

## **Undergraduate specialization in painting in universities in South-South Nigeria, at the close of the last millennium**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study investigated undergraduate specialization in painting in universities in South-South Nigeria, at the close of the last millennium. There are eight public Universities in the South-South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria. Although a number of factors influence undergraduate specialization in various units in Fine and Applied Arts in tertiary institutions, this study focused on the situation in public universities in the South-South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria at the close of the last millennium. The problem of this study is: What was the situation in the area of painting at the close of the last millennium in universities in South-South Nigeria? Was undergraduate specialization in painting in the selected universities low or high? The design of the study is descriptive survey while the major instrument used was interview. The following finding was made: that specialization in painting in universities in South-South Nigeria, at the close of the last millennium was lower than what it is in this millennium. In other words more students are specializing in painting since the wake of this millennium in universities in South-South Nigeria.*

### **KEYWORDS**

*Undergraduate specialization, painting, South-South Nigeria, last millennium, survey and Universities*

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*L'étude a examiné le premier cycle de spécialisation en peinture dans les universités au Nigéria de Sud-Sud, à la fin du dernier millénaire. Il y a huit universités publiques dans la Zone géopolitique du Sud-Sud du Nigéria. Bien qu'un certain nombre de facteurs influent sur la spécialisation de premier cycle dans diverses unités en beaux-arts et arts appliqués dans l'enseignement supérieur, cette étude a porté sur la situation dans les universités publiques dans la Zone Sud-Sud géopolitique du Nigéria à la fin du dernier millénaire. Le problème de cette étude est : quelle était la situation dans le domaine de la peinture à la fin du dernier millénaire dans les universités au Nigéria de Sud-Sud ? Le premier cycle de spécialisation en peinture était dans les universités sélectionnées haute ou basse ? La conception de l'étude est une enquête descriptive tandis que le principal instrument utilisé était une interview. La conclusion suivante a été faite : que la spécialisation en peinture dans les universités au Nigéria de Sud-Sud, à la fin du dernier millénaire a été inférieure à ce qu'il est en ce millénaire. En d'autres termes plus d'étudiants sont spécialisent dans la peinture depuis le sillage de ce millénaire dans les universités au Nigéria de Sud-Sud.*

**MOTS-CLÉS**

*Spécialisation de premier cycle, peinture, Sud-Sud Nigeria, dernier millénaire, enquête et Universités*

**INTRODUCTION**

This study investigated undergraduate specialization in painting in universities in South – South Nigeria, at the close of the last millennium. There are eight public universities in the South-South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria spanning Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross-Rivers States.

Although several factors influence undergraduate specialization in various units in Fine and Applied Arts in tertiary institutions, this study focused on the situation in public universities in the South-South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria at the close of the last millennium. Precisely, the study sought to identify what the situation was in painting at the close of the last millennium in universities in South-South Nigeria? Furthermore, the study was designed to find out if undergraduate specialization in painting in the selected universities low or high.

The following sub-headings capture the review carried out in line with the problem: Creativity and the issue of talent; Is the painter born or made? The Nature of Painting; Elements and principles of Art as premise for execution of painting:

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK*****Creativity and the issue of talent***

Imonikebe (2010), has observed that the production of an artist has much do with creativity, being a vital ingredient for artistic excellence. Sullivan (2007), noted that there has been a general move by researchers from the question of what creativity is, and which is usually seen as biological construct or what he termed a desirable disposition of the mind, to question about when it becomes manifest. He claims that it is valued and somewhat rare human trait which has been a subject of debate and considerable investigation for quite some time now. Sullivan is also of the view that the process includes that of preparation, incubation, illumination or inspiration and verification or elaboration. Sullivan asserted that creativity is a highly valued human capacity and a conceptually robust construct in research.

Diepeveen and Laar (1999), described originality as something new that thrills the viewers. According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia, “creativity is manifested in the production of a creative work (a scientific hypothesis or new work of art) that is both original and useful” another- assumption-breaking process implies, that when preconceived assumptions are discarded and an unthinkable method considered, new creative ideas may be generated.

Some other definitions stated that creativity is:

- (1) “Producing or bringing about something partly or wholly-new
- (2) Investing an existing object with properties or characteristics.
- (3) Imaging new possibilities that were not conceived of before:
- (4) Seeing or performing in a manner different from what was thought possible or normal previously” (Wikipedia).

Amabile (1996) noted that, “most people associate creativity with the fields of art and literature. In these fields, originality is considered to be a sufficient condition for creativity, unlike other fields where both originality and appropriateness are necessary” (Wikipedia). It is also the “Sensitivity to problems on the part of the creative agent, originality, ingenuity, unusualness and appropriateness in relation to the creative product and intellectual leadership on the part of the creative agent” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/creativity>). This position was equally maintained by Cheng, Chu and Liao (2008) when they stated that creativity is inherent in the individual with the child-hood stage as the critical period. Clark and Zimmerman (1986), support the progress of the artistically talented student through encouragement and instruction. They have observed that even today some art educators wrongly believe that artistically talented students do not require formal instruction in acquiring art techniques, studying or learning to criticize works by known artists. They asserted that the untutored self-expression does not take the learner beyond the rudimentary level of their model, and affirm that “if a society stresses art as a respected body of knowledge necessary to complete education for all students, more students will be led to Discipline-based and idiosyncratic level of art education” (Clark & Zimmerman, 1986, p. 121) (idiosyncratic level is the highest region that can be attained in the Feldman’s Universal to Unique continuum model). It would be necessary to differentiate between talent, giftedness and creativity. What distinguishes talent from giftedness according to Winner (1996) in Parisier and Zimmerman (2004) is gifted is associated with the individuals and his abilities in academic and artistic fields. They cited Lubart as defining creativity as the individual’s capability to create work that is novel and appropriate. They also tried to differentiate talent from creativity by citing Csikszentmihalyi as asserting that talent focuses on one’s ability to do something while Garner explained that individuals who are talented could function within a well-defined area of knowledge within a defined location.

### ***Is the painter born or made?***

There are two views about the sources of artistic individuals, one is that artists are born and not taught while the other says artists can be taught. A contemporary view, which states that “artists are born and developed” has also been observed (Mbahi, 1992, p. 28). He concluded by saying that most art educators hold the contemporary view that artists are born and made. “Artists are born with artistic capabilities which have to be developed through training, teaching and interest developed in the arts. Without adequate exposure to development opportunities, these talents could remain dormant and eventually waste away (Mbahi, 1992, p. 28). A similar view was also advanced by Jordan (2013). According to Mbahi, the contemporarists asserted that every child is naturally endowed or has an inherent creative ability, hence the claim that artists are born, a position he describes as consonant with that of Lowenfeld and Read. He noted however that the contemporarists also believed that having been naturally endowed, his ability is like a blunt edge which requires to be sharpened through training, teaching and interest development in the arts in order to develop the artistic skill. The contemporarist also argued that some people with bare minimum of natural flare for art have succeeded in the art field because they have driven. They were also unanimous on the influence and indispensable role of the environment and art education.

### ***The nature of painting***

According to Wangboje (1985), painting is the creative application of pigments on a surface or ground. There are different types of surfaces that the painter can use for painting. It could be paper, hardboard, canvas or wall. The painter’s application of pigments (paint) on the surfaces is

not just a mechanical process but expresses his mood, feelings and ideas about his subject matter and his environment. His colours are either opaque or transparent in nature, they are either water-based or oil-based. Water colour, poster paint (Gouache) and acrylic paints are examples of water-based pigments, while oil colours are oil-based. A host of other materials are needed for painting such as: linseed oil, turpentine, pastels, charcoal, varnish, brushes, palette, etc (Lewis, 1983). Equipment such as easels, donkeys etc are essential to the painter. Broad areas of painting include: Composition (pictorial), Mixed Media, Life Painting, Materials/Methods and Visual Aesthetics.

Broadly speaking painting is one of the Fine Arts, while Fine and Applied Arts are the Visual Arts. In the same vein Visual Arts is a branch of art (Emokpae, 2001) As asserted by Ocvirk, Wigg & Stinson (1983), art over the years meant different things to different people at different times. Emokpae (2001, p. 4) similarly defined art as “the expression of one’s inner mind with the use of materials in a visual form” Uzoagba (1991, p. 26) conceptualized art as medium of self-expression.

### ***Elements and principles of Art as premise for execution of painting***

Elements of art are generally referred to as elements of design, while principles of art is synonymous with principles of organization (Wangboje, 1985). The elements of design are: Line, Texture, colour, value (light and dark) form, space, while the principles of art include; Balance (Symmetrical/ Asymmetrical), Variety, Rhythm, Proportion, Repetition and Dominance. The creative use of these elements and principles of art results in the production of paintings. The artist can skillfully apply these elements and principles in composing pictures. This is a consensus view of most scholars. (Wangboje, 1985; Carrington, 1979). According to Gude (2004), the elements and principles of art are presented as essence of art making, she went on to observe that the elements and principles are universal and foundational.

### ***Statement of problem***

Over the years emphasis has continued to move from one specialization area to the other in Fine and Applied Arts in our tertiary institutions. Visual Arts is one professional area that has remained dynamic. To some extent, undergraduates are quick to observe the trend in the society when choosing their areas of specializations. Although several other factors influence undergraduate specialization in various units in Fine and Applied Arts in tertiary institutions, this study focused on the situation in public universities in the South-South Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria at the close of the last millennium. Precisely, the study sought to identify what the situation was in the area of painting, at the close of the last millennium in universities in South-South Nigeria? Furthermore, the study was designed to find out if undergraduate specialization in painting in the selected universities was lower or higher than what it is now?

### ***Research questions***

- (1) What was the situation in painting at the close of the last millennium in universities in South-South Nigeria?
- (2) Was undergraduate specialization in painting in the selected universities lower or higher than what it is now?

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

### *The overview of the study*

The design of this qualitative study is descriptive survey (Ex post facto). The main instrument used was Interview. A structured interview was designed to obtain the following information from Fine and Applied Arts Departments in the selected universities (The University of Benin, Benin City Nigeria, Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Delta State University Abraka and University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State): Number of painting lecturers; teaching qualifications; Ranks; infrastructure for teaching painting; equipment and materials; number of specializing students during the period under review.

### *The subjects*

The subjects in this study are Painting undergraduates, and Painting lecturers of the four universities under investigation. There were fourteen specializing painting undergraduates at UNIBEN, six at AAU, five at DELSU, and six at UNIPORT. There were three lecturers at UNIBEN, one of which had teaching qualification in addition to MFA degree. Two at AAU with MFA. Three at DELSU with two having in addition to MFA, teaching qualification. Six at UNIPORT with three having in addition teaching qualification.

### *The interview protocol*

The interview protocol was organized in two parts. The first part had to do with specific questions ranging from staffing to number of students who requested for specialization. The other part was random enquiry into the quality of learning and the learning environments in the various departments.

## RESULTS

Table showed that specialization in painting in all the four universities studied was lower than what it is now (2012/2013 Session). The data showed that UNIBEN had 14 students at the close the millennium and 16 students in 2012/2013 Session. AAU had 06 students at the close the millennium and 09 students in 2012/2013 Session. DELSU had 05 students at the close the millennium and 50 students in 2012/2013 Session and UNIPORT had 06 students at the close the millennium and 10 students in 2012/2013 Session.

The results implied that specialization in painting at the close of the last millennium was lower than what it is in this millennium.

The result further showed that UNIBEN with 14 students at close of the millennium placed highest, followed by AAU and UNIPORT with 06 students, and DELSU lowest with 05 students. Incidentally of all the four universities studied, UNIBEN is the oldest and most popular.

This finding did not however come as a surprise considering the uncompromising position of the NUC Accreditation exercise in Nigeria (NUC BMAS, 2012). NUC accreditation exercise makes uncompromising demands on Nigerian universities which includes conducive learning environment. Central to this, is infrastructure; instructional facilities and adequate staffing to mention a few. Students' learning and participation would certainly increase with the creation of good and conducive learning environment (Ojo, 2006; Kleiner, 2010). Hadden's claim (1999, p. 48) also supports this position when he rightly observed, that "we can only make something new when we are at our optimum best".

**TABLE**  
*Undergraduate Specialization in Painting*

S/N	Universities	1998/1999	No. of Lecturers	2012/2013	No. of Lecturers	Remarks
1	UNIBEN	14	03	16	04	Lower
2	AAU	06	02	09	02	Lower
3	DELSU	05	05	50	03	Lower
4	UNIPORT	06	03	10	06	Lower

Calibre of teacher and learning environment have been found to be strong indicators of effective learning. Improvement recorded in teacher supply and learning environment in the four universities studied was responsible for the increase in specialization in painting. This ascertainment is evident in the results presented in the Table. It is clear that specialization in painting at UNIBEN rose from 14 students at the close of the millennium to 16 in 2013. AAU from 06 to 09 in 2013; DELSU from 05 to 50; and UNIPORT from 06 to 10. Similarly, it was observed that the number of Lecturers did not only increase, but a number of them acquired teaching qualifications in addition to their previous qualifications. Certainly, these factors contributed to the improved learning environment.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated undergraduate specialization in painting in universities in South – South Nigeria, Four universities that specialized students at the close of the last millennium sampled were: The University of Benin, Benin City Nigeria, Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Delta State University Abraka and University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The findings revealed that specialization in painting in all the four universities studied was lower than what it is now (2012/2013 Session). The results implied that specialization in painting in universities in South – South Nigeria, at the close of the last millennium was lower than what it is in this millennium. In other words more students are specializing in painting since the wake of this millennium in universities in South –South Nigeria. Concerted effort should be made not only to sustain the standard but to improve on the learning environment as this is capable of inspiring more students to specialize in painting. Recruitment of qualified lecturers and studio attendants (Technical support staff) coupled with the training and re-training of painting lecturers/studio attendants will attract more specializing students. Deployment of lecturers with professional teacher’s qualification to teach introductory courses in painting will greatly motivate more students to specialize in painting.

This study has successfully assessed the undergraduate specialization in painting in universities in South-South Nigeria. Nevertheless, this study can be replicated in the South - East and South - West Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria for the purpose of comparison.

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