

THE ROLE OF ARTS AND CULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Aihevba, Peter O.¹ and Ojiebun, G.O. (Mrs.)²

¹ English Department, College of Education, Ekiadolor, Benin City
Tel.: +234-803-592-1562; Email: peteraihevba@yahoo.com

² French Department, College of Education, Ekiadolor Benin City
Tel.: +234-806-033-3361; Email: fridayojiebun@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper highlighted the role of arts and cultural education in a developing nation like Nigeria. The words arts and culture were defined. Evidently, these two terms cannot be separated from a society as they tend to define who a people was, is and can be. The western impact on Nigerian culture and arts was also examined. A conclusion emerged with the needs to reposition arts and culture in the Nigerian education. Some recommendations were made as to further improve the place of arts and culture in Nigerian education.

Introduction

Culture is defined as “the social and religious structures and intellectual and artistic manifestation etc that characterize a society” (*The New Lexicon Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language*, 1990). Bodley (2006) was more succinct when he described culture as,

The pattern of behaviour and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create and share. Culture distinguishes one human group from others. It also distinguishes humans from animals... a peoples culture include their belief, rules of behaviour, language,

rituals, arts, technology, style of dress ways of producing and cooking food, religious and political and economic system.

From this definition, it is clear that the totality of a people's history and identity is captured in their culture. Culture separates one society from the other. It is the most formidable tool in the education and civilization of a people. No people can truly progress until they come to terms with who they really are and the roots of their existence. The culture of a people is a definition of who they were, are and can be.

Bodley (2006) believes that culture is so strong that it can be interchanged with society. If culture refers to a society or groups in which many live and think in the same way, then any group of people who share a common culture constitute a society.

Encyclopaedia Britannica (1972) defines Arts as,

The use of skill and imagination in the creation of aesthetic object, environments or experiences that can be shared with others, it may also designate one of a number of modes of expression conventionally categorized by the medium utilized or the form of the product, thus we speak of painting, sculpture, filmmaking, music, dance literature and many other modes of aesthetic expression as arts and all of them collectively as the arts.

From this definition, it is clear that Arts, involves imagination, skill, aesthetics and the audience. Arts generally is the aesthetic and skillful creation, recreation, relieving, expressing or re-enacting of experiences, ideas, and objects in beautiful, aesthetic and creative means and ways, and is shared or displayed for the admiration of the audience. The imaginative and creative impulse of man is drawn upon to create a product that is sublime and beautiful to the extent that it

The role of arts and cultural education in Nigeria

possesses inner-powers and energy that pulls and enchants the audience to see and see again.

Bodley (2006) considers Arts as the ultimate form of culture. According to him, “it can have the quality of pure expression”. Artistic symbol allows people to develop complex thoughts and exchange those thoughts with others. They help to convey feelings, ideas and values. They provide a way for people to communicate very complex thoughts with each other. Bodley (2006) argues that people are not born with culture, but that they have to learn it. People must learn to speak and understand a language and abide by the rules of a society. He adds that children learn culture from adults through a process called enculturation or cultural transmission. Arts is one of the strongest means of enculturation.

Western Impact on Nigeria

The British arrived Nigeria as a colonial power at a time when the industrial revolution in Europe created the need for new markets overseas. Their effect in Nigeria was felt in two separate, but complementary, fronts – commerce and evangelism. The British needed to find a market for their manufactured goods. With the annexation of Lagos as a British colony in 1861, the British occupation gained ground and was to last another century. They also needed to spread the gospel among the indigenous people of Nigeria and to propagate a new culture for Africa, since a standard European observation was that, in general, Black Africa had produced no culture.

The British imperialist saw everything that identified and defined the native African Nigerian as barbaric, inferior, dark and bleak. The impact was strong and destructive. Melville Herskovit’s study of the general European reaction to African art and culture was that African artistic talent and culture ranged from ‘childlike’ and ‘grotesque’ to ‘savage’ and ‘beastial’ (Herskovit, 1960). Herskovit went on to say that:

It was impressed on the Africans that their art was crude, their talents naïve, their dances lascivious... this appraisal was made explicit in discussion and criticism at times was reflected in unspoken attitudes of Europeans but it was rarely absent.

The influence of the West on African values, art and culture is greatly disturbing. The “inferior” African way of life was consciously distorted and disorganized. Attempts were made by the imperialist to transfer the entire cultural system of the Europeans to Nigeria. This affected the indigenous people’s philosophy and way of life. Uwangboje (1977) believes that Europeans attempted directly to:

Destroy or suppress the arts and attendant ceremonies that inspired their creation. The ancestral ways were largely destroyed or neglected. ... new ideas, modernism, western amusements – all contributed their share to undermining the traditional culture of Africa.

In the same vein, Maran (1921), in his literally work, *Batuola*, pictures an African culture that is salvage and barbarique, a culture not to be reckoned with. Murray (1938) observed that Nigerians illustrate the general tendency of Africans to copy Europeans and to suppose that anything imported or European must, of necessity, be better. Hence, most Nigerians opt for goods imported, rather than the Nigerian locally made goods. This opinion underscores the fact that Nigerians live under a certain inferiority atmosphere, where European ideals and ideas are more cherished by Nigerians. In the light of the above, Maryse Conde in *Heremakhown* (1976: 50) presented a people who preferred the white man’s culture to the African’s:

Des hommes parlent les langues des blancs, ayant manieye de blanc et n’ etait plus Africains que de nom.

The Role of Arts and culture in Nigeria

In the 21st century, Nigeria and indeed the black race or Africa is still grouping in a consciousness of inferiority, subservience and oppression enjoined on them by imperialism. There is a need for Africans to return to their roots. To return to their heritage, and to take their pride of place and to view the black race in proper perspective. One of the ways is to stimulate the needed positive thinking towards Africa cultural education. This mentality can be challenged and changed by re-directing the Nigerian to his majestic status and pride and glory in history, as captured and documented by culture in its most expressive medium, Arts.

All people of a society collectively create and maintain culture. Societies preserve culture for much longer than the lifespan of anyone in the form of objects, festivals, rituals, music, oral traditions, etc. All these are forms of arts. In most societies, the personal and group identity of a people are established by arts. Through such forms of artistic expressions, as patterns of dress, body adornment, ceremonial customs, the true nature and identity of a people is boldly established. Through the observation of and the participation in arts, the proper restoration, representation and reorientation of the mind is achieved.

Arts and culture is a primary form of storing and reproducing the life and heritage of a people. Ezra (1973), for instance, commenting on Benin Arts, says Benin arts portrays

past people and alludes to past events that have contributed to the kingdoms power, wealth and conceptual or spiritual greatness. The themes of history, politics and most importantly divine kingship are inextricably woven into the fabric of Benin arts.

The complex political structure of the Binis; communication with the ancestors; oba, the vast might and greatness of the kingdom; the complex administrative bureaucracy that unified the kingdom; the trade relations and interaction with the Portuguese traders, who sometimes served as mercenaries in the Benin army; and many more

events and experiences are repeated, documented in the brass casting, ivory carving, palace rituals and palace festivals. The culture and arts of the Binis are so sacred that artists' guilds, which include about 68 guilds, are affiliated with the palace societies.

Arts is a great tool of civilization and cultural transmission from one generation to the next. It helps to document the history, seasons, traditions and achievements of a people. Dewey (1956) observes "that there are transient and enduring elements in a civilization, which are functions of multitude of passing incidents that are organized into meanings that form minds". Nigeria, a developing country passing from one phase of civilization to another, needs arts and culture to condition and regulate its historical development in the right perspective.

Artistic products are also a great source of finance and economic stability. Arts can create personal and public finance for individuals and the nation. It is a great source of foreign revenue in the sense of tourist attractions and holiday making. Individuals can also use arts as a means of livelihood and financial freedom, especially now when the nation is looking at alternative employment sources, like self reliance and the small and medium scale industries.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The future of Africa has been written in false, negative light by almost everyone, including Africans. It is time for Africans to re-write their history and predict an assured future through the visible writings on the walls of culture and arts, for history always repeats itself.

In the words of Dora Akunyili, "there is the need for repositioning and rebranding" of arts and culture in a developing country, such as Nigeria. It is time for Africans to change the African history from story to glory, turn the failures and pains of the past to gains through arts and culture. The true picture of any society is embedded in the arts and culture of that society. Therefore, Nigeria needs a re-awakening in the aspect of arts and culture for a social, economic, religious and political repositioning and development.

The role of arts and cultural education in Nigeria

It is, therefore, recommended that:

1. The government at all level should pay more attention to the organization of seminars, in other to promote the arts and cultural value of the nation;
2. At intervals, there should be exhibition of artworks in the nation. To this end trade fairs should be organized. Arts exhibition should be encouraged in our schools at secondary and tertiary level.
3. Festivals, indigenous dances, music contests and concerts should be stately sponsored. This is to say that government should at all levels encourage and sponsor programmes, such as interschool festivals, interstate concerts, etc. Also, the reintroduction of state festivals, such as FESTAC will sensitize the public on the need for arts and culture in the society.
4. Man-made or natural cultural sites e.g. Olumo Rock, Okomu Resort in Benin, the Benin Moat, Kainji Dam, etc. must be protected and preserved. The essence is to aesthesize them to generate funds, and develop tourism thereby bringing to the limelight the arts and culture of our society.

References

- Bodley, J. H. (2006), "Culture" Microsoft Student 2007 (DVD). Redmond, WA: Microsoft Cooperation 2006.
- Conde, M. (1976), *Heremakhonon*, Paris: Robert Laffont.
- Dewey, E.J (1956), *Art as Experience*, New York: Capricorn Books.
- Ezra, K. (1973), *Royal Art of Benin*, New York: Harry N. Abrhams Inc.
- Herskovit, M. (1960), *The Human Factor in Changing Africa*, New York: Harry N. Abrhams Inc.
- Maran, R. (1921), *Batuola*, Paris: Albin Michel.
- Murray, K.C. (1938), *Introduction to Nigeria*, No. 14, Special Arts and Crafts number, New York: Harry N. Abrhams Inc.

- Onwubiko K.B.C. (1973), *History of West Africa*, Onitsha: Africana Educational Publishers.
- The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (1990), New York: Lexicon Publication Inc, 1990.
- Wangbojie, S. (1977), "Western Impact on Nigerian Arts," *Nigeria Magazine*, Nos. 122-123, Lagos: Academy Press.
- Werner, G. (1984), *A Short History of African Arts*, London: Butter and tanner.