

Students' Perceptions of Ceramic Education in Public Universities in Rivers State: A Review

Abstract

The article discusses the perception of ceramic education among students in Nigerian universities, highlighting challenges and potential benefits of the field. It notes a negative perception among students, citing concerns about job prospects and the difficulty of the discipline. Despite challenges, the article emphasizes the importance of ceramics education for promoting growth in aesthetics, technical knowledge, and conceptual approaches. It advocates for increased awareness and promotion of ceramics as a viable course of study. The article also discusses the historical development of ceramics education in Nigeria and outlines the curriculum structure in universities. Challenges facing ceramics education, such as inadequate facilities and parental bias against art programs, are addressed. Additionally, the article explores the potential of ceramics in Nigeria, including abundant raw materials and market demand. It concludes by proposing recommendations for improving ceramics education, such as government initiatives to encourage student interest and providing financial support for graduates to start their own businesses.

Keywords: Ceramic Education, Curriculum Structure, Job Prospects, Students Perception and Universities.

Introduction

Ceramic education offered in public universities is a highly important area of study, although it is frequently undervalued. The way students view this field affects its future direction significantly. Gaining an understanding of how students perceive ceramic education is valuable in uncovering the difficulties and possibilities that exist within this discipline. In Nigeria, students' perceptions range from viewing ceramic education as difficult and tedious to questioning its lucrative prospects and job opportunities. This highlights disconnect between the academic offerings and students' expectations regarding the practical outcomes of pursuing ceramics as a course of study. Ceramics education is one of the major programs in Nigeria tertiary institutions designed to promote growth in aesthetics, technical knowledge, and conceptual approaches. The programme uses different approaches such as, individual tutorials, group seminars, and critiques

to provide a variety of settings for improvement and interchange of ideas relevant to the study of arts in general, and ceramics in particular (Okonkwo, 2014).

The capacity to see, hear, or become aware of something via the senses is known as perception. It is a way of being or a process of realizing something in that manner. Therefore, students to become aware of ceramic education and the benefits the course can accrue needs to be re-echoed by the universities. Many students hold courses such as Medicine, Engineering, Law and Pharmacy in high esteem neglecting the entrepreneurial courses in the universities. The undergraduate programme in ceramics education is designed with the philosophy and intent of providing a broad, yet specific, base of knowledge as related to the ceramic arts (Nick, 2008). Any nation that seeks relevance and competitiveness in the age of globalization must make every effort to give its citizens the best education possible. Ceramics Education is an instrument par excellence that a nation can rely upon to bring about self-reliance. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) has provisions for the teaching of art at all levels of education. It recognized the role of art education which includes ceramic study as one of the powerful instrument for self-reliant economy. It is one of the disciplines in our educational programme that avail trainees the opportunity of acquiring appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society.

But the reality of the situation is that the teaching of ceramics in Nigeria's universities has a huge setback because of students' ambivalent negative perception towards the course. Many students have neglected ceramics education; some of them have even despised the course. Consequently, students' enrolment into the Department of Fine and Applied Arts to study ceramics has been on the decrease in the recent time. One thing that has become worrisome is the fact that the children of professional ceramists, those who teach ceramics in higher institutions now opted for courses

or careers other than ceramics (Arayela, 2006). Due to the increase in popularity of sciences in the society, students now develop more interest in science courses to the detriment of art related courses, especially ceramics (Okon, 2010). Some students have developed hatred on ceramics education for no just reason. This may be attributed to the false stories they were told about arts education in general and ceramics in particular. Some students also believe in the fallacy that those who study arts in the university never get rich because it has little or no job potentials (Bello, 2003). Students speculate that ceramics education is a very difficult and tedious discipline. Therefore, anyone applying to study the course is subjecting himself or herself to perpetual stress and suffering. Others speculate that ceramics education is for those who were either less intelligent or did not meet up with the requirements for their choice of study and then decide to manage it temporarily and reseat for another O' level or JAMB examination later. The perceived value of ceramic education among students in Nigerian universities is generally negative. Many students believe that ceramics education does not guarantee job opportunities. However, ceramics has the potential to thrive in Nigeria due to the availability of abundant raw materials, despite existing challenges. Additionally, there might be a lack of awareness about ceramics as a viable course of study, indicating a need for increased promotion and education about its potential.

Benefits of Ceramics Education

The arts and crafts have been an integral aspect of African traditional culture since prehistoric times, as shown in previous documents on Africa's arts history (Blier, 2001). The artistry expressed in the use of ceramic materials, dated back to early periods, could now serve as a surviving reference mark of human development across a wide spectrum of culture-based civilizations from time immemorial. One of the earliest found terracotta sculptures of sub-Saharan Africa, associated with the Nok arts of northern Nigeria, mirrors the people's creative

ability and excellence in ceramic craftsmanship as early as 500 BCE. It is supposed that the knowledge of this craft across generations must have been learnt or taught in informal settings such as the apprenticeship system. Over the years, Nigerian art tradition has continued to grow from its traditional orientations, metamorphosing into modern creative expressions significantly influenced by contact with Western Europe. Wangboje (1969, quoted in Kashim et al., 2010) noted that the first attempt to introduce fine arts into the Nigerian educational curriculum was in 1897 at the Hope Waddel Training Institute, Calabar. Also of important note is the pioneering work of Aina Onabolu (1882–1963), a man who set the stage for modern art training in the early twentieth century. In the development of Nigerian ceramics around the mid-twentieth century, the establishment of the Abuja (Ladi Kwali) Pottery Training Centre anchored by the British potter, Michael Cardew, was a remarkable precursor to the introduction of ceramic courses into Nigerian tertiary education. Ceramics is a skill-based practice and can be studied as art, vocation or technical education. A unifying factor is the fact that all forms of its study engage clay minerals, the principal and most abundant ceramic material in Nigeria, which can be creatively and productively utilized for socio-economic gains. Ceramic art education now strives to gain prominence in the foreground of Nigerian education. Arts education is a psycho-cognitive and developmental process which enhances individuals' ability to create and communicate: sharpening the sense of perception and judgement through thoughtful reasoning and sensorial experience. The National Art Education Association (1994) promoted its far-reaching impact in the National Visual Arts Standards: Arts education benefits both student and society. It benefits the student because it cultivates the whole child, gradually building many kinds of literacy while developing intuition, reasoning, imagination, and dexterity into unique forms of expression and communication. This process requires not merely an active mind but a trained one ... it also helps students by initiating them into a variety of ways of perceiving and thinking. Ceramics is a self-

developmental vocation in the field of art and design whose potential is yet to be fully tapped by arts education in Nigeria, even though formal ceramics education took root in 1953, when it was first introduced in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, one of Nigeria's foremost tertiary institutions. Akinbogun (2006) and the United Tertiary Matriculation Examination Brochure (JAMB, 2010) have recorded at least 15 universities, 10 polytechnics and 6 colleges of education involved in teaching ceramics as an academic programme.

In most of the universities offering ceramic art education in Nigeria, a cognitive and competency-based learning system is usually projected, coupled with an objective approach to student assessment. A model for the teaching of ceramics in Nigerian universities of technology is further exemplified. At the introductory stage, a foundation of knowledge is laid to develop students' manipulative skill and visual perception; to promote their understanding of art and design principles, tools and methods; and also to acquaint students with the concepts and vocabulary of visual art and design. The intermediary stage captures subjects in creative drawing, art and design history, two- and three-dimensional design, reproductive methods in art and design, study of African crafts techniques and the use of computers in design. Towards the advanced level of graduation, students are guided in using their creative skills in areas of production such as industrial ceramics, handbuilding and throwing. Reproductive methods are also taught in slip casting, jiggering and jollying. The subject of kiln building and firing also forms a pivotal area of learning which is practically oriented. There is currently an emphasis on the need to develop the students' entrepreneurial skills and proficiency in the use of computers in order to raise graduates' employment potential. In Nigeria, a large proportion of students make unrealistic vocational preferences and appear to fail in their jobs fields after school, since knowledge of their individual characteristics like interest, aptitude, intellectual ability and values were not considered before vocational choice was made (Ezenibe, 2011). Ceramics education is

an aspect of technical and vocational education. Technical and vocational education emphasizes skills, knowledge and attitudinal acquisition for productivity and self-reliance (Umunadi, 2014). The activities of ceramics education provides the students with appropriate training for acquisition of technical and vocational skills. Having a broad knowledge of the students' position about ceramics as a course of study could engender proper orientation at secondary level of education which could go a long way to enlighten prospective students into the tertiary level of education on what ceramic discipline is all about and the potentials it holds towards the economic and technological advancement in the country. Be it as it may, it is imperative to investigate into students' awareness of ceramics discipline, starting from the second tier level of education in Nigeria.

Some Challenges of Ceramics Education in Nigerian Universities

Ceramics art education in Nigeria faces various challenges. These hamper the rate of students' enrolment and slow the development of ceramic education, as remarked by Na'Allah (2001). Most higher institutions offering art and design programmes still have to contend with problems of ill-equipped studios and inappropriate teaching materials, which results in the improvisation of tools. The paucity of teaching materials and ill-equipped ceramic studios pose serious challenges for quality education delivery. Processed ceramic raw materials are hard to come by either through local processing or through importation. Local processing is difficult because of the lack of access to appropriate equipment, while importation consumes too much money through foreign exchange.

Ogunduyile (1999) and Mbahi (1999) report that most Nigerian parents are biased against fine and applied art as a subject because it is assumed that success could only be made in life if children are encouraged to study engineering and medical sciences, even when they do not have the mental capacity to cope with them.

The Potentials of Ceramics in Nigeria

In spite of the various constraints clouding the prospects for ceramics education in Nigeria, ample opportunities and possibilities are waiting to be unveiled. The following can be identified as factors in the rich potential of ceramic art education relevant to the prospect of careers. Nigeria is home to a diverse culture and rich art tradition that have been long established. Nigeria is endowed with abundant ceramic resources that could serve the purpose of education and research capable of transforming the nation economically and technologically (Adelabu and Kashim, 2010; Kashim, 2003; Na'Allah, 2001; Sullayman, 2000). Besides the abundant availability of solid raw minerals, Nigeria is also endowed with a high reserve of petroleum products, the by-products of which can readily be converted to usable fuels for energy generation in ceramic firing processes. A good number of ceramic cottage industries have been established in the post-colonial era based on this availability of ceramic raw materials. Hence engagement in creative and productive ceramic practices can serve as gainful ventures, and, with functional policies in place, there is good potential for job creation. With a population of over 140 million, Nigeria has a vibrant market for ceramic products suitable for various aspects of household and industrial utility (Kashim and Adelabu, 2009). An increase in housing construction coupled with an increase in the acceptance of ceramic tiles, bricks, tableware and sanitary ware are producing a growth in demand.

Conclusion

Given the enormous potential that may be accessed and maximized from it both locally and internationally, ceramics as a field of study in Nigeria has a bright future given the development in applications in the utilisation of ceramic raw materials. Not only should self-reliance be viewed as a goal unto itself, but also as a path to more expansive goals. In order to secure

sustainable ceramic practices and advance Nigeria's national development in the twenty-first century, art, science, and technology should be appropriately integrated.

The Way Forward

1. The government ought to create a sincere initiative that will draw in young people and inspire more potential students to pursue a degree in ceramics.
2. It is important to identify and fearlessly address the reasons behind the majority of Nigerian teenagers' unwillingness to pursue careers in ceramics, such as the perception that the field is unprestigious, monotonous, and has limited employment potential.
3. In order to provide graduates of ceramics school with access to small and medium-term loans, the federal government should work with commercial finance institution to develop a programme that would allow them to borrow money and launch their own pottery business.

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