

Relevance of Arts and Crafts in Awka South Contemporary Society

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Abstract

This research work aims at expressing the values of arts and crafts in Awka South society today. This study explains arts and crafts to be something that reduced stress and tension. Crafts played a major role in maintaining well-being of individuals and societies. The expression of one's mind in form of an art work has so much importance to us. Over the years arts and crafts have been in existence. It was dated back to antiquity. People used the things found in their cultural environment to provide basic things they need for a healthy lifestyle. These things were used to improve their standard of living. Africans were mainly craftsmen. They relied in art work for survival and existence. Even the Europeans to a great extent deal in arts and crafts. The research work highlighted the benefits of arts and crafts in Awka South today. Also how we can improve in arts and crafts as a field of life. This study also explained how people who engaged in arts and crafts perceived it. The significance of arts and crafts were seen in three ways: a. The meaning and value of arts. b. The feeling experienced during craft activity and c. The benefits of arts and crafts to humanity. As an activity, arts and crafts helped participants to handle life situations, elements of arts and crafts that enhance well-being can be traced to both the artefacts and the sense of achievement gained in producing them. The effects of arts include personal growth, development of physical and cognitive skills, control of one's body, thoughts and feelings, as well as cultural and social awareness. Government should give recognition to arts and crafts by providing facilities to enhance its development. Also people who have achieved so much through it should be recognized and appreciated.

Keywords: Arts, Crafts, Relevance, Contemporary, Society

Introduction

Humans have been creating arts as long as we have been existing. Arts and crafts were as old as humanity. Our ability to appreciate beauty, to spin stories, to create things in our imaginations, to write on fields of life is uniquely human. Even when human life becomes difficult and complicated, people still resort to arts to express their innermost feelings. Art makes life more beautiful and meaningful. Arts are the expression or application of human creative skills and imagination, typically in a visual form, primarily to be appreciated by humans and to be used to improve the standard of living. Arts are not really an end but a means to an end itself. Practicing an art, no matter how it is; it must be a way to grow. Arts have been a medium for social change. People are capable of instigating change on a global scale. Arts are a diverse range of human activities in creating visual, audio or performing artifacts. Arts are the expression of human imagination or ideas. It was something created with imagination and skill that is beautiful. Arts are really beneficial to us in our society. Arts are natural behaviour of expressing oneself. People use their art work to bring out something that reflects their thought process. Arts are media for communication in our society. It is a universal form of expression which everyone understands. It also reflects culture greatly. The kind of art work created by people of a particular group is used as a mirror to see through the culture of the people. Art makes a culture rich.

Crafts on the other hand basically have to do with skill. It was an activity involving skill in making things by hands. It can be said to be the making of decorative or practical objects by hand as a profession or leisure activity. Crafts has to do with materials, provenance and making. It has to do with a process of making new things that are relevant to human life. Crafts are representation of our culture

and belief system, it promotes our heritage, through the use of our indigenous materials found in our cultural environment. Crafts act as a tool for preserving traditional knowledge and talents. Arts served as a medium to provide the basic necessities of humans here on earth. Crafts reveal that there are so much appreciation when something is produced by mere fingers and tools than when it was produced with machines. It makes for more usage also crafts preserve traditional knowledge and talents. Arts and crafts are a core aspects of a culture. The mastery in any craft shows the skill and experience the craftsman has acquired overtime.

It is also very important to note that despite the availability of alternatives, crafts have remained over the years a popular form of activities. In contemporary western culture and African culture, men and women made craft a hobby and an occupation that can generate as much income as possible.

Definition of Concepts

Arts: They are an expression of human creative skills and imagination, typically in a visual form to be primarily appreciated and used by humans.

Crafts: The word crafts have several meanings in different context, depending on the historical phase or the philosophy or target of the specifier. Crafts can be described as a distinctive knowledge that is intuitive and expressed through making and doing. The concept of crafts may be defined from the angles of maker, a process, a product or a user. Crafts comprise the design and making process. In craft human activities are usually involved and also concrete materials to be dealt with.

Activity and Occupation: While an activity may be defined as a general class of basic activities, an occupation is framed by personal interests, desires and values. An activity becomes an occupation if the activity is personally meaningful and specific to a person. An activity has to possess these qualities to be an occupation; it is perceived as doing by the individual, it is goal oriented and purposeful, it carries a specific meaning for the individual and it is repeatable. These kinds of activities are performed with some consistency and regularity bringing structure and meaning to individuals.

Traditional Arts and Crafts: These refer to the use of local materials, hands and tools to produce things that are useful to the society. It involves skills and talents, it is deeply rooted in the people's culture and can be transferred from one generation to the other.

This research is aimed at explaining arts and crafts as a concept and revealing the relevance of arts and crafts to our society. This research is also to develop the minds of the youth on the importance of skill acquisition. Also it aims at exposing different areas of arts and crafts that are yet to be harnessed and explored.

Literature Review

Arts can be characterized by a representation of reality, expression, or communication of emotions of other qualities. The general description of arts centers on the ideas of imaginative or technical stemming from human agency and creation. Anything arts comes from the human creative mind into a reality that is to be appreciated by humans as well. Arts can be seen as a component of culture reflecting in the society. It is an activity done to appeal to human conscience and emotions. The concept of arts is often shared specifically among the members of a given society and dependent upon cultural context. The purpose of the works of arts is to communicate political, spiritual, or philosophical ideas to create a sense of beauty and to explore the nature of perception.

Arts and crafts as a concept has been defined by scholars, researchers, and craft men in so many ways according to their perspectives of arts. Also in view of Diogu et al (2010:3), their experiences of what artwork is all about, also in accordance to how they have performed a work of arts or executed a particular skill. The definitions of arts by people are influenced by the unique perspective of that person as well as by their own personality and character. People have defined arts and crafts according to the impacts it has in their daily life.

Frank Peebles (2006), interpreted arts as the means by which a community develops for itself a medium of self-expression. Richard Wolleim (2017), expressed it to be a vehicle for the expression or communication of emotions and ideas, a means of exploring and appreciating formal human elements for their own sake and as a representation. He described the nature of arts as the most elusive of the

traditional problems of human culture. Jean Sibelius (2016), defined arts as a signature of civilization. He described it as a reflection of the modern things found in our environment. In his words, explained that arts are not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it. The object of arts like any other product, creates an artistic and beauty enjoying public which makes art a corner of nature seen through a temperament. Oscar (2013), defines arts as the intense mode of individualism that the world has not known. He believes that the ability of arts to transcend reality and to create the sublime is what makes it great. Arts are really about illusion and imagination, in fact the proper aim of arts are just to tell a lie of beautiful untrue things. In his view, the aim of arts is not to represent the outward appearance of things but their inward significance. In his words, "Arts as an imitation of beauty or nature was persistent throughout the history of art" Also views arts as that which completes what nature cannot bring to a finish. In arts, we get nature's unrealized ends.

Leo (2006), defined arts as the union among men joining them together in the same feelings and indispensable for the life and progress towards the wellbeing of individuals and of humanity. It goes without saying that arts created a good form of human interaction, mostly in arts; the audience whom the arts are directed to, can share that feeling or experience. Arts do not belong to any class of society. Frank Lloyd (2017), defined arts as a discovery and development of elementary principles of nature into beautiful forms suitable for human use. Lisa Marder (2019), in his perspective; sees arts as a conscious creation of something beautiful and meaningful using skills and imaginations. This of course makes the work of an artist come into play that is creating beautiful things that are really useful to humanity. Lucia Annaeus in his view describes arts as an imitation of nature. This is true because everything that comprises in arts are just natural. Arts help to bring so many aspects of nature to reality.

Edgar Degas (2019), defines; Arts are not what you see but what you make others see. Collingwood (2017), argues that arts are the imaginative expression of emotions. The theory seem quite inadequate to the task of capturing art's extension of encompassing all works we generally suppose should be rounded off under the concepts. The principles of arts include; movement, harmony, variety, balance, contrast, proportion and pattern. The elements of arts include; texture, form, space, shape, colour, value and line.

Schofield and Littrell (2012:3), expressed that "crafts are embedded with meanings through their creation and they carry the symbolism of the maker and relationships with other people". Crafts are seen as a means to carry on traditions of the people. Johnson and Wilson (2012:2), described "crafts as that which offers a means of self-expression". Nelson, Labat and Williams (2012:7), expressed that "crafts are that which reflect a person's life experiences. Crafts products are a symbol of oneself". The interaction between a person and his craft products can bring a high self - esteem. Mason (2012:6), expresses that "crafts as an example of meaningful life activities that contributes to a healthy lifestyle, because it has a contribution to a person's inner well- being and life experience". To him, there is a connection between crafts and well - being.

Kojonkoski (2012:11), in his words says; "crafts are that which develops a maker's pragmatic sense, which helps to analyse the relationship between different events and situations in life". It involves the wholeness of a person's life situation and to intuitive learning. Tubbs and Drake define arts as a therapeutic activity in which the therapeutic nature of crafts are something that enhance personal strength and functioning through sensory, psychological and social significance. According to them, crafts can help people realize that through the design process, process of taking raw materials or minimally prepared substances and assembling and forming them, people can do the same with their lives. Ihatsu (2011) says that; "craft as an activity can be approached from two angles, the angle of technique and that of process". Crafts are in two dimensions, holistic craft and ordinary craft process. The holistic crafts are that which the maker is in charge of the ideas, process, and the design for achieving a particular work. The ordinary craft process is that which the maker produces from a model or technique already in use by another.

Research Methodology

The researcher adopted this method of library research by using articles, journals and all other texts that are in relation to this research work. The books were thoroughly analyzed to come up with relevant information for the research. The researcher went into the career of arts and craft, discovered skills, tools and all sorts of materials used to produce things that are used by humans. The researcher also interacted with some known and talented craftsmen in the society to find out relevant information to the research work. This method was adopted to solve issues arising as it is not contestable, so it is not a good reason. Art and craft is relevant to every society.

This study adopted a written narratives method to explore the roles of arts and crafts in Awka South contemporary society. This method explored the well-being of men and women who have been involved in arts and crafts. These people were told to express thoughts and experiences on arts and crafts. It was emphasized that all ideas, thoughts and experiences related to any aspect of their life and life course, whether they were small or big one, that meaningfully improved their well-being in different life areas were relevant. The gender that participated more were the females, thus; more females engage in arts and craft than the males. Their ages were ranging from 16- 50 years old. A comparison of the data shows that participants represent the normal range of people who do crafts as a hobby.

Crafts

Crafts basically have to do with “skills”. It is seen as what a person has to do to complete their work of arts. Crafts can be an arts form, where people can express themselves and form a creation that makes other people react to it. Craft is an activity that involves skills in making things for humanity by hand. These things are used to satisfy basic human needs. Crafts can be seen as making human or decorative objects by hand and other necessary tools needed at any time. It is seen as a profession of leisure activity. In a historical sense particularly the middle-ages, the term is used to apply to people occupied in a small scale production of goods. On the other hand, we have local crafts. Local crafts are any art work that can be done with our hands. For example: pottery is made of clay, weaving is made of raffia or thread. We have craft works in our localities like pottery, weaving, leather works, blacksmithing and dying.

Crafts are manually produced objects meant to serve a particular purpose of human needs. They can also be called handicrafts, this is because of the skilled hands involved in it. They are usually produced with local materials. The person who makes crafts is known as a “craftsman”. A craft is seen as an activity such as weaving, carving, pottery that involves making things skillfully by hand, often in a traditional way. Craft denotes a skill usually employed in branches of decorative arts example, Ceramics or in an associated artistic practice. Craft involves skills and experience, especially in relation to making objects. Craft is that which enables people to learn skills and translate it into self-satisfying activities. Craft produce provides identity, therapy, creativity, enjoyment and self-actualization.

Despite the availability of viable alternative, arts and crafts have remained over the years a popular form of activity. In contemporary western culture, men and women made arts and crafts hobby and profession. Even though, arts and crafts are no longer a financial obligation, craft is still very important in our life as humans. Arts and Crafts are still used for economic purposes. Craft is defined by people according to the impacts it has on them.

Values of Craft

Craft is a language of material, provenance and making. It is earning the value of things, especially those things we can do on our own. Hand-made things are really beautiful if done well and they can easily be appreciated than those things produced with a machine. The value isn't solely monetary, it is also political and social. To know how something came to be makes us more interested in that thing, as such in a way we become more responsible consumers. The hand-made has unique aesthetic pleasure in itself. The vast economy of our country is not built on crafts but the cultural drive to make intense political currency which tugs at our heartstrings. The important thing is nurturing and educating those

who work with their hands, ensuring young people can discover their own talents and retain skills for a new generation. As skills and material knowledge central to craft continue to have great value, it is the role itself that changes. As technology increases, the people desire more for authenticity grows more, making the crafts more and more crucial to modern life. Traditional crafts have the power to deeply satisfy, all it needs is patience and appreciation.

Craft is of great value to our culture because it interprets our beliefs, attitude and general way of life. It promotes our heritage and tradition through the use of indigenous materials and it preserves traditional knowledge and talents. Craft is very important to our brain. It helps those who suffer from anxiety, depression or chronic pain. Craft helps to ease stress, increase happiness and protect the brain from damage caused by aging. Craft is important in education, because it helps students explore and express their emotions, share how they relate to their family and friends, talk about their difficulties, dreams and aspirations. It develops courage and self-esteem in them. Crafts helps us to value artifacts over time and to understand the context in which they were made. Craft helps us to gain a knowledge of ourselves and how we can relate to things around us, this happens by the things we produce and the whole process of producing them. Craft is important for all round development of an individual

Traditional Arts and Crafts

Traditional arts and crafts can be seen as that culture of a group that involves making things with hands. It has to do with skills that were passed down from generation to generation. Traditional arts and crafts are influenced by culture, family, ethnicity and era. Traditional arts and crafts represent the belief system, values and attitudes of a group of people. It can be used to express the thoughts and feelings of a point in history. It strengthens community ties. Local crafts are meant to serve a particular purpose of human needs. They are made with local materials and tools which are found in our environment. Traditional arts and crafts are symbol of our spiritual heritage, they are objects that can be used to promote culture and heritage. Traditional arts and crafts cut across; pottery, wood carving, weaving, metal works, ivory carving etc. Traditional arts and crafts involve making things skillfully with hands. It involves a variety of art forms from sculpture and metal work to knitting and carving. Traditional arts and crafts are form of leisure time activity, it creates employment for people and helps people to ease tensions. People look out for arts and crafts made skillfully and beautifully. In traditional arts and crafts, there are advantages humans get as they explore this concept.

It Improves creativity and skills: Whatever skills or talents that one has can be improved greatly in the course of creating new things. It is a very good platform to enhance one's skills and interests.

Availability of raw materials: The things that are used in traditional arts and crafts are materials which are readily available in our cultural environment. This makes it easier to explore. The things used sometimes can be waste materials, which can be recycled into things beneficial to the public.

Products of traditional arts and crafts are usually unique and good quality: Most times, people value things that are produced in their local environment. They see it as a way to appreciate nature and all of its kind. People also trust the durability of such products.

It Involves very little capital: Local crafts depends solely on individual skills and ordinary raw materials found in the environment we live in. They are not made with machines so no consumption of power supply or energy.

Strengthens economic growth in our land: Handmade products from a small scale industry or cottage can be easily marketed with the help of cultural festivals. This will show the unique talent of the people and it will be well appreciated by all. Production and sales of such unique products can easily influence the economy of the land.

Traditional arts and crafts reduces the rate of idleness/unemployment: It is one of the best ways to eradicate laziness, idleness and unemployment in so many communities. It helps one to explore numerous opportunities, skills and talents. People can spend their time learning local crafts which will generate so much income for them. The income will now depend on the quality of skills that one has.

Arts and Crafts Should Be Preserved and Promoted Because:

1. They are beautiful when they are done well
2. There is more satisfaction in making something skillfully than getting a machine to do it.
3. The products have better quality than their factory equivalents and have more characters.
4. They don't depend on resources such as electricity, the internet, gas or petrol which are unreliable.
5. The products of arts and crafts are very functional.
6. Pre-industrial techniques are transferable to posterity.
7. These products depict the identity and heritage of the people.
8. Arts and crafts allow people to be independent business people and have ownership of their enterprise rather than being cogs in a wheel.
9. Pre-industrial techniques are better for the environment, they constitute a major part of the skills emerging in the present day.
10. They can be carried out in a home environment and so help protect family and community life.

Conclusion

In this research, it was discovered that arts and crafts are relevant to our life as humans. Arts and crafts constitute a major part of existence. Arts and crafts have been invoked, it was as old as humanity. It was not a new concept. The things produced through arts and crafts are more unique and beautiful, than its likes produced with machines. This is because it was skillfully made. It was also discovered that things produced through arts and crafts are more durable, people still patronize it because of its durability. Despite the fact that modern technologies are coming up, and it does not take away the fact that these arts and crafts are so much important and appreciated in the society. This research also revealed the values of crafts to the growth and development of children. Arts and crafts played a major role in the education sector through skill acquisition. We can testify to the fact that these days too many skills are growing and developing.

Recommendations

The researcher has some recommendations to improve the place of arts and crafts, to develop it more, since it was a concept that has come to stay.

1. Government should give recognition to arts and crafts by providing facilities to enhance its development. Also people who have achieved so much through it should be recognized and appreciated.
2. Art and craft forms should be promoted in their native nature instead of mixing it so much with modern things that may not be necessary.
3. Arts and crafts should be put into school curriculum as a compulsory subject so that it can go a long way in the future, this is very important especially at the secondary school level.
4. Initiatives should be taken to revive and promote these arts and crafts forms and more number of people must be encouraged to participate in the older tradition of arts and crafts.
5. Non-governmental organizations should try as much as possible to empower people with skills that will improve the society. Also they should empower people to learn skills and to develop on the already existing skills.

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