

PROBLEMS AND NEW REALITIES FACING CERAMIC EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the current state of higher education as it affects ceramic development in developing countries, and considers the new realities they face and how they are reshaping ongoing challenges. In the past decades, Nigeria have witnessed a rapid expansion of higher education, the simultaneous differentiation of higher education institutions into new forms, and the increasing importance of knowledge for social and economic development. The focus of this paper is on the challenges affecting the developments of ceramics education in Nigeria in order to make significant progress in terms of national development and job creation.

Introduction

Issues concerning education have become contentious issue amongst well meaning individuals in Nigeria. Education is of great importance to every nation. It therefore, attracts considerable attention. At the family, community, state and federal government levels, education is discussed, planned and processed. It is believed that education makes both the person and the nation; it also influences values and attitudes. The professions are similarly built through the training and preparing people for different careers in life. Ironically, problems of ceramic education and ceramic designer's applicability in the industry is not yet appreciated when viewed against the total absence of ceramic science, engineering and technology among Nigeria University programmes, (Na'Allah, 2001). The development of ceramic education like other educational institutions in Nigeria is beset with a lot of problems.

Pottery making in Nigeria is an old craft. The introduction of modern Ceramics teaching and production were started by pioneers like Mr. D. Roberts – 1904, Mr. K.C. Murray – 1930 and Michael Obrien - 1950 who came to the Nigeria from different cultural backgrounds. Most of the higher institutions currently offer

ceramics as a course were then not established. This meant that their ideas were based on studio production developments.

Despite notable exceptions, higher educational institutions in Nigeria where ceramics is taught suffer severe deficiencies in each of these areas. As a result, few perform to a consistently high standard. A well qualified and highly motivated department is critical to the quality of higher education institutions. Unfortunately, even at flagship universities in Nigeria, many faculty members have little, if any, advanced-level training. This according to Mamzah (2007) limits the level of knowledge imparted to students and restricts their ability to access existing knowledge and generate new ideas.

Teaching methods are often outmoded. Remote learning is common, with instructors doing little more in the classroom than copying their notes onto a blackboard. The student, who is frequently unable to afford a textbook, must then transcribe the notes into a notebook, and those students who regurgitate a credible portion of their notes from memory achieve exam success. These passive approaches to teaching have little value in a world where creativity and flexibility are at a premium. A

more enlightened view of learning is urgently needed, emphasizing active intellectual engagement, participation, and discovery, rather than the passive absorption of facts.

While pay disparities make it difficult to attract talented individuals, recruitment procedures are often designed in ways that hinder intellectual growth. The country has been slow to develop traditions of academic freedom and independent scholarship. Bureaucracy and corruption are common, affecting the selection and treatment of both students and faculty. Favoritism and patronage contribute to academic inbreeding that denies universities the benefit of intellectual cross-fertilization. These problems arise most commonly in politicized academic settings, where power rather than merit weighs most heavily when making important decisions.

Problems

The challenges or problems mitigating ceramic education are:

1) **Funding:** Universities in Nigeria are owned and funded by the Federal Government, state government and private individuals. Over the years, government subventions to universities have never been adequate but at the same time governments maintain the policy that universities should not charge fees it deemed adequate to complement the financial effort of the government. In Nigeria, the allocation to education as a share of the GDP is quite minimal. Till date, government funding of vocational and technical education programmes including ceramic education have not been impressive.

2) **Facilities:** Most the ceramics departments in Nigerian universities do not have laboratories or workshops space let alone usable equipment and facilities and where they exist, they are grossly inadequate, as the laboratories only have the items or equipment that were provided when the departments were established.

The available facilities, programme as at today are inadequate quantitatively and qualitatively and besides they are obsolete. Na'Allah (2001) indicated that only a few of institutions of Higher Education where ceramics is taught in Nigeria have laboratory or workshop space. The others do not have laboratory or workshop space and that this reflects the low quality of

the ceramic programmes in higher institutions. He further noted that these few universities that have laboratories, experience acute shortage of laboratory equipment and supplies. He concluded that this situation is partly responsible for the reason why it has been increasingly difficult to run experiments effectively for students and made the teaching and research in the science and technology of ceramics difficult and therefore the country was producing insufficient and ill-prepared ceramic graduates necessary for driving the technological and socio-economic development of Nigeria as a nation.

The inadequacy in teaching, laboratory and workshop facilities has contributed to the low quality of ceramic education graduates in Nigeria. Reyes (1989) categorized students into three, namely: verbalizers, visualizers and doers. The verbalizers are those who learn easily if information is in written or spoken form. They benefit from lectures, tutorials and hand-outs. Visualizers learn easily when information is presented in pictorial or diagrammatic form while the Doers learn more easily when information is presented by practical demonstration by the lecturers.

The inadequacy of facilities both qualitatively and quantitatively has put the visualizers and the Doers at a disadvantage. The verbalizers may also have problem in a class with large student population. The implication of this scenario is that only a small proportion of the students benefit from the current pedagogical system.

3) **Staff training:** The training of academic staff is ordinarily a continuous exercise to ensure consistent improvement in the quality of their outputs. The training is two-fold: training to acquire minimum qualification (Ph.D.) to teach and continued professional training. Both types of training can be acquired either locally or overseas. Usually, local training within the nation is cheaper than overseas training but more strenuous because of inadequate facilities, literature and distractions arising from the need to meet the necessary demands. Overseas training requires a lot of foreign exchange but the enabling environment exists to achieve success in a record time. However, over time it has always been difficult to get the trainees

back to their respective countries after the completion of their study.

4) The curriculum of technical education:

The curriculum of a subject with practical content is generally organized into an average of 67% for the theoretical classes and 33% for laboratory. Students also use the laboratory to develop case examples on their own time. Olunloyo (2002) noted that one of the issues confronting the design of appropriate curriculum for technical/vocational education is preparing students for the shift from the past to ICT paradigm in technology practice. The low pace of industrialization and technological growth in Nigeria can be attributed to the widening gap between science and technology as a result of the inability of technical education to adequately utilize the scientific ideas to promote technology. This suggests the need to overhaul the ceramic education curricula in Nigeria. However, the overhauling of the curricula may not necessarily translate to the production of highly literate technical education experts of ready-made graduates for the industry which may result in rapid industrialization or growth in the economy unless solutions are proffered to some constraints that may militate against positive outcomes, but will adequately equip our youths with the relevant skills needed for their day to day living. The problems associated with the current curricula are that:

- (i) They are based on a foreign model which has evolved under ideal conditions (staff, equipment, infrastructure and training opportunities) that are not easily duplicated in developing countries.
- (ii) There is a basic lack of textbooks in this area and most of the available textbooks are often illustrated with examples from outside the local environment and which are irrelevant to the particular country.
- (iii) There is usually a shortage of highly competent indigenous teaching and support staff with sufficiently wide practical experience of ceramic technology.
- (iv) The curricular are adjudged to be too academic and overloaded with intellectual content in arts at the expense of basic engineering and technology.
- (v) Inadequate provision for business management concepts and entrepreneurial skills development. Because of the inadequate preparation of the students for

the industry some employers do not retrain the graduate.

(vi) The teaching approach follows the conventional method of transferring knowledge across through the lecturer reading out to students, who would then take down notes. The educational system continues to place considerable value on this method of teaching.

5) The apathy of political office holders/law makers:

Education generally, including technical/vocational and art education programmes has been grossly neglected in Nigeria. Art educators have the greatest challenge of convincing the law makers on why they should give priority to the programme in allocating resources. Many options of getting positive results have been advocated at different fora, namely, lobbying, participation of technical educators in governance, wooing etc. Yet the government is playing a lopsided attitude to the proper development of the programme in Nigeria. Thus, Nigeria will ever remain a technologically backward and dependent nation if this attitude and trend is not reversed.

Recommendations

Quality higher education teaching is absolutely crucial in enabling our higher education institutions to produce the critically-thinking, creative, adaptable graduates who will shape the future of ceramic technology in Nigeria. We need to become more outward-looking, more innovative, and to put our societies on a sustainable footing for the future. In response, we need more creative, flexible and entrepreneurial young people who are equipped for the challenges of today's ever changing work environment. It is therefore recommended that:

- Public authorities responsible for higher education should ensure the existence of a sustainable, well-funded framework to support higher education institutions' efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Every institution should develop and implement a strategy for the support and on-going improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, devoting the necessary level of human and financial resources to the task, and integrating this priority in its

- overall mission, giving teaching the due parity with research.
- Higher education institutions should encourage, welcome, and take account of student feedback which could detect problems in the teaching and learning environment early on and lead to faster, more effective improvements.
 - Curricula should be developed and monitored through dialogue and partnerships among teaching staff, students, graduates and labour market actors, drawing on new methods of teaching and learning, so that students acquire relevant skills that enhance their employability
 - Higher education institutions and national policy makers in partnership with students should establish counseling, guidance, mentoring and tracking systems to support students into higher education, and on their way to graduation and beyond.
 - Higher education institutions should introduce and promote cross-, trans- and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, helping students develop their breadth of understanding and entrepreneurial and innovative mind-sets.
 - Higher education institutions facilitated by public administrations and the federal government should support

their teachers so they can develop the skills for online. Other forms of teaching and learning opened up by the digital era, and should exploit the opportunities presented by technology to improve the quality of teaching and learning

Conclusions

In Nigeria, higher education with regards ceramics exhibits severe deficiencies and for progress to be made in Nigeria the challenges confronting ceramics education must be recognized and fought vigorously. Universities in Nigeria where ceramics is taught need to review their missions and come up with specific strategic plans for the 21st century, based on each university's unique situation, as well as national and global issues affecting universities.

Innovative thinking and new strategies are essential guides to future educational provision and practice. Such strategies include improvement of evaluation and accreditation systems, review of programs to make them more responsive to societal needs, informed management of higher education, promotion of university linkages with the private sector, and involvement in policy analysis through research. In addition, improvement of higher ceramic education programmes will require more effective utilization of new information and communication technologies.

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