Politics without Art Education: The Nigerian Situation

Politics determines what project a country embarks upon for the benefit of citizens of a particular country. It is also expected that political actors and policy makers would have been ideologically groomed to know that art education is the bedrock of cultural awareness of her citizen and this would eventually reflect in developmental project that would benefit the citizens. Art education is not given prominence and attention at the primary and secondary education levels in Nigeria due to factors of misplacement of priority. This paper therefore intends to document the attitude of decision makers towards art education in Nigeria and why the art education is not given the attention it deserves despite the abundance of creativity in Nigeria. Creativity that abounds in Nigeria is without conscious institutional support and art education eventually suffers negative attitude. The paper also intends to do a comparative analysis between Nigeria and other country like Ghana where art education is given institutional support. This paper believes that politics of recognition of art education would set the tone for proper scientific and technological direction which Nigeria is currently lacking.
Introduction
For any nation to be culturally influential, its art education needs to be very strong in order to penetrate other areas of human endeavour - be it science, technology and social sciences. Politics can be simply defined as ideas and activities relating to gaining and using power in a country while art education is the area of study or learning that is based upon visual and tangible arts that include drawing, painting, sculpture, pottery, weaving fabrics and design applied to more practical fields such as commercial graphics and home furnishing photography, video, film, design and computer/digital art. The study of art education is to instill inseparable artistic and aesthetic experience and learning among students and pupils. Art education develops creativity among youth and this manifest in other areas of development. The Nigerian educational system has not been stable since its operators are also not stable and this has a negative effect on art education where little attention is paid to it at the primary and secondary school levels. Although, Nigeria has policy on Education which is supposed to be a guide to school administrators and operators, its operation has not been successful. To the educational policy in Nigeria gives priority to science on paper but it is ironical that more arts and social science students enroll for university matriculation examination. Despite the enrolment of more arts students, only few art education students deliberately or consciously enroll to study visual art at tertiary level.

The current system being operated in Nigerian educational system is called 6-3-3-3-4 where a pupil is expected to spend six years in primary school, 3 years in junior secondary school, 3 years in senior secondary school and 4 years in the university or related tertiary institution. Of interest is the 6 years in the primary school where pupil is expected to be taught most subjects including creative arts – fine art, music and drama/theatre.

In some instances, a teacher is employed to teach creative arts without minding his or her specialization and in most cases visual art is taught by theatre or music experts and the implication is that a child who has flair for creative art is encouraged to follow the specialization of the teacher teaching him or her. Visual art is seldom given serious attention because few visual art
teachers are available and the subject exists, the facilities like studios and teaching materials are not available.

**Place of Art in Education**

It is appropriate here to discuss the place of art in education. Art is the organization of otherwise chaotic elements into certain shapes and forms for aesthetic purposes. There are three key words that art has promoted and these include organisation, elements and aesthetic. To organise is to put together or arrange in order, elements that go into the making of a thing using the learnt-up or mastered way of organizing these elements. Organisation of elements can achieve a shape or form of a thing so desired. It may be to create a new form or shape of thing which requires a skill – a high standard of doing a thing, backed by the knowledge of how that thing is done. Art also organises or put together the elements such as line, texture, form or shape, colour etc which are in chaotic form – not arranged or unorganized. Art organises like foot steps to get a dance colours on canvas to get a picture or pieces of wood to get a chair, clothes and colours of clothing on our bodies in dressing etc. The ability to select and to arrange and to achieve some satisfaction is promoted by art. Art also promotes aesthetic in order to have an appealing, pleasing or satisfying effect that is beautiful.

According to Akpaide (2006):

> it is difficult to think of organizing elements to get the desired beautiful effect without knowing what to bring in, what to consider, what is lacking or even having the spirit to rationally dismantle in order to properly organise to get the desired beautiful effect.

One’s sense of appreciation of work is richer if one has some knowledge or experience of the technical processes involved in doing that work which art education promotes.

It is interesting to note that art education was introduced into the school curriculum around 1923 single handedly by Aina Onabolu (1882 – 1963) in Lagos before it spread to other parts of Nigeria. As corroborated by Akpaide
(2006) “it was a one-man effort and government was not interested as the only type of education necessary at the time was some knowledge of reading, writing and a little arithmetic for jobs as clerks and interpreters during the colonial period. Could this have been responsible for low attention given art education in Nigeria? Nigerians are highly creative people both in the traditional era and modern time but this creativity has not been met with serious policy operation and institutional support. Akpaide argues that owing to acculturation, Nigerian men and women are developing higher aesthetic tastes even without aesthetic education. What that mean is that Nigerians complain of Made-in-Nigeria products and prefer foreign goods. The phrase “colonial mentality” is usually used to describe our attitude to foreign products at the expense of our own because no serious focus is placed on art education.

There is no gainsaying in the fact that ideological, cultural and art education would have served as impetus to genuine development. But because Nigeria’s politics is not based on conscious and ideological development – driven by the operators of governance, we most times rely on foreign leaders to dictate development Nigerian people need. And because development can be transferred from outside the country, self effort and in-born creativity that the country is blessed with is treated with levity as most of our schools are not equipped to meet the challenges of modern day.

**Government attitude to art education**

The attitude of government officials and policy makers on education can be summed up as a “fire brigade approach”. Despite the fact that they know and enjoy the end products of art, they seldom finance education generally not to talk of art education which to many of them it is just drawing and the attitude is that they do not have to spend on that. The UNESCO’s recommendation of 26% of annual budget to be spent on education has never been met half way and this has overwhelming effect on art education in Nigeria. By the time the little percentage released is spent on other subjects, little or nothing is left for art education.
Instead of a well planned educational program for art right from primary through secondary to tertiary levels, the government officials prefer to organise art activities at any slight opportunities if it would add to the cultural and aesthetic value of the event and as soon as such programmes are completed, the students, teachers and artists are left in the cold. Nigerian government has not promoted art education to the level it deserves. According to Lawal (2006) “inspite of the ebullient appreciation of traditional African art in Europe and America and the crucial role it played in the birth of modern Euro-American Art, the teaching of traditional art was largely ignored in Nigerian schools most of which were owned by missionaries who associated traditional art with paganism.”

To worsen the situation, some of our “born-again” politicians never see anything good in creative works that depict culture and some of them still see such works as “demonic”. What an irony! If people that are constitutionally saddled with responsibility of promoting indigenous culture and art have this attitude then the future of art education is black. Azeez (2007) posits that “our art is not just for entertaining foreigners and tourists, it should be ideologically and psychologically sunk into our psyche, that, it is our common cultural heritage that has made us distinct from other cultures and it is only art education that brings such consciousness in us if its curriculum content is implemented right from the primary, through secondary to tertiary levels.

To achieve this, one would agree with Crowder (2006) when he says: 

*Despite that so many graduates of Fine Art programmes go into teaching in secondary schools, it appears that in very few of these schools are Nigerian children introduced systematically to their artistic heritage, both past and present. Art should be a compulsory subject in all secondary schools even if it is not to be taken as a school certificate subject on the ground that a proper education should include appreciation of both one’s past and present cultural heritage. Preparation of undergraduate planning to teach art in secondary school should place special emphasis on the teaching of the history of Nigerian art in*
particular and African art in general. Textbooks suitable for children preparing for school certificate should be published on both Nigeria’s pre-colonial artistic heritage and the work of its contemporary artists.

Nigeria’s educational curriculum has not overcome such simple ideological commitment that would have reshaped her cultural outlook even beyond the shores of Nigeria despite the abundance of creative minds in it.

**Challenges of Art Education**

Other challenges being faced by art education in Nigeria secondary schools especially include:

- Lack of enough time on the Time-table
- Art teachers are sometimes asked to combine art teaching with other subjects in order to get them “busy”
- Art classrooms and studios are not available especially at the public schools.
- Subject combination discourages students who have flair for science to combine art with it.
- Low funding of art materials and equipment
- Lack of job satisfaction by the art teacher and this makes Okeke (2006) to say that “there is indication too that artists / art teachers’ conscience is disturbed by unfulfilled dreams of greatness.
- Research grants and other opportunities that can develop art educators and teachers career are limited if available at all. There is usual “mimicking” of art being capital intensive and there are “better” subjects that need attention.

**Nigeria – Ghana: A comparative analysis**

It is very apt here to do a comparative analysis between Nigeria and Ghana because of their related colonial experiences from Britain. Although Ghana gained political independence in 1957, Nigeria got her own independence in 1960. The educational policy of Ghana is not very far from Nigeria’s. The two countries operate 6-3-3-4 system of education that was explained earlier in
this discourse. Despite some similarities, Ghana places more emphasis on technical and practical skill acquisition whereas Nigeria is more theoretical even in her science subjects. While Nigeria has more resources than Ghana because of the former’s oil discovery and exploration, Ghana spends more on education than Nigeria and its political system is more stable than that of Nigeria. Although more creative artists abound in Nigeria, more attention is given to artists in Ghana than Nigeria, as more facilities are available to Ghanaian artists than Nigeria’s. Nigerian artists are on their own as one cannot see through length and breadth of Nigeria where artists village or centre is consciously created with modern infrastructure for artists where as there are government supported trade / craft centres in Ghana.

**Conclusion**

While it is true that not only art education is affected with this negative attitude to creativity in Nigeria, art education is hard hit because of lack of appreciation of connect between art and human development and discovery which other advanced nations have consciously developed. One hopes that if this type of world conference on Art Education is hosted in Africa and especially in Nigeria, there may be some array of hope which can be appropriated by policy makers, art educators and teacher to reposition the discipline of art education in national development. It is equally hoped that in understanding the place of art, and as Azeez (2009) suggests that International agencies such as UNESCO should make support grants available to Nigerian schools for the purpose of researching and documenting more on their visual culture. May be this would influence Nigerian policy makers to realize the importance of art education the more.
References


