Visual Arts Practice: A Remedy for Unemployment and Youth Restiveness

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Abstract

Visual art practice has inherent capacity to mitigate the heightening negative impact of unemployment as it can lead to job creation when harnessed. This paper highlights the hypothetical gains of Visual arts as a creative and skill-based discipline. The paper outlined the discus appraising the role of visual arts as a practice alongside the challenge of youth restiveness in the face of visual arts' economic benefits. It more so, evaluated the disciplines in visual arts and concludes that this practice underscores skilled opportunities which can drive the economic development of any nation as well as keep citizens engaged enough to not be idle tools for negative vices. Finally, this article recommends the sustained investment into vocational training centers to deepen engagement in visual arts practice for national development.

Key word: Visual arts, impact, Creative & Skill-based Discipline, Economic Benefits

Introduction

In the early 70's and 80's in Nigeria, anyone who had either college, polytechnic or university certificate was sure of securing one form of paid job or the other. At that time, employers plainly would just march into the institutions to shop for middle level manpower by placing adverts in several schools and faculties for various vacant positions (Galadima, 2017). Today, the story is quite different owing to various factors that have militated against our economy. Often times, it is the case of "who you know" and "give and take" syndromes to get employment (Akwashiki, 2013). Nevertheless, as bad as this situation appears, people with various skills and creative minds, especially in the field of visual arts, are able to find ways to scale through these hurdles of economic depression which has brought about untold loss of jobs, unemployment and poverty to many families.

Nigeria's unemployment rate stagers at about 25% of her population (Omoh, 2014). This fundamental threat to the economy does not portray positive growth for any nation but threatens patriotism as well as the citizen's sense of responsibility.

Visual arts according to Popova (2012) involve a wide array of media, tools and processes that includes drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and photography. There are, however, many other areas that fall entirely or partially within the visual arts, ranging from design areas such as architecture and the built environment, fiber and clothing to the folk arts and from crafts to video animation. Ogumor (2012) views visual arts as a set of skilled practices relating to technical and vocational skills, trade, crafts as well as acquired expertise. In this regard, visual art practices expose one to lifetime skills that will make them employed and empowered. With skills in visual art practices, entrepreneurial engagements will be activated and youth will be well placed to have something doing towards self-sustenance, thereby plugging the unemployment gap and nipping restiveness.

Furthermore, Enweremadu (2018) pointed out that the hardship and sufferings caused by unemployment are predisposing factors which bring about youth restiveness as well as increase in cases of armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, ritual killing among other vices. Furthermore, Asuni (2014) noted that when youths are idle, they become vulnerable and easily influenced by politicians as thugs used to perpetuate negative electioneering purposes. Worrisome is the fact that some of these youths go into drug peddling, which obviously influences them negatively. Human Rights Watch (2015) noted that 'drug abuse' is becoming a pervasive problem and it is directly responsible for the level of armed robbery, kidnapping and restiveness being experienced in Nigeria today.

Appraising the role of visual arts

Stevenson (2010) has opined that Art is the highest form of human expression and a reflection of the society that it creates. Thus, creativity in fine and applied arts portrays the ability to create any object in its finest form. Although, the layman's view of art is that, it entails merely drawing or painting with no knowledge that it goes beyond that. Hornsby (2010) states that one creative role of art is the use of imagination as a skill to create objects expressing ideas or feelings particularly in

drawing, painting or sculpture. In the same way, Oladumiye, *et al.,* (2012) in Onyeyela, (2023) sees art in school curriculum as that which can be used as a major transformational tool and a formidable instrument for socio-economic empowerment, reconstruction and creativity

Visual Art Practices and Youth Restiveness

Issues of youth restiveness are contemporary matters in the present day Nigeria. Youth restiveness resulting to crimes and insecurity has become more pressing now, more than ever as it affects safety of lives and properties. Adeyemo (2014) laments the unemployment proportion of all school leavers as now being very rampart, and that this has contributed to the high incidence of youth restiveness and various types of crime witnessed in the country today.

This writer though subscribes to the position of Eme's description of restiveness and the contributing factors responsible for recurring unrest in Nigeria but he is mainly interested in the economic-based youth restiveness which he sees as the poverty induced catalyst that makes people to lose their sense of reasoning and thus become belligerent. To further support this position, Adeyeye (2012) posits that:

> …the root of most social problems such as youth restiveness is economic discontent when people cannot get daily bread, have no hope for shelter, they will have no hope of a future neither for themselves, nor for their children or loved ones. This condition predisposes them to negative vices. This can be traced to active actors used in perpetuating violence in petroleum pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram in the north and indeed accounts for cases of kidnapping for ransom and ritual killings. A critical evaluation of these agents will reveal a common trend of hopelessness, lack of access to employment as well as skills required to navigate life itself.

The revelation from National Planning Commission (NPC) in Adeyemo (2014) further validates the above opinion that, 'although Nigeria is rich in natural and human resources, 7 out of every 10 Nigerians live on less than US$1 a day'. This further suggests that 'above two-thirds of Nigerians are poor, despite living in a

country with vast potential wealth.' All these instances largely contribute to the menaces of youth restiveness leading to indiscriminate killings, kidnappings, vandalism, bombings and robbery, just to mention a few.

Visual arts therefore, are potent forces that can decrease this wave of confrontation by reaching out to the general public with informative displays of adverse effects of youth restiveness and other crimes on both the perpetrators and the community at large (Echeta, 2011). Visual arts increase awareness and refresh anti-crime messages for those who may have heard but forgotten them.

There is the need to promote skills of youths in visual Arts: painting, ceramics, textiles, Graphic designs, and sculpture (Enamhe & Echeta, 2018). Each of the units mentioned have different areas where students can be exposed to creative concepts which can be used for self-development. Examples are: Tie and Dye, batik, embroidery, appliqué (both hand and machine) tailoring, printing, engraving, typography, photography illustration, book design, moulding, hand building, throwing, construction, tiling, carving, welding etc (Dashen and Nyohom, 2012).

Training in the visual Arts empowers students with skills and they develop constructive mental ability that will discourage them into any hostile acts. Dashen and Nyohom (2012) posited that visual art practices provides certain useful qualities in identifying a life occupation in the world of painting, ceramics, textiles, Graphic designs, and sculpture. Visual art is the answer to empower restive youths that roam about without doing any meaningful work in the society today. Visual art practices can reduce youth restiveness through the following specific social benefits as outlined by (Enamhe and Umana, 2013):

Visual arts and its economic benefits

- Through visual arts development, hands-on skills in the use of materials, experimentation, manipulation and practice can be learnt.
- It can provide gainful engagement to which will lessen idle time.
- Visual art will make the youths to become creative in almost all fields of visual art practices and its endeavor.

- Visual art practices will build confident individuals with sense of self-worth presentation of ideas using visual language.

Specializations in visual arts

The specialized areas in visual arts that can provide opportunities for youth employment and the reduction in youth restiveness according to Ojie (2016) are as follows:

Graphics: This is an aspect of visual art that deal with the production of designs that facilitates visual communication. It deals with production of logos, posters, hand bills, flairs, greeting cards, book covers, billboards, printing of various types of banners. All these are for the purpose of communications. Each of these areas of visual art is money making spinning venture in Nigeria if properly harnessed. Well trained graphics artists' can be employed, be self-reliant as well as become an employer of labour. Thus empowering youths in this field of study will enhance economic growth and development.

Painting: This aspect of visual art is a process of coating a surface with coloured pigments or materials with a result. This is a skill-oriented vocation and can be a high means of sustenance for youths who desire and practice it (Odey et al., 2015). It is also noted that there are many genus in painting, which one can be harnessed to make a living, and these include; landscaping, still life, life as figurative composition and abstraction. Youths that equip themselves with skills in painting would not lack; and such individual would contribute massively to the development of his or her nation. Portrait painting is another area with high patronage and prospects of empowerment since it involves the painting recognizable human beings, it easily attracts monetary rewards. Painting on unusual materials like shirts, trousers, shelves, wardrobes, curtain rails etc. are not common in Nigeria; therefore, such new venture would be economically viable if youths think in that direction.

Sculpture: This is part of visual art that deals with forms and exists in three dimensions. It also means to sculpt from a solid mass. The availability of materials for this does not pose a problem since most them such as clay, cement, metal, metal scraps, glass, bronze, brass etc. are readily available in the local markets.

Sculptures are very viable area in the visual arts that is capable of creating jobs for the teaming youths roaming the streets in search for white-collar jobs, which are not readily available.

Ceramics: This is an aspect of visual art that refers to all products made of clay, hardened and glazed by heat treatment through the firing process. Ceramics comprises such varied products like tiles, porcelain wears, vases, dinning sets, goblets, jugs, ceramic conductors, etc. The economic viability of ceramics due to its utilitarian nature makes it highly recommended for adoption as a vehicle for economic empowerment of the youths in Nigeria. It is this strategic economic viability of ceramics that informs the advocacy for the establishment of ceramics industries as a means of youth empowerment. Nworie and Okolie (2014) maintains that this skill area can be harnessed if most of the raw materials are locally available and setting up small scale ceramics/ pottery industry is possible.

Textile design: This is about creative decoration of fabrics and other allied products for clothing, drapes and furniture. The decoration may take the form of dying, printing, painting, embroidery, stitching, appliqué, etc. Clothing is one of basic necessities of life besides food and shelter. The fact that every human being; irrespective of class, race, creed or colour needs clothing, make textile design an important means for sustainable economic growth and development.

Conclusion

In a society with scarce job opportunities, like Nigeria, which has accelerated the incidence of youth restiveness, visual art which is an integral part of functional skill education, is needed for self-reliance. Thus, if visual arts are truly embraced and pursued in Nigerian educational system as well as the continued training of the teeming youths in progressive areas of the arts, it will not only check the rising unemployment rate and youth restiveness but promote human capacity building and self-reliance due to its inherent skills and dexterities.

Similarly, visual art could be used as a strategic instrument for alleviation of unemployment and youth restiveness which is also a strategic tool for economic development. If visual arts are given the attention it deserves; and students motivated largely to enroll to study the course in Nigerian institutions, the youths

in Nigeria will become self-employed and also become employers of labour, capable of contributing to economic growth and development.

Recommendations

Going by the findings of this paper, the following recommendations, among others, are proffered for the way forward:

- Government at all levels should embrace efficient policies and focus on this creative economy, to positively impact the lives of the people.
- Government investment into training of vocational and technical centers should be sustained with the provision of adequate funding and starter packages for grandaunts' of the training centers.
- There should be sincerity of purpose from trainees as well as adequate supervision by authorities to ensure trainees continue in the practice they were trained in.

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