

Assessment of Selected Ceramics Entrepreneurs and their Impacts on Ceramic Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

With a proliferation in students' intake into the tertiary institutions, the Nigerian government and other education stakeholders were put to the task of revitalizing the tertiary educational standard. The uprisings scenario eventually led to the introduction of the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) as a core aspect of the tertiary institutional curriculum. This provided a link between the institution and the work world to create an avenue that strongly promotes the objectives of tertiary education towards capacity building and students' empowerment for self-reliance. Under an economic situation unconducive for sustenance of large scale ceramic industries, this paper considered important, the roles being played by the ceramic entrepreneurs to tertiary ceramic education in Nigeria. The six months out-of-school students' industrial training has in no little way contributed towards satisfying the academic needs for experience-based learning and development of entrepreneurial skills for students in Nigerian higher institutions.

Keywords: Nigerian pottery, education, entrepreneurship, ceramic cottage industries

1. Introduction

Nigeria has over 250 cultural tribes which can be identified with varied rich pottery tradition in forms, function, surface rendition that reflects on their religious and socio-economic life. Pottery constituted one of the oldest surviving craft widely practiced in Nigeria and often passed down from generation to generation under the apprenticeship system until the advent of western education. Over the last 60 years, pottery have transformed from the rural practice to modern method influenced by foreign contact with the western European potters and the formal institutionalization of teaching and learning of pottery in Nigerian tertiary institution which started toward the late 1950s.

Ceramic manufacturing and practice in Nigeria is naturally advantaged to thrive because the country is well endowed with material resources coupled with her good geographical spread that support sustainable production. It was observed that a good number of ceramic industries emerged and flourished in Nigeria from the mid-20th century. However, in the wake of an unstable economy that started in the late 1970's, only few of these large scale ceramic industries could survive to date while majority were forced to close down due to operational hitches rooted on poor management, poor infrastructural facilities, energy crises, high cost of importation of raw material and spare parts, and inadequate technical know-how of the available personnel.

Ceramics in Nigeria has continued to thrive as a professional practice and a promising choice of career since Michael Cardew's assistance at establishing the Abuja Pottery Training Centre in 1951 at the instance of the Northern Nigerian Government and subsequent introduction of ceramics as a course of study in Nigerian tertiary institutions. In spite of the downtrend in the growth of big ceramic industries owing to the overwhelming political and economic constraints, the small and medium pottery enterprises are still able to subsist in bridging the gap of collaboration that should exist between schools and the industries. The vast potentials for ceramic practices in Nigeria have further provided a supportive platform for the growth of small and medium scale enterprise industries that could operate with alternative technologies and be self-reliant. The inescapable crisis bewildering the large ceramic industries has in turn positioned the small enterprises at the forefront of absorbing students' of Nigeria tertiary institutions on a short term (6-month) Industrial Training (SIWES). The Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) in Nigeria was established through a governmental policy (Decree 47 of 1971). Though most of the small and medium enterprises lack real industrial capacity, yet they have been able to offer students on industrial attachment basic vocational training, craftsmanship and business skills relevant to build their capacity for self-reliance and quest for a balanced tertiary education.

The effort and contributions of the surviving small and medium scale ceramic enterprises in corroborating with the institutional effort towards the delivery of proficient graduates has been very considerable over time. Interestingly, these potentially-strong establishments are still able to thrive under a depressed economy and yet contributing to the economic well-being of their immediate communities, generating employment and providing economic sustenance. An appraisal of the impact made by these enterprises on students of tertiary education in Nigeria is the focal point of this article.

2. Ceramic Education in Nigeria and Students' Industrial Training

Fine and Applied Arts constitute prominent Departments that offer advanced educational programmes in some tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Ceramic art and designs are specialized options within applied art/industrial design programmes whose curriculum content are periodically revised in order to meet up with the contemporary global challenges. Ceramics art training in Nigeria has been an aged long exercise that stemmed out of the traditional pottery practices with a well-established apprenticeship system. A school-based training for contemporary ceramics however emerged in 1953 at Zaria Art School (now Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria) following an inspiration of the pottery training initiative anchored by Michael Cardew at Ladi Kwali Pottery Centre in 1950. It took off on a sound note while tertiary institutions began to embrace the course and enroll students until late 1970 when Nigeria experienced a depression in its economy which impacted very negatively on its educational standard generally and the low turn-out of employable graduates. With a proliferation in students' intake into the tertiary institutions, the Nigerian government and other education stakeholders were put to the task of revitalizing the tertiary educational standard. The uprisings scenario eventually led to the introduction of the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) as a core aspect of the tertiary institutional curriculum. This provided a link between the institution and the work world which created an avenue that strongly promotes the objectives of tertiary education towards capacity building and students' empowerment for self-reliance.

2.1 Examples of Nigerian Cottage Ceramic Industries: Basic Operational and Enterprising Structures

The establishment and operations of selected cottage ceramic industries which are currently operational in Nigeria were reviewed. Maraba pottery at Kaduna, Dajo pottery at Markudi, Buhari pottery and Ushafa pottery both at the Federal Capital Territory, Sweet Art Nigeria Ltd situated in Lagos, (Atamora pottery) close to Ikire in Osun state, Pot-purit Pottery centre located in Lagos, Saubana and Sons pottery at Ibadan and Heritage ceramics established in Lagos, Nigeria were considered as the focal point of discussion in this article. The findings reported captured the evolution of these ceramic enterprises, assessment of their production facilities and methodologies, market operations, and appraisal of students' performances when they return to school after their internship.

2.1.1 Maraba Pottery Centre

The name *Maraba* originated from an Arabic word *Mari-aha-ba* meaning welcome. This pottery enterprise has since 1985 engaged itself in the production of ceramic wares, supported with kiln building operations and fabrication of metal of different designs. It was established by some set of people who have had influence of training under Michael Cardew. They include Micheal O' Brien (renowned British potter), alongside Danlami Aliyu, Umaru Aliyu, Amadu Yakubu and Jan Kiesle. The centre started with 3 staff members until the staff strength increased to 15 in 2006 to compensate for increase in demand on their goods and services. It has 3 studios, a glazing room, show room, and a drying room and kiln facilities for bisque and glazed firings (Fig. 2).

MarabaPottery centrehas a built environment with 15 buildings taking a typical feature of aHausa traditional settlement built in mud, grasses, bamboo and wood; all ofwhich hascharacteristics that can attract tourist and engender interest to patronize the environment and their products which looks unique. The workers reside in some of the building while the others serve as studios. They primarily source their clay from Regachuku and Maraba village. It is not highly plastic but has a high heat resistance. It is added to other plastic clay for workability. Another very important event of interest is the location the Chukker Polo club close to the pottery environment.

The major production is centered on objects made from the throwing wheels, casting and hand building using the coil and slab methods (Fig. 3). They also produce a lot of insulating bricks; formulate local glazes made purely of local contents and recipes using materials like potashfeldspar, kaolin, quartz, whiting, wood ash and talc. The decorative techniques adopted are sgraffito, leaf decoration, stamping, waxing and banding.

MarabaPottery has a showroom at the studio centre(Fig. 4) and also at the ground floor of Nicon Hilton hotel in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. At the hotel, the products are displayed for public awareness and also for the purpose of marketing. They participates in local and international exhibitions especially exhibitions of Craft Potters Association of Nigeria (CPAN). Other sources of their marketing are through commissioned projects, individual request and foreign patronage by tourist to Nigeria. The large expense of land, the structures that depict Northern architecture and a true representation of African setting made of local hut in clay, water and grasses made the centre aunique one. The foreigners received frequently are nationals from America, Germany, France, Britain and other African countries.



Figure 1: Maraba Pottery Environment



Figure 2: Research visit by a Master Student to study kiln facilities at Maraba Pottery



Figure 3: A university student attached for training in Maraba Pottery



Figure 4: Some local glazed wares produced in Maraba Pottery

2.1.2 Dajo Pottery Centre

Dajo pottery is located in Benue state of Nigeria and established in 1988 by its president Levi O' Ben Yakubu, a fourth generation potter in his family and a ceramic graduate of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. It occupies 10 hectares piece of land at km 5, Gboko road, Makurdi, the state capital of Benue State. The pottery centre produces table ware and offer entrepreneurial training to young Nigerians through the following agencies:

- i. National Directorate of Employment through the National open apprentice programme.
- ii. United National Development programme/Benue State Ministry of Commerce and Industry, through their small scale employment programme.
- iii. Industrial Training Fund through their Student Industrial Works Experience Scheme (SIWES).

They have participated over the years in various international exhibition, trade fairs, expos, trade missions to United States of America, United Kingdom, China, Germany, Spain, Australia, South Africa, Kenya, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Ireland won several awards, honours and prizes such as:

- i. Member of the order of the Niger (MON 2000).
- ii. National Productivity Order of Merit (NPOM 2004)
- iii. National Raw Material Content Award (NLRMC 2006)

The centre has over 30 employee producing variety of ceramics table wares, using throwing, casting and jigger/jolly methods. The proposed future investment areas are burnt bricks, refractory bricks for kilns and furnaces, clay academy and electrical insulators.

2.1.3 Buhari Pottery Centre

Buhari pottery is situated just beyond the Nigerian law school, about 3km along the road to Ija and Suleija in Bwari, Federal Capital Territory Abuja. The pottery started its operation as pottery studio with the name Biu pottery Nigeria Ltd in 1988 at Biu in Borno State before it was relocated to Bwari in Abuja after its registration as a full-flagged Company. (Fig. 5)

The ceramic production is centre on the making of table wares and different ceramic forms meant to serve ornamental and aesthetic purposes. It was established in 1999 with the involvement of Micheal O' Brien. It was registered with the Nigerian Corporate Affairs Commission in the year 2000 when it commenced full operation. Indigenous raw materials such as ball clay, kaolin, iron oxide, talc and feldspar are used for their body preparation and also for the production of both white and red slips. Glaze recipes are centered on local contents.

Among the kilns that are used at the pottery centre is a wood kiln. The use of wood kiln becomes desirable because of availability of wood within the production environment. It is a double chambered kiln made for gloss and biscuit firing. The firing chambers are made of high refractory bricks while the biscuit chamber is made with red bricks.

The marketing of their wares are usually either through exhibition, locally and internationally or through commissioning from customers and clients from different parts of the world, individuals, wholesalers, and gallery/show room where displayed work can be ordered (Fig. 6). It has a picnic huts located close to the show rooms for relaxation of clients and tourists.



Figure 5: Cottage studio facility in Buhari Pottery



Figure 6: Local ceramic wares made in Buhari Pottery

2.1.4 Atamora Pottery Centre (Sweet Art Nigerian Ltd)

Atamora Pottery Centre evolved its production operation in 1985 at Ile-Ife, Osun State as Country Crafts Ltd by Mr. Ibukunoluwa Ayoola. In 1998 the studio's location was moved to Anifowose, Ikeja-Lagos with a change of name to Sweet Art Nigerian Limited before setting up a pottery village project at the Atamora Village in Osun State in September 2006.

The centre produces ornamented and aesthetic wares of varied shapes and sizes. The decorative techniques used include incision, appliqué decoration, sprigging and stamping, simulated textures and burnishing.

The pottery centre prospect her raw materials from the surrounding areas around the villages. The site has advantage of clay heap as a result of land clearance resulting from road construction. Apart from handling ceramic products for aesthetic and functional purposes, the outfit also engages in either landscaping or horticulture. Marketing of their products are done through periodic exhibitions and creation of awareness for individual buyers and whole sellers, displays in studio gallery/show room or display of work at a roadside shop (Fig. 7). Their works are also patronized by the foreigners, multi-national corporations, individual and retailers.



Figure 7: Wheel-thrown large pottery vases produced in Atamara Pottery center

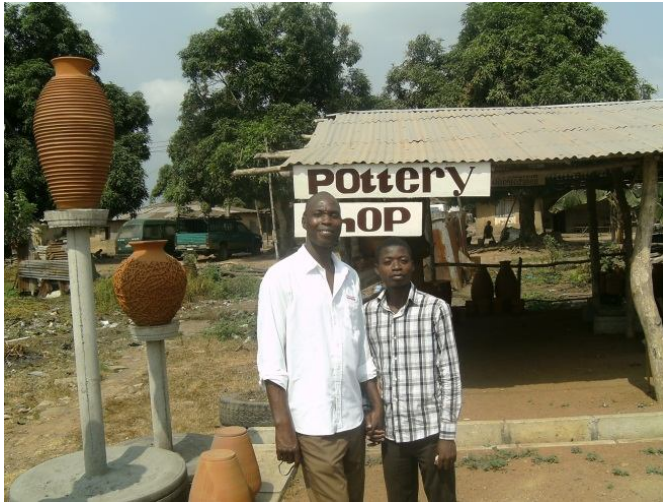


Figure 8: A former student trainee with the Chief potter and manager of Atamara Pottery center

2.1.5 Pot-PuritPottery Centre

This cottage ceramic industry was established by Mr. D.O.Owolabi, a graduate of College of Education, Ilorin, Nigeria, where he studied ceramics as an option in applied art (Fig. 9). While he was seeking for job opportunity, he went to undertake an apprenticeship in practical skill of throwing on the potter's wheel, hand building and casting at Sweet Art Ceramics studio, Lagos for four months. He later set up his own studio in 2004 at Ikeja in Lagos, Southwestern Nigeria.

The industry produces various types of wares ranging from flower vases, planters, to lamp shades (Fig. 10). Due to limited production space at the current site, there is plan to relocate to a more permanent site and convert the current site to a show room. The kiln adopted after so many considerations was an arch roofed rectangular downdraft kiln fired with wood. It has such advantages as production scale, availability of wood in term of cost and supply, type of ware to be fired, interval of firing, firing time and cost effectiveness in time and fuel, space, and the cost of construction.



Figure 9: The chief potter and entrepreneur of Pot-Purit Pottery centre



Figure 10: Artistically decorated pottery wares from Pot-Purit Pottery centre

2.1.6 Saubana and Sons Ceramics

It is located in Ibadan South West. Production is centered on ceramic wares that serve as ornamentation and interior decorations such as lamp stands, planters, flower vases and wall hanging vases. The chief executive of the Ceramic centre is Mr. Ogundele, who was trained at Ocean 5 Ceramics Industry, at Ogunmakin, Owode local government area of Ogun State in 1985. He set up his ceramic studio in 1993 with full operation the same year (Fig. 11).

The major source of clay for his pottery studio is from Iyana church along Iwo road in Ibadan while kaolin is sourced at Alakia Ibadan (5-10km away from the studio). The production methods adopted are hand building and casting, while decoration is in form of denting the shapes, using decoration, incision, banishing and polishing by rubbing pottery surface with smooth hard object for glassy surface character.

The major patronage of finished products are through commission, display in gallery/showroom and individual patronage. (Fig. 12)



Figure11: The Manager of Saubana and Sons Ceramics working with a student-on-training



Figure12: Unglazed pottery wares produced at Saubana and Sons Ceramics

2.1.7 Ushafa Pottery Centre, Bwari

The Ushafa Pottery centre is situated in Ushafa town in Bwari Area council. The modern pottery and ceramic complex is located about 40 kilometers from Abuja city centre and has a sizable number of local skilled potters in its employment. It was conceptualized to harness the rich clay deposit in the area and promote self-help among the women potters who were resettled in that area in the 80's. Ushafa pottery centre was set up by the USAID self-project with the following objective:

- Promote and reserve the thriving pottery industry in the area.
- Promote the acquisition and development of skills among young girls in the area in traditional and ceramic pottery production techniques using modern technology.
- Create an enabling environment of harnessing resources of women's potters so that they can be better coordinated, organized and result oriented.
- Promote tourism and recreation.

The United State Embassy assisted to bring the project to fruition through USAID self-help project. This unique initiative was combined with traditional pottery and modern slip casting with the sole aim of promoting skills acquisition of very rich, abundant clay deposit found in Ushafa.

Raw material sourcing:

Sourcing of clay at Ushafa pottery is usually done during the dry season. The dry season reduces the difficulty encountered in the process of excavations which could be attributed to sticky and slippery nature of the clay during raining season. The clay is sourced from Gwarinpa estate road between Dutse, Achaji and Kubwa.

The forming techniques adopted are throwing either as single piece or multiple pieces that are joined, slab methods, coiling through extrusion, press-moulding and slip casting. Before the application of decorations, green wares are turned and fettled. The decoration are done using incision, impressing, denting of body for irregular shapes, piercing, relief slip decorations, waxing and resist furnishing, painting with metallic oxides and glazing.

An up drafted kiln, down draft kiln and top loading kilns are used but the top loading kilns of 5ft is more regularly used. Most firings are regulated for either oxidized or reduced effect on the ash glazed wares. The kerosene burners are used with an adapted 50kg gas cylinder. The kerosene was adapted when there was persistent scarcity for gas, unreliability in the use of electric kiln as a result of poor electricity supply and campaign against deforestation where hard woods are used for wood kiln firing.

Marketing strategy adopted at Ushafa pottery centre are through commissioning, exhibitions, display from show room/gallery, and display during canivals, festivals and public activities. A typical example of the commissioned work is over 1000 pieces of satellite boarded vases ordered by the former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo which was distributed to people in his office on Gala night before he left office.

Ushafa played host to important dignitaries since its inception among who are presidential tour to the centre by President Olusegun Obasanjo and the president of United State of America Bill Clinton, first ladies, high commissions of different countries to Nigeria, Nigerian Television Authority, and the Nigerian Field Society.

2.1.8 Heritage Ceramics

Heritage ceramics Nigeria Ltd started its operation in the year 2002 as a ceramic equipment sale outlet and servicing centre in Lagos, western Nigeria (Fig. 13). It started its operation as ceramic studio with the name Stack Ceramics in the United Kingdom in 1984 before it then changes its name to Heritage Ceramics. Heritage Ceramics is currently managed by Mr. Odion Ogogo. The company has an emerging contemporary studio with a production style that synthesizes a home grown style with the European pottery techniques using modern ceramic equipment that include electric potters' wheel, gas kiln, pug mill, wad box etc (Fig. 14). Its studio was established in the year 2004 in Nigeria. Its creation was centered on boosting the ceramic production and provide a training ground for all intending ceramists to practice and likewise to serve as a point of integration for ceramic product in Nigeria. Besides its studio practices, the centre has continued to run its sale outfit of various ceramic equipment and materials for the consumption for Nigerian ceramists.

Though most of their works are made in Nigerian and with foreign orientations, but however, some of the wares have traditional motifs which identifies with the Nigerian culture.

The main operation of Heritage ceramic was centered on the production of creative wares and pottery forms, which serves mainly ornamental, cultural and aesthetic purposes. Apart from the production of creative ceramic wares, it also distributes ceramic materials like glazes, refractory bricks, kaolin, kiln furniture and oxides. It company is among the few practicing indigenous pottery. The Chief Executive Officer is the grand patron of Craft Potter Association of Nigeria (CPAN) South West Branch. Heritage ceramic has participated in various exhibitions both locally and internationally, among which are: Common Institution Exhibition (1992), Solo exhibition in London (1998), a yearly exhibition in IRIS Republic (1984 to date), and Craft Potters Association of Nigeria (CPAN) exhibition (1986 to date).



Figure 13: Heritage Ceramics sale outlets



Figure 14: Heritage Ceramics studio environment



Figure 15: Auniversity student consultation with the managers of Heritage Ceramics and Pot-PuritPottery centre

3. Appraisal of Students' Performances after their Industrial Training Exercise

To fully appreciate the impact of the Industrial Work Experience that is made compulsory for students offering Technological and Engineering courses, the problems facing educational institutions are highlighted below;

Up to the early 1990's the funding of tertiary institutions was reasonable but towards 1985 to date government subvention to these institutions keep reducing to the extent that the government budget for education hardly exceed 13% of the National budget as against UNESCO recommended 25%. The demands for high level education continue to increase within a national population that is over 140 million with 2006 national census enumeration. The implication of all of these is that the student's enrolment continues to increase while facilities for research and training are either not enough to cope with student population or grounded. The government initiative that student should spend at least 1 semester of six months in the work world is therefore a welcome development with its numerous advantages.

The advantages for ceramic students which are the concern of this paper are enumerated as follows:

1. It helps the student develop their throwing skills on the potter's wheels since the facilities in the institution are grossly inadequate to help their irregular practice.
2. They are able to develop confidence at initiating specific projects based on their past experience. Some of them were able to initiate projects bothering on kiln building, making of refractory slabs, construction of throwing wheels, kerosene burners, development of pyrometric cones and application of information and communication technology into their works. Their practical skills in throwing, casting and firing of ceramic wares are further developed.
3. They participated in the marketing of ceramics ware in the industries in which they are trained. The advantage of this on them is that they are exposed on merchandising of ceramics products, realizing the potentials of ceramics products and where they are sorted for in the society. It further gave the students courage as most of them are very pessimistic about what future have for them as ceramists.
4. They returned to their various institutions with more matured mind at development their concepts taking particular cognizance of their immediate society.
5. The importance of industrial training is to get student involved in essential and relevant practical knowledge in their field of studies and area of specialization. It also equally has the objective of acquitting students with practical relevance and application of what they learn in the school as theoretical principle through exposure to the industry.
6. In recent times, cottage industries in Nigeria are able to offer more ground for students training while the large scale industries still battles with unfavourable economic factors. It is worthy of note that most surviving pottery entrepreneurs in Nigeria have stood shoulder high in taking up the task of offering students placement for their 6 months out-of-school industrial training where they acquire more practical skills, workshop ethics, ability for pottery studio establishment and

management, design and construction of ceramic equipment and facilities and basic skill in ceramic marketing.

4. Conclusion

The importance of industrial training to get student involved in essential and relevant practical knowledge in their field of studies and area of specialization cannot be underscored. It also equally has the objective of acquitting students with practical relevance and application of what they learn in the school as theoretical principle through exposure to the industry. In recent times, cottage industries in Nigeria are able to offer more ground for students training while the large scale industries still battles with unfavourable economic factors. It is worthy of note that most surviving pottery entrepreneurs in Nigeria have stood shoulder high in taking up the task of offering students placement for their 6 months out-of-school industrial training where they acquire more practical skills, workshop ethics, pottery studio establishment and management, design and construction of ceramic equipment and facilities and ceramic marketing.

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