REFOCUSING VISUAL ART EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In General Education, Visual Art Education (VAE) is an important aspect of vocational education, which has relevant role in national building. Improving the young pupils early at primary level through Visual Art Education will help them as future generation to develop appropriate attitude and skills for national growth. In this light, this paper discusses definition of operational words, the state of Visual Art Education and recommendations.

Introduction

Education in its totality aims at developing and equipping individuals with skills and knowledge that will make them live meaningful and fulfilling life, and contributing to the development of their society. According to Nebo (2004:293), Nigerian education aims at equipping the recipients with the necessary skills that would make them independent and self-reliant, adjust them to those needs demanded by society that are relevant to national development. In essence, therefore, educational programme must be tailored to the needs of the society.

Visual Art is an aspect of vocational education, whose the recipients can survive without being 'parasites'. It prepares the individual in skill acquisition that enables him not only to secure gainful employment, but provides opportunity for self-employment in a depressed country like ours today.

Visual Arts Education is very relevant for national development as it prepares the youths of this nation to be useful members of the society. As contained in the national Policy on education (2004:14), the realization of the objectives of primary education hinges on Visual Art education as a means of intellectual development and manipulative skills etc.

Despite these important qualities of Visual Art Education, the social and technological roles of Arts have led to all kinds of perversions of the concept. In the light of its roles, Visual Art education is still a veritable tool for national advancement. Therefore, the need to refocus Visual Art Education in primary school for future skilled and better adults cannot be overemphasized.

Definition of Operational Terms

Visual Art (VA) is an umbrella name for fine and applied arts. The fine art involves the disciplines such as sculpture, painting and architecture while ceramics, graphics, textile etc are categorized as applied Arts (Chukwuma, 2004:231). These arts designate those arts that primarily appeal to the sense of sight.

Education on the other hand is a process established by every human society to ensure that the values and beliefs, which make up the culture are passed from one generation to another. According to Ani (1999:1), Education is a tool utilized by man to develop and affect some positive changes both in the life of man and in his social environment. In other words, education is the process through which the younger and inexperienced members of the society are prepared for active participation in the productive and developmental activities of the society.

Visual Art Education (VAE), is training in any of the Visual Arts designed for development of skills and knowledge useful for the survival of both the individual and the society, Yahaya (2004: 2248), states that this type of education is relevant to the needs of the people as self-reliant would be achieved. If it is inculcated in the children early at the primary level of education, national development would be ensured because children are the next future generation.

Primary school is an institution where formal education is given to children aged 6-11 with six-year duration. The National Policy on education (2004:14), states that the rest of the educational system is built upon it. It is the foundation and the key to either the success or failure of the whole educational system. The future advancement of the society no doubt, depends on the survival, growth and development of the younger generation.
National development includes social, economical, cultural, political and technological development of a given society. According to Isyaku (2000:27), development is a change, which is both forward looking and self-fulfilling. Any education, which includes Visual Art Education (VAE), is recognized as the greatest force or tool that could be used to bring about progress and advancement to a nation, state or society.

State of Visual Art Education in Nigerian Primary Schools

Visual Art Education (VAE) is an aspect of the general education, which is of vital importance to the entire educational system. Nwabani in Olowu (1999:59), also observed that in Nigeria today, public opinion is unanimous on the view that education, which includes Visual Art Education, is a vital factor for all-round national development.

To most people including the educated in our society, Visual Art education simply means drawing and painting without any intellectual skill. Uzoagba (2000:40), writes that drawing and painting appears to them as products of the lawless activity of self-expression. It is seen as a subject for the dullards who are not succeeding in academic programmes and a dumping ground for the dropouts. The place of Visual Art education in Nigeria will depend on the recognition given to it in the curriculum.

There is no officially prepared Visual Art education (VAE) curriculum for primary schools. In other words, it is not recognized in the curriculum of the primary school. The teachers also have no planned scheme of work to follow, or approved method of teaching to follow because the teacher teaches without any scheme. This makes the teaching of Visual Art education (VAE) to be mechanical and defective and does not allow the pupils to get the rewarding experience expected from the subject.

Visual Art education is designated as cultural and creative arts (FRN, 2004:15) and in some cases, the handiwork is used to replace art period, which suggests that it is not taught at all. This can be attributed to the teachers' ignorance of the purpose of Visual Art Education at the primary school level. This also goes a long way to affect the achievement of the objectives of Visual Art education in primary schools.

The primary school teacher is omnibus; he/she teaches all the subjects on the timetable in a particular class without specializing in any particular area. With this, it is difficult to transcend his/her bias or specialty to perform equally well in other areas with mastery.

Some of the teachers may not have the perception of the aims and objectives of Visual Art Education. The official time allocated to Visual Art Education in some primary school is used for other things. However, sometimes there are no facilities for the teaching of art, in spite of its utility.

In view of the above, it is necessary to refocus the position of Visual Art Education in primary schools so as to achieve the stated aims and objectives of the primary school education as contained in the National Policy on Education.

Refocusing Visual Art Education (VAE) in Nigerian Primary Schools

Visual Art Education is an aspect of vocational education, which is essential educational tool for the development of necessary skills required for increased productivity and national growth. In this light, it is necessary to refocus Visual Art Education in primary schools so as to start harnessing the potentialities of the primary school pupils early enough. According to Uzoagba (2000:37), the children are dynamic people always in progress, they are full of potentials, which have to be discovered and channeled.

Visual Art Education (VAE) must be acknowledged as an important part of the primary school curriculum. Eisner (1972), in Nebo (2004:299), opined that children need Visual Art Education to develop their creative skills. It also helps them to live useful life.

An officially prepared VAE curriculum with clearly defined objectives must be made available to the teachers. Uzoagba (2000:43), states that it must make for a systematic progress of VAE from one school level to another. It will also make for continuity so that skills can be developed, refined and internalized and help the pupil develop their creative thinking. This will enhance the teachers' understanding of the objectives for teaching VAE in primary schools. Based on this, the teachers will be able to select the appropriate materials, content and instructional methods.
As a specialized subject that requires specialized teachers as contained in NPE (2004:15), it should be given the needed attention as stipulated. There must be adequate facilities, equipment and structure such as, space for effective and efficient instructions on VAE. An ideal VAE however, must comprise of a classroom and studio instructions to provide for the development of creative thinking. Sufficient contact must be allotted to VAE on the timetable. As in other subjects, practical periods must be given double periods at a time to allow adequate practice.

Visual Art Education and National Development

Education is an essential tool necessary for the development of both human and material resources of any state or nation. Isayaku (2000:27), asserts that national development involves the exploitation and utilization of both human and material resources to improve the lot of members of a given community. To achieve greater height in national development therefore, there is need to refocus VAE and encourage it in -Nigerian primary schools.

Occupational VAE - Occupation refers to any job, business, career, profession, trade or work done to earn a living. A knowledge of different occupation available in Visual Art is of key importance for survival. VAE provides occupation to the recipients by equipping them with durable vocations in artistic skills - such as in ceramics (pottery), sculpture, Graphics design, Painting, Photography, Textiles and others.

Technology - VAE is technically related to technology education. Amadi (2004:280), asserts that both use practical and scientific knowledge. This means that there is much art in technology and much technology in art and none can do without the other. The two areas involve designing, constructing, creating, manipulation and so on. At some levels of education, Visual Art is offered as Industrial Design. Uzoagba (2000:3), states that in general education, Visual Art is seen as a way to develop skills in the use of art materials through experimentations, manipulation and practice.

Communication - Art in itself is a special language used in the teaching and learning experience. It is a special media that aids classroom instruction by helping to reduce the learning complexities into understandable forms. This is done through the use of instructional aids in the forms of symbols, pictures, illustrations, painting, signs, sculptural objects and so on. When pupils are exposed at this level of education, growth begins to set in, and future development would be enhanced.

Recommendations

Government should make VAE a basic and compulsory subject. This would help to develop and extend pupils practical skill and comprehension of other subjects.

Federal Government should come up with an organized and officially prepared curriculum. This would enable the VAE teachers have a planned scheme of work and understanding of the aims and objectives. Based on this, the teacher of VAE in the primary school would improve his/her teaching techniques. The structure of the Visual Art syllabus must be planned against the broad outline of the social, commercial and technological background of our society.

The ministry of education should include VAE as one of the core subjects taken in the First School Leaving Certificate Examination. This would encourage the teachers and pupils to take the subject seriously.

The need for the establishment, equipping and maintenance of studios and other facilities in primary school cannot be over emphasized. Pupils require suitable accommodation for Visual Art activities like drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics etc. assorted and sufficient materials for the teaching and learning of Visual Art should be provided for the pupils to enable them explore and experiment sufficiently the use of various techniques of Visual Art.

Adequate funding from all arms of Government and Non-Governmental organizations is absolutely needed. VAE program is expensive to establish, government should substantially improve the monitoring and supervision of its implementation strategies. This should ensure accountability of fund as well as achieving effectiveness in teaching and learning of VAE in primary schools.

Conclusion

To ensure a national development, the young children should be particularly given priority consideration, because they are the younger generation of tomorrow. The future of the society
depends on survival and growth of the younger generation. So VAE is an important tool in laying solid educational foundation for the youths because it would lead them through their youthful and later life. Therefore, every one should strive to give her young people such education that would enable them participate in National development. Refocusing VAE as a means of educating young children is indeed an investment, which would enhance national development.

References


