Visual Arts and Technology Department, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar: An Overview

Enamhe, Bojor and Ekpe, Umana

Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar.
blossomenamhe@yahoo.com

Introduction

The intention of this paper is to give an overview of the Department of Visual Arts and Technology in Cross River University of Technology, Calabar (CRUTECH). Though the Department had existed since 2002 but it has not created the impact to sustain it. The following studies can attest to the above. According to Ajibade, Enamhe and Oloidi in a research undertaken to find out if Fine Arts is inevitable requisite for bachelors degree in Visual Arts, attest to the fact that the life of the department is being threatened.

It was a threat in that, in the entire Cross River State of Nigeria, only a few secondary schools mounted fine arts as a subject for pupils to study while, paradoxically, the subject was requisite for all prospective candidates of the BA Visual Arts programme of the university. As a result of this it became very difficult for candidates to gain admission into the programme (184).

Furthermore, Ajibade and Lawson analysed, “the limitations of teaching and learning Fine and Applied Arts at tertiary level in Cross River State: Calabar Metropolis”, the result shows that only 16 students out of 219 secondary school students that offered Fine Arts graduated in Calabar between 1998 and 2002 went ahead to study Fine Arts at CRUTECH.

It becomes very necessary to undertake this study to bring to the fore this Department which has rich entrepreneurial skills with areas of specialty of high commercial value. The Department known as VAT has to source from other Departments to make up the required students intake in the first year. Though the Department has to its advantage a large population in 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 sessions, the problem of awareness still hangs on. The Department ought to be projected adequately for first hand Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) applicants. (The JAMB is Nigeria's official entrance examination board for tertiary-level institutions. The examinations being administered are available for most students who choose to apply to Nigerian public and private Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and Universities). Considering the relevance of the Department to culture and tourism in Calabar, Cross River State and Nigeria.

Nigeria’s obligation of promoting, presenting and preserving the heritage of its people with art as part of the people’s heritage has been on the increase. Culture is a fundamental asset in the economic and socio-political development of Nigeria. Nigeria has a great culture, some of which are now festivals that have been lately revived in various states of the country. Art is an integral part of culture being a reflection of a people. It becomes imperative for arts at all levels to carefully plan, analyse and reposition itself to take its place in the Nigerian Polity (Dandura 2011).

Art is an essential part of culture involving worthwhile activities and should bring about positive developmental changes in a country. The rich culture of Nigeria is revealed through arts. “Art and culture of a people represent the vividness of the Nigerian lifestyle coupled with a glorious history and tradition”. (Nigeria at 50 A compendium), it is no over statement therefore to say that art is an integral part of a people’s culture. For the purpose of this study, art is divided into visual and performing arts.

Visual Arts is arts engaged in the communication of life’s experiences to an audience, it communicates experiences or the likes out of the chaotic nature of existence through a visual language. With innovations in modern technology and the establishment of CRUTECH, the study of arts expanded into its present status as Visual Arts and Technology with five units or areas of specialization namely Painting, Sculpture, Ceramics, Textile and Graphic Design.

Central to this study is information, basic structure and content of the Department as runned by Cross River University of Technology from hence forth known as CRUTECH. The paper has been divided into five parts; part one is the introduction, part two and three deal with the formation and objectives of the department, part four deals with limitations and prospects while part five is the conclusion.

Formation and Objectives of the Department

In order to proceed it is necessary to know how the Department started. The Department of Visual Arts and Technology (VAT) is in the Faculty of Environmental Sciences created from Fine and Applied Arts Department in the then Polytechnic Calabar, following the closure of the Polytechnic in the year 2002. The Polytechnic Calabar was established in 1998 to award a 2-year National
Diploma. It was the Fine Arts Department, Polytechnic Calabar, which transformed into the Department of Visual Arts and Technology (Ajibade, Enamhe and Oloidi 2011). The Department runs a 4-year Bachelors in Visual Arts programme in five studio areas which are listed as painting, ceramics, sculpture, textile and graphics. These areas of specialization are taught and practiced on the basics of functionalization, creativity and localization of material, recording and management of the materials in a way that can benefit the students and society. As Kenneth Kaunda puts it, “society is there because of man” (In Azikiwe, 1980) Art is a reflection of a people and society. To Ofem, art is an important statement in the life of humans. It is perceived in every aspect of human life - movement, dressing, eating, working, homes, offices, worship, environment, etc. (79). It is a binding force in the society and if not in use, creates a major vacuum or emptiness.

According to Ajibade, “it would appear that educational planners at higher levels of governance and policy formation do not reflect on the totality of the society, cultural and psychological value of the arts generally in the lives of the Nigerian youths and on the recreational survival of the nation” (2006, 12). The objectives of the Department (VAT) has as its vision; “to build a Department of Visual Arts and Technology, equipped with the technical facilities and competent academic man-power to train students to attain professional competence that fits them into the wave of interdisciplinary global standard”. The Department has the mission to break the stringent bounds to artistic studies in other Departments in Nigerian Universities, by promoting a broad-based visual culture through technology, research and learning.

The Department was given interim accreditation by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in 2005. In the year 2007 the Department received full accreditation. The goals for establishing the Department are as follows:
1. Positioning the Department as a centre of visual excellence through research, publications, exhibitions, establishing and maintaining a visual relationship with the industrial terrain of the Calabar Urban economy.
2. Creating awareness for the Visual Arts among secondary schools through exhibitions, art competitions, discussions, including the expansion of the Visual Arts and Technology Curriculum to include interesting specialties like glass technology, Scenography, Film and Photographic Studies (Departmental Hand Book, 2007).

The Department started with an enrollment of 10 students for the Degree programme and has 157 students for the 2010-2011 session. The undergraduate programme has grown in studio capacity and intends to be upgraded to run the postgraduate programme. With the mission of the Department to break away from the conventional artistic studies and institute a broad based study in visual culture and having a vision to attract highly competent academics to train professionals in Visual Arts at all levels whose skills paralleled artists from anywhere on the globe. (Post-graduate curriculum for Visual Arts and Technology, 2011).

The strategic Direction of the Department is to train graduate students at MFA, MA and PhD levels with skills, which enable them to buy into global interdisciplinary directions in research and opportunities in industrial development.

The Postgraduate Diploma in Visual Arts and Technology (PGD) is to be a general degree designed for those wishing to undertake postgraduate studies in the Department but without Bachelors in Visual Arts. The Masters Degree in Visual Arts and Technology has two paralleled studies, from which a candidate can chose. Masters of Arts (MA) Degree, and the other is the Masters of Fine Art (MFA) Degree. The Department (VAT) runs an undergraduate programme of four (4) year duration which also includes six (6) months of industrial training and field trips for all students in their third year. Generally the students are given full exposure to these areas of specialization in their third year. This is to allow for introduction to other aspects of the Visual Arts in the first and second year of admission.

**Limitations and Prospects**

The education system in Nigeria through a critical examination of Michael Sunday Agba and Agaboh Agba’s view, portray the fact that the current problem faced by the Nigerian education is under funding. This realization must have prompted Edame to argue that, between the last two decades, the funds available for education have reduced considerably. Ushie in his work, “Education and Effective Human Resources Development in Organization” captures this problem more graphically when he asserts:

> Poor funding can cause a well conceived training and development programme to fail. In fact, human resource development involves different activities, materials and other resources, and all these activities can not succeed without adequate funding (2004: 233).

The weighty nature of under funding of the education sector can be seen in the running of the Department. The study undertaken by Ajibade and Lawson reveals that,

> due the nature of Calabar, being atypical interior Nigerian city where the social and
Lecturers’ offices are ill-work under deplorable conditions in the department. Students in all the sections. Students still study and spaces are too small and few to accommodate the needs of the Department. It is sad to note that the above it is obvious that the university cannot of Educational Research Vol. 2, No.1 & 2, 2003). From institution, Cross River University of Technology only few secondary schools and one tertiary universities. The implications of the above is that participate in the development of fine art in the state and nation in general giving rise to challenges, recorded was alarming.

According to the authors, Calabar is affected because of its meagre financial base and the general down trend of Nigeria’s economy. With poor industrial development in the state there is no avenue for private sector participation in the development of the educational sector or fine art. Where there is high traffic of activity, galleries and other organizations participate in the development of fine art in the universities. The implications of the above is that only few secondary schools and one tertiary institution, Cross River University of Technology study fine/ applied arts. (see p. 130 of Global Journal of Educational Research Vol. 2, No.1 & 2, 2003). From the above it is obvious that the university cannot meet the needs of the Department. It is sad to note that the Department lacks adequate facilities, studio spaces are too small and few to accommodate the students in all the sections. Students still study and work under deplorable conditions in the department. Lecturers’ offices are ill-equipped, this however limits their active participation in school activities. Inadequate supply of water and electricity supply have restricted students and lecturers’ performances in the studio. VAT is a practical intensive Department without equipment, demonstration cannot be possible which can result to students graduating half-baked and ill-equipped for professional practice. With the large intake of students in the last session, the Department suffers from quality assurance, which is a borrowed concept from the production industries. Salami explains that, it has become a key issue for higher education since 1900, making distinction between quality and quality assurance. Quality is about the “what” while quality assurance is the “How” of education (Salami 2009: 142). The Department is suffering from students’ poor performances and must be arrested fast. This is from personal observation from the assessment of results in art appreciation, art history and art management in the 2010/2011 school session, the performances recorded was alarming.

Significant changes are taking place in the State and nation in general giving rise to challenges, which have significant implications on the development of the cultural sector. Art empowers individuals with creative skills that widen the base of participation in the society, create jobs and decentralize the economy. But, without appropriate investment in the Department the benefits of tourism will elope the department. To avoid this situation certain factors ought to be addressed to sustain the Department of Visual Arts and Technology as the “power house” for producing materials for culture and tourism. VAT has progressed and developed, graduating students into the 4th convocation. The goal of education in any society is the maximum development of individual potentials. These can be achieved through programmes in the department. The urgent need for an effective Visual Arts and Technology Department cannot be over-emphasised.

The Department can progress and develop with the provision of adequate facilities, ranging from studio spaces, offices for lecturers, lecture rooms, gallery, materials and qualified man-power.

If the Department is well equipped, then it can graduate students who can meet the challenges of the times. The Department has already trained students for technical institutions, colleges of education, factories and design companies. Due to the practical nature of the Department, small and medium scale enterprises are established by some graduates of the Department. Some of the grandaunts, Michael Ekperikpe who specialized in graphic design owns an active business in town.

CONCLUSION

The Visual Arts and Technology Department is not relenting in its endeavours and as the only avenue in the state for training visual artists in the tertiary level of education. The challenges notwithstanding, the Department’s impact must be felt. With the shift from oil and gas to tourism, the Department needs to develop itself to partake of the trends of development that are likely to occur in the twenty first century. Omagu (2011) notes that, globalization has become a sweeping theme in contemporary world. The tourists circuit in Cross River State and its associated economic activities are evidently not immune to such a wider context of the world economy. Over the years the state has witnessed domestic and international tourist flows. Nigeria desires a nation with good education. Education produces constructive knowledge which is fundamental in culture, politics, scientific and economic development. The values of education is captured thus, “the race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed” (cited in DLCF National Worker’s Retreat Programme, 2003), this implies that the right kind of knowledge is power; the absence leads to deformity. (Agba and Agba, 2008).
References


Four-year BA Curriculum Department of Visual Arts and Technology Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Calabar, 2007.


Postgraduate Curriculum, Department of Visual Arts and Technology. Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Calabar, 2011.
