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Sculpture as a Learning Subject in Nigerian Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the teaching and learning of sculpture in our institutions. The study was based on the notion of appraising the extent of how sculpture has been taught in Nigerian institutions. Accordingly, three specific purposes of the study were raised to guide the study, namely: the depth of coverage, resources collected and the effectiveness of teaching. It is in view of the foregoing that the researcher sought to look at sculpture as a subject in our institutions. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The sample size for the study comprised 104 fine arts teachers in primary, secondary and university in public institutions in Anambra State obtained through purposive sampling technique. Semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Data collected were analyzed using frequencies and percentages.The findings of the study revealed that at primary school level, sculpture is taught and that 70% of the primary school pupils have interest in sculpture while 60% of talented students have interest in sculpture in secondary schools. Additionally, the findings of the study showed that sculpture was taught as a course in universities but only 32% of the students had interest in sculpture. It was recommended among others that vocational guidance and counsellors should be provided in all schools especially universities. This is to enable students go through regular counselling of choosing their careers and courses of study in such a manner that they see prospects in sculpture.

Keywords: *Sculpture, Institutions of higher learning.*

Introduction

Sculpture as a subject was first introduced in the curriculum of the College of Art Science and Technology, Zaria. Thus, the sculpture curriculum content at Ahmadu Bello University, was similar

to that of University of Nigeria Nsukka, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife and University of Benin Benin City. The Yaba College of Technology served as a model for Auchi Polytechnic, the Polytechnic Ibadan while University of Nigeria Nsukka provided guidance to Institute of Management and Technology prior to the advent of National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). However, the harmonization of the sculpture curriculum was effected by the National Universities Commission (NUC) all through the Universities with quite a small deviation. Interestingly, a course identified as *experiments in indigenous designs* which cuts across all studio areas is found challenging by lecturers in the development of meaningful content in the course (Isiboge and Egonwa, 2024). For example, basic design is expected to capture basic African design principles rather than being taught as African traditional Craft a separate course.

It is instructive to note that students of sculpture in institutions of learning are being taught the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject by learning to pass academic requirement in place of the creation of one's own job for production of acquired knowledge (Micah and Donkor, 2016). This type of system emphasizes a teacher-centered approach of students following rather than a student-centered approach of having students lead at pre-tertiary education level. Interestingly, reality dawns on the sculpture students as they enter the tertiary education world as they are confronted with an inescapable message of preparing for a job. It is at this level that they realize that the ultimate essence of sculpture is to prepare them to eke out a living from their expertise. Thus, they are exposed to industrial trainings or internships that reinforce the message of getting a job. In the wake of graduating from tertiary education, society is surprised that graduate sculpture students look for jobs, rather than focusing on job creation for themselves and the community atlarge. It is in view of the foregoing that the researcher sought to look at sculpture as a subject in our institutions of learning.

Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to investigate the status of sculpture as a subject in institutions of learning. Specifically, the study aims to :

1. Determine the status of sculpture as a subject in primary schools.
2. Determine the status of sculpture as a subject in secondary schools.
3. Determine the status of sculpture as a subject in universities.

Social Values of Sculpture

Visual arts embraces various sub-disciplines such as drawing, printmaking, film, painting, and sculpture (Esaak, 2019). However, in sculpture, the artist requires to grapple with three-dimensional depictions. This is a vital distinction from other sub-disciplines like painting or photography. Another

vital aspect that should be considered is how the sculpture is positioned in space given its volume and dimensions. Incident light from the sun throws shadows, giving the artwork a different appearance from that under artificial lighting. Also, sculptures in either hard or plastic material give different possibilities for media, namely: stone, wood, wax, clay, glass, plaster, and so on. Clay and wax often have an organic effect, while metal appears hard and cold. Making sculptures from soft media such as clay, the material is added as the work progresses. In the course of creation, rudimentary changes can be effected to the artwork (e.g. changing the posture of a figure) and then the sculptures can be cast (e.g. bronze or cement) (Puppe, Jossberger & Gruber, 2021).

At the turn of modern art, Nigerian idea and ideal of art were abandoned. Teachers of sculpture would rather employ a work by Michael Angelo or Raphael Sanzio than one by any classical masters of Africa from any of the wood sculpture producing zones(Puppe, Jossberger& Gruber, 2021). Known artists of not too distant past such as Lamidi Fakeye (1928-2009) or Kofi Atunban(1922-64) were not studied and cited as examples for students. Art objects like sculptural pieces such as masks, figures are dieted and utilized in shrines and most often serve as intermediaries' semi-gods, deities through which the traditional Nigeria worshippers approach the supreme God. Thus, the researcher sought to determine whether this has changed in the way it is taught in institutions of learning.

Assessment Feedback as a Common Feature in Institutions of Leaning

A common feature of institutions of learning is teachers' provision of assessment feedback to students Assessment feedback is at the centre of assessment in all levels of education, particularly secondary education. Erkan (2022) pointed out that assessment feedback enables students to utilize the information bordering on the learning task to enhance the quality of their academic tasks. Erkan further stated that feedback can facilitate the correction of errors, develop understanding via explanations, generate learning through the suggestion of further specific tasks and promote the development of generic skills by concentrating on the proof of the use of skills rather than on content alone.

Assessment feedback provides opportunities for students to make adjustments in their expected standards on the basis of previous performance (Clarke and Boud, 2018). Assessment feedback enables teachers to identify areas of misunderstanding as well as students' learning difficulties in the class. Thus, assessment feedback mechanism is a professional approach to assessment practices that influences students' academic achievement (Sethy, 2018). Particular assessment feedback mechanism deployed by teachers in teaching learning process impacts on students' achievement of determined objectives no matter the level of education - nursery, primary, secondary or tertiary - each student

maybe in. However, the lecturers' provision of assessment feedback comes with its attendant challenges. Supporting this, Killingback*et al*. (2020) observed that lecturers are cognizant of the fact that the marking criteria of feedback could be challenging for students. One challenge with the provision of assessment feedback is students' understanding that the skills needed for one examinationmay not apply for another examination. For example, good assessment feedback for an essay test does not necessarily translate to success in practical experience as well. The implication for the lecturers is thoughtful planning of assessment feedback and its subsequent provision to students in a well-defined format. Similarly, McConlogue (2020) noted that assessment feedback can be designed backwards, which will enable lecturers ponder over what students ought to learn in the course, module, or unit.

Students benefit the most when lecturers provide feedback in a clear manner. This is usually the case in higher education in the domain of sculpture. Students need feedback in several stages of their creation process: ''Feedback on potential ideas for artworks; feedback during the production of the artwork regarding size, form, material, tools, or draft; feedback on the finished artworks; and feedback on the exhibition of the finished artworks(Puppe, Jossberger& Gruber, 2021)''.

Causes of Decline in Sculpture in Institutions of Learning

The decline in sculpture in institutions is caused by many factors. These include: societal and parental attitude, shortage of art teachers in primary/secondary schools and high cost of materials/equipment.

Societal and parental attitude:

Most parents and the society large do not appear favourably disposed to their children studying sculpture in schools. This view is corroborated by Wangboje (1988) who related this perception to his personal experience at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, then, Nigeria College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria in 1955. According to him, he met a friend who was in Zaria studying Engineering. They were happy to see each other and out of curiosity, the friend enquired about Wangboje's course of study, his eyes almost popped out of the sockets when he learnt that he was in the university to study Fine Arts. He said, 'you mean you came to Nigeria College of Arts Science and Technology just to draw? Similarly, students' choice of subject has often been traced to their parents mainly because most parents have ideas and aspirations of what they think their children should do when they grow up. Moreover, some parents refuse to buy art materials needed by their children, whereby the society and parents often discourage students for their choice of art as a profession which further discourages students from studying art. Again, the African society sees

sculpture amongst other options such as graphics, ceramics, textiles or even modern painting as something not novel to the African as all traditional art is predominantly moulding and carving.

Shortage of art teachers in primary/secondary level:

The choice of careers and courses of study is made or developed based on students' familiarization with different subjects available for study in schools. A situation in which sculpture is not taught in many lower schools due to lack of teachers is not likely to breed large number of students intending to take sculpture as their choice of interest.

High cost of materials/equipment:

Most of the sculpture materials are imported from overseas and also lack locally made alternatives that are suitable. Similarly, many art departments are deficient in the necessary infrastructure to meet students academic needs, often requiring students to supplement equipoment and studio consumables. Many undergraduates in the course of choosing specializations would not opt for sculpture as it is demanding to engage in imitative representation because of lack of adequate infrastructure in most art departments. (Isiboge and Egonwa, 2024).

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The sample size for the study comprised 104 fine arts teachers in primary, secondary and university in public institutions in Anambra State. The sample was obtained using purposive sampling technique in which fine art teachers across the public institutions were selected based on their having at least five years of experience. Research instruments were also validated through expert review. Having validated the suitability and reliability of the research instruments, data were collected using questionnaire which sought information on sculpture as a subject in institutions of learning. The data collection process was facilitated using postgraduate students in Department of Fine and Applied Arts given their in-depth knowledge on the subject matter. Then, frequencies and percentages were used for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

At primary school level, the researcher observed that sculpture is taught and that 62 fine art teachers out of 104 revealed that 60% of the primary school pupils have interest in sculpture because

of their sense of creating new forms and ideas (see figure 1).They enjoy working with various materials like clay, wire and paper materials to create 3D sculptures.

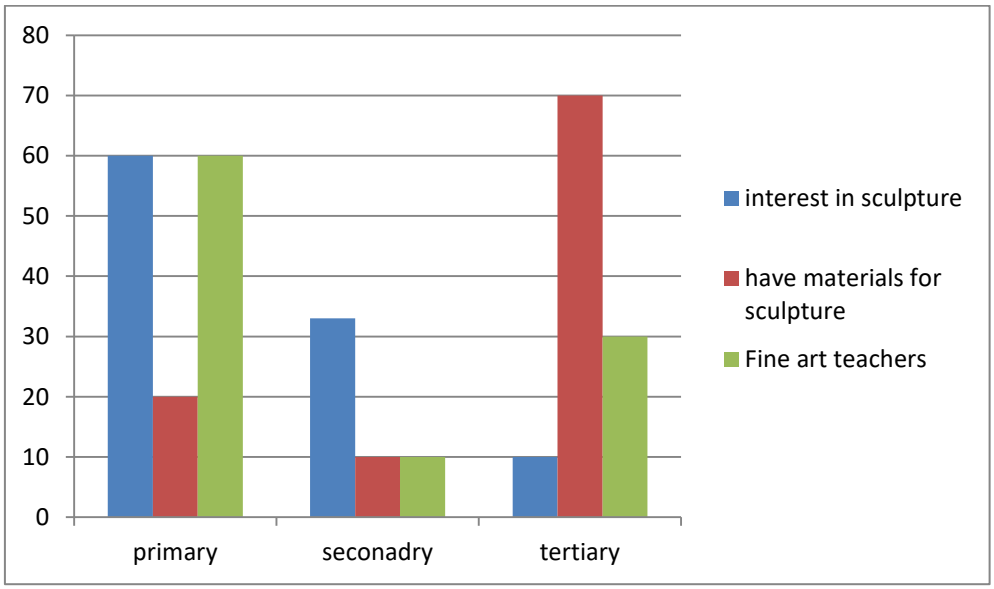


Figure 1: *Chart showing the students' interest in sculpture and availability of materials for sculpture according to the purposively selected fine arts teachers*

However, when it got to the state of buying materials, their parents refused to give them money to get the materials they needed for art to complement the efforts of the school.

At secondary school level, 10 fine art teachers out of 104 revealed that sculpture is equally taught at this level. However, there are few of the students that are talented and 50% of the few have keen interest but their parents are unwilling to buy them materials for the subject of sculpture by way of complementing the efforts of the school. Out of 200 students, 100 have interest in sculpture.

Sculpture was taught as a course in Universities. However, only 32% of the students have interest in sculpture given that many did not see the prospect of gainful employment in it even though the materials for it were provided by the school. This perceived limited job prospect according to observation could be that the students consider that field like sculpture will require high competence and can be competitive; thus, students might feel that there are limited opportunities for success.

According to Winner, E., & Hetland, L. (2000), Hetland & Winner (2001) and Atkinson (2017) the implication of the aforementioned findings could be due to lack of financial support from parents which could hinder students' ability to pursue sculpture. Also, Ecclestone (2007) discusses how students' interests and motivations change across educational levels, which could help explain the variation in interest in sculpture as seen in the findings of the study where interest in sculpture varies across educational levels, with more interest at secondary level (50% of talented students) compared to

university level (32%). Wigfield & Ecclestone (2000) also explore how students' motivations and interests evolve over time, which might shed light on why interest in sculpture differs between secondary and university levels. All these reasons and other exposure of the students especially the university students that may have interest in other things in this digital age may affect their level of perceived job prospects in respect to sculpture. Thus, students' perception of limited job prospects and high competition may deter them from pursuing sculpture.

Conclusion

Many factors have been identified as being responsible for the decline of sculpture in institutions of learning. These factors ranged from societal/parental attitude towards sculpture to high cost of materials/equipment. In addition, it can be deduced that sculpture is most appreciated in primary schools and least appreciated in universities.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of the study several recommendations were made. These include:

1. Government should create enlightenment programmes towards self-employment. This would encourage a lot of objectivity in choice of sculpture towards self-reliance.
2. Vocational guidance and counsellors should be provided in all schools especially universities. This is to enable students go through regular counselling of choosing their careers and courses of study in such a manner that they see prospects in sculpture.
3. Government at all levels should be prevailed upon to rise to the responsibility of funding sculpture through the provision of infrastructure, equipment while making grants and scholarships available to students of sculpture. This is with a view to rekindling students' interest in sculpture especially at secondary and university levels.

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