

EMPOWERING NIGERIAN WOMEN THROUGH VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION AS A FORUM FOR SUSTAINABLE SKILLS ACQUISITION AND CHARACTER BUILDING

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Abstract

This study delves into the concept of education, empowerment and character building. It discusses the fate of women especially amongst less educated where they are treated as mere house wives and thus relegated to the dust. Some women are in poverty-trap that they resort to nasty dirty business for survival. The paper also briefly lists some attempts made by governments to relieve gender inequality in Nigeria and beyond. It further briefly discusses the sources of empowerment for women which include: education, entrepreneurial studies for acquisition of skills, and summits for women and women meetings. Much attempt has also been made in this paper to x-ray the place of Visual art self-sustainable skills which can change the fate of women if acquired and empowered in paid jobs or as self-employed women artist, that is, as an entrepreneur. It also highlights various life-sustaining practical skills and technical know-how in visual arts which if acquired and developed, will make the beneficiary self-dependent. These also will lead to the development of some desirable behaviours such as tolerance, endurance, patience, honesty, hard work, courtesy, accessibility, carefulness, observance and others. The paper finally proffered the steps to take in order to help develop, realize and harness the potentials in women through Visual Arts for the growth and development of our nation, Nigeria.

Introduction

The problem of women is age-long and deep rooted from creation of Adam and Eve, his subordinate, according to Christian religion. And the first solution is empowerment of women through provision of education to every woman world over. Education forms the bedrock for effective growth and development of any nation "it is a major instrument of change and an instrument for effective national development" (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004).

Education is wings for progress of human beings. It helps the individual to attain intellectual, physical and spiritual or emotional progress Ebite (2002). According to Nwadiani (2004) "Education is constant transmission of ideas and values for the development of the whole man in relation to the dynamic need of any particular society." Education is thus the foremost empowerment for any person especially

women for their emancipation.

Empowerment via education exposes women to light. It helps them to identify their talents and potentials and use them for their survival. According to Longwe (1997), cited in Medel Anonuevo (1997) "Empowerment involves the transformation and collective action by women to discard the patriarchal belief and attitudes they have learnt in the school women are taught to accept the naturalness of male domination". The empowerment of women is so essential that even a sentence by Advanced Learner's Dictionary reads: "The movement actively empowered women and gave them confidence in themselves". Permit me to say that, empowerment in this paper means authority, encouragement and impetus given to women to have confidence in themselves, develop and harness their talents and potentials endowed in them. This will make them

develop the knowledge, skills and technical know-how they have acquired for the improvement of their lives and character. By the empowerment, the women's subdued commendable characters are exposed for use, while the poor attitudes are suppressed and may gradually be displaced for better ones. Character building and development follow suit the use of developed skills and knowledge through education. Intelligence plus character is the goal of true education....., education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual” Odo and Odo (2013). Character is further defined by the Advanced Learner's Dictionary as “All the qualities and features that make a person, group of people and places different from others.” Character building is meant to improve somebody's good qualities. Education thus makes any woman who acquires it to drop her character defects.

The Fate of Women in Nigeria in the Years Past

The main problem of women in Nigeria and world-over is gender inequality. Many years past, in Igbo land, some parents, especially fathers, hesitated to spend on their female children's education because they were given out for marriage to another family and thus they felt they might not harness and enjoy the benefits of their education. To this, the female children however, with heavy hearts had no alternative than to accept the ill-fated decision against their destiny in complete obedience. In reference to such previous situation of women, Ikpenwa (2005) observed that there is discrimination against female children's

education in favour of male's education in Nigeria, especially in Igbo. However, today the reverse is the case due to empowerment women get from education as more females are in the higher institutions than males. In those days, the economic and financial delimita of those women and even some of our today's women who are still totally dependent on their husbands for their livelihood is better heard than experienced. In Nigeria as in other developing countries, the situation is even much worse, Uzoezie (2015)

In the past, in most African countries, cultural and/or traditional practices subdued women and denied most of them education which crippled them financially, politically, socially, mentally and psychologically and thus their potentials which would have contributed to personal, societal and national building were not harnessed fully. Nmezi (2010) noted that in the past women had on the average less education than men, even though they are endowed with numerous gifts such as perseverance and strength which are essential ingredients for nation building.

Women sometimes are maltreated by their husbands and sometimes the husbands' mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers may join where the husbands lean on their sides. A woman may also experience violence in various ways and degrees, such as beating by her spouse, physical suppression, use of abusive languages, threats of murder, and spousal rape, harassment, isolation, intimidation, molestation, humiliation, shouting down, mimicking, nicknaming and provision of little or no allowance. All these abuses are purported to control the woman.

World Health Organisation (WHO) lamented that this type of violence (domestic violence) is frequently invisible since it happens behind closed doors and effectively when legal systems and cultural norms do not treat them as a crime, but as a “private family matter, or as a normal part of life (WHO, 2007). Concerning violence against women, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA 2000) said that spousal abuse and battering are used to maintain total control over the victim.

Attempts Made by the Governments to Relieve Gender Discrimination

Education has been made universal in Nigeria. Everybody has equal right and opportunity to education, males and females alike. But the fact is that our norms and culture have already discriminated women in favour of men and formal education is not exempted from the scene till today.

In 1996, president Obasanjo launched Universal Basic Education (UBE) at Sokoto, as men are better favoured than women in ascending to higher education around that area. Eta (2000) and Njoku (2001) observed that according to statistics “males have higher literacy education than females”. But females are more in number in every institution in Nigeria than males, because the population of women is higher. This is a great achievement on the part of the governments, for this combats effectively the problem of gender discrimination in Nigerian educational system.

Another measure tried out to settle the problem of gender disparities in Nigeria is the Blue Print on women in 1990 when

UPE could not well address the issue of gender imbalance. Thus women were given equal educational opportunity with men. Again, various state governments penalize parents and care-takers of children who deny their children/wards the opportunity to get education.

Furthermore, Federal Ministry of Education, in 1986 provided Open Air University Education to allow educational opportunities for those (especially women) who could not get education early in their lives. Some of them are women who were engaged in early marriage. “These attempts made were to identify a set of measures to achieve gender equality and participation in education at all levels in our country” Abiola (2006). In each case, Visual Arts is one of the courses offered in many institutions at various levels.

Source of Empowerment for Women

Usually, education whether formal or informal gives every woman the greatest empowerment for survival. From education, one acquires both knowledge and skills that can help her survive the tribulations of dearth. Empowerment of women through enlightenment campaign, right type of education with productive and life sustaining skills such as visual arts practical skills and technical know-how (such as printing technology, fabric printing, book-binding, graphic reproduction, photography, welding, ceramics, (which involves production of wares) computer graphic designing and package designing to limit the list. These skills if acquired will to a large extent bridge the gap for any woman. This is because few women may cross the huddle bars while majority

are still at the rear swimming in the dilemma of negligence, suppression, isolation, societal constraints, restrictions and other abuses against women.

Women also can get empowerment through the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. Even those who have not got higher education can learn practical skills and technical know-how, establish their own business and survive. Branson (2008), defines entrepreneurship as turning the potentials we are with which excites us into capital so that we enjoy even more. Entrepreneurship frankly involves innovating products and services that improves people's lives. A woman who has taken the risk of being an entrepreneur by the practice of Visual Art life-sustaining skills has no cause for alarm. She is redeemed from the shackles of poverty, idleness, patriarchal masturbation or spousal abuse because she is no longer amongst the have-nots.

Another source of women empowerment is women's summit and/or women's meeting. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, summed up the effectiveness of women's meeting as a strong source of women empowerment in the following statements; "..., that is the real power of a woman- when she joins other Women to set an objective and work as a team to realize it. The men's meeting was louder but at the women's meeting problems were solved. When the women came together, widows and orphans were fed, school fees of children whose parents could not afford their education were paid, babies whose mothers are dead are breastfed, the union building was completed. When the women came

together, great things happened". And they are still happening.

Truly, it is from women's meetings that women loan some money to start expanding their business. Governments also give such grants to help individuals establish businesses.

Visual Art Education and Empowerment of Women

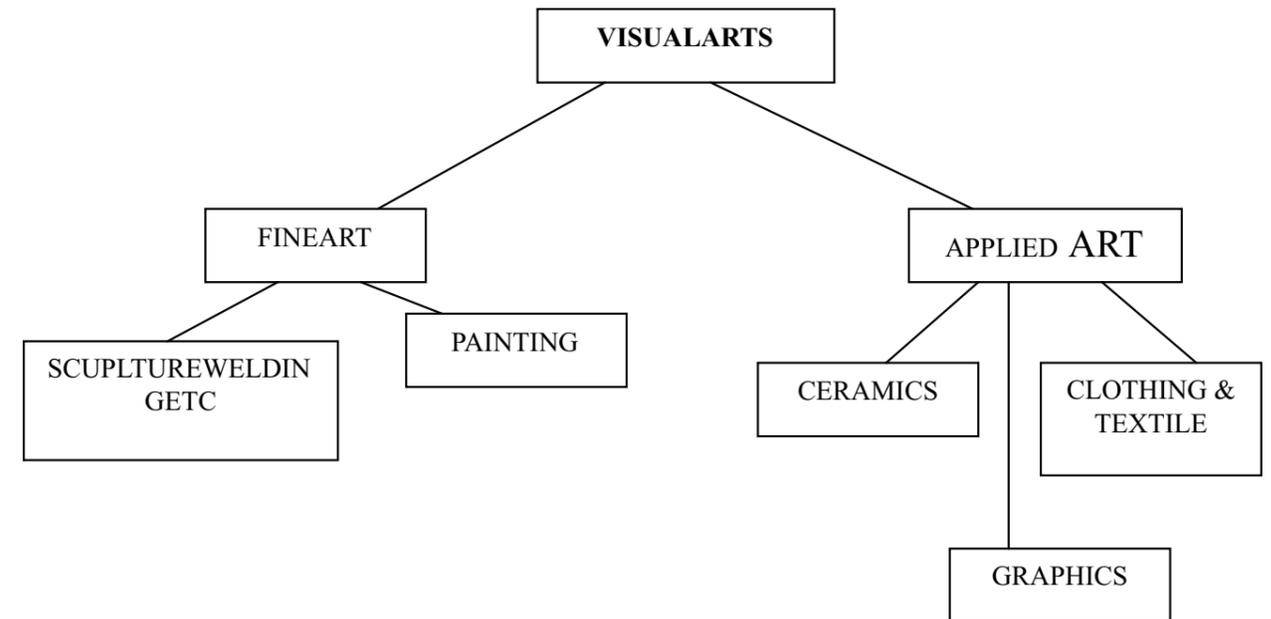
Visual Arts is a skilled oriented course and a core subject in Vocational Technical Education (VTE). As a vocational course, it therefore possesses the qualities, significance and characteristics of a vocation. Visual Arts development is as important as knowledge acquisition on which Vocational Education hinges. Fine and Applied Arts is otherwise called Visual Arts and will be interchangeably used in this paper. Thus, Fine and Applied Arts is a course which entails development of manpower skills which are essential for productivity and self-reliance. The Nigerian Policy on Education (NPE) (2004) emphasis on skill acquisition for self-reliance which is now essential for human resources needed for creativity, productivity and self-reliance. Nigeria needs practical education necessary for job-creation which will help curb unemployment and its resultant poverty, idleness and increase of social ills. "The urgent need of resources brought about the emphasizes on practical education, that is education that will create things" Nsa(2006).

Visual Arts as a vocation, reserves the power to equip the beneficiaries with the relevant skills, knowledge and technical know-how needed for good opportunities and job creation for their day to day

living. Vocational education is any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in recognized occupation, Okoro, (1993). Visual Arts has two branches and sub-branches. Each aspect is stuffed with various skills and technical know-how enough to prepare the beneficiaries for paid jobs or to establish their own art studios and/or laboratories as entrepreneurs. A female visual artist who masters some of the skills can embark on paid job or be self-employed and hire labour. The various areas, from which she can choose to specialize in are Fine Art, which includes painting, sculpture, metal work and others. Applied Arts: textiles and clothing (e.g textile

designing, weaving e.g sweaters, Akwaete, towels, among others) printing on fabrics (such as wrappers, T-shirts, badges, wrapping papers and so on). Graphics: printing and printmaking on various surfaces, graphic design (visual communication design), photography, computer graphics (computer graphics) and others.

Ceramics: (Table-wares such as cups, plates, and jugs, and house-hold sanitary wares such as tiles, bowls among others). These are just the summary of areas in which an artist can specialize. For clarity and better understanding of the branches of Visual Arts by the readers, their simplified diagram is shown below, thus:



A combination of the skills and technical know-how in two or more of these sub-branches of visual Arts is more than enough for any artist to make a very strong living. For instance, a computer graphist who masters the skills in

computer operation, photography and graphic design can hardly cope with the demands of her clients and customers and thus must employ strong hands in these areas. She embarks on the production of posters such as obituary posters,

event posters, adverts of various kinds bill-boards, barges, rosettes, calendars and almanacs others are certificates, package designs, photographs, pictures, book illustrations, magazines, newspaper, textbooks, maps and wedding cards, to say the least. If she accepts to work for an employer, although there should be division of labour, she will have no time to waste. If she embarks on running her own business on production of the above items and more, she becomes an entrepreneur.

A sculptor, be it a man or a woman can start as a welder. Even the road-side sculptor, who specializes in welding alone, designs and produces building materials for architectural works such as building of houses and bridges among others.

A textile designer may open a sewing studio and embark on designing patterns and patterns and motifs for other tailors and seamstresses, sew already-made clothes, weave sweaters, towels and akwaete to mention but a few, A ceramist who starts production can either work as a teacher/lecturer or establish her own business on the production of ceramic wares by moulding the core from which the mould for casting various items is built. Such items are: plates / bowls, decorative wares, buckets, cups, wall plaques, flower vases to list a few. Only few examples are given of the skills that can be acquired from Visual Arts. Skills, knowledge and technical know-how in Visual Arts if acquired by any woman prepares her for self-sustenance through job creation. Fine and Applied Arts (Visual Arts) is a course which entails development of manpower skills needed for self-reliance, self sustenance and job-

creation Ofoye (2010). Quality education through Visual Arts, apart from giving a person a strong financial support and repute, helps in character building especially of female artists.

Character Building through Acquisition of Visual Arts Education

Character building is meant to improve one's good qualities thereby reducing and averting character defects. The goal of true and quality education involves the development of intelligence and character.

The skills acquired and practiced is a key instrument that can change one's life style and behaviour and addresses global problems such as unemployment and its related poverty, aggressiveness, loitering, prostitution, violence and various state of unrests. Acquisition and practice of sustainable skills in education captures and seizes the emotion and tendency for unrest and riots in individuals. When a female artist has something doing that fetches her money enough, she must unknowingly develop the spirit and attribute of emotional control, patience, tolerance, creativity, concentration, carefulness, observance, hard work and respect for herself and others. Also if her business is to progress effectively, she must learn to be accessible, considerate and humble; also habit of listening to others must be developed so as to attend well to her customers and colleagues who may sometimes stage dialogue with the artist. This dialogue often clear some doubts in both parties and makes each develop good attitude of listening, viewing and considering others points of view, taking people for what they are and avoid monopolizing discussion. This type of

dialogue can bring understanding and peace among people of different ethnic groups and religious beliefs. This type of dialogue Arinze (1997) called "inter-religious dialogue and names its forms: dialogue of life, of action, discourse and dialogue of religious experiences". Dialogue is very important in Nigeria because of her multi-ethnic nature. This leads to the understanding, peace and harmony needed in Nigeria today.

Quality education acquired in Visual Arts can help make the female artist develop some good behavior that can displace some unhealthy attitudes inherited and/or gathered from peers, friends and from upbringing in her life. This will help her manage peacefully and successfully her dual functions of job and family management.

When a woman acquires saleable and job-creating skills in Visual Arts which fetches her wealth and fame, she can stand out for politics. In Nigeria today, for a woman to stand out to contest for election in politics, she is either backed up by her rich parents, relations or friends or she gets education and wealth by embarking on a productive, wealth-creating and self sustaining paid job or business. This is very essential as involvement in politics is cost intensive, involving campaigning and rally for support, organizing, mobilizing and sustaining or retaining the supporters. Only persons (women) with strong political affiliation either by virtue of their parents, spouses or close relatives in political cleavage with some strong economic base can aspire to contest for elections starting with party primaries. Ekundayo and Ama (2014). But a woman artist with higher education and strong

financial base as an entrepreneur can contest and win any election.

In addition, an educated woman plays a very important role in her family and thus the nation at large. When a woman acquires life-sustaining education with saleable skills she can then read from other books how other people solve their various problems, especially problems emanating from children bearing and rearing, the management and sustainance of family resources, the maintenance and keeping of peace and stability of the family and thus the society and the nation. This adaptation to situation is a commendable and appreciable character for peacekeeping in the family and among others. An educated woman artist who puts into service her acquired life-sustaining skills and knowledge will automatically scrape off that character of much complaining within the family and to outsiders, which is inherent in many people especially poor suffering jobless women in this era of economic mess. Some simple explanation, observations and experiences show us that an educated self-sufficient woman is a good resource manager, organizer and her spouse's associate resource provider, what a blessing to the spouse, the family, her society and the nation.

Furthermore, skills in Visual Arts which if learnt and practiced trains a child out of habit of laziness and procrastination. There is a saying that "procrastination is a thief of time". A female visual artist who is sharing her time between household works, her waged job and her business may, by the demands of her jobs and position, prune Sparky's attitude of procrastination; she

thus does not keep for tomorrow what she can do today. This change also cubs her of laziness if she is the type. Again, a visual art skill learnt and practiced as a means of livelihood, trains and develops in the artist the attitude of a diplomat and to be conciliator, and thus avoids conflicts and unnecessary confrontation. She rather negotiates than fight, in order to keep her clients, customers and audience. Where she is running a studio and probably other associated business, no matter her temperament, traits and unpleasant weaknesses, the determination and need to survive in her new venture as an entrepreneur helps her to diagnose her weaknesses and develop a planned programme for overcoming them. There is no compromise for laziness. The Bible, in 2nd Thessalonica 3 verse 10 said, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" and Igbo adage said, "if a lazy man covers himself with mat, hunger will surely remove the mat". Visual art skill which is practiced to create wealth opposes laziness. Laziness has no seat in such a female artist.

Temperament is another innate tendency man combats with in life. In Matthew 26 verse 73, Peter was told, "your speech betrays you". That is often true of your temperament. Your speech pattern, reactions to things and other behaviours and utterances are a gateway to your temperament because it is a combination of inherited inborn traits from our parents and grandparents through genes and is more or less unpredictable. It is therefore empowerment gathered through education and other sources that can help one to shape it.

One's temperament subconsciously

affects his/her behavior. Self-discipline and self-control most often portray our temperament. The self-control of temperament shapes one's exhibited character. Character is real you which is usually modified by childhood training, education, basic attitudes, beliefs, principles and motivation. Visual art education reserves the strength to input self-control and self-discipline in the beneficiary. A female visual artist can modify her temperament in attempt to create a better personality for the progress of her job. But here, we should remember that the place of changed behavior is inside man, not outside. In the realms of emotion, one's will and determination affects her temperament. Here, self-discipline and self control play important roles. Women usually are more emotionally expressive than men. Most men never weep, but every woman, no matter the strength and hardness of her heart weeps most often. That weeping and crying is where and how they ease off their sorrows and their uncontrollable emotion rising from gender discrimination and suppression. But a female visual artist while busy at her work can hardly surrender to such, especially when she remembers that she is responsible for her success and therefore, persistence, hard work, self-discipline, self-control, cheerfulness, courtesy and her overall happiness really, do pay off. Being self disciplined will help her realize that her business as a practicing artist and also her financial goals can make her a better leader and a better manager and thus will help her close more sales, attract more money, improve her time management and problem solving abilities and will make her more effective and successful at work. It will also help her in her

relationship with her children, spouse, friends and her clients and customers. A little self-discipline **and** self control go a long way in helping her stop making excuses or envying others rather it helps her upgrade her skills and earn more money and get out of debt, suppression, varied spousal and cultural abuses.

Conclusion

The title of the paper centres on the empowerment of women which can be achieved through acquisition of saleable, job-creating and life-sustaining skills and technical know-how in visual art education. The skills are embedded in the practicals and theories in various branches of Visual Arts. Some of those aspects of Visual Arts treated briefly are- Fine Arts which includes sculpture, painting, welding and Applied Arts which includes- ceramics and its sub-branches, textiles (clothing and textiles, printing on fabrics and designing), Graphic Art and its branches such as: graphic design (visual communication design), printing, print making, computer graphics, photography and bindery. On these and more aspects of Visual Arts, the necessary knowledge and skills for women empowerment are hinged.

The fate of women in the society and in the family is also discussed. The fate of women is mainly from cultural constraints which strengthens the society to relegate women personality to the ground. Various attempts are made by the governments to relieve our women of that gender disparity and its resultant effects against them, such as - spousal and societal abuses, denial of rights and privileges, worst still, the denial of education which is the bedrock of all

empowerment for development. Other sources of empowerment include entrepreneurial studies through which those who are denied education acquire various education skills empowerment necessary for survival.

Visual art sustainable skills also helps in character building for the development of the individuals and the nation. It improves the women character in self-control and self-discipline in which other developed attitudes anchor, such as creativity, patience, tolerance, humility, courtesy, leadership skills/qualities, management skills, perseverance, honesty, accountability, accessibility, carefulness and so many others.

This paper will serve to our every woman as a step to step guide to becoming a remarkable person who is capable of remarkable achievements. The practice of the acquired skills in Visual Arts will lead to the development of self-discipline which is the high road that makes everything possible.

Suggestions/Recommendations

1. More efforts should be made by the governments, philanthropic individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) to help bridge the gender gap.
2. Entrepreneurship programmes if extended more effectively to rural areas to include the women folks will help develop their hidden talents and potentials.
3. This paper proffers that women should be empowered also by "Reintegrating them into an integrated socio-economic developments through enlightenment and

empowerment” Uzoezie (2009), and this will go a long way in alleviating their problems.

4. As finance is most often the impediment to starting a lucrative business, providing adequate financial assistance by the governments, sometimes through banks and government assisted corporations to those women who want to start their own business as entrepreneurs, should have been a bedrock for making their business viable.

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