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## Art, Employment and Society (Pp. 140-152)

**Irivwieri, Godwin O.** - Fine and Applied Arts Department, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State – Nigeria

E-mail: [dririvwieri@yahoo.com](mailto:dririvwieri@yahoo.com)

GSM No: + (234)8023787331; + (234)8064402390

### Abstract

*This paper discusses the Arts as potential source of entrepreneurial and skill acquisition, capable of reducing unemployment in society. Following the failure of past governments, curriculum planners, educational psychologists and career educationists in not realizing the place of Art in National growth and development, this paper aims at highlighting the positive impact of Art and its creative potentials which will re-direct policy planners to give the art vocation the attention it deserves. Through reviews of literatures, Art, employment and society were discussed. Societal perception of Art and its roles were equally investigated. In conclusion, art acts as a creative force in employment reduction and as cultural catalyst, which should not be neglected but rather serve as a roadmap for National development. Artistic activities serve as agents of psychological and social improvement and welfare. It is recommended that emphasis should be placed on creative art activities from the pre-primary, primary through the secondary level of education nationwide. There should be adequate sensitization of the citizenry about the nature of the arts. Government should as a matter of urgency stop the contract employment syndrome for retirees so as to create vacancy for young graduates and other job seekers.*

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial skill, creativity, compensation, career, political community.

## **Introduction**

Art as a discipline is multi-faceted and considered as a veritable tool for job creation in society that appears to be over saturated with academically equipped citizens with not enough industries to be gainfully engaged. This is further buttressed with the present phenomenon whereby the certificate acquired after a set programme of training (paper qualification) is no longer tenable as passport to employment or considered as a meal ticket. This is due to the fact that most workers who are due to retire from service, thereby creating place for graduates from schools are no longer anxious to quit. They go on and on declaring falsified age to keep them on the job. The implication of this is that this breeds the teeming population of jobless youths, whose activities lead to moral decadence in society and hence productivity in the economy is not only seen to be at its lowest ebb but devastating. Thus, this paper is set to discuss the subject content of Art, its job creation opportunities and prospects in society. It should be recalled that during the industrial revolution in Britain, greater considerations were given to both the aesthetic and technological aspects of industrial products. According to (Adetoro 1987,3) after 1945, there was a steady movement towards courses that encouraged experimentation with design, equipment, materials and processes. This, according to (Householder 1979,11) aims at developing in each individual an insight and understanding of industry and its place in culture. It enhances the discovery and development of talents of students in the technical fields and applied sciences. It also develops in each student, some measure of skill in the use of common tools and machines and thus serving as a vehicle through which students acquire occupational awareness.

It is on this backdrop that the concept of art, employment and society is discussed with a view to highlighting the positive philosophy of Art in the development of a given economy. The present millennium requires the acquisition of basic skills to be able to face the challenges of the future. This is because Nigeria's scientific and technological quest will be a mirage, a tragic illusion, if art, science and technology are not integrated in the course of National Development. This is affirmed from the failure of educational psychologists, curriculum planners and career educationist in not recognizing the place of art in general education. Numeral literacy is important as visual literacy. Art thus taken as an enterprise, craft and design can create new market and generate income. Art is a veritable path to job creation (Egonwa 1999,5). For instance, culture, Tourism and sports provide more than the

basic requirement for not only resolving most unemployment problems in an economy but are potentials for foreign exchange generation.

### **Concept of Art**

Art is a difficult concept to define for it has come to have a wider significance. The word “art” derives from “ars”, the Latin word for “skill” that is the exceptional talent manifest in any human endeavour as skill applied to art of imitation and design, painting and architecture. It however, still retains this original meaning for example, “the art of cooking”. (*Encyclopedia Americana International* 1995:226).

To others, art is a means of formulating our feelings and emotions and giving them tangible expression. It is something more than mere picture making, painting or sculpture and the creation of our environments. It is not only the ability to create an object in its finest form, but a universal language not spoken but in visual form. One common point in these definitions is that “Art is a form of expression of feelings usually in visual form”.

Art is also considered both as a process as well as a product. As a process, art is a means through which we give sensuous and concrete expression to our ideas and feelings about the world around us. As a product, art includes pictures, images, buildings, food, clothes, utensil, music, dance, drama, etc. However, as most commonly used today, art means the visual arts, those areas of artistic creativity that seek to communicate primarily through the eye. Thus, art can be divided into three main categories – performing arts, Liberal arts and visual arts. Performing arts comprise music, dance and drama. While the liberal arts are made up of history, philosophy, poetry and literature, whereas visual arts is subdivided into Fine Arts and Applied arts. Fine arts include drawing, painting and sculpture, while applied arts comprise graphic design, textiles design, metal design, architecture and ceramics. Creative activities are the most natural means of developing the creative talent of the individual and for observing and catering for ones emotional needs.

### **Concept of Employment**

Employment is an occupation, trade or profession carried on for the purpose of receiving compensation. Compensation may be in the form of wages, salaries, commissions, fees or profits. Most compensation is in the form of money, but some may be in the form of goods or services. For any work to be

considered to be employment, it must be for the purpose of receiving compensation. A professional athlete is considered to be employed because he receives money. An amateur athlete is not. A person who operates his own business or profession is said to be self employed. Total employment is a term used to refer to the number of persons who are employed. In general, total employment tends to rise when business, industry and consumers spend or invest more widely. Employment tends to fall when more organizations and individuals save their money (Otuyelu 1978:17).

When spending and saving remain about equal, employment tends to remain about the same level. The level may be high or low, depending on what has happened before. Stimulating employment is a situation whereby the government can boast employment by either increasing public works or reducing taxes in her programme of deficit spending. Paid employment in Nigeria is believed to have begun scantily about 1830 during the navigation expedition by Richard and John Lander. The appointment of John Beecroft as the British consul in Nigeria in 1849 laid the foundation for the creation in the country of a civil service. This was made up of Europeans, Nigerian and other West African Nationals (Ofoegbu 1982:2).

In statistical sense, workers are considered employed if they have either full or part-time paying jobs or are self-employed, even if they are not working at a given time for reasons of health, strike or vacation. High level of employment is an important goal of public policy while unemployed labour is considered an economic waste, because of the rejection implied when a willing worker cannot find work. Since the production of goods and services (the national product) yields employment, the goal of a high level of employment can be translated into the maintenance of high and stable levels of total demand. However, this goal must be balanced against others, especially stable prices and economic growth (*Encyclopedia Americana International Edition* 2004:317).

It is therefore the aim of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) that models are created that will be capable of reducing unemployment among youths particularly graduates from higher institutions of learning in the country. NEEDS is the response to the development challenges of Nigeria. Nigeria as a country has the human and material resources to become the strongest economy in the world if a solid foundation for sustainable poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth

creation and value re-orientation is pursued with vigour and enthusiasm. (*National Planning Commission, 2004*). One of the most important decisions that most people make is choosing the type of employment for which they are best suited and which best suits them. If a job seeker has a clear idea of his ability, interest, limitations, and aims, he will be able to narrow his choice of employment and try to match himself and an occupation (Adetoro 1987:5).

### **Concept of Society**

In its broadest meaning, society refers to the totality of social relationships among men. Each aggregate of human beings of both sexes and all ages bound together into a self-perpetuating group and possessing its own more or less distinctive institutions and culture may be considered a society. In medieval social and political theory, society as such was not differentiated from the political community. Man belonged to this political community and to the church. Until Comte and Spencer sought to establish sociology as a separate science in the middle of the 19th century, society was generally considered an aggregate of individuals whose collective character could be deduced from the fundamental nature of man. Both Comte and Spencer insisted, however, that society is not merely a collective name for a number of individuals but is a distinctive entity transcending the individuals who belong to it (Spencer 1885:435). According to (Ginsberg 1932:39) society refers to the whole tissue or “the whole complex scheme” of social relationships. (Linton 1936:91) further identifies a society as any group of people who have lived and worked together long enough to get themselves as a social unit with well-defined limits.

From the foregoing, society is viewed as a complex network of interconnected and overlapping groups which together form a larger whole sharing a common culture and a distinctive institutional system. The society is the microcosm of the totality of human existence on the planet earth. A community of people – the family, the church and school are social organs of the society.

### **Societal Perception of Art**

Having x-rayed the various concepts of Art, employment and society, the writer wishes to highlight societal perception of the subject matter of Art. This is to disabuse the mind of the uninformed about the nature and capability of art as a veritable tool for economic and technological development of a given society.

Some people feel that Art is only for the gifted and not for everybody. This is not true because every human being from birth is imbued with that creative talent. The only difference that arises between person is as a result of constant practice in the exercise of this vocation. The more effort and practice put in this creative venture, the more perfect one becomes.

There is also the notion that art is a lazy job. Some even go further to state that art is not academic enough. This is a misinterpretation of the subject content. Art involve the use of high intelligent quotient of expression. The ability of the artists to translate mere literal expression in two dimensions into visuals or monumental form in three dimensions involves high level of intelligence. They are thus equipped with some basic academic principles which they follow in the creation of these art forms.

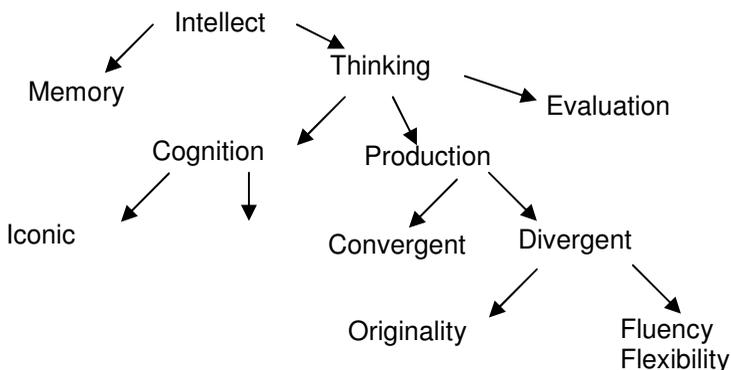
There is also the negative impression that art is a dirty job. To this assertion the writer wishes to state unequivocally that art involves the art of ordering disorganized forms in an orderly sequential manner in order to create something beautiful. This comes by the full integration of the elements and principles of Art and design. In ancient Greek and Roman view, all art was an invitation of nature and the artist's skill was measured by his ability to create life-like images. Plato regarded art as immoral and anti-social primarily because it calls forth emotions at the expense of reason. Aristotle insisted that art has two purposes – to instruct and to delight. From the foregoing, art cannot be said to be “a laissez faire” activity. There is also the notion that art is not difficult. Art involves the use of mental reasoning in the execution of a designed project which tasks the intellect. It is therefore not so easy as a number of persons perceive it to be. Furthermore, very little segment of the society think of art as not being a prestigious profession. Parents in the past, who are uninformed about the subject content of art, decry their children/wards from taking art as a subject worthy of study in higher institutions of learning. They prefer their children to study medicine, law, engineering which they consider as noble professions. One must add that a study of these so called noble professions cannot come without adequate knowledge of the subject matter – art for one to excel. It is therefore factual to state that presently the positive contribution of art to national development and growth has now made parents change from their initial perception and position.

To the adult, art is a medium of expression which features all branches of the arts for their obvious values but to the child, it is only a means of expression which gives him joy. Religion uses art to propagate its message. History also relies on Art as record of events in visual forms e.g. Pre-historic art and various art cultures of the world show the nature of the people. Advertisement sees art as one of the best ways to attract the prospective buyers and induce them to patronize products. Psychology uses colour to effect feeling or direct various emotions in the mind. Education uses Art as a form of teaching skill for a well developed child in art under normal circumstance is usually a creative person in every field of life which he may find him/herself e.g. Engineer, an Architect, Medical doctor, political or social scientist all need one form of creativity or the other. The textile world uses art to produce clothing materials for the masses. Decent homes painted with beautiful colours and embellished with interior decoration are all elements of art. Without Art involved in the graphic arts, the world will not possess millions of books, newspapers, etc, that flood the world's reading public.

### **Art as an Academic Discipline**

It is rather unfortunate that in most developing economies, the arts are given little regards in national development. Upto the beginning of the nineteenth century, the sciences and technology suffered similar fate. Both the arts and technology are manifestedly practical and both call for creative capabilities which are only slightly different in kind.

Creativity as the quality of creative expression not guided by any rules and not necessarily controlled by any convention is perhaps, the major trait that separates the arts from technology. Guilford, the US clinical psychologist and his team of investigators have suggested that the notion of creativity is not a unity but a collection of different component abilities. They found that "..... in the areas of performances of the graphic artist and the composer, at least, there are factors that are distinct from those that are important in the creativity of scientists, technologists and managers, yet that are parallel to them. The range of intellect is summarized thus;



However, much of the arts and all of the technology are essentially practical. It is exactly their practical attributes that held up the full integration of the visual arts and technology in the Western Universities for such a long time (Suleiman, 1977:11).

According to (Ashby 1958:50) “Britain’s industrial strength lay in its amateurs and self-made men, the craftsman–inventor, the mill–owner, the iron–master. It was no accident that the crystal palace – that sparkling symbol of the supremacy of British technology was designed by an amateur. It is clear that the earlier universities in Europe did not feel inclined to include the practical disciplines in their curricula. Technological education started with a minority of working class who could read and write. They included the craftsman, the foreman, the mechanic. Technological education in Great Britain did not make any headway into Universities until after the international exhibition held in Paris in 1867.

During 1862 – 1900, more colleges and Universities sprang up and official recognition was given to discipline previously neglected. The oldest known of the liberal arts colleges (Harvard, Yale and Columbia) also became universities.

From the above, it can be seen that the practical nature of some forms of arts and of science and technology delayed their social acceptance in society and in the educational system. However, the de-facto necessity for science and

technology in trade, industry and welfare enhanced their prestige, their acceptance and their vigorous pursuit. No such case can be made for those forms of arts which touch more on practical than on theoretical modes of expression. These non-verbal or iconic modes of expression have intellectual validity and respectability. We cannot continue to make valid objections against their pursuit because of their assumed intellectual inferiority (Suleiman 1977:11). The liberal arts in the middle ages of Europe were referred to those branches of learning as intellectual pre-requisites for the pursuit of advanced studies. The so-called trivium (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy) constituted a course of seven subjects known by the name as “arts” or liberal (free) arts. This was the origin of the “faculty of arts” and the award of degrees of “bachelor and master of arts”. Art is an intellectual activity and thus academic since it involves thinking, imagination and organization of ideas.

Presently, artists know that art is a means of understanding human experience as science. It supplies science with raw data for its theorems and hypothesis. Most scientific analyses proceed from visual experience, thus:

Visual Experience – Imagination – Hypothesis – Testing – Scientific Theory.

Technology, which is the application of scientific knowledge for purposive human ends, is not often seen as the by-product of artistic creativity which provides check and safeguard against the technological abuse of the human race. That Art is an academic discipline cannot therefore be underscored.

### **Art as a Profession**

In view of the present global economic meltdown, emphasis is now on the introduction of entrepreneurial skill at different levels of the educational system. Art as a profession also fills the vacuum created in incorporating the brain and hand to guarantee creativity as a means of reducing unemployment. The training in Art is planned for graduates to seek jobs and also to be self employed. There is plenty of room for free-lancing. Art is classified into three basic areas – The performing, literary and the visual arts which are in turn subdivided into Fine and Applied Arts. These broad classifications are further divided into various sub-units of specializations. It is, therefore, easy for graduates in these specialized units to find employment in industries such as in ceramics, sculpture, drama, graphics, metal design, painting, drawing

amongst others. There is practically no establishment where graduates of these art programmes cannot find employment. The training involved is so flexible cutting across art, science and technology. Today, a number of specialists in these art specialized disciplines combine practice of their vocations with teaching, hence, we have Professors of arts and design among others.

### **Role of Art in Society**

In the face of inexplicable reasons about the undesirability of making any efforts to develop the arts in contemporary society, the arts have educational, aesthetic, social, environmental values which we cannot ignore. According to (Wangboje 1990: 7–10). Art is the basis, the very foundation upon which our human existence, our life in society rests. The houses we live in, the household utensils we use, the clothes we wear, the picture we hang on our walls, the vases in which we display our flowers, the furniture we use are all products of art. In this sense, we are all consumers of art products. The ability to see and appreciate as well as distinguish between what is beautiful and what is ugly is a direct result of our experience with art either as makers or consumers of art. It is clear therefore to state that without art and its various products, human society as we know it today cannot exist. Art is relevant to society in the area of education. Through art, students develop their skills in the use and handling of materials and art media through which they express themselves in visual form. Art finds practical use in other subject areas.

Art is a language of communication through which the students can talk about himself, about his life and people around him. He uses the elements of art such as colour, line, texture and form to make his communication possible. Art is a language through which we can speak to other people irrespective of differences in language or nationality. A further relevance of art to society is in the area of culture. The culture of a people and their way of life can be seen in their works of art which are developed to maintain a sense of cultural identity.

Artistic activities serve as agents of psychological and social improvement and welfare. The arts have cultural relevance in their aesthetic psychological values to the individual members of the community and in the social and aesthetic value to the community as a group. The society uses the arts as a medium of stimulating appreciation of and bringing improvement to the environment to emphasize the value and quality of both natural and man-

made objects and phenomena in our social, biological and physical environments. The arts are our natural means of enlarging our horizon as human beings. They are our main natural source of psychological stimulation and relaxation. The understanding and patronage of the arts is a valuable resource material for the balanced growth of a nation (Suleiman 1977:13).

### **Conclusion**

The ultimate aim of our national development should be one of promoting and projecting the peculiar characteristics of distinct disciplines within the nation. There is hardly any academic discipline or area of human endeavour that does not make positive impact in a developing economy. Consequently, to focus more on one sector to the detriment of the other as is the case in science and technology in relation to the Arts does not augur well. For the average person, art seems so useless and so far away from his most basic and urgent needs. Yet the art is even more basic than the so-called prestigious disciplines such as law, medicine, engineering and the sciences. Without the arts, the society perhaps would return to the ape level of existence.

The point being made is that Art is a potential source of entrepreneurial and skill acquisition in society since it is capable of reducing unemployment among youths particularly graduates from both secondary and tertiary institutions in a country. Art according to (Wangboje 1990:9) can make valuable contributions towards our economic recovery and social mobilization. Art by its very nature is an infinite creator of employment opportunities. It is therefore a challenge for artists to improvise experiment and thereby fashion new tools, discover new materials that are locally available to create wide range of products in the market and thus provide a means of livelihood for thousands or even millions of our people who would otherwise remain unemployed or be devoid of any means of livelihood. Therefore, contemporary societies should use art as a creative force and as cultural catalyst. Art should not be neglected because according to (Fatuyi 1990:19), the technological activities of the world cannot be sustained without tremendous artistic abilities such as imaginative thinking and creative reasoning – seeing things in relationship, clear perception, observation and detailed analysis of parts to parts and parts to the whole. In the visual world, nothing stands alone, no image is isolated. An image is related to its background and cannot be properly seen or described without

reference to its components or environment. Thus, Art is a function of society in *pari passu* for the existence of one depends on the other.

### **Recommendation**

Since the arts are valuable aid in building a new socio-cultural order, the developing nations must give serious thought to art education. This choice is important since it will contribute immensely to the building of a new socio-cultural order. Consequently, emphasis should be placed on creative art activities from the pre-primary, primary through the secondary level of education. This will equip the youth with the basic occupational skill to guarantee a living worthwhile irrespective of the chosen profession that they have elected to undertake. It would be beneficial for both artists and consumers of artworks to make art part of elementary national education as it is in some developed economy like Germany and Switzerland.

Government should integrate experts in the diverse art fields in policies bothering on national planning that will generate a robust economy. Planners of development programmes should comprise able scholars from the arts amongst others. Efforts should also be made at the sensitization of the citizenry by all the tiers of government to regenerate mass interest in artistic development. A proper orientation will bring about the desirability of the creative arts activities among parents/guardians who will in turn encourage their children/wards in the study of Art not only as an academic discipline but as a veritable and viable profession.

The government as a matter of urgency should stop the contract employment syndrome for retirees from both public and private sectors of the economy. Rather, an extension of a period of grace for about three to five years be added to the existing statutory retirement age. This will put paid to this menace of incessant declaration of age by public servants before retirement and thereby opening windows of job opportunities for young graduates from schools/universities and other job seekers. By and large, our programme on aesthetic education will be inadequate if there is lack of grace, rhythm and harmony in our societal life.

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