only serve as a means of income generation to the inclusive painters but also performs the duties of cultural preservation and gives a facelift to most important places. Artists like Prof. Uche Okeke of blessed memory, though not disabled but preserved our vital cultural heritage through his invented Uli painting.

Sculpture

The third area of fine art which is sculpture also plays tremendous role in achieving equitable and quality education in Nigeria. Sculpture is another area like painting that is used effectively as a means of cultural preservation. Art indeed is the mirror through which the histories of a people is preserved and today learn even by the physically challenged students. No wonder the great Benin Kingdom used it in documenting all the activities that took place in their area especially in Oba's palace. Besides, strategic places in most big cities of Nigeria are beautifully decorated with environmental sculptures. For instance, when one takes a ride around Enugu, one

has enough to feed one's eyes. The works in Enugu were not only produced to suit the environment as decorative value, but also as representation of our people's activities, past experiences and events. In fact, without art, there is no tangible history. The written documented books cannot be compared with art as far as preservation of our culture is concerned because seeing is believes. It is therefore not surprising the huge amount of money spent during FESTAC 1977, just to defend before the entire world that the black race had and has reputable culture. History is a very vital tool in achieving quality education in Nigeria, because a nation must clearly understand where they are coming from and where they are, before successfully planning where they are going. Art performs this duty effectively through sculpture, painting and other relevant branches.

Applied art is the branch of art that is created for the sole purpose of solving a definite utilitarian function. This is to say that works of applied art are not limited to ornamentation only. They are not art for art sake. In fact, today's world cannot exist in absence of applied art. How can men go about their daily duties in absolute nudity? How possible is the existence of the world today without lettering? Strictly speaking, development will be pushed back to the pre-historic era should the world encounter the above situations.

There are three branches of applied art, namely; Textiles, Graphics and Ceramics. All these branches are very vital as far as inclusive and quality education is concerned.

Textile

Textile art is the utilization of cloth to express an intellectual concept and/or

aesthetic design. There are a variety of ways this can be achieved. Textile artists may be engaged in the actual production of the cloth itself, as with weaving and felting. Quilting, another form of textile art, is the process of stitching together already produced patches of fabric and then stitching with thread over top to create an overlying design and texture. All of these special skills towards the production of textile can be employed by the inclusive students in order to be distinguished for exploit in achieving equitable quality education in Nigeria today. Besides, textile designing has created self-employment for many Nigerians who have chosen it as their career. Textile designing is a very lucrative branch of art in Nigeria because of our fashion consciousness. Undoubtedly, if Nigerian government encourages her citizenry to go into textile production especially the disabled, as that will go a long way towards the reduction of inequality activities that are bedeviling our educational system and affecting the nation at large.

Graphics

Graphics is the art of creating interpretable symbols. It makes use of pictorial and typographical images in the expression of its information. All the written documentation as we know them today is a unique graphic creation. Graphics employs lettering and image powers in the production of bill boards, sign posts, banners, newspapers, magazine captions and so on. In fact, graphics helps tremendously in information dissemination and advertisement of goods. These are indispensable factors in achieving

inclusive and equitable education among this special category of artists.

Ceramics

Ceramics is the art of wares production. It is the branch of art that is responsible for the production of plates, cups, jugs, mugs, tiles, flower vases, flower pots, to mention but a few. These ceramic products are on high demand in Nigeria. Based on the above fact, ceramics is a very lucrative branch of art that ensures the economic empowerment of ceramists. If this art is embraced by our teeming disabled youths, it will indisputably bring about achievement and place them on an equitable level with their able bodies contemporary and as a result alleviate their neglect and poverty.

The State of Art Education in our Schools Structure

Art is absolutely necessary and unavoidable subject especially to a growing child considering its imperatives to the child's general growth. And these include Cultural awareness, Language development, motor skills, Visual learning, inventiveness, Decision making and Improved academic performance etc. As unavoidable as it is very sympathetic to know that Art Education in Schools, Colleges and Universities are in a very deplorable condition in the nation. This sympathetic situation of art education is coursed by ignorance and misunderstanding of the said subject by both the literate and illiterate ones in the society. No one wants to be recognized as an artist and when you attempt to boldly introduce yourself as an artist you will get such a cold reply as "so you can draw". You will be looked upon as a person that cannot make use of his brain. Our society

sees an artist as nobody and because of it many do not want to offer art as a course. Art is only partially done in primary and secondary school levels; it becomes a field left entirely to those that are not academically sound. What a misconception! Even at the primary level, which only one aspect of it is done compulsorily (i.e. drawing) it is not being offered for the sake of art as a subject, but as a means of developing the psychomotor skills of the pupils. This attitude towards art has placed art in extinct rather than vibrant condition which should be accorded to it.

Consequently, this negligence towards art education has made most educated people take the place of cars without fuel which unmistakably cannot function. This assertion is true, Talabi (1990) stated that, art provides the mirror through which all other disciplines of life are seen clearly. It is a practical oriented course that is useful in all educational ramifications and still our society does not value it. Even those that read language courses need the knowledge of art for clear illustration of some certain points during teaching. But for the fact that such knowledge lacks in them they would always leave their students in confused state when oral explanation cannot solve the problem. What of those in science that would never do without illustration. Unfortunately, this class of people would always be proud to claim that they are not good in drawing. They would go to any extreme looking for somebody to salvage their weakness during examination not considering how useless they will become after graduation. What a blind pattern of thought! Strictly speaking, science and technology cannot flourish in isolation of art education.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following:

- a. The government and relevant agencies should ensure that majority of educated Nigerian acquire the preliminary skills needed in art education before majoring in their various disciplines as this will serve as a base where they can anchor themselves after graduation when employment is not forthcoming and make their lives enviable to all citizens.
- b. The emphasis must be on integrating the knowledge of arts and improving the quality of the educational network and generating a synergistic pattern that will be repeated and valued by all those committed in a bid to embrace inclusiveness and maintaining an effective, quality and equitable education in Nigeria.
- c. Most people do not want to be recognized as artists because of the sympathetic situation of art education which was caused by ignorance and misunderstanding by the generality of people in the society, to this effect government must make frantic effort to create awareness for better understanding and interest for art.
- d. Lastly, the paper recommends that emphasis of art education should be channelled towards integrating knowledge of arts among inclusive settings.

Conclusion

Inclusive education remains the inevitable tool in achieving equitable

quality in Fine and applied arts education. No wonder the utilization of Arts education among the disables indeed facilitate the achievement and awareness of inclusive education in Nigeria, as this has drastically reduced the number of disables depending on the government. As this can only be achieved through Fine and applied art as a primary vocation to all Nigerian. In conclusion, the acquisition of such knowledge makes a disabled but creative mind self-reliant and easily employable thereby eradicating unequity syndrome among the youth. Though such knowledge is still but struggling to survive as a result of the glaring setbacks because of negative perspectives towards arts. The paper concludes that utilization of Arts education will facilitate achievement of inclusive education in Nigeria.

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