

## Is Fine Arts Inevitable Requisite for Bachelors Degree in Visual Arts?: Notes from the Admission Policy of a Nigerian University

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**Abstract** There was dearth of students for the BA programme of the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, because a credit pass in fine arts at the secondary school level was requisite for admissions. This research sort to find out if doing fine arts at the secondary school level was an inevitable requisite for studying visual arts in the university. Admissions data was recorded for 6 years before, and 5 years after credit pass in fine arts was delisted as admission requisite. Research instruments were designed and applied to students and staff to find out if not having done fine arts in secondary school affected the ability of BA students to learn and execute creative skills, or whether there was any significant difference in performance between them and those that did fine arts in secondary school. Data indicates a dramatic rise in the number of students that applied and were admitted after fine arts was delisted. Further, 91.2% of the students were satisfied with doing visual arts without having done fine arts in secondary school, while 78.4% of the students and 100% of lecturers perceived no significant difference in performance between students that did fine arts in secondary school and those that did not. The study then concluded that fine arts is not an inevitable requisite for Bachelors Degree in Visual Arts and students that did not do the subject in secondary school can do as well if the curriculum and training conditions are right.

**Keywords:** Visual Arts, Fine Arts, Requisite, Secondary School, Bachelors Degree

### 1. Introduction

Nigerian Universities are accredited by the National Universities Commission (NUC), which sets uniform standards for admission, studies and administration. Prospective candidates for Bachelors degrees at any university in Nigeria are required to take and obtain yearly-determined minimum scores at nationally organised matriculation examinations, conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Aside from this, it is mandatory for candidates to obtain Ordinary Level (O-Level) credit passes, at the secondary school level, in a minimum of 5 relevant subjects. The term 'relevant' applied to the O-Level entry requirements means that the subjects must be directly related to the proposed course of study. As, for instance a candidate wishing to undertake a BSc. 'Chemical Sciences' must have requisite credit passes in Chemistry and related courses, while candidates for arts and humanities must have credit passes in the specific art or social science courses they intend to study at the university. Thus, candidates wishing to study visual arts at any Nigerian University must have credit passes in fine arts, technical drawing, industrial drawing and other visual arts subjects at the secondary school level. For all Nigerian universities, 2 semesters make-up 1 academic session, which usually begins at the end of a calendar year and spills over to the next.

However, at the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Cross River University of Technology (formerly Department of Fine and Applied Arts, The Polytechnic Calabar [POLYCAL]), this admission policy of making the study of fine arts at the secondary school level requisite for admission into the visual

arts programme threatened the life of the Department and the career of prospective candidates. It was a threat in that, in the entire Cross River State of Nigeria, only a very few secondary schools mounted fine arts as a subject for pupils to study while, paradoxically, the subject was requisite for all prospective candidates of the BA Visual Arts Programme of the University. As a direct result of this it became very difficult for candidates to gain admission into the programme. This study uses data gathered between 1999 and 2009 to analyse and document how the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Calabar, surmounted the problem of dearth of students, placed by the admission policy of making fine arts requisite in a social environment where candidate did not have the possibility of studying fine arts at the secondary school level. The purpose of the study is to determine whether a credit pass in fine arts at the secondary school level is an absolute necessity for candidates who wish to do Bachelors studies in visual arts.

## 2. The Study Area

Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Calabar was established in 2002 as a multi-campus University following the merger of 3 existing tertiary institutions. These institutions were The Polytechnic Calabar (POLYCAL), College of Education Akamkpa, IBB College of Agriculture, Obubra. Although The Polytechnic Calabar was established in 1973, its Fine Arts Department was established in 1998 to award a 2-year National Diploma. It was the Fine Arts Department, POLYCAL, which transformed into the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH, in 2002. The Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH, runs a 4-year Bachelors in Visual Arts programme in five studio areas, namely, Painting, Ceramics, Graphics, Textile Design and Sculpture. As a critical part of the training, students are required to do a 6-month industrial attachment at any industry of their choice, where they learn industrial techniques and applications of what they have learnt in the classroom and studios. However, the Fine Arts Department, POLYCAL, existed for just 4 academic years before it transformed into the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH. Right from the beginning of the Fine Arts Department in 1998, it was virtually impossible for prospective candidates to fulfil its admission requirements because they did not have the requisite credit passes in fine arts at the secondary school level. Because of this limitation, there was a dearth of students in the Department in the 4 years of its existence. Thus, whereas the *Cultural Policy for Nigeria* (1988) insists that Nigerian arts and artists must be promoted, the Department was unable to fulfil its training objectives in those years. But this lack of students can be said also of the first two years (2003 and 2004) of the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH, because fine arts was also requisite for prospective candidates of the BA Visual Arts programme.

## 3. Statement of the Problem

There has been a dearth of students for the visual arts programme in Calabar. Whereas the admission policy makes fine arts requisite for studying fine/visual arts in the universities, most prospecting students are unable to secure admission because they did not have the possibility of studying fine arts at the secondary school level in Cross River State. In this study, the vital question is whether fine art is an inevitable requisite for undertaking an undergraduate course in the visual arts.

## 4. The Study of Visual Arts in Calabar, Cross River State

Calabar is the capital city of Cross River State (south east of Nigeria), which has a land mass of 23,074km<sup>2</sup> and an estimated population of about 2.89 million (2006). In the whole of Cross River State, there are four tertiary educational institutions: the University of Calabar, Cross River University of Technology, College of Education (at Akamkpa) and the Ibrahim Babangida College of Education (at Obudu). Of these institutions, it is only the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, which offers Degrees in visual arts. Candidates that live in Cross River State and wish to study fine arts or visual arts in the university, had to seek admission in another Nigerian state if they did not fulfil the admission requirement of the CRUTECH visual arts programme. Thus, right from the beginning of the Fine Arts Department, POLYCAL, the problem of lack of candidates who could fulfil the admission requirement of a credit pass in fine arts at the secondary level was very pressing. It was pressing because, while a lot of material resources and studio space were being made available to the Department, such expenses seemed increasingly unjustifiable in view of the limited number of students

admitted into the programme. Furthermore, since the Department is the only institution in the state that offers Bachelors programmes in visual arts, there was a great deal of pressure to urgently resolve the issue. Parents of prospecting candidates could not understand why the problem should linger, making their wards ineligible for admission. On their parts, candidates that applied but were denied on account of their lack of credit passes in fine arts at the secondary school level, were increasingly disappointed and agitated. Responding to the barrage of complaints from parents and wards, staff in the Department began to debate the strategies that can be adopted to address the situation.

One option was to go to the secondary schools and meet with the pupils, staff and Head Teachers to generate more interest among secondary school pupils and teachers in fine arts. This effort was not fruitful because secondary school Principals expressed their willingness to mount the fine arts subject but drew attention to the lack of teachers who can teach fine arts. As a follow-up to this, Lecturers in the Department of Fine Arts, POLYCAL, took it upon themselves to visit interested secondary schools and offer free services and teach fine arts to the pupils. Unfortunately, this strategy, good as it was, was not sustainable because, at one point, the cost of moving from secondary school to secondary school to teach them became unbearable for the Lecturers. This was more so since they also had their individual primary work schedules at the Polytechnic. By 2002 when the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH, was formed, the debate was still ongoing among lecturers of the Department about how to resolve the issues in a sustainable way. It became clear that what was required was a more scientific approach that will make the problem resolution evidence-based and, thus more sustainable. There was therefore the need for research into this problem.

One research, Ajibade and Lawson (2003) studied the limitations of teaching and learning fine and applied arts in Calabar, Nigeria. Among others, the study found out that most secondary schools in Calabar do not offer fine arts as a subject. A major constraint in the secondary schools themselves is that fine arts teachers are very scarce, which makes it impossible for proprietors to mount fine arts subjects for pupils to study. It turned out that most fine/visual artists who graduated from the university were more interested in setting-up studios for private practice than taking-up teaching appointments with secondary schools. The reason for trained artists not wanting to become secondary school teachers is the very poor wages paid to teachers. Another major finding was that this problem in the secondary schools is transferred to the tertiary education system. Furthermore, the study was conclusive that, in light of the “lack of opportunity for most Cross River students to study fine arts at the secondary school level”, it was counter-productive to make fine arts an absolute requisite for admission into the visual arts programme of CRUTECH. The authors continue:

*Since making fine arts a requisite for admission will exclude most Cross River state students from CRUTECH, the more prudent and viable thing to do is provide admission for students that apply and fulfil all other requirements and then design adequate introductory courses for them in the first few years of study. (Ajibade and Lawson 2003:31)*

What Ajibade and Lawson proposed is that the visual arts admission policy needs not be too rigid or sacrosanct and it should be responsive to critical and peculiar sociocultural circumstances of the immediate society. What the authors proposed for the visual arts curriculum in CRUTECH is in fact not new. For, according to the publication, *Tuning Fine Art Education* (2010:2) – a document that is formulated to harmonise and position visual arts curricular in Universities across Europe – it is very “important that Fine Art programmes continue to define their own specific qualities, weighting and approaches to their curricula” because:

*Fine Art education enables students to become creative arts practitioners. Students learn to develop the necessary imaginative, intellectual, theoretical and practical skills to equip them for continuing personal development and professional practice within the arts. Students are required to actively participate in their own education and to define their own area of practice, theory and research and the relevant professional skills that their practice requires. Fine Art education involves modes of study that lay stress on creativity, improvisation and the questioning of orthodoxies.*

From the above, it is clear that the focus in either admitting or training students in the visual arts should not be the orthodox, theoretic or hypothetical ‘standards’ that supposedly aim to fine-tune the ‘quality’ of students admitted. Rather, the focus should be on the students themselves and their potentials to develop creative skills through interactive processes of self awareness. At a workshop, *Teaching Visual Arts in Modern Languages Departments*, on November 23<sup>rd</sup> at Cambridge, Wagstaff and Treherne (2007) have highlighted the need to make better use of contact time by basing art courses around activities in order to make students active learners, that is, as opposed to them being passive consumers of theoretic matter and standards. In the words of the publication *Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California*

*Public Schools* (2010:201), it is of the most importance to design curricular and instructional strategies that address the needs of the students. Also, according to Lipoff (2010), the vital thing is for students to know the differences between art materials and the abilities to both describe and master the various materials in creating art to express themselves.

Furthermore, as Beal (2001) has demonstrated and emphasized, there is the importance of artistic materials and art's power to foster deep personal connections between the artist and the world around. The importance of art's social power nonetheless, scholars have noted that there is often an unserious way in which people in society perceive the teaching and learning of the arts as disciplines of study. This much is clear from the paper, *Teaching Core Curriculum Content through the Arts* (Jacobs, Berghoff and Bennette 2003), presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal. Thus parents, guardians and even policy makers very often treat the subject with levity. While parents may try to dissuade their wards from undertaking the visual arts programme (in preference for the sciences), policy makers and government itself do not invest enough in art training in both the secondary schools and in the universities. The sum total of these negative attitudes is that, on the one hand, candidates are unable to gain admission because of deficiencies and, on the other hand, the subject becomes a very unattractive prospect for many secondary school pupils. In view of Ajibade and Lawson's (2003) findings and recommendations, in 2005, two years after the Department of Fine and Applied Arts (POLYCAL) was transformed into the Department of Visual Arts and Technology (CRUTECH), it became necessary to avoid replicating the admission problems in the new dispensation. In the first two years of the Department of Visual Arts and Technology (CRUTECH), the former admission policy requiring credit pass in fine arts at the secondary school level was in place. And, just as it was in the POLYCAL years, students were unable to gain admission into the new Department because of the limitations placed by the fine arts clause. Thus, the clause was removed and the lecture, practical and tutorials content of the new curriculum was designed to introduce fine arts to students that did not do the subject at the secondary school level.

**Figure 1.** *The Former and New Admission Requirements for the Arts Programme in Calabar*

Former Admission Policy	New Admission Policy
Candidates must possess credit passes in fine arts, English language and any other three subjects	Candidates must possess credit passes in English language and any other four subjects

## 5. Methodology

Admission data for the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, POLYCAL was gathered between 1999 and 2002. Motivated by the empirical understanding that most secondary schools in Cross River State do not offer fine arts in their curricular the admission requirements for the visual arts programme was changed in 2005 to make it possible for students to enrol in the programme without having done fine arts at the secondary school level (see Figure 1). In contrast to the former entry requirements, in the new admission requirement, fine arts was no longer a compulsory subject for applicants. To be eligible for admissions into the BA visual arts programme, candidates needed only to have credit passes in any five subjects at the secondary school level. After the implementation of the new admission policy in the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH, further admissions data was captured between 2004 and 2009 according to gender and years of admissions. Questionnaires were also designed and administered to 204 students who have done the Bachelors programme at the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH, without doing fine arts in secondary school. Data was presented in tables, percentages and graphs to show the frequency distribution of admitted students in the years under review. In order for the research to have a rounder perspective, personal interviews were also conducted among staff and students of the Department.

## 6. Results

From Table 1 below, we find that in 1999 a total of 12 students applied and were admitted in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts (POLYCAL). Of this 8 (or 66.7%) were male while 4 (or 33.3%) were female. In 2000, a total of 10 students were admitted of which 5 (or 50%) were male and 5 (or 50%)

were female. In 2001, a total of 6 students were admitted of which 4 (or 66.7%) were male and 2 (or 33.3%) were female. In 2002, a total of 16 students were admitted of which 11 (or 68.8%) were male and 5 (or 31.3%) were female. Thus, of a total of 44 students that applied and got admitted for the 2-year National Diploma in Fine Arts programme between 1999 and 2002, 28 (or 63.6%) were males while 16 (or 36.4%) were females.

**Table 1.** *Students Admitted to Study Fine and Applied Arts in POLYCAL, 1999-2002*

	1999/2000			2000/2001			2001/2002			2002/2003			TOTAL	
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
	8	4	12	5	5	10	4	2	6	11	5	16	28	16
%	66.7	33.3	100	50	50	100	66.7	33.3	100	68.8	31.3	100	63.6	36.4
Total number of students in the years under review														44

From Table 2 below, we find that a total of 9 students were admitted in 2004, consisting of 5 (or 55.6%) males and 4 (or 44.4%) females. In 2005, 18 students were admitted with 11 (or 61.1%) males and 7 (or 38.9%) females. In 2006, there were 77 students admitted with 36 (or 46.8%) males and 41 (or 53.2%) females. In 2007, there were 44 students admitted with 14 (or 31.8%) males and 30 (or 68.2%) females. In 2008, 60 students were admitted with 22 (or 36.7%) males and 38 (or 63.3%) females. In 2009 there were 157 students admitted with 58 (or 36.9%) males and 99 (or 63.1%) females.

**Table 2.** *Students Admitted to Study Visual Arts and Technology in CRUTECH, 2003-2009*

2003/2004			2004/2005			2005/2006		
M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
6	4	10	5	4	9	11	7	18
60	40	100	55.6	44.4	100	61.1	38.9	100

2006/2007			2007/2008			2008/2009			2009/2010			TOTAL	
M	F	Total	M	F									
36	41	77	14	30	44	22	38	60	58	99	157	152	223
%	46.8	53.2	100	31.8	68.2	100	36.7	63.3	100	36.9	63.1		

Figure 2 below is a bar chart showing the visual analysis of the students admitted into the arts programme in the four years of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, POLYCAL (1999/2000, 2000/2001, 2001/2002 and 2002/2003), and the first two years of the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH (2003/2004 and 2004/2005) when fine arts was still entry requisite for admission.

**Figure 2.** *Bar Chart of Students Admitted to Study Fine/Visual Arts in POLYCAL and First Two Years of CRUTECH*

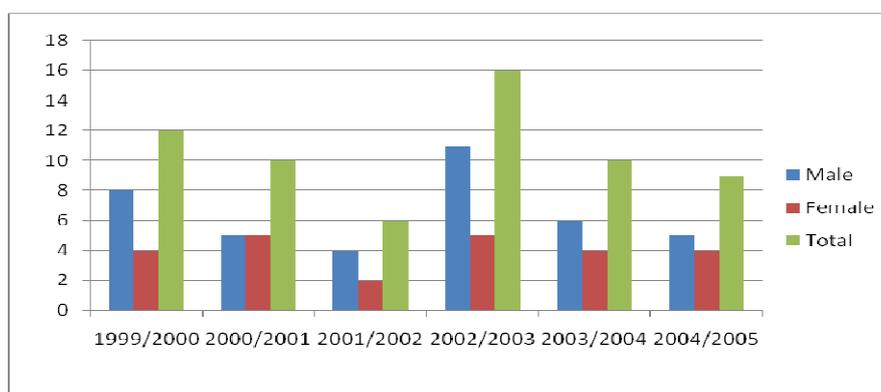
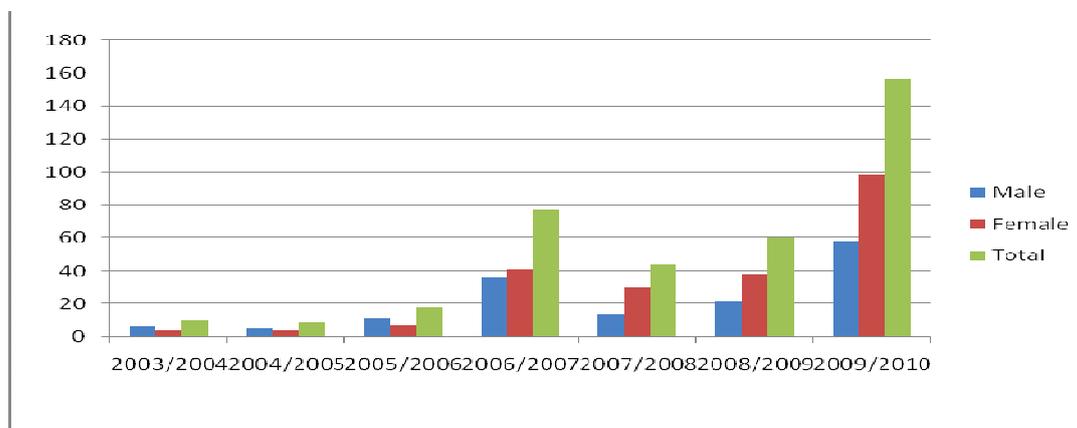


Figure 3 below is a bar chart showing the visual analysis of the admissions for first two years of the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH (2003/2004 and 2004/2005) when fine arts was still entry requisite, and the next 5 years (2005/2006 – 2009/2010) when fine arts was delisted as requisite.

**Figure 3.** Bar Chart of Students Admitted to Study Visual Arts and Technology in CRUTECH, 2003-2009



In table 3 below, 204 student respondents randomly sampled among those that did not do fine arts in secondary school responded to their level of satisfaction with the BA visual arts programme. Of these, 56 (or 27.5%) were most satisfied, 60 (or 29.4%) were very satisfied, 70 (or 34.3%) were satisfied while 18 (or 8.8%) were unsatisfied.

**Table 3.** How Satisfied Students are with Studying Visual Arts without Doing Fine Arts in Secondary School

	Most Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
	56	60	70	18
%	27.5%	29.4%	34.3%	8.8%
Total number of student respondents: 204				

In table 4 below, 204 student respondents who did not do fine arts in secondary school responded to the question whether they perceive a significant difference between the creative skills they have developed and those of BA students that did fine arts in secondary school. Of these, 36 (or 17.7%) say they perceived a difference, 160 (or 78.4%) say they perceived no difference in the creative skills they have developed in the programme, while 8 (or 3.9%) were undecided.

**Table 4.** Do BA Students that Did Not Do Fine Arts in Secondary School Perceive a Significant Difference Between their Creative skills and those of BA Students that Did?

	Yes	No	Undecided
	36	160	8
%	17.7%	78.4%	3.9%
Total number of student respondents: 204			

In table 5 below, Lecturers in the Department responded to the question whether there was a significant difference in performance between students who did fine arts in secondary school and those that did not.

**Table 5.** Is There a Significant Difference in Performance Between Students Who did Fine Arts in Secondary School and Those that Did Not?

	Yes	No	Undecided
	0	22	
%	0%	100%	
Total number of lecturer respondents: 22			

## 7. Discussion

From the data analysed above, the delisting of fine arts as prerequisite for the art programme in Calabar has successfully enabled many more candidates to gain admission. In the 4 years between 1999/2000 and 2002/2003 academic sessions, only 44 students were able to gain admission because of restrictions placed by the fine arts requirement. This represents an average of 11 candidates per academic session. Also in the first 2 years, 2003/2004 and 2004/2005, of the Visual Arts programme in CRUTECH, only 10 and 9 students respectively enrolled. In contrast, from the time credit pass in fine arts was delisted as requisite in the admission requirement in 2005, the bar chart in Figure 1 indicates there was a dramatic increase in the number of students that applied and were admitted into the programme. For instance, in the 5 academic sessions of 2005/2006 to 2009/2010, a total of 355 students were admitted, as against 63 students admitted in the 6 academic sessions between 1999/2000 and 2004/2005.

Furthermore, most students that did the visual arts programme in CRUTECH without doing fine arts in secondary school are satisfied with what they have learnt, and they do not perceive significant differences between their ability to learn and apply creative skills and those that did fine arts in secondary school. In oral interviews, the major reason those that were not satisfied gave is that they could not 'draw' very well. However, for two reasons, it may be a purely subjective position for them to believe that the reason they could not draw well is that they did not do fine arts in secondary school. Firstly, keen observation does not indicate that all candidates that did fine arts in the secondary school can draw well. Secondly, there are dozens of creative skills and techniques in visual arts, of which drawing (as a subjective creative activity) is only one. From experience and observation, different students take to different creative skills depending on their areas of interest and how much they have committed to experimenting with materials and techniques. For instance, Nkami-Eval Eleme, a graphics major declares as follows: "I did not do fine arts in secondary school but I have learnt graphic design and print making. I will graduate soon. The 6-month industrial attachment was very helpful because I learnt artistic discipline during the period" (*Personal Communication*, August 20, 2010). Also, Angela Aji, who did not do fine arts in secondary school but was admitted and graduated in Ceramics was very insightful:

*I did not do fine arts in secondary school. But I have a BA in Visual Arts. I have not found any significant difference between my ability to learn skills and techniques in visual arts and those of my colleagues that did fine arts in secondary school. It was only in the beginning that I was afraid because I did not do fine arts in secondary school. I originally set out to do Mass Communication. It was when I did not get admitted into the Mass Communication programme that I applied for Visual Arts. But after I started the visual arts programme, I soon adjusted, learnt and performed as good as my other colleagues. In fact, I am even better than many of them who had done fine arts in secondary school. (Personal Communication, September 5, 2010)*

In essence, data indicates that Bachelors Degree students of visual arts are not incapacitated in any significant way by the fact that they did not do fine arts in secondary school, insofar as the curriculum is structured to be interactive in enabling students learn and develop creative skills and techniques.

## 8. Conclusion

In *Connecting Arts Education Policy and Research to Classroom Teaching*, presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Chicago, Burns (2003) has shown that the arts are not only beneficial to the learning process but that they enhance learning and achieve positive social outcomes when they are integral to students own experiences. Furthermore, Swan-Hudkins (in Cluff 2010) has established that learning through the arts does improve student's scores even in other presumably remote subjects such as science and mathematics where spatial reasoning is mainly used. Thus since most prospective candidates did not do fine arts in secondary school, to make the BA visual arts programme (CRUTECH) integral to students' experience, the subject needs to remain delisted as requisite for admissions because they can learn and improve on diverse creative skills when they are admitted into a BA Visual Arts programme without having done fine arts in the secondary school. From the study, there seems to be no significant correlation between not doing fine arts in secondary school and doing well in the Bachelors programme in Visual Arts. Therefore, a credit pass in fine arts at the secondary school level is not an absolute necessity for candidates that wish to do Bachelors studies in visual arts. Thus, rather than base the future of a good proportion of Nigerian youths in unnecessary jeopardy by insisting on credit pass in fine arts at when they did not do it at the secondary school level, it is best to

open-up the admission space by removing exclusionary criteria and adapting it to actual social reality. And, if at all selection processes become inevitable, such a process is best based, as *Tuning Fine Art Education* (2010) outlines, on a wider range of criteria, including competence tests, interviews where students may be selected by teams of staff or individual lecturers that work with candidates for a specific period of time. However, even without rigorous selection processes, data clearly indicates that fine arts is not an inevitable requisite for Bachelors Degree in Visual Arts and students that did not do the subject in secondary school can do as well if the curriculum and training conditions are right. Being right, in this case, means that both the admission requirement and the curriculum are locally relevant (UNESCO 2005) by taking into cognisance the fact that applicants did not do fine arts in secondary school and designing a programme that will transfer adequate knowledge and creative empowerment to the students, in the duration of the course .

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