

**CURRICULUM AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING THE
ART OF DANCE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES**

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Abstract

A look at the curriculum of various levels of education in Nigeria (primary, secondary, and tertiary) reveals that dance is one of the smallest and most neglected elements taught within the artistic spheres. It is mostly seen and taught as an aspect of Theatre Arts. This paper takes a look at various definitions of dance according to different scholars and the importance of dance education within the school system. The paper further discusses the implications of teaching and establishment of dance departments in Nigerian universities as well as points out issues that may arise as a result of the development. It calls the attention of stakeholders in the education sector in Nigeria to the need to ensure effective dance education in theory and practice. Issues ranging from curriculum, methodology, society, infrastructure as well as personnel are raised in this paper. The philosophical approach is adopted. This paper calls for mandatory inclusion of dance education in the curriculum of schools and recognition of it as just as important for students as other subjects.

Keywords: Curriculum, Dance, Dance Education, Dance performance, Pedagogy,

Introduction

The National Policy on Education of Nigeria (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004), while stating the philosophy of Nigerian education stresses among others, that quality of instruction at all levels be geared towards inculcating the promotion of the physical, emotional, and psychological development of all children and acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance. There is a need, therefore, for effective teaching that will lead to the attainment of these goals and philosophies. A look at the curriculum of various levels of education in Nigeria (primary, secondary, and tertiary) reveals that dance education is one of the smallest and most neglected elements taught within the artistic spheres. Dance is the movement of the body in a rhythmic way within a given space to

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express an idea or emotion, release energy, or simply take delight in the movement itself.

Dance education is the practice of teaching students a broad understanding of dance as an art form or being trained professionally in specific dance genres. The study of dance is to learn the language of bodily movement as it expresses and communicates the essence of humanity. Artistic dance education serves to stimulate a conscious understanding of the language of movement and to develop aesthetic knowledge and skill in movement expression.

Historical Overview of Formal Art Training in Nigeria

The history of Western or formal education in Nigeria can be traced to the early missionary and Colonial era. This period was marked by the introduction of a Western system of education, which can be said to have begun about the year 1515 when some Portuguese Catholic Missionaries set up a mission school at the Oba's palace in Benin (Onuchukwu 1994). The Oba (Esigie) had requested educational and religious assistance from the court of Portugal. In response to this request, some Portuguese Catholic Missionaries were sent to Benin to teach the children of the royal families, who had been earlier, converted to Christianity. This early development was almost wiped out in the civil disorder which nearly destroyed the powerful Bini Kingdom.

However, a solid foundation for Western education was laid in Nigeria in 1842. This time, it was the English-speaking missionaries who established stations in various parts of Southern Niger i.e. in places like Badagry, Abeokuta, Lagos, Calabar, and other parts of the then Eastern region of Nigeria. The period (1842-1882) marked intensive missionary activities and expansion in these territories. During this period and up to about 1908, education was entirely a church affair. The main objective of both primary and secondary education (a distinction that dates from 1859) was religion -the spread of evangelism and conversion (Okon, 2006). Art, considered by the missionaries as part of the heathen culture, was excluded from the school curriculum. When the colonial government took on the responsibility for education in 1909, the situation remained the same. The government's aim for secondary school education was the training of clerks and administrators, the preparation of students for "white collar jobs, and for the few lucky ones, admission into institutions of higher learning, especially in

Great Britain. Art was not considered to this end and was therefore still excluded from the school curriculum.

The period-Later missionary and Colonial Era (1923-1959) witnessed the development of what could be termed modern art training in Nigeria. Art was introduced into the secondary school curriculum in 1923 through the individual effort of Chief Aina Onabolu. For this singular achievement, he deserves the name “Father of Modern Nigerian Art”.

“Onabolu studied art in Art schools in London and Paris and obtained a diploma in Fine Art, specializing in the “European sciences of painting, perspectives, anatomy and specializations and auxiliary disciplines which characterized European art education” (Wangboje, 1959).

Onabolu returned to Nigeria at a time when the Phelps-stokes report on education in Africa had a strong impact on British Colonial education policy in Africa. This report had among other things, recommended the teaching of native handicrafts in schools. Probably, it was this state of affairs that made it possible for Onabolu to introduce art into Nigerian schools. He started conducting part-time classes in leading schools in Lagos, teaching the science of perspective drawing and human proportions, water-colour painting, and graphic design, (Onabolu, 1963). His style was in sharp contrast with indigenous art and marked the beginning of the divorce between art and life in Nigerian schools.

“However, his most important achievement was his success in persuading the then director of education to allow qualified art teachers from the United Kingdom to take teaching positions in the Secondary Schools and Teacher’s Training Institutions in Nigeria” (Wangboje, 1968). One of the expatriates who came to Nigeria as a result of this was Kenneth Murray. His arrival in Nigeria in 1927 marked a significant turning point in the history of Nigerian secondary schools’ art curriculum. His efforts led to some mission schools including traditional arts and crafts in their art program. Thus, in the 1930s, at the Slessor Memorial Home, Arochukwu held classes in Cloth Design based on Uli body and wall painting. At Christ the King College, Onitsha, blacksmithing and brass work were taught. In Owo, wood and thorn carving was taught at the government school, and in St. Andrew’s College, Oyo, Calabash carving. Murray also initiated the training of a handful of Nigerian artists who served as art educators or administrators (Wangboje, 1968). Upon graduation in 1936, these students became art teachers in various schools in Nigeria; and their pioneering

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efforts yielded many dividends. Within a decade after 1936, a lot of activities and development in the Nigerian educational system led to the recommendation of an Inter-University College Delegation (IUCD) of 1946-1947, that colleges of higher institutions, in addition to universities, be established in Nigeria. The colonial government appointed a two-man commission to look into the establishment of such institutions and make recommendations. The commission produced the report for Nigeria on April 12, 1949. The following were included in the recommendation.

- A Nigerian College of Arts Science and Technology should be established with branches In Ibadan, Zaria, and Enugu under unified control.
- The development program for secondary schools should include provision for...and greater provision should be made for science, arts, handicrafts..." (Onuchukwu, 1994).

The above recommendation led to the establishment of the Nigeria College of Arts, Science, and Technology in Ibadan, Zaria, and Enugu. A Fine Arts Department was created at Zaria. This led to the genesis of formal art training in Nigeria. These institutions further started granting degrees in art. The Ashby Commission of 1959 among other things recommended the establishment of Advanced Teachers' Colleges for the training of non-graduate teachers for service in Nigerian secondary schools. Most of these colleges now offer art in their programs. By the end of this era, it was no longer difficult for any school willing to include art in their school program. Nevertheless, the structure and content of the art curriculum remained the same over the years and the art of dance was not included as a programme in these institutions.

Need for Teaching Dance in Nigerian Universities

Martha Graham (1894-1991) outlines the following as the main objectives of a well-planned dance programme; which are:

- To gain significant knowledge of dance elements, principles, and concepts.
- To develop and apply an understanding of basic principles of choreography.
- To apply the knowledge, skills, and techniques of dance in formal dance presentations.

- To build personal criteria for evaluating non-professional and professional dance performance and study.
- To effectively communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings through dance.

Graham states further that, in the process of studying dance, students will:

- Accomplish specific tasks and gain knowledge in several ways and develop skills that are valuable for achievement in other areas of school and life.
- Develop meaningful concepts of self, human relationship, and physical environment.
- Build critical thinking skills by examining the reasons for dance actions, analyzing individual responses to lessons and performances, and interpreting the intent of choreographers.
- Strengthen and refine creative thinking skills by creating original interpretations of dances, based on responses to other works, and by constructing scenery, props, lighting, and make-ups.
- Learn to contextualize dance in culture and history by exploring how dance relates to the time and place of its origin
- Learn the communication methods of different media by carefully examining live and recorded dance performances, and in addition,
- Students learn the pedagogy of dance education that can help in a future career in dance education (<http://www.cedfa.org>).

While some scholars see dance as an aspect of Music and Theatre; others see it as a human activity that portrays mood, joy, and happiness or as mere ceremonial (ritual, religious or social) activity. A few scholars also see dance as a mere activity like clapping of the hands and stamping of the feet on the ground; thus, as an intangible art existing only in the bodies of the performers and dying with them (Karen 2008). On the other hand, Martin John notes that “dance can be seen to be a basic, fundamental element of man’s behaviour and one which expresses that which lies inside and is too deep for words.” Graham (1985) declares that “dance is the hidden language of the soul” (New York Times Interview). Yerima (2006) defines dance as an ephemeral art that takes shape at the moment of performance while according to Olomu (2007), dance is the pattering of the human body in time and space to give expression of ideas and emotions.

Olokodana (2016) says dance is an expression of one's individuality, yet dance amongst other things replicates a society. It represents a people's ideas, beliefs, traditions, and culture. Nwamuo (1993) posits that dance is "the expression and transference through the medium of bodily movement of mental and emotional experience which an individual cannot express by rational or intellectual means". Ojo-Rasaki & Onyemuchara (2016) affirm that dance is an intangible cultural heritage; dance transcends the overall aesthetics of the human body to the cultural essence of a people which has existed from Paleolithic times till date. The authors note further that the nature of dance creation in contemporary Nigeria is that human activities and or phenomena are abstracted into movements and gestures to achieve a desired dance piece. The authors stress further that to dance in the Nigerian traditional society is to encode significant meanings that border directly on the totality of aspects of the life of the people; that is their cultural identity.

For this paper, dance can be seen as the rhythmic, stylistic, and sequential movement of the body in response to inner impulse or force to express one's feelings and emotions. It is a natural means of personal communication and expression, integrating movement, feelings, and intellect. It requires only the body and its inhabitant's desire to express something. Dance is the art of gesture and movement. Thus, dance is a means to express our bodies and communicate our inner feelings to others.

"Dance is the mother of the arts; Music and Poetry exist in time, painting and architecture in space. But dance lives at once in time and space. The creator and the created, the artist and the work are still the same thing... (Curt, 1963 <https://www.azquotes.com>).

Karen (2008) affirms that one of the most noted dance educators is Margaret H'Doubler (1889-1982). In 1926, Margaret H'Doubler, a basketball coach established the first dance major in higher education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison at the Department of Physical Education for Women. H'Doubler was sent to New York in 1916 by her superior to discover some sort of dance "worth teaching to young women". For a year, she relentlessly searched studios only to return with what she felt was "worthy of higher education". The sort of dance she discovered was a mixture of Colby's creative dance based on natural movement and Bird Larson's Science of Movement- a system in which

dance movement originated from the torso. Throughout her career, H'Doubler strived to keep the kind of dance she learned through a liberal and non-stratified creative learning experience. H'Doubler believed that dance was something for everyone and so should be taught as an integral part of public education. She expressed her view about dance education in the famous quote from *Dance; a Creative Art Experience*. H'Doubler (1963) says:

“It is to be expected that not everyone will be a great dancer and that dancing, of course, will be experienced as a complete art form more by some than others; but as every child has a right to a box of crayons and some instructions in the fundamental principles of drawing and the use of colour, whether or not there is any chance of his becoming a professional artist, so every child has the right to know how to achieve control of his body in order that he may use it to the limit of his ability for the expression of his own reactions to life. Even if he can never carry his efforts far enough to realize the sheer joy of its highest forms, he may experience the sheer joy of the rhythmic sense of free, controlled, and expressive movement, and through this know an addition to life which every human is entitled.”

Sharing the view of H'Doubler, the writer believes that several dance patterns have emerged in Nigeria over the years and the need to take them to perfection through training becomes imperative. Some of these dance steps go into extinction due to a lack of continuous training, practice, and documentation. They are seen as mere displays by the dancer (artiste) to express his mood at a given time. In Nigeria today, we have cultural dances like Bata, Senwele, Atilogwu, Dadakuada, etc. We also have popular contemporary dance steps like; Azonto, Galala, Shoki, Suo, Alanta, Makosa, Etigi, Skelewu, Sekem, Shakiti Bobo, Yahooze, Kukere, and so on. Hence, there is a need to include dance education in our curriculum to train upcoming talents and document these dance patterns. Like many advocates of dance education in Nigeria, the author believes that dance plays a significant role in the education of both children and adults.

Dance/movement education is essential as a way of reconnecting human beings with their bodies and use of the bodies as an important means of expression. Karen (2008) notes that people who know how to express themselves physically and express their emotions are people who are more emphatic and in touch with others and are thus, better communicators, as well as being better able to appreciate all aesthetic qualities inherent in the world. The author, therefore,

believes that the inclusion of dance education will ensure a balance between our curriculum and our whole selves.

Historically, dancers, artists, and theorists have not only mirrored or reflected culture but have shaped it. There are great men and women around the world, who have contributed to dance development; Delsarte, Dalcroze, Laban, Duncan, and H'Doubler are a few examples. Dance is presently part of the curriculum in British Columbia's schools, placed in either Physical Education or in Fine Arts. This is also the case in Nigeria, but it can be taken to a higher level by creating Departments of Dance in Nigerian universities to absorb the products of secondary schools to train and produce professional dancers and dance educators.

Implications of Teaching and Establishment of Dance Departments in Nigerian Universities

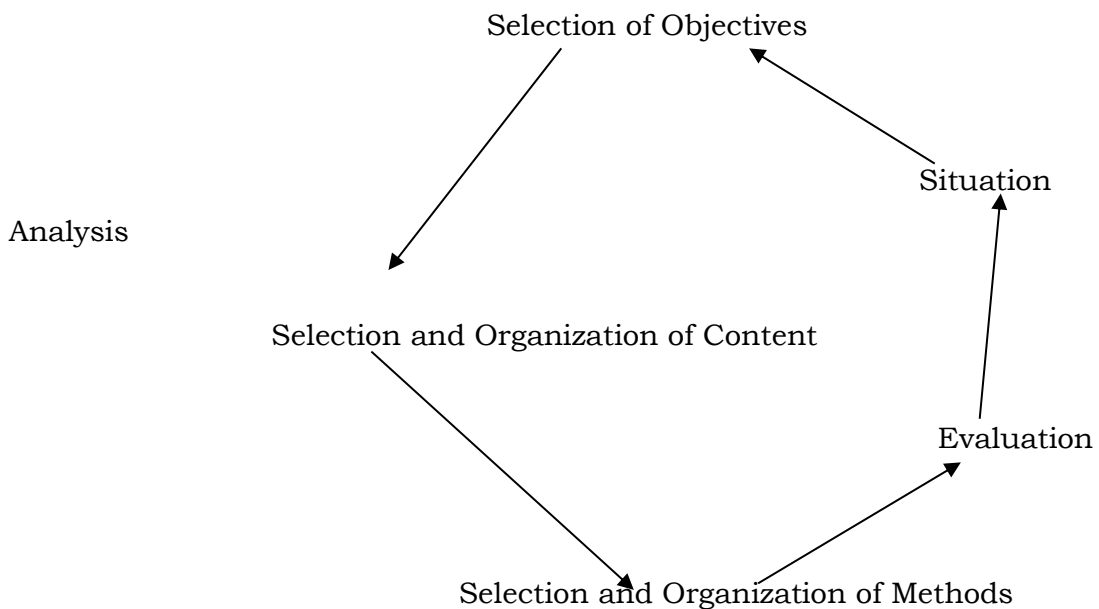
Teaching dance and establishing dance departments in Nigerian universities is not without some implications, among which are:

Pedagogical Implication: Pedagogy refers to methodology. However, establishing departments of dance in Nigerian universities will pose the question of what to be taught and what methods are suitable for teaching the various dance steps identified. Every idea or content to be taught and learned within and outside the school system has a methodology suitable for it. There may be the need to replace some old dance steps with contemporary ones to cope with the ever-dynamic world of our time. Dance educators/instructors are, therefore, faced with pedagogical challenges. Identifying and matching the outline or topics of instruction with available methodology could be an arduous task to dance instructors. Therefore, dance teachers must explore various teaching methods that will enhance effectiveness at the classroom level. A thorough understanding of the cultural elements of the host community is also needed to function well. Hence, there may be the need to train and retrain the students while in school within various cultural contexts. This will enable them to discharge their duties efficiently across boundaries since dance steps vary from one culture to the other. The peculiarities in the dance steps need to be taught in all institutions regardless of geographical boundaries.

Curriculum Implication: Like other areas of education, the establishment of dance departments in Nigerian universities implies that the government, as a

matter of urgency needs to set up a panel of curriculum developers to draw up modules of activities to be taught in these departments. This development means sourcing experts within and outside the country, bringing them together to collate their ideas and experiences and come up with a study plan that is worthy and acceptable to produce dance graduates. Nigeria, being a multi-cultural nation poses a task for the experts who are required to document and put together various dance patterns/steps from different cultures and harmonize them with contemporary dance steps to have a curriculum suitable for tertiary education both in theory and practice. Knowledge of the stages of curriculum development is very crucial to do this effectively. This according to Nicholls and Nicholls in Orukotan (1999) involves the identification of different needs in the society through situation analysis, stating the aim and objectives of the curriculum, selection and organization of the content of the curriculum, selection and organization of teaching-learning methods and an evaluation of the curriculum process after which is feedback of the evaluation process and modification of the curriculum for further implementation. The process is cyclical in nature and is represented below:

Phases of Curriculum Development



Source: Orukotan (1999, p, 95.)

Teacher Production and Retention: Another challenge is the production and retention of dance teachers/lecturers/instructors or educators as the case may

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be. A roll call of staff in Nigerian Universities reveals inadequacy in the number of dance specialists. The questions therefore arise; How do we produce enough teachers to meet the demand of ever-increasing universities and when produced, how will they be retained? What is going to be the minimum qualification required to teach in these departments? Can traditional dancers or practitioners from various ethnic groups in Nigeria be employed to teach in these institutions as a synergy between the 'town and gown'? If 'NO', which institution will be saddled with the responsibility of producing dance instructors and educators?

Infrastructural Implication: Establishing a dance department in a university implies that all structures (physical and human) must be on the ground to match the demand within the departments. Adequate facilities must be procured to cater to the need and use of the students/scholars and instructors both within and outside the department. A country like Nigeria, with a dwindling economy, may find it difficult to make available all the needed facilities considering the number and size of her universities. It is, therefore, imperative to put things in shape to enable these departments to function effectively when established. This will in turn reflect on the products of the Departments which are expected to cope with the dynamics of our time and their counterparts within the globe.

Societal Implication: There is a perception in Nigeria that some courses are more important than others. Arts generally are often neglected and not given as high esteem as it is in the Western world; hence, there is the challenge of delineating the 'town' from the 'gown'. There is a belief that everyone is a potential dancer. Why then study dance at a university? This implies that all stakeholders in the education sector will have to be involved in the task of sensitization and launching enlightenment campaigns on the need to view dance from the perspective of other courses in the university. The 'gospel' should be spread to schools (primary, secondary, and tertiary) to get prospective applicants and candidates into the proposed dance departments.

Employment and Job Creation: Every trainee hopes to secure employment upon completion of training/ programme. How then do we provide employment for dance graduates in a country like Nigeria where some courses are 'tagged' for lazy people? Do we have a labour market that can absorb prospective dance

graduates, especially when almost every state in the country has a badly managed cultural troupe? The implication of establishing dance departments in Nigerian universities is that employment must be secured for graduates of these departments; otherwise, frustrated potential dancers will be the result of the initiative.

Cultural and Policy Implication: As noted earlier in this paper, Nigeria is a multi-cultural country with each region claiming superiority and aspiring to govern others. Establishing dance Departments means that government policies should be geared towards the development of such a venture. The departments must be nurtured and sustained within succeeding and transitional regimes. The country (Nigeria) is 'blessed' with many brilliant ideas, projects, and initiatives that are abandoned due to ethnic differences. Possibly, there could be an 'Act' for establishing these departments to sustain the pressure and effect of bad policy by succeeding governments. A case in mind is the National Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos, which is now a shadow of its old self due to the movement of the capital to Abuja from a bustling centre.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that teaching dance in Nigerian universities will enhance physical growth, ensure sound health and a good state of mind, promote mutual understanding and interactions among students as well as promote cultural heritage and above all, lead to professionalism in dance as well as increase inter-cultural communication among cultural spheres in Nigeria, which might lead to national unity. While the teaching and establishment of dance departments in Nigerian universities is a welcome idea, it is not without some educational implications. However, the author advocates mandatory inclusion of dance education in the curriculum and recognition of its importance for students like Music, Arts, Drama, Maths, English Language, and other core subjects within the school system.

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