

ARTS, HUMANISTIC DISCIPLINES AND THE CONUNDRUM OF MARGINALIZATION: A RETHINK

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Abstract

Over the years, arts and humanistic education have been disdained and unduly marginalized. The marginalization borders on their perceived irrelevance in the overall growth and development of the human race. This condition is further exacerbated through the misguided and lopsided actions of the federal government when it allocates 60 per cent resources to the pursuit of technological and scientific education as against the 40 per cent that is allocated to the arts and humanistic disciplines. This is a prejudiced testament to the effect that arts and humanities are inferior to the sciences, which ideally, has no *locus standi* or substance. It has been observed that, though unwarranted attention is given to the sciences, they have not justified this 'exalted' position. It has to be argued and, logically so, that currently, there is a contest and a struggle for supremacy between arts/humanities and science/technology. There is no victor or vanquished yet, and there will never be, for one can only develop science and technology through the arts and humanities. The study believes that science and technology are indispensable in our contemporary society just like the arts and humanities. The arts, humanities, science and technology are not conceived as being polarized and mutually exclusive, rather they are complementary, one to the other. The paper, therefore, concludes that both the arts, humanities and sciences are mutually beneficial to the society and the idea of marginalizing one and skewing in favour of the other may be seen as counter-productive and would amount to putting the cart before the horse with obvious implications. There is, consequently, the need for an informed rethink on this obvious imbalance.

Introduction

The Nigerian educational system, at least from the secondary school level, is polarized into two divergent but mutually beneficial areas – arts and sciences. Usually, the students in both areas do not stay in one classroom as the science-inclined students are given class A, while the arts students are sent to class B, an indication that they are separate entities; they

coincidentally find themselves in the same class. Informally, the placement of science students in class A and arts in B respectively, portrays the level of thinking and perception of teachers and planners of the curriculum at that level. Wittingly or unwittingly, it unarguably shows their preference to science subjects against arts. Apart from subjects that both share together, every other thing is done separately. The same thing also replicates itself in our tertiary educational system. Indeed, it may be argued that the aim is to engender effective teaching and learning of the specific subjects; but it has ended up sending a wrong signal that some subjects are better than the others, especially when argued from the point of view that 'A' represents Alpha, while 'B' comes a distant second.

Our society is a pluralistic one and whether arts, humanities, science or technology, all are applied in the same society for the benefit of man and his environment. Man, as the apex of created beings, is the highest manifestation of God's creative energy. Hence, he is not only capable of evolving a new universe in the form of a society, he is also able to objectify, engage on cosmic level of cognition and thought, and probe the supreme mind of the universe. It is man, through the degree of the divine quality in him, that is able to probe and articulate the universal moral order which he, in turn, uses to order and govern himself and his society.

As facts and happenings of the natural phenomenon are arranged and general principles are related to one another, man is at the centre by infusing the artistic component of language, languages, historical framework, painting and drawing, philosophical and divine inspiration of bringing back these into fiction (science fiction), building bridges first in the mind and working from the past to the future. Arts and humanities (science inclusive) are inclined towards the affairs of the human race, of the society and every other thing therein. Humanities is an omnibus discipline that interrogates man, nature and environment. In the words of Ajileye (2005:13):

Humanities, as a concept, covers certain branches of learning that deal with human thought and culture, excluding the sciences. The term was applied originally to the study of the literatures of classical Greece and Rome. It has been expanded to cover all languages and literatures, the arts, history, philosophy, etc. The humanities are generally defined in the modern educational curriculum, as treated in *The Encyclopaedia Americana*, in such articles as architecture, art, dance, drama, history, language, literature, music, philosophy, theology, the history and comparison of religion and law, and those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods such as linguistics, archeology and ethics.

Nwokoye (2012:274) corroborates the above when she stated that “the humanities include ancient and modern languages, literature, law, history, philosophy, religion and visual and performing arts such as music and theatre. The humanities regarded also as social sciences include technology, anthropology, area studies, communication studies, cultural studies and linguistics”. It is in the light of the above that this paper examines the place of arts and humanistic disciplines in the Nigerian society, their conundrum of marginalization and why there is need for a rethink so as to give everyone a sense of belonging and encourage holistic development in both the artistic, humanistic, scientific and technological endeavours in the society where we are all stakeholders.

Arts and Humanistic Disciplines in Perspective

Arts and humanities belong to the same realm of study, a study that engenders creativity, imagination, critical thinking and the building of high moral and civic standards. The difference being that humanities are a broader subject than the arts. It may be argued that the arts are part of humanities since their products perform the same function in the society. They are mutually dependent on each other and generate a near similar response and output with almost the same methodology and approach. Arts education serves the humanities, and as a humanistic discipline, its functional objective is to “shape the spirit of the people, educate, cultivate and improve human quality, and promote all-round development” (Ekweariri, 2010:166). They also aggregate in the aspect of humanistic behavior and refinement of individual lifestyles. Ayu (1986:6) writes that “while art reflects reality (cognition) it, at the same time, constructs a new reality for humanity (creativity). It seeks to humanize.” Though all these abound and, convincingly so, it will be proper we examine their individual intrinsic values separately so as to delineate their essence and place them in their proper perspectives. Art has been described as a catalyst for change and transformation. In the words of Sofola (1994:2):

Art is a creative experience which is the only human experience that is nearest to God because it is in that experience that man shares very clearly in the most enduring and significant attribute of the supreme deity, God as a creator, the supreme artist. Art emanates from the soul of man, the centre of his being in which resides his divine quality as the zenith of creation. Art is, thus, the medium through which the soul of man reaches out beyond itself to transform and make intelligible the proddings within the inner recesses for the ultimate truth, the meaning of existence, man’s place in the cosmos, his relationship to the supreme creator and to his fellow creatures, and finally the ultimate end of man...

She went further to argue that:

Art is life, knowledge and feeling. It is the life that never ends. It is eternity. It is knowledge that never decays because it is through the perceptive participation of the artist in the divine essence and fluidity of life that he emerges to unveil the unknown and opaque of mankind in his art form... Art serves as a catalyst for all that man does, aspires to and envisions (1994:3).

Similarly, Weitz (1970:80) writes that:

Art is a virtue...a *habitus* or 'state of possession', an inner strength developed in man which perfects him with regard to his ways of acting, and makes him – to the extent of which he uses it – undeviating in a given activity... art is a virtue of the practical intellect – that particular virtue of the practical intellect which deals with the creation of objects to be made.

The humanities reveal how people (human beings) have tried to make moral, spiritual, and intellectual sense out of this world in which irrationality, hopelessness, loneliness and death are as conspicuous as birth, friendship, kindness, hope and reasonableness. Ajileye (2005:14) argues that "from the humanities, mankind learns how individuals or societies define and try to attain the moral life, attempt to reconcile freedom and the responsibilities of citizenship, and express themselves artistically". Humanities, being the academic disciplines that study the human condition, use methods that are primarily analytical, critical, or speculative, as distinguished from the mainly empirical approaches of the natural sciences.

However, it has to be borne in mind that arts and humanities serve human needs. Man's quest to explore his environment and make the best use out of it is dependent on his ability to creatively manipulate it to ensure his survival.

Indeed, man sets out to recreate life and give it expression through many ways. When such a method of recreating life is beautiful and appealing to the senses, we say that the creation is 'artistic'. Art may be categorized into the doing (performing) arts, the making (plastic) arts, and the written (literary arts) (Duruaku2006:3).

The intrinsic skills and techniques that are capable of making man realize this are rooted in the arts and humanities. Without arts and humanities, the much-desired change and development becomes a mirage, an illusion of reality. This is because:

Development...involves change. It involves improving the productive skills and technology of a people or what is conventionally termed economic development. However, development does not end in economics or industry. For these to even take off, there must be a mobilization of human

resources. This mobilization is usually aimed at the formation, internalization and crystallization of new skills, new aspirations and new goals. In other words, the paramount requirement of change in any society is that the people themselves must change. This change... must be rooted in the arts and humanities (Okonkwor (N.D) 12-13).

The arts and humanities transform man and imbues in him the technical skill, managerial acumen, artistic and practical knowledge requisite enough to conquer his environment, subdue and inhabit it.

Arts and Humanities, Science and Technology Juxtaposed

Unarguably, arts and humanistic education have been disdained and unduly marginalized. This borders on their perceived irrelevance in the 21st century of science and technology. And, it has placed the arts and humanities in a disadvantaged position in the eyes of the uninformed. It has to be argued and, logically so, that the arts and humanities are not contesting or struggling for supremacy with science and technology in any way. This is because their roles are well-defined and their potentials and place in the society cannot and have not been underestimated. There is no doubt that science and technology are indispensable in our contemporary society and, are currently, global phenomena. But must we sacrifice arts and humanities because we want to be globally compliant? There should be a concurrent pursuit of the two because no one is more superior to the other. As far as we are concerned, and from all indications, there has not been any known victor or vanquished. There will never be such, for they are mutually interactive of one another. The arts, humanities, science and technology are not conceived as being polarized and mutually exclusive, but as being complementary, one to the other. However, if there should be any victor, it has to be the arts and humanities because one can only develop science and technology through the arts and humanities. In a paper delivered during the 2016 School of Arts Conference, in Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Obinna (2016:10-12) pontificated that:

According to *The Reader's Digest, The Origin of Words and Phrases* (2007:293), "originally, science was knowledge, or any branch of knowledge, including the arts; and the word is from latin *scire*, which means 'to know'". It can be summarized, therefore, that no clear distinction was made between the now seemingly opposed words of arts and science, until quite recently when we started witnessing a kind of conflict of perception. We need to observe that there is nothing like science without arts, and that in every art, there is science. Arts provide science with the skills to do things, helping to put things together, with a sense of creativity and reinventions. It

is the arts that give life to those physical and natural elements of science for meaningful application. Whatever science is doing or producing is for humanity and humanities. It is using language to relate and interpret science that brings out the essence of science. It is the artistic packaging that makes water and sand to give the real meaning to science. It is the philosophy of life brought into inanimate elements that makes science to have conscience and reason.

This writer cannot agree with him less. There is art in every science. Arts and humanities derive their nature and strength through imagination, creativity, beauty, production in a liberal form. All these hinge on the ability and possibility of inventing through words and expressions of language(s), moving into literature, recreating history with a renewed approach in getting inspiration through the divine creativity of words becoming reality - painting and drawing of fine and applied arts that create and reinvent reality, performing in drama and theatre through the spoken or the stylized, combining sounds of actions and music into the film and cinema levels, arts and skills of humanities in liberal and varied invention(s). Obinna (2016:50) went further to inform us that:

Arts in science are essential to give the best packaging and expression for the world of science. Science in arts equally helps us to organize our seemingly rioting and riotous ideas and imaginations, just as a way of talking to our Nigerian women seeking equality with men, the arts will not seek equality with science and technology. Let us not bother about equality. Let us strive for equity (Obinna 50).

For instance, there is a fusion of arts, science and technology in the design for cars. This shows the interrelatedness of these.

Technology, on its own, is a product of human imagination that passes through the process of creating. Without the creative prowess embedded in arts and humanities, the period of conception and realization wouldn't have been possible. Uka (1989:1) argues that:

Technology, properly understood, is a product of human creativity. To fully appreciate its function in human society, attention must focus on its human creators and users, not on the product as an end in itself. Because, properly, technology is a means to the realization of society... a primary goal of technology is to extend and amplify human capacities.

He went further to argue that "... all science and technology begin as art" (Uka, 1989: 1). Indeed, arts and humanities provide the platform for the expressive of creativity and imagination which scientists and technologists borrow in their fields of study. Sofola (1994:3) agrees with the above when she states that:

For the artistic mind first of all catches a glimpse of a truth in his divine essence, actualizes it in his medium as a suggestive blue-print, before any other level of human awareness catches on and further realizes it in the various channels of actualization. For the aircraft had to exist first in the creative mind of a Greek artist before technology could actualize it in its utilitarian medium. The space ship and Star Wars of science drama series had to be envisioned in the creative mind of the artist before the scientist could get a hold of it for the present wonder feats of space ships and Star Wars of technology.

With all these laudable and obvious contributions of the arts and humanities, our educational planners still treat them abysmally. Indeed, this misguided, lopsided and bias actions of the Federal Government when it allocates 60 per cent resources to the pursuit of technological and scientific education as against the 40 per cent that is allocated to the arts and humanistic disciplines is an indication that they are either ignorant of the above or are deliberating doing all these in order to discredit the arts and humanities. Of course, it is clear that this marginalization did not start today. According to Nnadi (N.D:3),

Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, there has been a steady erosion of the role of the humanities in the country's educational system. This was partly in response to what was then (and, perhaps, still is) thought to be a world-wide phenomenon. But considering its timing, this may also have been just another expression of our new-found freedom. For shaking off the colonial yoke might not be complete without dismantling the 'unprogressive' educational edifice imposed by the yoke.

In support of the above, Ajileye (2005: 20),

The problems facing the humanities in Nigeria are of recent development. During colonial rule, the humanities dominated higher studies in Nigeria. But since the last two decades of the 20th century, there has been a great imbalance in favour of science and technology: more scholarships for students in the sciences, increased admission quota, etc.

Obviously, there are implications to these conundrums of marginalization. Because of this, a dichotomy exists between graduates of arts and humanities in one hand and science and technology in the other hand. Obiakor (N.D: 27) argues that:

The result is that students who study the humanities feel a little embarrassed to see that their field is no longer considered important. Consequently, in order to be with the crowd, many parents want their children to study astronomical physics or geological engineering or any such jaw-breaking

combinations, so that they (the parents could be called “Nne engineer”, “Papa astronaut”, or any other such “psychedelic” name. Even if the child’s aptitudes dictate a more successful career in the humanities, the parents do not want to know. Their children must be geologists or engineers. Full stop!

That accounts for the apparent decline in the enrolment of students in arts and humanities courses with almost everybody wanting to study engineering and sciences courses. This has indirectly given science and technological students a false sense of superiority. Unfortunately, not everybody would want to be in those departments. What they seem not to know is the fact that there are different areas of specialty and, at the end of the day, the graduates of science and technology practice in the same society where everyone’s work dovetails into the other. It has to be pointed out that any policy unduly skewed in favour of science and technology to the detriment of the arts and humanities, is a misguided one. It is a policy that could lead to abundance of technical hardware but not to development, because any meaningful development must be people-oriented; and that is domiciled in the arts and humanities. Therefore:

The Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria should realize that the humanities deserve her attention like any other field of learning, all for a collective stake in the development of the country. This attention should be backed up with an appreciable budget. The curriculum for school certificate examination now has Mathematics, English, Entrepreneurial Education, Computer Science and Civic Education as compulsory subjects. Where are the arts subjects? By this, the Federal Ministry of Education is telling all students that the arts are not necessary for nation-building. Too bad! If this lopsidedness is unabated, people who will specialize in bomb manufacturing (Science) and kidnap taking (Entrepreneurial) will be the products of the schools at the neglect of humane citizens who will serve this nation with passion. This nation must go back to the roots where virtue was honoured and sought after. Only people with virtue can take the nation to the promised land (Idolor, 2011:16-17).

There is no gainsaying that the subjects that constitute the humanities have known considerable neglect, if not on the pages of policy documents, at least, in their implementation. The humanities have been subjected to attacks, re-examinations (almost cross-examinations), even threats of expunction from the curriculum. One cannot help but wonder when all this will end. In frustration, Sofola (1994:1) says:

I tremble as an artist in these days when our nation, indeed, the world, has run berserk, and bereft of all that it takes to be human beings... in these days

when the academia is supposed to be meant only for loftier minds whose exploration of the outer space is seen as a sine qua non of life. One can even hear mutterings under breath from the unknowing public, saying, “we need spaceships, inter-planet bridges for outer links, and computerized cosmic order for better living; not art...” but I tremble the more, because I am in an academic community whose understanding of the essence of life and the place of art in it is distorted to the degree that the cart of life has been put before the horse... the taming agent of the society which art is, has been relegated to the background. It is, thus, only noisy clatters from technology that rattle the cart. The citizens who should have guided the cart receive no attention. Bestiality, moral insensitivity and wildlife of the jungle overrun us; we, the brain centre of the nation, gape on helplessly.

What is certain is that not only the humanists among us, but all well-meaning educators, are anxious of seeing stability, continuity and respect for tradition introduced into all facets of our national life, to usher in an era of peaceful co-existence among the humanities, on one hand, and science and technology on the other. It is important to remind Nigerians that world leadership cannot rest solely on the possession of material wealth and advanced technology, but must also be based on such humanistic categories better known as “things of the spirit”. Encouragement of creativity, appreciation of the fanciful and beautiful concern for man’s ultimate destiny, in a world, the arts and humanities, are the major constituents of world greatness. Never have arts and humanities “been more necessary, because never has man been more threatened by dehumanization” (Ayu, 1986:1). This can be attributed to the over reliance on science and technology and the neglect of that which makes us human.

Furthermore, there is a popular misconception about the ‘developed’ countries and ‘developing’ or ‘underdeveloped’ ones like ours: the latter believe that the greatness of the former lies in their advanced technology, their scientific discoveries, their sophisticated weaponry, their all-knowing computers, the rockets they send to the moon, etc. Nnadi (N.D: 9) argues that:

certainly, these feats sound nearly ‘super-human’ as the rest of us merely look on in awe and bewilderment. But they are not the cause, rather the fruition of the greatness of these ‘powers’. Their greatness lies not in their machines, but in the mind, the man, behind the machine: his character, his morality (in the *Herbartian* sense), his self-discipline, his submission to the rule of law, etc. Those of their citizens who have not imbibed this culture are carried away by the superficialities of a world they do not understand. They drift along for a while, pleasure seekers, comfort lovers, seeking solace

in alcohol, in drugs, divorce suits, suicide! Technology without a well-balanced mind is like naked fire in the hands of a baby.

There is, therefore, the need for a rethink in this obvious imbalance, segregation, undue preference and unmerited attention accorded science and technology at the expense of arts and humanities. Unfortunately, we have not recorded much success since all these attentions have been drawn to them. They are equal stakeholders in the quest to make the country a better and comfortable place to inhabit. Remove the arts and sciences today, and there would be chaos and retardation in peace, progress and development. Arts should not be remembered only when there are guests to be entertained. Ihekweazu (N.D:11) aligns himself with the above when he argues that “only when it comes to public celebrations, the arts are called upon to perform cultural dances for background entertainment. When it comes to sharing funds and awards, they are neglected and forgotten...” It is not as if the sciences and technology have not made telling impacts in the system, but no matter the level of those contributions, it is not enough to place them at the highest echelon of educational preference.

Conclusion

We have done an appraisal of what constitutes arts and humanities as well as their impacts in the process of creating an egalitarian society where refined citizens are nurtured and churned out, citizens with high moral rectitude. In like manner, we have tried to establish the fact that the starting point of any scientific and technological innovation involves conception, critical thinking of the idea (imagination) and the creativity that allows the design to function. These are all anchored in the artistic and humanistic disciplines. This paper has also decried the marginalization of arts and humanities and the undue attention/preference given to science and technology without commensurate attention to arts and humanities. We believe that a fair deal has not been brokered between these two disciplines. This is because the two disciplines belong to two realms of different but related studies and any attempt to place one above the other has obvious implications to the society where the products of the two are expected to coalesce and function. It is the opinion of this paper that arts and humanities predate science and technology and provide the raw materials, finesse and creative imagination with which science and technology function.

To that effect, therefore, the Federal Government should not be seen to be biased in their choice of discipline, and even when that is the case, it should not be displayed openly as it is doing presently, to the chagrin, bewilderment and disappointment of members of the other discipline. What this paper considers important at this point is to assess the connectivity between arts/humanities and science/technology and how they can be effectively harnessed for common good. Science and technology “involve some elements of art in its execution... arts involve processes, knowledge and products.” (Ekweariri, 2013: 85). The idea of

marginalizing one and skewing in favour of the other is counter-productive and would amount to putting the cart before the horse, with obvious implications. The tangible and intangible must work in *paripasu* so as to achieve the desired result.

What we Need to Do?

The Federal Government has policies patently biased in favour of technological education. More colleges of technology have been built; Federal Polytechnics are dotted all over the country and even some universities have to be called those of technology to rub in the point. There is no university, polytechnic or college, whether private or public that is named university/polytechnic/college of arts and humanities. For there to be equity and fairness, there is need to establish one so as to give members of artistic and humanistic disciplines a proper sense of belonging. As funds are being disbursed to improve the standing of science and technological faculties, the same should be applied to arts and humanities. In fact, what is good for the goose is equally good for the gander. And, a progress and advancement in science and technology without carrying the arts and humanities along may be seen as a futile effort. This is not capable of achieving the desired result.

Teachers and scholars in arts and humanities should not bemoan their fate and keep silent. The era of docility and taking things as they come is gone. This is an era of persistence, of doggedness, open-mouthedness, praise-singing and renewed commitment to our course. We should continue to drum this perceived marginalization to the ears of whoever cares to know until justice, equity and fairness are attained, otherwise this marginalization would continue unabated. There is the dire need to make arts and humanities more practical. The re-introduction of handicraft in our primary, secondary and tertiary institutions has become imperative. This is because the uniqueness of arts and humanities lies in the sociological anthropology of cultures of the schools which manifest in the creative output of the pupils/students. By so doing, skills are nurtured and developed, which are later applied in the larger society.

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