

**ME ZA A YI DA SHI; A SIDE-COMMENT THAT REVITALIZED THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS IN UMAR SULEIMAN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
GASHUA**

*Ifeanyichiukwu Asogwa*  
*Department of Fine and Applied Arts,*  
*Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua, Yobe State.*  
*ifeanyichiukwuasogwa@gmail.com*  
*08065425585*

and

*Adamu Sandah*  
*Department of Fine and Applied Arts,*  
*Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua, Yobe State.*

**Abstract**

*Many individuals may wonder how Fine Arts, in its Western conceived import, has survived in Gashua, an area that has deep attachment to cultural practices that run parallel to Western artistic orientations. Like an oasis in the desert, this story has become a success, thus marking a turning-point in which Fine Arts has transited from its experimental stage to become permanently enshrined in the Faculty at Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua. Presenting a three-phased maiden developmental account of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts in this College of Education, this paper maintains that consideration of a reoccurring side-comment at exhibitions of fine arts – me za a yi da shi – in the implementation of its curriculum brought about significant improvement. Under its influence, the department, initially literally on the verge of collapse, quickly resuscitated and the number of admitted students increased. The paper further shows that the spirit of me za a yi da shi is related to the emerging global education order – Entrepreneurship Education – and suggests ways of making it a national policy in Art Education.*

## **Introduction**

It is regrettable that there is no documented history of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts in Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua. Information on the activities of the department are scattered on pieces of paper and locked within the minds of different persons. In effect, accessing them conveniently and reliably becomes a tedious task. Apart from being liable to wear and tear, collating information from segmented document is labour intensive and getting accurate oral tale, especially as events age, is also an arduous project. Thus, making accurate reference to the past activities of this department, especially after its silver jubilee, is becoming increasingly difficult. There is an urgent need to have a documentation of the development of the department now; before the exit of all the people who have first-hand information from the vicinity.

This paper, therefore, documents information on the historical development of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts in Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua via the working rubric of establishment and structure, innovation, achievement, problem and prospect. Information in this paper are gathered from segmented records in the department, oral interview of eye-witnesses, and personal experience of the researchers some of whom have worked for nearly 20 years in this establishment.

In addition to making information about this department accessible, the document will also serve as a guide for future planning because it is in reference to the past experiences that re-occurring errors are prevented. Joseph (2013) notes that proper documentation of events is essential for providing the contemporary professionals and future generations the opportunities to know, learn, and benefit from the past knowledge and experience. According to Trevor (2009), documentation streamlines processes, allowing people to look up answers instead of asking co-workers or reinventing the wheel.

## **Historical Development**

Fine and Applied Arts is one of the academic departments established at the inception of this school in 1986 as Advanced Teachers' College by the then Borno State Government. In 1988, it metamorphosed to College of Education on the orders of the same state government. Gashua, the location of the college and of course the department, is presently in Yobe State, having been carved out of Borno in 1991. It (Gashua) is about 185 kilometers north of Damaturu, the state capital. In 2007, Yobe State Government changed the name of the institution from College of Education Gashua to Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua. According to Student Handbook (2010), the entire college started with a total of 34 senior academic and administrative staff and 64 Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) students but as at 2011 (College Handbook 2011), there were 587 staff and 1856 students spread in six schools (faculties) and 30 academic departments in it.

The Department of Fine and Applied Arts, which belongs to the School of Vocational Education, has had a fair share of the overall development of the college. The department started with three academic staff headed by late Midala Mshelia, and only one student – Danladi (who

came from Damaturu) - in NCE programme but since then, it has expanded in structure, faculty, and facility.

**Structure:** Structurally, the department is exclusively housed in two large blocks split into seven units that accommodate the following academic programmes: Sculpture, Painting, Ceramics, Graphics, Textiles, Art History, and Art Education each under a senior academic staff accountable to the Head of Department, who in turn, is answerable to the college management via the Dean. In addition to specializing courses provided by these units, Drawing, Entrepreneurship Education, Computer Graphics, and Photography are also offered in the department as general courses. At the final year (Year Three) of the NCE programme, students specialize in one fine art course (sculpture or painting) and one applied art course (ceramics, graphics or textiles) and execute a researched work or project in any of the departmental units or programmes. The department participates also in Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES), Teaching Practice (TP) and Excursion or Field Trip (Educational Visit). It also organizes exhibition, workshop, and conference from time to time.

**Work Facility:** The department possesses, in fair quantity and quality, the following: Three Dimensional Arts Studio, Two Dimensional Arts Studio, Drawing Studio, Art Theory Classroom, Photographic (Dark)room, Gallery, Departmental Library, Store, Shelves, Quadrangle, and Staff Offices. Art equipment like Firing Kiln, Clay Dump, Potter's Wheel, Printing Table, Sewing Machine, Computer, Loom, Welding Machine, Wheel Barrow, Cutter, Clamp, Soldering Machine, Work Bench, Stool, Donkey, Tracing Box (Graphic Enlarger), Model's Throne, Carving Tools, Modeling/Masonry Tools, Carpentry Tools, Compressor, Stove, Pressing Iron, Easel, Display Board, Drawing Board, Mortar (Grinder), and Art Books are also in fair supply but most of them are getting outdated.

**Personnel:** The department has had many regular lecturers of which many have left and a few died. It has also had members of the National Youth Service Corps (of which some were retained) and a few other supporting staff. In their order of coming in, the following are names of lecturers who have worked (some are still working) in this department; with their courses of specialization:

Midala Mishelia	-	Graphics
Hassan Wutarama	-	Art History
Halidu Wakawa	-	Painting
Miyim Migaawa	-	Textiles
Yunusa Mohammed	-	Art Education
Ladi David Msheliza	-	Art Education
Gabriel Ajayi Oke	-	Ceramics
Mohammed Ali Buni	-	Graphics
Sani Ahmed Dahiru	-	Painting
Ifeanyi Asogwa	-	Sculpture
Daniel Musa Kwari	-	Painting
Abubakar Jaji	-	Art Education
Maryam Tafida	-	Graphics
Abdullahi Bawa	-	Textiles

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Alhassan Musa Yim	-	Ceramics
Mahadi Baba Toro	-	Computer Graphics
Dauda Mshelia	-	Painting
Hajja Mama Ali	-	Art Education
Adamu Sanda	-	Art History
Isa Dauda	-	Art Education

The following are names of some of the National Youth Corps members who served in the department:

Edwin Akpam	1989
Cefas Alkali	1989
Tofik	1991
Adamolekun Olubunmi	1993
Gabriel Ajayi Oke	1993
Ifeanyi Asogwa	1994
Adeola Odeyemi	1994
Babajide Sule	1996
Kinsley Ezeh	1996
Gladys Bolorundun	2001
Dennis Unutakunu	2002
Titilayo Faleti	2003
Henry Eke	2003
Lilian Idaminigbo	2003
Abigail Nnaji	2003
Uchechi Ogbonna	2004
Judith Onyema	2004
Livinus KC Ngwu	2005
Ambrose Idahosah	2005
Hajja Mama Ali	2010
Adewale John Olakunle	2010.

Clement Kemesia, Zainab Sani Abdullahi, Audu Umar and Aisha Sule (Hajjiya) have served in the department as models while Haruna Mohammed, Hassan Ibrahim Abba, Laraba Mohammed and Ibrahim Kaitafi have been studio attendants.

The department has so far been headed in the following order:

Midala Mshelia	-	1988 – 1991
Halidu Wakawa	-	1991 – 1992
Hassan Wutarama	-	1992 – 1993
Yunusa Mohammed	-	1993 – 1998
Daniel Kwari	-	1998 - 2000
Abubakar Jaji	-	2000 – 2002

Gabriel Ajayi Oke	-	2002 – 2004
Ifeanyi Asogwa	-	2004 – 2006
Abubakar Jaji	-	2006 – 2011
Dauda Mshelia	-	2011 – 2013
Hajja Mama Ali	-	2013 - Date

**Student Enrolment/Academic Quality:** On the whole, over 350 students have so far been admitted into the NCE programme of the department. However, the distribution of this number over the years and the quality of academic exercise in the department have tended to follow the general societal acceptability order of art programme itself which relatively falls into three phases or stages.

In the first stage which ran from its inception to the implementation of a policy in Yobe State which excluded people from Borno State (parent state) from enjoying indigenous rights (1988 – 1997), the department was strongly supported by Biu people in the Southern Borno. Almost all the academic staff and students in the department, in this period, came from Biu axis. Students were well qualified and highly interested in their (art) courses. Work equipment, materials and tools were sufficiently supplied. Field trips (educational visits), exhibitions, and workshops hosted in rotation between the colleges of education that offered arts in the region (the then College of Education Gashua, Federal College of Education Technical Potiskum, College of Education Hong, and Sir Ibrahim Kashim College of Education Maiduguri) were promptly organized. The motivation was high and the outputs were strong. For instance, all the surviving outdoor sculptures which give face to the department, including: The Visiting Bird (1989) by Alkali (Figure 1), Fish (1989) by Akpam, Festac Mask, Crocodile (1995) by Hannatu Samson, Abstract Figure (1996) by Ibrahim Mbahi (Figure 3), Fish Fountain (1997) by Yohanna Millam (Fig. 6), and Cattle Rear-er (1996) by Hamidu Mohammed (Figure 2) were produced in this period.

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Figure 1: The Visiting Bird, Concrete, 6.8 Ft Height, 1989, Alkali, C Figure 2: Cattle Rearer, Concrete, 7.4 Ft(H), 1996, Hamidu Mohammed Figure 3: Abstract Figure, Concrete, 6.7 Ft, 1996, Ibrahim Mbahi, respectively

In the second stage, ranging between the time the last set of students from Biu axis passed out of the department (1998) and 2006 when the department was given partial accreditation by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the standard reduced as the quality and number of the students admitted mainly through Pre-NCE, dropped significantly. Supply of work materials and organization of educational visit or field trip, usually sponsored by the college management, slacked. Understanding and patronage of art went very low and a remarkable thing happened in the area, which gave impetus to reconsideration of the problem of art in the department. Each time artworks were exhibited anywhere in the state, even when the works were adaptations of cultural objects (see Figure 4), observers would be making specific side-comment in Hausa Language –**me za a yi da shi** (meaning what will it be used for)? Even in the department, many of the students (most of them, this time, coming from Gashua and its environs), kept asking the same question – **me za a yi da shi**- on sighting artwork. Sculptures and most other three dimensional artworks were simply referred to as *gunki* (idol) and avoided; adaptation of traditional objects in their designing notwithstanding. Specialization in sculpture ceased completely in the department during this period and some of

its existing pieces were mutilated and defaced (see Figures 5 and 6). The situation was very pathetic.



Figure 4: Journey of Fire, Burnt Calabash, 1998, Ifeanyi Asogwa



Figure 5: FESTAC Mask, Concrete, 3x5 Ft, 1989, Akpan, E. Figure 6: Fish Fountain, Concrete, 5.3 Ft(H), 1997, Yohanna Millam

In the third stage, becoming prominent from 2007 and reaching to the present day, change is sought and innovations are made specifically to arrest the precarious situation in the

department and improvements are being recorded. Eight out of 14 students in NCE III, in the 2012/2013 academic year, specialized in sculpture.

### **Innovation**

Frustrated by the appalling situation of art in the region, artists started taking bold steps. Many resigned from teaching and relocated to new places and some of us insisted on finding solution to the problem. We started by making adaptation of the cultural objects of the people in art production and illustration, our watchword but the problem was not solved. What eventually became the solution came rather accidentally. In a conversation with Midala Mshelia and Yunusa Mohammed in an exhibition ground in Maiduguri around the year 2000, I asked; “Why is this *me za a yi da shi* thing repeated here and there?” “Functionality! Mr Ifeanyi; functionality of artwork! It is high time we considered this in our designs”; interjected Midala. From here, a revolution on teaching and production of art in the department started.

We considered the implication of *me za a yi da shi* to be that unfamiliar and non-functional standards of learning yield ineffective results. Thus, it was unceremoniously decided that explanation of topics in a course outline should start from the rudiments and production of practical works should target satisfaction of basic utilitarian purposes. Specifically, rudiments of the English Language such as punctuation, word spelling, meaning and tenses, parts of speech and sentence structures were (and are still) taught in art theory classes. In practical sculpture, attention shifted from aesthetics to designing of functional house hold objects like seat, table, door, frame, slate, and support in different media (see Fig. 10). Ceramics deemphasized designing of breakable clay-wares and focused on production of aluminum pots (Fig. 9) and spoons highly in use by the people. In painting, mural and colouring of functional items have become the favourite practice. Similarly, drawings are targeted towards sketching and studying of functional objects for possible fabrication. Graphic design now focuses on construction of letters and numbers in basic writing and with the labeling orders, especially those of Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET Fund) projects and supplies in the college, the practice is robust. In textiles, special attention is being paid to production of Tie and Dye, Batik, Embroidery (Fig. 7) and understanding of basic sewing techniques and styles.



Fig. 7: Dyed Cloth, 2013, Rabil Garba Fig. 8: Graphic Class work, Paint on Chair, 2013, NCE I



Fig. 9: Ceramics Class work, Aluminum Pots, 2012, NCE III.

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Fig. 10: Sculpture Class work, Iron-Gate, Wooden Seat and Leather Sandals, 2013, NCE II

Under this approach, artwork, including class work, is no longer done in this department for art sake; rather, it is done for commercial purpose. The determination is that every class work must be designed in a way it should be functional and saleable in the society. Since then, attention of many people is being attracted to the department and nobody has questioned the usability of its products. Functionality of every artwork in the department is now clear and understandable to everybody and smiles are returning to the faces of its observers. Consequently, the student population is growing. For instance, in the previous years, the number of students admitted in a class hardly reached 10 but in 2011/2012 session, 53 students were admitted and this present session (2012/2013), 62 were admitted. The spirit of *me za a yi da shi* is about redirecting art to the practical needs of the people. It is in line with the main objectives of entrepreneurship education currently in vogue around the world. Wilson (2009) notes that while the contexts around the world vary dramatically, entrepreneurship education, in its various forms, can equip people to proactively pursue those opportunities available to them based on their local environments and cultures.

Similarly, the philosophy of general education in the Minimum Standards for NCE (2002) recognizes that education in its broadest sense provides the backdrop against which development acquires its meaning. It emphasizes that constant changes in human thought as well as advancements in all disciplines require a responsive educational system that would keep pace with, and reflect the related trends.

Due to the effectiveness of this educational approach and in line with the revenue generation interest of the college coupled with the increasing number of female students, the department has outlined plans on rendering of Printing/Bindery, Pedi-cure, Hair-do/Hair-cut and

Exterior Design/Landscaping services. In collaboration with the Human Resources Development Centre (HURDEC), affiliate of the University of Maiduguri in the college, plan has reached advanced stage in running certificate and diploma courses in Culture and Tourism in this department. We are expanding.



Figure 11: Bade Fishing Festival, Enamel on Wall, 2005, Umar Bukar Alhaji

### **Achievement**

Despite all odds, Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua, has made remarkable achievements especially in maintaining academic standard and realization of national objectives.

**Maintenance of Academic Standard:** Even with the prevailing economic hardship, insecurity and location isolation from major art schools, the leadership of the College has on average been supportive and the academic staff in the department have kept on up-grading their qualification and capacity to impart relevant skills and knowledge. In this regard, over 70% of the staff, at any point in time, either possess or are pursuing Master's Degree. Most of them are in the senior categories of the academic staff in the College and well respected. For instance, the first Deputy Provost of the college (Mr Midala Mshelia) and the first Academic Staff Union Chairman of the College (Hassan Wutarama) were staff of the department. To this affect, all the units and the sections of the department have maintained full accreditation (with exception of 2006) from the inception to date. The department won bronze (3<sup>rd</sup> price) in a national art competition organized by NCCE for colleges of education in Nigeria at Kaduna in 1997.

**Realization of National Objective:** According to the Minimum Standards of the National Commission for College of Education (2008) objectives for setting Fine and Applied Arts Education in Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) include training of professional art teachers, preparing teachers to qualify for teacher education at the university level, and equipping NCE graduates with manipulative skills which would make them self-reliant job creators. In line with these objectives, the department has produced over 250 NCE Fine and Applied Arts graduates some of whom are outstanding. This paper identified the following NCE arts graduates from the

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Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua, who have either obtained University degrees, established functional art businesses or are teaching art in secondary schools:

Yakubu Sarki  
Ramatu Lawan  
Mohammed Ali Buni  
Dahiru Mohammed  
Aliyu Hong  
Deborah Nasiru  
Ibrahim Mbahi  
Hamidu Mohammed  
Jacob William  
Ustaz Adamu  
Yohanna Millam  
Nana Tahir  
Watilla Sambo Jibrilla (Master Artist, Geidam)  
Hannatu Samson  
Samailla Bare  
Hajja Mama Ali  
Asmau Da'azmi  
Esther Bulus (Fashion Designer, Gadaka)  
Gambo Usman  
Salisu Musa  
Hassan Yusuf  
Alhaji Baba Mallum (Calabash, Geidam)  
Namadi Alhassan  
Abba Ibrahim (Modesty Arts, Gashua)  
Umar Bukar Alhaji (Desert Fingers Arts, Gashua)  
Rabil Mohammed Garba (Rabi Textiles, Gashua)  
Nurah Adamu (Fashion Designer, Gashua)  
Isa Usman Anze  
Hussaini Lawan  
Dahiru Yarima Gaya  
Ibrahim Sule Umar  
Suleiman Musa  
Mathew Ali  
Rahilla Salla Sabo (Fashion Designer, Gadaka)  
Adamu Hassan (Young Artist, Fika)  
Ibrahim Mohammed Kolo (Bagurere Arts, Gashua)  
Goni Hassan (Elbis Textiles, Gashua)  
Amadiya Bulama

Yakub Bauna (Geidam)  
Ezrah John  
Adamu Aliyu Daya (Bongus Arts, Potiskum)  
Talatu Ishaku  
Hassan Galadima  
Jumai Musa Tagali  
Yayye Hassan  
Ladidi Bulama  
Ibrahim Dogo Abare  
Esther Yakubu  
Abigail Aje  
Zara Mohammed  
Kabir Mohammed Kabir  
Lazarus Adunbe  
Musa Samuel Dada  
Blessing Simon Abu

Many others are teaching in primary schools and some are into other art related businesses. Our graduates are doing well.

### **Problem**

Even in the face of all the efforts made to maintain relevant continuity, the following problems are encountered in the department; if not checked, they will retard the development:

**Insufficient Facilities:** Multiplication of the number of students admitted into the department has made the existing number of work-facilities insufficient. Again, although the provost has promised coming to her aid, the reconstruction of structures going on in the whole of the college has destroyed most of the facilities of Fine and Applied Arts Department and converted all her block structures into classrooms; making teaching and production of art difficult.

**Information In-diffusion:** Insecurity in the region has displaced many people, disallowing interaction and appreciation of various cultural practices and heritages of the country which art promotes for possible national integration. Almost all the students admitted into the department these days come from mono-cultural background, and excursion and field trips are halted; making wider cross-fertilization of ideas and diffusion of information difficult in the department.

**Trainability of Students:** Most of the students admitted to study Fine and Applied Arts have no basic qualification both in the practical work and the communication skill (English Language) making them practically uneducable; thus putting teachers under a lot of strain. There is also element of *me za a yi da shi* in sending students to Fine Arts Department from the management as only those who do not fit into any course but insist on being admitted, get to the place. In a conversation with a serving dean in this research, it was informed that all the candidates who failed Pre-NCE in different departments in this college, this academic year and who were rejected for admission into NCE by their respective departments, were pushed to Fine and

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Applied Arts. Most of such students are of poor background and cannot afford common tools and materials for work and government's supply is not forthcoming. Here, art is in a dilemma.

**Curriculum Inflexibility:** Curriculum, in a way, restricts exploration as its breakage causes disagreement which, in turn, delays progress. Sometimes, external examiners to the department question the perfect relationship between a piece of (*me za a yi da shi*) work and the curriculum; and staff would battle to extract facts with which to support it.

**Low Patronage of Art:** Due to the high rate of poverty in this region, patronage of art is very low. Art being naturally the last expenditure, commissioning and acquisition of artwork for public and private uses are almost absent in a state battling how to secure, feed, medicate and educate its populace. Even in the rare cases when artists are commissioned, collecting the money as charged or as agreed and signed is impossible. Artists and art students here are not adequately utilized as their counterparts in other states of the federation.

**Prospect**

Increasingly, young people in Yobe State want to acquire western education; visual arts inclusive. In their determination, they tend to close their ears against negative inhibitions and face the physical realities head-on. Dislike for art here and now is basically due to poverty and thus can be overcome.

Culturally, Kanuris, Bade, Mangawa, Bolawa and all other people in this area are flamboyant and fashionable in dispositions; thus they have every tendency and inclination to nourish art. Their elaborate dressing pattern in free flowing gown, head cover and foot wear to match; their body decoration especially the hands and feet of women in calligraphic design known as *Lalle*, the use of ornaments and deodorants; their marriage performance especially with regards to possession of home utensils and furniture; and the observation of festivals mostly Sallah and agricultural related ceremonies are highly artistic whereas their religious activities are performative and rich in material utilization.

According to Oladimeji (1997), craft is second to agriculture in providing means of sustaining livelihood in Yobe State. There is also good appreciation of geometric structures in the architectures of the people here. Figure 12 is part of the fence of house of one of the prominent people in Gashua. Thus, all these are indications that when art is properly directed to meet the demands of the cultural practices of the people, it will flourish well here in Gashua and Yobe State.



Figure 12: Geometric Structure on Private House in Gashua

### Conclusion and Suggestion

Structural development of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts in Umar Suleiman College of Education Gashua has been slow and steady but its general acceptability and patronage, including quality of studentship, has been dwindling. However, empathetic consideration of the plights of the people by the academic staff of the department in their teaching and production of art has put it back on an appreciable track and the formula can be effective for general development of art education in Nigeria.

For effective realization of the dreams of this department as well as smooth development of Fine and Applied Arts in Nigeria, the following modifications should be made:

1. Art education curriculum should be made more flexible to give enough room for addressing peculiarities because developmental stages of communities in Nigeria are not even.
2. NCCE should collaborate with TET Fund to see that functional equipment and materials are supplied to art departments in colleges of education so as to encourage vocational (entrepreneurship) education in Nigeria. This is so because functional vocational training is too expensive for many states in the country to provide.
3. As the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is about equipping every Nigerian child with both literacy and vocation and NCE is specifically dedicated to preparing those who will teach them, every NCE student should take productive course in vocational education, most especially arts, to be able to deliver in the new expectations. Currently, impacts of vocational training are not felt on graduates of the UBE in most part of the country and this is slowing down teaching activities in higher institutions.

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