

Impact of African Traditional Art Practice in the Development of Artistic Impulses among Children of School Age in Afikpo L.G.A. of Ebonyi State.

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Abstract

Art as an instrument of development forms a framework in the traditional Afikpo art practices where its inhabitants acquires creative skills for human development. This study yearns at encouraging the young youths who passed through the traditional process of art training to continue with art through formal training to improve on their creative expressions. The study adopted a historical survey design where a population of those who passed through the traditional tutelage of Afikpo was sampled randomly to ascertain the viability of Afikpo traditional art practices and its encouragement to advance in art study. One hundred Afikpo Indigenes took the sample size. Seventy-seven initiates and nine teachers from Afikpo made up the sample size, covering the Afikpo communities. Questionnaires, observation and oral interviews were used to obtain data. Out of 100 questionnaires sent out, only 86 returned. Data obtained were analysed with simple percentages. The study recommended afterwards based on the findings of the research that artistic skills be vigorously encouraged among the youths in Afikpo, that cultural centres be revived, museums and local resource centres be built, cultural seminars be held locally within the communities in Afikpo among others.

Keywords; Art, Traditional, Practice, Development, Artistic Impulse, School age.

Introduction

The culture of a people strenghtens their existence and art is an integral element that forms the catalyst of societal build. It is imperative therefore to note that art as a basic structure for cultural and traditional operation of a people, go a long way to establish a strong base for their social, political, economic and religious development. Udochukwu, (1972) in Ali (2001) says that a society's environmental, mythical and religious peculiarities are crystalized in its art which as a result does not reflect or portray anything outside the society, therefore that the objects represented in the works of art are those within the physical limits of the society that produce them. Typical of this are seen in the various art products of different cultures of the people and Afikpo Ekpo masks, potteries, and other cultural items possesses the art dynamics that depicts these practices (Ibiam, 2017). Though the meaning of art is broad but it can be configured to mean creative expression, skill and beauty, evolving concepts, provoking thoughts and communications which are enshrined in the cultural items produced by artists and craftsmen and

women in their various localities. Art is the ingredient through which the people operate in their cosmic spaces.

Art as an element of culture is dynamic, it is not static phenomenon and it is subject to the laws of change and continuity, (Egonwa,1994). This is because the traditional guild of the Afikpo possesses the power of change and continuity through its art educational values which impacts in the people positively. The reflections of the various meaning of art can be reconfigured in the inputs of Egonwa (1991), where he implies that art possess cultural values embedded in functionality which is typical in Africa. For this reason he states that social functionality has been an important factor in the validity of most African arts, Afikpo inclusive. Biebuyck (1969) and Harley (1950) in Egonwa (1991) examine masks as agent of social control in Liberia where Sieber (1962) in Egonwa (1991) fused in agreement over the essentially functional nature of African art. Egonwa further expresses and I quote ‘‘that in Euro-American aesthetic category, an art work is useless in the sense that function is not a condition for an object to be art. On the contrary, many of the objects of art which were later promoted by them to the status of art, were otherwise useful in one or more social context in their parent societies’’.

The quote however suggests that a beautiful pottery ware with leakage can never find a collector. Africa has contributed greatly to the world civilisation in the concerns of art with such monumental approaches to show the strength of African cultural philosophies. The creation of artistic products in Africa is largely to make contacts with the super natural forces which helps them to overcome the dangers of the environment (Uzoagba, and Olorukooba, 1991). They further said that Africans believe in a universal life force which an omnipotent creator pours into the world and which gives life to every created things such as humans, plants and stones even the dead still retain their living force.

The archaeological findings of the pre-historic period reflects the art of magic and religion which conceives African traditional art as a life force that breeds dynamisms that control several life phenomena. By this, Africans like to transform the invisible forces or spirits to tangibles where they create sculptures that serves as mediums to give access to the spirit world. They create ancestor figures, fetish figures, masks and other guild objects.

African traditional art today has transcended to making of other functional objects for domestic use and social entertainments which most of the ethnic groups have taken as their heritages and practiced for sustenance and development. Afikpo in Ebonyi state is therefore not left out in the discourse as their artistic traditions are significant to human and societal development.

Geographical Location of Afikpo

Afikpo is the second largest town in Ebonyi state made up of twenty two villages. The old Afikpo province once covered Unwana, Edda , Amasiri, and Akpoha. Afikpo today comprises Unwana, Akpoha, Amasiri, Ehugbo with connecting roads. Afikpo North is located in the rain forest belt with patches of savannah vegetation but unguarded urbanisation has given rise to deforestation in the town which is alarming, fuelling the problem of soil erosion. Afikpo North and its villages are bounded by smaller streams of water and undulating land surfaces, (Inyang, 2017). Enyum (Ndibe, Oziza and Unwana Beaches) are untapped potential tourist centres with beautiful works of nature that adorns the geographical face of the town. Amasiri and Akpoha stone caves are naturally deposited for tourism. Afikpo inhabitants are farmers, traders, and craftsmen.

Historical Origin of Afikpo

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Afikpo is shrouded in several myths and legends, the most reliable is that which is connected with the ancestral father who was a great warrior called Igboekwu. Mbey (1990) says that Igboekwu and his people set out from Saudi Arabia in the middle –east in quest of conquest and settlement. Igboekwu travelled to Africa and first settled at Ikoyi –Lagos. He proceeded to Calabar from where he attacked, defeated and drove away the Ibibios who inhabited the area now occupied by the Aro. The similarity in language and custom between the Afikpo and Calabar is not disputed as it is legendary. Mbey (1990) further states that Igboekwu and his people settled in Aro and had many sons. His prominent sons were named Egwurochi, Egwu-Ehite, Urobuchiali, and Ukwuanyi-njaka.

Other of his children were Okoro-Igbo who founded Unwana upon migration to settle there and Ezeni-Igbo who committed adultery with his father's wife, and was expelled to Edda, where he founded the village known as Ufu-Ezeni. Igboekwu and his children settled at Aro for a long period hence the Aro call themselves Aro Oke Igbo. At the death of Igboekwu, his first son took his brothers and expedited, thus landed at Ehugbo, from where Okoro-Igbo took off to Unwana. Okoro-Igbo had children that eventually formed the four villages in Unwana. Egwurochi and his other brothers formed the known autonomous communities of Ohaisu, Itim-Ukwu, Mkpogboro, Ibii and Oziza.

Another legendary documentation according to Ottenberg (1951) has it that Afikpo dates back to 3000BC. The oral historical account was told by the chroniclers and elders. Ottenberg stated that the present day inhabitants of Afikpo are descendants of two groups, Nkalu and Ego or Egu who were the first settlers at Afikpo and by this Afikpo owe its culture and tradition to Ego. A man called Anuma Ugwu settled in an area occupied by Ezi-Ukaka Amaha Amizu. Another tradition held that the indigenous people of Afikpo went to war and defeated Ego who were originally somewhere between Abakaliki and Ohazara and took many of them as prisoners to Afikpo.

Afikpo Traditional Art Values

Traditional art is the art of the people handed down from generation to generation which is not tampered by the outside world. Traditional art is rooted in belief, commitment, and part of the cultural pattern which was understood as an integral part of an inherited pattern of life (Ogbale, 2001).

Afikpo tradition builds on socio-cultural and religious pedestals which anchors on the seven cardinal goals of the traditional African education as stated by Fafunwa (1974), where traditional African education is said to be a multilateral with the end objective of making an honest, respectable, skilled, co-operative individual who also should conform to the social order of the day. Afikpo has various social and entertainment cultures through which people are informed and educated in the process. Such cultures are Onyeigiri, Okumkpo, Okpaa, Otaeru, Ekpo and among others. Other Igbo communities have theirs as mmanwu in the chains of Iyiagbaku, Okwomma, Iga, Ijelle, Izaga, Omebe, Akatakpa among others.

Among the female folk is the pottery setting where young and old maidens engage in pottery productions of different sorts, ranging from plates, cooking pots, water pots and ritual figurines. These women seclude themselves to a place where no other person will easily visit and tap their secrets. There they mould and fire their pots, it is called ‘‘Ohuhu’’ and by this study we may classify such pottery practice of the women as their guild. It is also a process through which the women attain their mistress crafts apprenticeship scheme for the purpose of skill development and entrepreneurship. Afikpo tradition shields the art education process of the people, Art

education therefore is the provision of knowledge of production of visual creative works that satisfies man's sense of aesthetics and functionality within his environment (Talabi, 1987).

It transcends to the study of art that is based on visual tangibles such as drawing, painting, sculpture, pottery, weaving, and design in jewellery among others. The training process may be informal but works with a functional curriculum that meets its objectives at the end of training. The Ogo guild of the Afikpo people which is an embodiment of traditional education process enables the male child into manhood and it is designed to teach the initiates good morals, survival skills, and art skills that would help to develop their creativity and sustain them socially and economically. The training acquired provides the energy to sustain the male child in a course for survival. The Afikpo Ogo guild also defines sound art education process through male initiations from where several learnt artistic skills are twined with entrepreneurship skills by master craftsman apprenticeship. This created opportunity for initiates to gainfully engage themselves upon graduation from the process and contribute their quota in community development. These narratives provide basis for this study as to understudy the "Impact of African Traditional Art Practices in the Development of Artistic Impulses among School Age in Afikpo L.G.A". It is expected that the traditional tutelage of the initiates should transcend to the child furthering in skill development with the zeal to meet the taste of time and satisfy the imminent aesthetic desires of the Afikpo inhabitants and diaspora. The traditional tutelage encouraged learning through play method and individual explorations. Montessori education brings about a system of education for young children that seek to develop skills through natural interests and activities rather than formal teaching methods. For more than a century, Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian physician, developed the child focused approach in educating children which has been transforming schools around the globe. Montessori method fosters rigorous, self-motivated growth for children and adolescents in all areas of their social, cognitive, emotional and physical development.

The study builds a touch on the imperativeness of understanding that the transiting from Afikpo traditional art practice to a formal process will account to the understanding of modern art which is the marriage of both old tradition and new artistic expressions in terms of materials, techniques and tools.

Statement of the Problem

The advent of Christianity, western education and modernisation which has drastically reduced certain traditional practices of the Afikpo people seem to some extent extincted the artistic practices learnt during initiation. The concern therefore is to seek a continuum from traditional practice to formal training. It is observed that children of school age seem not to advance in learning those skills acquired during their Ogo initiation and seem to have lost touch of material manipulations and innovations for sustainability. The Afikpo communities are left with the inadequate productions of the few traditional weavers, black-smiths, potters, few maskers and carvers.

The decline of these cultural efforts instituted by the fore-parents has shown the way to immoralities, corrupt practices, youth decadents and gross bastardization of the laws of the land.

Purpose of the Study

The study having deduced the possible problems aims at; Investigating the effectiveness of the Afikpo traditional art tutelage and its chances of encouraging further formal training in school children.

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The specific objectives of the study are to;

- ascertain the Afikpo traditional art practices
- ascertain the teaching and learning processes
- assess the quality of the products of the system
- assess the viability of the traditional art practices as a break through to art specialisation

Research Questions

- Are there traditional art practices in Afikpo cultural structure?
- Are there teaching and learning processes adopted in Afikpo traditional art tutelage?
- Do the Afikpo art products show tangible qualities?
- Do the Afikpo traditional art practices encourage further studies children of school age?

Significance of the Study

- The study may inform curriculum planners and educators to adopt functional traditional processes in teaching and learning of creative arts in schools.
- The study shall inform cultural studies experts to delve into diverse cultures in Nigeria as a lot of African artistic backgrounds are not known.
- Museum practitioners will benefit through the study as cultural dynamics have led to several artistic modifications
- A reveal of the Afikpo traditional art practices as a guild process and not a cult.
- The study will however inform the custodians of Afikpo tradition to encourage the initiates of the Ogo guild to commence formal training in the arts after their experiences.

Scope of the Study

The study was carried out in Afikpo communities, comprising Unwana, Ehugbo, Amasiri and Akpoha.

Limitations to the Study

The Afikpo guild is an ancestral practice which the people hold tenaciously on for livelihood, therefore they do not divulge easily their processes which was a near impediment to this study.

This study reviewed some literatures relating to African traditional art practices in the development of artistic impulses among children of school age in Afikpo L.G.A. of Ebonyi state. The study built up the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the study under the following;

- Place of African Traditional Art
- Afikpo Art Practices
- Art learning in Children
- Theories of Child Art learning Conceptual Framework

Place of African Traditional Art

The core to this study are traditional art, art practices, development and artistic impulses.

Art in every case is considered a means but to some end, it goes beyond. What counts is not the nature of the work of art work but the effect on the audience. It can be sensory, cognitive, moral, religious or social. The Nok, Igbo, Ife, and Benin art cultures in Nigeria have reflected the traditional African art of Nigeria which carried the characteristics of the immediate societies from where they were produced. The significances of these cultures were very objective to the materials used in the production of the art objects as provided by the natural location and the

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second aspect focuses on the ‘ethos’ which means the general principle by which a culture survives or operates.

This also can reflect the inner aspect which is the spirit of the people. The objective and the spiritual culture is the totality of the people’s way of life which defines a certain outlook on life, a certain morality, a certain disposition and a certain spirit of the people (Abiola,1991).

African art is not devoid of the conventionals as communication, daily living, spiritual upkeep, social, and political purposes are the arenas where art operates.

Art and Communication

The most important function of the traditional art is communication as the members of the community are informed through the skilful products of the traditional artists. Some of the artistic works are built to direct and remind the people of certain events and their periods which infuses into the inhabitants that consciousness towards dating. What we refer to as sign posts are traditionally known to be insignias that pictorially live in the hearts of the people. By this, information was assessable to the people and there was cohesion within the cultural setting.

Art for Daily living

Daily operations of the people is coined in the effective functioning of art. It is objective to note that the cosmic life of man is built around the natural formation of objects that traditionally emanated by the interaction between man and his natural setting which the environment makes available. The wood, earth colours, metals, plant pigments and plant fibres are natural resources through which certain utility objects are produced. All were meant to bring pleasure and efficiency into man’s daily lives. Mbelu (2005), affirms that visual arts which today is called environmental art helps to improve the quality of our surrounding. It is also on this that the architectures of traditional era were seemingly a creative dialogue generated to satisfy man’s spiritual existence.

Art and Spiritism

Art forms have spiritual attachments in various cultural societies. Various sculptures, paintings, smithed irons were for spiritual and magical use, (Mbelu, 2005). Traditionally, art was used for both art and for religious purposes. A lot of cultural backgrounds pay tributes to works of ancient and tribal religious art without knowing the intentions of their makers. In Afikpo, there were deities put in art forms (Mkprukem), which pleased the people by their forms and imageries and also conveys cross cultural information. In so many cultural societies, artists are seen as spiritual leaders or as native doctors as such function as councillors, these are artists who build community centered art with a strong traditional limits and provide cultural and spiritual continuity from generation to generation.

Art for Social and Political Use

A society is described by the kind of art produced by its inhabitants which puts the society to shape. The elemental forces of every cultural setting provides the mechanism by which checks and balances are enabled. It is fundamentally the role of art and artists to construct media for policing and criticising the anomalies in the society. Masquerading of sorts are products of art which provides social entertainments and social order. The artist uses his art to direct popular values, mould public opinions for gaining and holding political power, by this, art had helped in

controlling the minds of the people long before the modern communication process. There are myriads of masquerades from diverse cultures of the African societies.

Afikpo Traditional Art Practices

The traditional art of the Afikpo is enshrined in their Ogo cultural values which aligns with the socio-cultural and religious backgrounds that propels the living of the people. Ibiam, (2015) holds through oral tradition that Afikpo has a strong guild in which every male child should be initiated in to achieve full manhood. The guild is an embodiment of traditional education poised to expose the young male child to good morals and artistic skills for sustenance. The guild which is said to have originated from Edda practiced Egbele meant to be the Edda cultural institution which is mostly respected and cherished by the people for its policing and checking roles in Edda community. The guild practices lasts for three years and takes place in the forest and Ogo house in the company of peers. African art forms various aspects of the life of the people including their religion, Egonwa, (1994) affirms that African system of belief is to a great extent useful in the examination of the social aspect of most African art works. Egonwa, (1994) quotes;

“Not only is the occasion of religious observance or festivities with them auspicious for the patronage of art and the artists, but religion in very many instances contributed to the peoples aesthetic evaluation of the art objects”.

The Ogo guild provides artistic instructions where the initiates master a lot of creative skills in painting, crafts, sculpture, smithing and traditional textiles. They paint mask figures and masquerades, carved mask faces on wood and painted to suit their spiritual control. The initiates also explore various skills in making body wears using palms and raffia showing profound aesthetics and possess cultural quality. The learnt all these to build their entrepreneurial strength and serve the society. Ezema, (2004) affirms in this, the meaning of education which is a basic tool for social change and a principal medium for transmission of culture and attitudes and most importantly for the development of skills for the survival of the individual and the society.

The traditional art practice also reflects the pottery art of the women in Afikpo. The women also form their guild where they build a sacred space for the production of their pots and all processes of their operations are kept secret unto themselves. No outside person, man or woman comes around their space except those already initiated in their guild. This they do to protect their skills of pottery productions and sustain the spirituality of their beliefs. This potters satisfied the pottery need of the people as it were and sustained their products in the local and outside markets.

Art Learning in Children

Children are naturally curious and from the minute they gain control of their limbs, they work to get themselves out into the world to see how it all works (Kylie Rymanowicz, 2015). Children explore and imitate trying to figure out how things operate and how to control themselves which helps them to form connections in their brain, it helps them learn and it is fun.

Art therefore is a natural activity to support the free play in children, Kylie (2015) further affirms that it enables children the freedom to manipulate different materials in an organic and unstructured way allows for explorations and experimentation. These artistic endeavors and self-directed explorations are not only fun but educational as well. Art allows youth to practice a wide range of skills useful not only for life, but also for learning.

Fine motor skills, cognitive development, math skills and language skills form the potentials needed to build up in child art learning processes. Free expression given to a child creates good

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health and well-being. Creative outlet relieve stress from children so they can work through things happening in their lives.

Theories of Child Art Learning

This study will discuss some theories of child art development ranging from naïve realism, recapitulation, personality, developmental, intellectualist, haptic visual, perceptual development, perception delineation model, the author's synthesis, although not all will be discussed.

The theories of child art learning will be effective upon practical application, the theories provide interpretation of one child's art work to illustrate objectivity.

Naïve realism is that tendency to believe our perception of the world reflects it exactly as it is, unbiased and unfiltered. Epistemologically, naïve realism could be called direct realism or perceptual realism. Naïve realism was coined by a social psychologist called Lee Ross and his colleagues in the 90s.

Recapitulation theory or otherwise called the biogenetic theory captures the idea that the ontogeny of the child re-enacts the phylogeny of the human species meaning that the development of the individual human being follows the evolutionary history of the entire human species. Diane views play as evolutionary biological process. Further said is that children's play passes through developmental stages of the human race in an evolutionary sequence.

Personality theory by Sigmond Freud proposed that the mind is divided into three components id, ego and super ego. The id is the component of personality that forms the basis of our most primitive impulses.

The youth and children who passed through the traditional tutelage of the Afikpo had most of the learning by play and with their biological generations were able to fit in and achieved sustained knowledge and skills that will lead them into manhood. The theories substantially reflected the native experiences that enabled the children internalise learning.

Methodology

The research is on the Impact of African Traditional Art Practice in the Development of artistic impulses among Children of School age in Afikpo L.G.A. of Ebonyi State. The research adopted a historical survey approach to understudy the Afikpo traditional art practices. The purpose is to document the process through historiography and ethnographically.

Research Design

This research adopted a historical survey to enable use of questionnaire, interview or field observation in generating data.

Area of the Study

The study wss carried out in Afikpo L.G.A. comprising four towns namely Unwana, Ehugbo, Amasiri and Akpoha.

Population of the Study

The population comprised of all custodians of the traditional centres, art teachers and traditional guild initiates in Afikpo L.G.A. of Ebonyi state.

Population Sample

Traditional craftsmen from Afikpo town comprising seventy-seven traditional guild initiates, cultural custodians and nine art teachers were randomly selected from the secondary schools in Afikpo L.G.A.

Instrument for Data Collection

A questionnaire titled investigation into the impact of Afikpo traditional art practices in the development of artistic impulses among children of school age was developed by the researcher. The instrument contains 20 items arranged in three sections which sought information from different sources. The third section elicited information on the viability of Afikpo traditional art practices.

Validation of Instrument

The validation of the instrument was done by experts in measurement and evaluation and by this process the face and content validity was established before the adoption the instrument for use.

Reliability of the Instrument

The researcher did a test re-test with the same number of questionnaires which were administered to the another group after three weeks and the two set of scores were correlated using using pearson product moment correlation coefficient statistics yielding the same responses.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires was personally administered and collected on the spot to be sure of the returns. The returned questionnaires was for data collection. Finally 86 questionnaires were returned.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using simple percentages to justify the viability and potency of traditional art practices in building artistic impulses among children of school age.

Data Analysis

A table showing detailed responses and analysis of all data collected is presented with the question items, responses in percentages and the total.

Table Showing Summerised Responses and Analysis

S/N	Items	Responses	%		%	Total	%
		Yes		No			
1	Are there traditional art practices within the Afikpo cultural structure?	66	76.7	20	23.3	86	100
2	Are there teaching and learning processes adopted in Afikpo traditional art tutelage?	20	66	23.3	76.7	86	100
3	Do the Afikpo art products show tangible qualities?	66	76.7	20	23.3	86	100

4	Do Afikpo traditional art practices encourage further studies among children of school age?	66	76.7	20	23.3	86	100
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Discussions

This section discussed the findings of the study as related to the research topic. Art has been an instrument of livelihood in Afikpo and the cultural structure of Afikpo has created a base for artistic development over time. The data collected as shown in item 1 questioned the art practices of the Afikpo people. To discuss this, it is observed that Afikpo is a town rich in natural resources which enabled the inhabitants to explore various materials in making artistic works ranging from painting, sculptures, textiles, pottery, carvings, crafts, among others. Today in Afikpo, the people are known for the production of masks and masquerades, clay pots, ritual objects, war equipments, farm implements, and other various art forms.

In item 2, the Afikpo traditional process adopted a traditional education order where initiates were taught artistic skills through master craftsmen so that at the end of the guild process, the initiates must have acquired saleable skills for sustainability. The initiates learnt by imitation and observation with a traditional curriculum working for them. Some non initiates also ran apprenticeship programmes from the initiates who learnt the skill, meaning that master apprenticeship is effective in Afikpo traditional setting.

Item 3 through the responses showed that there are numerous artistic products that emanate from the art traditions of the Afikpo people which enables them to compete favourably with the other neighbouring towns that are culturally endowed. The study found out that the art products of the Afikpo people floods the market space there by generating fortunes for the inhabitants. The Afikpo products found their market spaces in other surrounding communities. Afikpo masks are dominant in Crossriver, Abriba, Item, while their potteries are seen in Okigwe, Awgu, Inyi, among others.

Above all in this study, as shown in item 4, that the traditional art of the Afikpo has projected great implications in developing artistic impulses among children of school age much as modernity and christianity have recreated the minds of people. The Afikpo society and diaspora therefore, cannot do without the products of art in the contemporary time, that is to say the children still have the interest to continue with the study of art as a subject in schools. They clamour for art professionalism, many of them have become teachers of creative arts, studio art practitioners and art researchers. The traditional art practices have built in some persons the creative search for art development the sustenance of the cultural heritage.

Further findings of the study is the negligence of the products because of their crude nature but with the enablements given to youths to embrace modern technologies, the local products may be refined to stand the taste of time and place records of the ancient efforts that yielded to livelihood.

Conclusion

The impact of Afikpo traditional art practices cannot be overemphasized, Although there are numerous challenges ranging from the influx of the Christian missionaries who saw the traditional practices as heathen but the interest of the Afikpo communities overwhelmed.

The African traditional art practices shaped the cultural identity and promotes cultural preservations among children of school age. The art tradition fosters creative expression and self expression among children in Afikpo.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, here are some recommendations for promoting African traditional art practices in the development of artistic impulses among children of school age in Afikpo;

1. Incorporate African traditional art practices into the school the school curriculum to provide children with a comprehensive art education.
2. Establish art clubs and programmes in schools and communities to provide children with opportunities to engage in traditional art practices outside regular school hours.
3. Ensure access to traditional art materials and resources such as adire, batik, masks, woodcarvings, carving tools, crafts works to support children's creative expressions.
4. Train teachers and mentors with requisite artistic skills so that they can impact in children adequately.
5. Galleries and museums be built in Afikpo for proper documentation of African art traditions.

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