RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN’S VISUAL ARTS EXPRESSION, DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AND THEIR PERFORMANCE IN NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN YOLA NORTH, ADAMAWA STATE

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Abstract
This research investigates the relationship between visual art expression and the developmental stages of children’s drawings in some selected nursery and primary schools in Yola North L.G.A of Adamawa State. This study employed the descriptive survey method where a total of six hundred children randomly selected from six nursery/primary schools were used for the study. The instruments used for collecting the data were drawing test, observation guide and interview schedule. A drawing test was given to the children to draw anything of their choice, the test was used to determine the relationship between their visual art expression and their developmental stages and was then assessed using six assessment scales developed by the researcher. It was observed that there could have been an improvement if there were more qualified art teachers and adequate art materials in the schools. Teachers lack of adequate theoretical and practical training in art education reflected in their lack of understanding of appropriate teaching styles and curriculum prescription for the children at all the various stages of art development and thus they are not made the centre and core of art teaching. Recommendations were made to improve the visual art expression of the children in the nursery and primary schools in Adamawa State.

Key: Visual arts expression, child arts, developmental stages

Introduction
Visual art has been referred to using different nomenclature by different authors, for instance visual arts, visual expression but all refer to art expression. Previous researchers like Rueschoff and Swartz (1969) explain that children’s art expressions are the result of inherent difference in children, and the result of the kind of experience they have. These experiences determine what they perceive; they also said that the self-expression of children with art media and symbols develop from these expressions are visual evidence of their feelings, emotions, reactions, experiences and attitudes. Lowenfield (1975) explained that no art expression is possible without self-identification with the experience expressed as well as with the materials by which it is expressed. The art materials are controlled and manipulated by one individual and it is the individual who uses his art materials and his form of expression according to his own personal experience. Gaitskell (1975) agreed with the previous researchers that artistic expression expresses the thoughts and feelings which reflect ones experiences, because such is the fundamental nature of art.

Yusuf (1992) defined visual art expression as the communication of thoughts or opinion, an indication of some feelings, conditions or quality. Expression is a kind of conventional sign used to indicate something symbolic, and is both mental and emotional. Also Umar (2003) referred to art expression as the making/producing of art works in visual form while visual arts are works produced by the children that could be seen with the eyes like drawings and paintings.

Martins (2001) reported that extensive research on child art carried out in previous and present years indicate that children grow through a series of predictable developmental stages in their drawings. Researchers like Piaget (1937/1954) and Lowenfeld and Brittain’s (1975) among others explained what occurs with respect to children’s artistic development. They proposed a similar pattern of development which is one of progression from scribbling to realistic representation. According to encyclopaedia of children’s Health (2010), the following stages were generalized from Lowenfeld and Brittain’s (1975) work, their theories showed children moving from scribble through several stages to realistic art. Children may overlap stages, making drawings with elements of one stage while progressing or regressing to another.

Children engage in art activities first by using familiar forms not only to denote but also to symbolize and communicate message (Cox, 1993). Cox explains further that art activities also enable children to understand the world around them. However, children can only discover objects and take a meaning from it if all the senses are involved. For the senses to be involved they need to be taught appropriately. When children engage in art activities, they among others learn to develop the ability to transform feelings and ideas at the various stages of their development into
visual form. However, Katherine (2003) points out that the intervention of an art teacher is necessary for any meaningful transformation of feelings and ideas into visual forms.

While psychologists have made various attempts to describe artistic development within their domains, there has been relatively little effort devoted to the search for general explanation of these developments. The descriptive investigations of this early period later developed into vigorous empirical research activities as witnessed today (Steele, 1998). In recent times, experts have shown concern on the study of children’s drawings.

Characteristics of children’s drawings
Children’s art is a reflection of themselves, and has some general characteristics that are common to their development.

The scribbling stage
The scribbling stage usually begins from two years and last until the child is about four years. At these stage children become interested in watching the colors flow on the paper, some may even look away from the paper while scribbling. The result on the paper is accidental and often delights the child. With time they begin to draw circles, and be able to name their drawings. Their drawings will start to look like tadpoles.

The pre-schematic stage
This stage is also called the pre-symbolic stage which begins from age four, the tadpole figures may begin to have faces, hands and even toes but no bodies, omission of the body details does not show sign that something is wrong with the child, it shows that the other parts of the body are more important to the child. Colors usually have no relationship with what is being drawn, figures may be scattered all around the paper, and objects will float because the child does not know how to express three dimensional objects on a two dimensional surface.

Schematic stage
This stage begins at the age of seven and extends to nine years. The children begin to draw specific symbols of people and objects in their environment and will draw them consistently over and over. The human figures will have all the body parts; this is due to more body awareness and recognition of what the body parts do. Adults are drawn with long legs because that is how the child see them, the houses and people no longer float on the pages they are grounded by a baseline that acts as a horizon.

Realistic or gang stage
The stage when the child is about nine years. More details are seen in the drawings, shapes now have forms with shadows and shadings, colors are used to depict the environment and more complex art materials are introduced. The children become more sensitive to criticism and teasing from their peers, they can be easily discouraged about art especially for lack of art experience or exposure the child may not continue to draw or participate in visual activities.

Empirical studies
Similar studies have been conducted over the years, and these studies are closely related to this study on relationship between visual art expressions. Yusuf (1992) studied the measurement of the relationship between children’s physical development and visual art expression among selected primary school pupils in Kaduna State. His findings concluded that there was no correlation between children’s physical development and their visual art expression. Umar (2003) also studied the relationship between intellectual development and visual art expression of children in nursery and primary school children in Adamawa State. Her result showed positive correlation among all the variables involved

Theoretical framework
This study was based on Lowenfeld’s (1952) theory on the stages of children’s artistic development which was influenced by that of Piaget’s (1937/1954) stages of development, which states that a distinct parallel shows that the first stage is about the child’s relationship to perception of the world; stage two is concerned with greater identification and communication with the world; stage three agrees with Piaget’s concrete operational stage that is defined by the child’s understanding of the permanence of the physical world around him; stage four deals with a more formal operational approach to life and its depiction through a different dimension. These theories state that children’s development shifts from one stage to another and has serve as a basis for other theories. The stages include the scribbling stage (from 2-4 years approximately), pre-schematic stage (4-7 years approximately), schematic stage (7-9 years approximately), the gang stage (11-13 years approximately) and the adolescent stage (13-17 approximately). Visual art benefits the children because it cultivates the whole person, gradually building many kinds of literacy, while developing intuition, reasoning, imagination and dexterity into unique forms of expression and communication.

Children’s Art
If art is properly taught, the relationship of visual art expression and the developmental stages of children should be adequate from scribbling through adolescent stage. It will also aid intellectual and aesthetic development and exploration of values and can promote practical and perceptual skills (Lopata, Wallace, and Finn, 2005). Children's artistic development is sequential and can be separated into a number of stages; their art works exhibit characteristics of each stage as they pass through them. As with all developmental stages, children go through these stages at different rates and often exhibit characteristics of one or more levels at the same time (Roland, 2006).

The outcome of previous research studies (Olorukooba, 1974; 1977; 1987; 1990; 2003; Mohammed, 1998; Mbahi, 1999) identify inadequate art teacher preparation, materials and poor teaching styles as some of the causes of poor performance and students lack of interest in offering art after Junior Secondary School (J.S.S) level. It has also been observed that the teachers often tell the children what to draw instead of giving them the freedom to express themselves, so the pupils will not be able to display their different characteristic of their drawings. The outcome of this study also suggests possible ways of solving some of the problems encountered by art teachers/children. Some of the suggestions include:

a. The need to understand the role of visual art expression in the chronological development of children (Fountas& Olson, 1996).

b. Making children the centre and the core of art teaching at all levels (Lowenfeld and Brittain 1974; Fountas and Olson 1996).


d. Use of appropriate teaching styles at various stages (Olorukooba, 1990; Mohammed, 1998; Mbahi, 1999)

e. Understanding art curriculum prescription for children at the various level of artistic development (Fountas and Olson, 1996).

This research investigates the relationship between visual art expression and the developmental stages of children in nursery and primary schools in Yola North Local Government of Adamawa State. Educators are not too familiar with the relationship between visual expression and the developmental stages of children. They need to be aware of the best ways to assist children learn and develop during the early years.

The main purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between visual arts expression and the stages of developmental children.

**Method**

**Research design**

This study employed the descriptive survey method, it is a formal method of obtaining information from various groups or programmes.

**Population and sample**

The target population for this study consisted of all nursery and primary school's children from Yola North LGA in Adamawa State; (ages 2 – 14). The simple random sampling procedure was used in selecting the schools. A total number of 600 pupils from six (6) schools were sampled for the study. Specifically, 71 were sampled for scribbling stage, 160, for pre-schematic stage, 151 for schematic stage and 218 for gang stage.

**Research instruments**

The instrumentation used for collecting data for this study were drawing test, observation guide and interview schedule. Children were left to freely choose what to draw. A seven (7) point scale was developed and used for the assessment of the drawings; items for the assessment scale were derived from both primary and secondary sources. The observation checklist contains five (5) items which cover few content areas. Such as: environment/space, availability of materials, freedom of expression, encouragement from their teacher's, teacher's supervision of the pupils works, and details in the children's works among others. A short unstructured interview was used to collect the opinion of several experts for comparison with those found in some secondary sources and the results were used for the development of the observation checklist and assessment scale. Short semi-structured interviews were also used to extract responses from the teachers and headmasters/mistresses with regards to some of the issues raised in the observation checklist. Seventy (70) children who were not part of the main study were randomly sampled from two primary schools who took part in the pilot test. The reliability of the instrument was tested during their art classes of 40 minutes.

**Reliability of the instrument**

In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach’s Alpha values of .915 for part one (1) (skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination) and .786 for part two (2) (expression, improvisation, detail) were established. The Correlation Coefficient between Forms was .848. The Spearman-Brown Coefficient for
equal length was .918 and unequal length was .919 1). and Guttmann Split-Half Coefficient was .883 (Table 1).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Reliability of the seven items on the rating scale</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s Alpha</td>
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<td>Guttman Split-Half Coefficient</td>
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a  The items are: skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism and imagination.

b  The items are: expression, detail and improvisation

Validity of the instruments
In order to ascertain the extent of the validity of the instrument to be used for assessment of the drawing test, a questionnaire was developed for experts in psychology and art education specifically 13 respondents were purposively drawn from five (5) different academic departments, in universities and one college of education. They were purposively sampled based on the criteria that they are experts in the field. The questionnaire was based on the items on the assessment scale used to assess the children’s drawings. The response revealed a high acceptance for the face and content validity of the instrument. Furthermore, the Inter-Item Correlation Coefficient was also calculated for the seven assessment variables, and improvisation was found to have Interrelated Correlation Coefficient ranging from minimum of .354 for eclecticism to .503 for skill. These values appeared to be low, and the position of the experts on improvisation was undecided, therefore Improvisation was dropped from the assessment scale. The scores of 40% on strongly agree and 33.3% on agree, making a total of 73.3% indicate that skill is rated as a valid item for the assessment of the children’s’ drawings. Similarly, enthusiasm was rated eighty-six point six (86.6%), eclecticism sixty-eight (68%), imagination eighty-six point seven (86.7%), expression one hundred (100%) and details eighty (80%). The overall assessment of the six items on the rating scale was fifty six point seven (56.7%) and twenty four point four (74.4%) for agree making the total of eighty one point one (81.1%). This shows therefore that the rating scale has been rated by the experts as valid for use in assessing children’s’ drawings.

Drawings by the children
Scribble stage

At this stage ages 2-4 years, the children begin to draw random circles with uncontrolled lines. Later on the child represents the human figure as a tadpole. The pre-schematic stage ages 4-6 years
The pre-schematic stage starts from the ages of 4-6 years, and by this time the child begins to recognize more details in the human figure and is able to identify different objects around them.

The schematic stage ages 7-8 years

The child becomes aware of his environment and starts to draw the things he/she sees. Drawings are seen to be floating in the environment, even though the floating images start at the pre-schematic stage it is also seen at the schematic stage. More details appear in the drawings. The gang stage or the realistic stage ages 8-12 or even 13 years.
More details are seen in the drawings; shapes now have forms with shadows and shadings, colors are used to depict the environment and more complex art materials are introduced.

The drawings showed that the children’s visual art expression progresses from one stage to another and it’s according to their chronological age. Based on the assessment scale, various researchers have given their opinion on assessing children’s drawing on criteria such as originality, flexibility, fluency. However, these assessments of children’s drawings based on such items alone may not be adequate; observation of the process of producing these drawings should also be considered. In addition to these, skills, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination expression, and details could be measured and used in assessing children’s art works.

**Skills in children’s drawings**

A skill is the learned capacity to carry out predetermined results often with the minimum outlay of time, energy or both. Logsdon (2010) believed that there is a Fine Motor Skill which involve the small muscles of the body that enable such functions as writing, grasping small objects, small motor skills which also involve fine motor control and dexterity.

**Enthusiasm in children’s drawings**

There is a strong feeling of excitement and interest in children in the process of visual art expression that is manifested in their finished art works. Children enjoy drawing; this is because drawings stimulate the desire to express oneself. Children should be allowed the greater freedom to explore papers, walls, boards or any other surfaces that can be used to draw on, as far as their imagination will permit, they are always deeply engrossed in what they are drawing, the sounds and motions they unwittingly make as they draw, the drawings draw them into a world of possibilities; to form a face, a hand, or to fancy an emerging significance until the world is “drawn” as they experience it.

**Eclecticism in children’s drawings**

Eclecticism is the freedom for children to express themselves in various approaches to visual art expression in their art works. Eclecticism can be seen in children’s art work by the way they express themselves in their own way and approaches to art which may be very different from that of adult’s way of seeing art.

**Imagination in children’s drawings**

Sasson (2010) defined imagination “as the ability to form a mental image of something that is not perceived through the sense. It is the ability of the mind to build mental scenes, objects or events that do not exist, are not present or have happened in the past”. Everyone possesses some imagination ability. In some it may be highly developed and in others it may manifest in a weaker form. Imagination makes it possible to experience a whole world inside the mind of children.

**Expression in children’s drawings**

Expression is when children express their experiences through their visual art works. Over the years, educators, psychologists, and philosophers have come to appreciate the value of children’s art and its important role in early childhood education. It is now agreed by many in the field that exploring and creating with art materials help children become more sensitive to the physical environment; promotes cognitive development; and increase their social and emotional development. Young children who are encouraged to engage in expressive art activities also gain a sense of accomplishment and grow towards achieving independence and autonomy. (Mshelbila, 2006).

**Details in children’s drawings**

Details are the ability for children to display the characteristic according to their developmental stages.
in their visual art works. Cox (1993) observed that the human figure is one of the earliest topics drawn by the young child and remains popular throughout childhood and into adolescence. At first the child may not intend their scribbles to represent anything, but this may change with age, as the child ages, these marks become more representative and often more realistic (Mshelbila, 2006). Children add details and complexity to their drawings, like faces attach to bodies.

During the observation, it was observed that the teacher’s lack of adequate theoretical and practical training in art education indicated that they lacked understanding of appropriate teaching styles and curriculum prescription for the children at their various stages of art development. The teachers tell the children what to draw, and this made the children to draw the same thing; there was no freedom of expression. This has affected the teacher’s perception of the proper position of the children in the art class: thus they are not made the centre and core of art teaching.

It was also observed that the environment was not very conducive enough for the pupils to learn, art materials were not very adequate, and there was lack of qualified art teachers who could use appropriate teaching styles as well as give the pupils proper attention. These could have adversely affected the performance of the children. Experts (Olorukooba, 1977, 1990; Mbahi, 1999) agree that these could weaken the visual art expression of children.

However, this study did not put into consideration the impact of the differences in terms of proportion, biological, psycho-cultural, ethnicity, and familiar relationship in the children’s drawing, rather it aimed at studying the relationship between visual art expression and the developmental stages of children and also looked at the content of children’s drawing based on skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression and detail.

Conclusion
It can be concluded that there is significant difference in children’s visual art expression and their developmental age among the pupils selected from the schools used for the study. The children at all the stages displayed the characteristics of their visual art expression as enumerated by some experts (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1975; Gaitskell and Hurwitz, 1975; Olorukooba, 1986; Melanie, 1996; Martins, 2001 among others). there is always that strong feeling and excitement and interest seen in every child in the process of art making in various approaches, not only that, the children are able to display the characteristic according to their developmental stages in art. , exposure to a variety of materials at an early age can encourage a child’s life long appreciation of art. Some encouragements can be in the form of providing quality children’s picture books that have illustrations and field trips to art galleries and museums. These experiences can broaden a child’s exposure to a variety of artistic style and content.

Recommendations
The following recommendations were made with the view of improving the visual art expression of the children in the nursery and primary schools in Adamawa State:

- Priority should be given to the art subject on the school time table. This will motivate the children in art as a base for clearer understanding on other subjects.
- Child-centre education should be introduced at the elementary level because freedom to play implies making use of their environment freely, and this requires providing environment that is conducive to move freely and work with art materials provided by their teachers. This will help the pupils to express themselves freely.
- School Authorities and Teachers should introduce new materials and equipment for children to use at the various levels. Materials like magazines, television, photographs, clay, different types of colours, among others; the provision of adequate materials will give the children the opportunity to improve their performance in their visual art expression.
- Teachers should be given the opportunity to go for training and retraining programs in art, this will help them understand children’s developmental stages, and make them the centre and core of art teaching and also provide standard teaching styles in art.
- Teachers should understand or have knowledge of the different developmental stages in children and always encourage the children; such encouragement will help them create new ideas in their visual art expressions.

References


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