

Analytical Survey on the Challenges of Teaching and Learning the Arts in the 21st Century and the Way Out

Soyoye Akinyode Solomon

Introduction

The concept of “Arts” in the context of this study refers to the disciplines of Creative Arts and Humanities, which are generally what Art disciplines entail. Despite the prominent and indispensable role the Arts could play in the process of nation building in the 21st century, it is quite unfortunate that it seems governments, curriculum planners, and other stake holders in the education sector all over the world, do not consider the prominent role that the Arts could play in raising awareness of the fundamental problems that militates against the development of a nation, the solution to these problems and preparing them on how to tackle future challenges that concerns their immediate community at large. This will encourage the process of building a nation.

Research findings have revealed that this rationale is responsible for many of the problems associated with the teaching and learning of the Arts. This situation has resulted in the Arts as subjects to be deemed as unimportant and unnecessary, especially in the secondary school curriculum.

Therefore, the problems facing the process of teaching and learning of the Arts in the 21st century are multi-dimensional, ranging from the non-professionalism of History teachers or facilitators, government policies, the lack of appropriate teaching aids to mention a few.

Nature of Art Disciplines

Though the Arts are uniquely different in appearance and method from each other, the disciplines employ similar cognitive processes, ultimately allowing language and thought to be expressed through a variety of representations. They are represented not in the ordinary sense of language as written on a page, but in either a visual, kinesthetic, aural or tactile form. Engaging students and pupils, arts can enable them to communicate in potentially profound ways (Eisner, 2002). As Russell-Bowie (2009) points out: Because the arts can embody and communicate emotions, ideas, beliefs and values, they can convey meaning through aesthetic forms and symbols and evoke emotive responses to life with or without words. There is also evidence to suggest that school arts programs can enhance students’ potential to engage with school and learning, as well as learning in a broader sense (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2004; Bamford 2006; Catterall, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Fiske, 1999). Unfortunately, there are gaps in our knowledge with regards to the cognitive process and social capabilities that can be effectively fostered through the Arts. Evidence of this is that studies into the academic impact of Arts education programs in schools conducted in the UK and US confirmed that attention has not been sufficiently paid to the Arts. Also, Gibson and Anderson (2008) argued that within the context of Australian schools there is an urgent need for a detailed study of the impact of Arts programs.

Internationally, there is a growing body of Creative Arts learning and engagement that has a range of positive outcomes in terms of the lives of young people both in and out of school settings (Bamford, 2006; Catterall, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Deasy, 2002; Fiske, 1999). Sadly, despite a renewed interest in the unique benefits of Creative Arts learning, it appears that the subject matter remains marginalized.

Challenges of Teaching and Learning the Arts in the 21st Century

Despite the prominent and indispensable role the Arts could play in the process of nation building in the 21st century, it is quite unfortunate that it seems government, curriculum planners, and other stakeholders in the educational sector all over the world, do not consider the prominent role the Arts could play in making the students aware of the fundamental problems that militates against the development of a nation, the solution to this problem and preparing them for tackling future challenges that concerns the community at large which will encourage the process of building a nation. However, research findings have revealed that the rationale for this is responsible for many of the problems associated with the teaching and learning of the Arts as a subject. These problems have made the Arts lose its value. The Arts as subjects or disciplines, as the case may be in secondary school curriculums around the globe, have become seen as irrelevant or unimportant, burdened with facts and incidents thus making the Arts uninteresting to students.

However, the problems facing the Arts in the 21st century as subjects or disciplines are multi-dimensional, ranging from the non-professionalism of Art teachers, the inclusion of lengthy notes and copious dates, government policies, lack of incentives for the available teachers of Art subjects, lack of appropriate teaching aids, and many others which include:

1. Unawareness of the relevance of the Arts to society and the curriculum planners:

Jayeola-Omoyeni (1983), "in 2005" was of the opinion that; *"the value of the Arts to human and community are never conceptualized by the learners before the actual teaching of the development of the kingdoms"*

The above statement suggests that many people, even those in high places and intellectuals in our society today, are not aware of the important role the Arts as subjects could play in the process of nation building. Thus, they ascribe derogatory names to Art disciplines and to Art students.

Furthermore, the Arts have suffered from a misconception of its essence and role in society in 21st century. This is an indirect consequence of the way and manner in which many practitioners have been presenting the Art disciplines. To many people in society, the Arts as a field of study are static, time wasting, and uninterested in contemporary events. Similarly, in national policy on education in the 21st century all over the world as revealed by research, the arts are grossly marginalized owing to the prominent importance placed on science and technology. This clearly illustrates the status of the Arts as endangered academic disciplines.

2. Non-professionalism of Art teachers:

Fadeiye (2004) advocated that *"there is no doubt that anyone who wants to become a teacher must have a good disposition to the teaching profession"*. In the same vein, Jayeola-Omoyeni (2005) postulated that *"the best teachers of Art disciplines include male and female indigenes and expatriates, who teach at all levels of educational institutions from primary to the university. He must have correct knowledge of Art disciplines, show enthusiasm and zeal to teach them (Art disciplines)"*. Yet unfortunately, many teachers of Art disciplines in the 21st century are birds of passage in the teaching profession. This is because many of the teachers in the Art disciplines that we have today lack an interest in the teaching profession and in the Art subjects they teach. Such teachers take the teaching profession as a hobby and consequently pay less attention to it while they devote much of their attention to other areas. These sets of teachers without the necessary commitment and interest usually do not

sincerely devote themselves to the teaching profession. They similarly take the teaching of the Art disciplines with levity.

It is important to note that most of these types of teachers find their way to become part of the curriculum planners. Consequently, the non-professionalism and inadequate knowledge allured to lack of commitment and interest which they have initially displayed are also displayed when planning the school curriculum, especially in secondary schools, and this has seriously damaged the position of Arts in the curriculum.

3. The government policy:

The attitude of Governments all over the world towards the Arts is encouraging a lack of emphasis on the Arts due to the fact that their attention and focus is on how to produce goods for export, build railways, manufacture homemade goods, and how to improve the technological standards of the country. In the context of such demands, the Arts appear to be regarded as irrelevant. It is clear that governments all over the world in the 21st century have marginalized Art subjects. In addition, very few periods are allocated to Art teaching on school timetables. Art lessons or periods are mostly taught in the afternoon when students are already tired, resulting in students being bored and not active in art history classes.

In furtherance to the above, governments prefer investing their money into finance seminars, workshops, conferences and so on, in Science and Technology subjects rather than using the funds on Art disciplines. They do not promptly organize lectures, symposiums, seminars, and refresher courses in order to make the subjects more alive and productive.

4. Personality of the student or learner:

The performance and achievements of a student is affected by their personality, that is to say the general pattern of a person's way of reasoning, feeling, adjusting and behaving with particular references to other persons or an environment. It is the projection of ourselves to others. Personality is a product of heredity and environment.

Farrant (1980) grouped human beings into two personality types: introvert and extrovert. The extrovert is always reaching out for new connections with people and things as they prefer the world outside of themselves. They like to be the center of attention and mix well with others. Their extroversive personality exposes them better in learning which situations to ask and answer questions, to adjust well and confidentially interact effectively with fellow students and teachers.

On the other hand, the introvert is observed to be concerned with the world within themselves. Their real feelings are not easily recognized, they hate being the centre of attention because of their withdrawing personality. In fact, they are drawn inwards with shyness, nervousness and calmness.

Students who are prone to falling into either of these two groups should be very vigilant because of the nature of Art disciplines. Arts subjects are not like other subjects that involve definitions, advantages and disadvantages etc. they deal with facts and interpretation.

5. Teaching skills of teachers and lack of appropriate teaching aids:

Although there are some teachers of Art disciplines who possess the necessary qualifications, they are not necessarily effective in teaching skills because they teach their subjects in an abstract manner. According to research conducted by various scholars, many teachers of the

Art disciplines in the 21st century engage in the teaching of Art subjects without the usage of necessary and appropriate audio-visual aids such as maps, charts, models, pictorial illustrations, radios, televisions, tape recorders and players, films etc., especially in developing countries. As a result, many students in secondary schools develop a dislike for learning the Arts due to the abstract manner in which it is taught since proper provision for specific teaching aids is not made by the curriculum. The Arts as subjects can never be a meaningful component of the school curriculum if taught without the necessary and suitable teaching aids to overcome this.

Methods of repositioning the teaching and learning of Arts in the 21st Century

Several solutions have been proffered to the challenges of teaching and learning the Arts in the 21st century by various scholars in the Arts and stakeholders in the educational sector around the world. These scholars were of the opinion that if the teaching and learning of the Arts could be repositioned, the lost value of the Arts would be revived and the relevance of the Arts in the process of nation building in the 21st century will be better understood. This would undoubtedly make society, governments at all levels and curriculum planners aware of the important role that Arts can play. Taking into account the opinions of various scholars, if the challenges hindering the teaching and learning of the Arts in the 21st century were to be addressed, then the following recommendations should be considered:

1. The usage of information and communication technology (I.C.T) to the process of teaching and learning the Arts.

Scholarly works and findings have proven that there is no single acceptable term or definition of information and communication technology (I.C.T) (Augustine, 1999). However, I.C.T can still be described as electronic technologies for collecting, storing, processing and communicating information. It can be separated into two main categories: those which process information (such as a computer system), and those which disseminate information (such as a telecommunication system) (Butter, 2003 and Gunton, 1993).

In the same vein, Ladon et al. (1994) in Augustine (1999), defines I.C.T as “information technologies and systems which include all the different means, methods and tools that humans have used throughout history to help manage information, conduct business, communicate with others and better understand the world”. Therefore, in effort to curb the challenges confronting the teaching and learning of Arts in the 21st century, it is suggested that curriculum planners should adequately ensure that they make provisions for the inclusion of information and communication technology in the teaching and learning of the Art disciplines. The inclusion of I.C.T into the curriculum will definitely make the teaching and learning of Art subjects less abstract and more interesting, especially in developing countries.

2. Inclusion of the usage of virtual libraries to the process of teaching and learning the Arts.

Fadeiye (2004) defined a library as “a place (room or building) where people can read books, journals, periodicals, magazines and other printed matter with a view to collecting information”. In furtherance, Abimbola (2003) opined that “since the mid-1980, the Art subjects have continued to record low numbers of enrolment of students”. In line with the above, Oyekanmi (2002) elucidated upon the relevance of virtual libraries to the teaching and learning of Arts in “Nigeria Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science, (NLAIS, 2003)”. He defined a virtual library as “a computerized system, which provides multiple access to entire collections of a library by means of electronic media”. Worthy of mentioning

is that a virtual library annexes digital technology and internet technologies to search, collect, organize, store and distribute information. A virtual library has the capacity to turn around the fortunes of teaching and learning the Arts in the 21st century.

3. Presentation and usage of appropriate teaching aids in the process of teaching and learning the Arts

To curb the challenges hindering the teaching and learning of Arts in the 21st century, the various concerned professionals on curriculum matters such as curriculum planners, the school administrators and Art teachers should always be mindful in ensuring the prescription of the appropriate teaching aids to teach the Art subjects. While the curriculum planners ensure the prescription of the appropriate teaching aids to be prescribed by the curriculum, the school administration should strictly supervise and co-ordinate the teachers in making use of the prescribed teaching aids in teaching the Art subjects. Furthermore, local materials should also be encouraged in the curriculum as it will greatly help in aiding the teaching and learning process of Art subjects in the 21st century.

It is very important to emphasize here that the prescription by the curriculum and the use of appropriate and relevant teaching aids will definitely be a good stimulant for generating interest in learning abstract subjects through an endeavor to include the usage of audiovisual aids in teaching the Art subjects. The audiovisual aids include: pictures, charts, films, etc. which help students gain a clear picture or description of what they have learnt. Televisions and computers will also go a long way in advancing their knowledge; the chalkboard for purpose of clarity and relevant textbooks which provide relevant, vital and up to date information of current trends and developments in the Arts subject etc. If all these are incorporated in the teaching and learning processes of Art subjects, it will definitely curb the challenges militating against the Arts subjects in the 21st century. Thus, Art teachers should not simply wait until the government provides teaching aids. They should also source teaching aids available within their locality.

4. The usage of relevant teaching methods in the process of teaching and learning the Art subjects.

Jayeola Omoyeni (2005), explained that “*good methods of teaching can improve the interests and enthusiasm of students to learn Arts subjects*”. In furtherance to the above, he further postulated that “*the usage of relevant and appropriate teaching methods to teach the Art subjects will erase the fear of students for learning Art subjects and their erroneous perception of the Art subjects as useless disciplines*”. In the same vein, Michael Omolewa (1987) was of the opinion that “*no teacher of Art disciplines that has the time, energy or experience to use all methods of teaching at a time but whatever the method is to be used, it should depend on general factors like age of the learners, aptitude of the learners, topic, purpose etc*”. However, research findings reveal that some specific methods of teaching should be adopted when teaching Art subjects. Prominent among these methods include:

- Excursion or field trip method.
- Group work method.
- Dalton method.
- Inquiry method.
- Socratic Method.

All of these methods of teaching among others have been observed as good and appropriate in teaching, and the learning process of the Art subjects.

5. Encouraging local writers and motivating teachers of Art subjects.

Another way which the challenges hindering the teaching and learning of Art subjects in the 21st century can be overcome is for governments at all levels, all over the world, to encourage teachers of Art subjects to write relevant textbooks on Art subjects which will reflect contemporary issues. These textbooks and materials produced by these authors should then be incorporated into and prescribed by the curriculum to be used in schools at all levels. Furthermore, since it is clear that there is a scarcity of professionally trained Art teachers, there is an urgent need to intensify the training and retaining of Art teachers. Thus, Art teachers should be encouraged to attend workshops, seminars, conferences etc. so that they can be integrated into the changing conditions of the 21st century. This will adequately enhance Art teachers in the ability to give students the right information and guidance, thereby making Art subjects interesting in schools.

Conclusion

As vividly shown in the analysis above, it has been discovered that there are many challenges bedeviling the process of teaching and learning the Arts in the 21st century. It has been explained why the relevance of Art subjects has been undermined, which has also accounted for the loss of student's interest in the Art disciplines. It can be concluded that if the challenges facing the teaching and learning processes of the Arts in the 21st century were to be overcome, the relevance of the Art disciplines will become better recognized, and its rightful place will be accorded in the educational curriculum all over the world.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, if the challenges facing the teaching and learning processes of the Arts in the 21st century are to be overcome, the following recommendations should be observed and adopted:

- Art teachers should avoid the teaching of Art subjects in an abstract manner. They should ensure the use of appropriate teaching aids.
- Governments at all levels all over the world should encourage the teaching and learning of Art subjects by providing adequate funding and equipment which will benefit Arts education just as how Science and technology is encouraged in the 21st century.
- Art teachers should not embrace the excuse of a lack of funding from the government or any education authorities in failing to make simple and useful teaching aids. They should improvise and experiment with whatever simple teaching aids they themselves can make use of in their lessons.
- Art teachers, especially in developing countries, should ensure the usage of and maximize the advantages of information and communication technologies (I.C.T), visual libraries and internet facilities in communicating relevant information in the teaching and learning processes.
- Art teachers should always attend conferences, seminars etc. so that they can be integrated into the changing conditions of the 21st century.

References

Crookall, R.E (1976). *Handbook of Arts teaching in Africa*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Evans brothers Limited.

Holloway, S.W.F(1967). History and Sociology. “What History is and What it Ought to be” in Omoyeni “*Methodology of teaching and learning of History in the tertiary institutions*”. London: University Press.

Longshalk, J.E, Alexander, C.D and Dutse, L.I (2003). Virtual Libraries for Academic and National Development in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of library Archives and Information Science*. Gboko: Vol 2, pp 35-44.

Tibble, J.W (1971). “Curriculum courses” in Omoyeni methodology of Teaching and Learning

History in the tertiary Institutions. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, pp 144-188.

Oyekan, S.O (2000). Foundation of Teacher Education. Lagos: Negro City Press, pp 191-194.

Omoyeni, J.M.S (2005). Methodology of Teaching and learning History in Tertiary Institutions. Ile-Ife: Wole Printing Press, Osun State.

Iseyemi, A.A (1999). Outline on Educational Technology. Ondo: Jambolad Prints, Ondo State.

Contact : +2348139440477; soyoye.akinyode@gmail.com