

Full Length Research Paper

“One man’s trash is another man’s treasure”: Graffiti and civic education among youths in Nigeria

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This paper explored the relationship between graffiti arts and civic education among young people in Nigeria. A mixed methods approach was employed to generate and synthesize empirical data. The study was guided by Barbara Rogoff's social constructivism theory. Findings indicated that graffiti arts and artists were present in Nigeria, driven by desires for self-expression, financial gain, and training opportunities sponsored by NGOs for up-and-coming artists. Writing styles varied, but drawing, mural painting, and styles uniquely African remained dominant. Despite the difficulty of acceptance of graffiti as an art form due to its earlier association with transgressive activities, its engagement as a method for emancipatory, participatory, cultural literacy, dialectical relations, and creative learning tools in both formal and informal settings demonstrated its educational-supportive capacity for young adults. The values that graffiti express can help reorient young adults in their thinking and social agency. To this end, this paper recommends rethinking the way we view and relate to graffiti arts and writers; incorporating graffiti art education into school curriculum reforms in Nigeria; and using an interactive approach, including new media, to understanding graffiti art produced and displayed by young adults.

Keywords: Graffiti, alternative art practice, civic education, pedagogical strategies, participatory learning.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of civic education is a fundamental human right that aims to help learners become responsible and active global citizens, contributing to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, and secure world (United Nations, 2015). Failure to educate young people about the principles and values upon which democratic institutions and social life are founded can pose a serious threat to their well-being and the welfare of human societies in general. As a process that privileges the transfer,

acquisition, and modification of one's knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, behaviour, and worldviews, learning is now done in a number of ways (traditional, social, media, etc.) and within different settings (institutionalized or non-institutionalized). While the process has traditionally been driven by strategies often seen as too abstract, argumentative, or teacher-centered, new sets of learning proposals (or theories) recognize the need to draw on approaches that may not necessarily be termed as

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conventional, but which are sometimes considered as student-driven, dialogical, radical, or even subversive. The use of graffiti arts or writings for teaching and learning falls under this latter strategic category. In contrast to most classroom learning activities that are abstract in orientation and often out of context, graffiti can offer the opportunity for learning that is contextually situated, liberating, and empowering. As argued by Xu (2017), children's graffiti, in particular, are language symbols rooted in the creation of culture and art; they can bear out children's inner world and serve to stimulate their latent consciousness and train their abilities. Thus, the ability of street arts to grow physical and mental prowess for learning is no longer a marginal debate in scholarship.

Focus on the graffiti art itself and its communicative and sociocultural values within the academia is also extensive over the years (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2017). Yet, in a number of Euro-American and African societies, graffiti making is still approached and regulated as a criminal activity, making the adventure of appreciating the intermediarity between graffiti art and education look seemingly impossible or inappropriate in view of the sustained negative view about graffiti subculture across a number of societies.

Rioch (2021) shows how the London boroughs in the UK spent a large financial budget over time to provide countermeasures against graffiti on surfaces and to mitigate the perceived graffiti problem. However, there has been increasing critique of attempts by some corporate organizations and governments to commercialize graffiti for sociopolitical and economic gains. These attempts have been critiqued for potentially placing restraints on the creative and editorial capabilities of graffiti writers, as well as for being counterproductive towards the realization of the „civic“ agenda of graffiti writers and the industry (Zhyhailo, 2022).

Approaching contemporary graffiti through the framework of visual culture with emphasis on its creative, social, aesthetical and, more importantly, its educational or pedagogical values, it is argued, could redress the age-old criminal tag and allegation often placed on the art *genre* all over the world, as well as place graffiti culture on a more favourable and competitive footing with professional art *genres* and for usages in public institutions and family homes for more productive teaching and learning outcomes, particularly for young adults. In fact, what appears like a trash for a few, when appreciated and properly used, could become a treasure of knowledge for many.

That said, it is rather unfortunate that till now (regardless of the extensive scholarly works that have already been undertaken on different aspects of street arts), there is still a large gap in knowledge and unexplored aspects relative to the appropriation of graffiti as a significant pedagogical tool within the context of youth education particularly in Africa. Increase of

research in this subject area in Africa, it is argued, could reposition the importance and strengthen the necessity of graffiti art as well as broaden the possibilities for the restoration and conservation of graffiti and street arts particularly for sustained usage in schools and family homes as an unavoidable artistic mechanism for the transfer and reception of knowledge outside the mainstream. This research aims at minimizing this existing gap in knowledge and to reassert the importance of this particular art form often seen as subversive, transgressive, and radical to knowledge building and transfer, both at its institutionalized (or formal) and noninstitutionalized (or informal) settings. The focus of the study is not on the „form“ of the graffiti art or on the aesthetics of the art form itself or on the process of graffiti writing; rather it is principally on the functional connection between graffiti and advancement in civic education, particularly in Nigeria.

The objectives of the study, therefore, include the following:

1. to ascertain the presence of graffiti as an art form in Nigeria and their locations;
2. to establish the specific writing style and format that dominates the artistic practice in Nigeria;
3. to understand how an art form considered radical and subversive could still be used for educational purposes;
4. to streamline the values that graffiti writings seek to express and how these can help address some of the challenges faced in the education sector in Nigeria; and,
5. to establish the contextual issues to education in Nigeria that would make the adoption of graffiti writing for teaching necessary.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Barbara Rogoff's social constructivism theory, propounded in her book *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (2003), is adopted to provide conceptual strength and direction for this research. As a subset of the broader constructivists' educational theory which comprise cognitive (Jean Piaget), social (Lev Vygotsky), and radical (Ernest von Glasersfeld) elements (wgu.edu/blog), Rogoff's social constructivism, focusing on different cultural communities, examines the relationship between sociocultural processes and human development (including educational development), in terms of ways of thinking, remembering, reasoning, and solving problems. While her focus is specifically on sociocultural and historical contents to development, she also makes assertions pertaining to children's learning behaviour in culturally constructed social learning environments.

Rogoff's theory places emphasis on „context“ and „situation“ in learning and encourages interactions

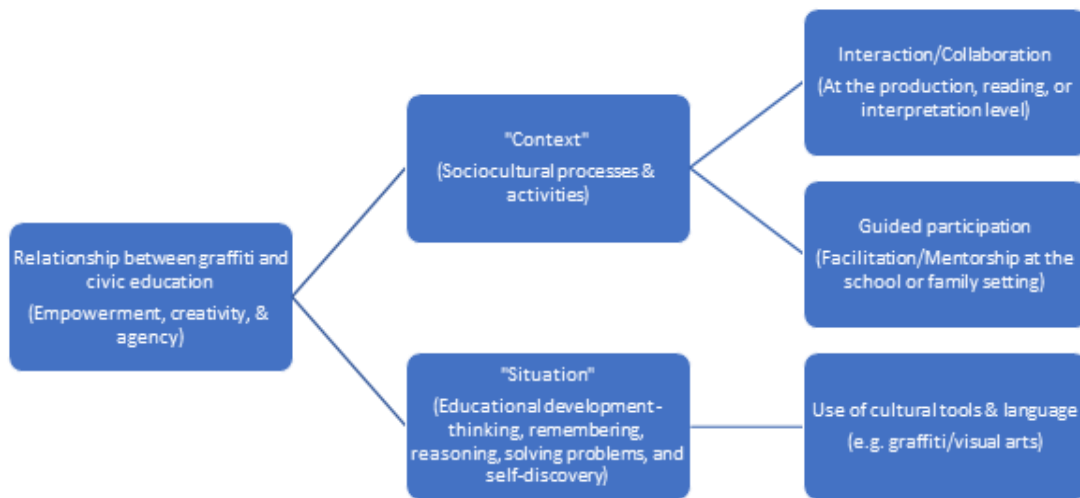


Figure 1. Conceptual variables.
Source: Author.

between individuals and situation. The theory does not focus on a child's own innate ability, but rather indicates that skills are developed in specific social contexts and learnt through specific cultural activities. It emphasizes that learning should be accomplished through interaction with others and outside experiences (including visual experiences). Being children- (or students-) centered, it recognizes the need for children (or students) to reflect and devise their own methods of solving problems but in a collaborative way. Rogoff's theory is not limited to academic learning, it can be stretched to address visual-based or recreational learning that is artistic in nature.

Of great significance to this research, however, is her idea of "guided participation" (2003: 282) which suggests the collaborative transfer of knowledge between a guide and an apprentice, or a caregiver and a child, or a teacher and a student. For Rogoff (2003), children on their developmental path use cultural tools and language with skilled mentors to shape their development. This understanding, when seen within the context of this paper, indicates the kind of collaboration that ought to sustain the teacher-student or parent-child relationship regarding the use of graffiti for learning. Such relationship should/could be shaped by the liberality and guardianship necessary for a good use of this alternative art form in learning. In a collaborative and guided transfer of knowledge between a teacher and student or a parent and child, the interactions, as Rogoff suggests, must be bridged in a synchronistic way. Children and mentors should structure learning opportunities in such a way that they share understanding both verbally and non-verbally.

When this theoretical model is applied to shape particularly visually-based environment for learning in schools and family homes, the likelihood is that it would

lead to increased creativity, the ability of students to take more collaborative risks in learning and the freedom to explore subject fields in different ways, including alternative visual artistic ways.

A summary of the different conceptual directions through which Rogoff's theory could be stretched and applied to the field of visual arts and graffiti writing culture in particular, is provided in Figure 1. Being originally developed within the field of culture vis-à-vis human development study, this summary, therefore, provides fresh conceptual dimensions in which the applicability of the theory to the field of visual arts within the context of this paper could be assessed.

GRAFFITI: ALTERNATIVE ART FORM AND SUBCULTURE

Defined as "writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed ... on a wall or other surface in a public place" (www.oxfordlanguages.com), graffiti constitute a form of visual communication and a subculture. Though sometimes referred to as „aerosol art“ or „graffito“ (Curry and Decker, 2020), or „spray can art“ and „subway art“ (Ganz, 2021; Gottlieb, 2008), graffiti is an art form that falls within the broader field of alternative art practice or amateur radical expressive art [or what Hess and Mulyana (2022) refer to as "low-technology modes of communication"], which is different from the mainstream or the professional art. Ganz (2021), Curry and Decker (2020), and Gottlieb (2008) are in agreement that the word was derived from the Italian word *graffiare*, meaning "to scratch". The English equivalent of „graffiti“ connotes a plural sense of the Italian *graffito* (a singular form). Ganz

(2021), in particular, notes that the word was first used by archaeologists around the year 1850 to describe inscriptions discovered at ancient antiquaries and archaeological sites.

Historically, literature on graffiti differentiates among ancient, medieval, and contemporary (or modern) graffiti. Ancient graffiti were exemplified in the writing activities of the early caves' men in Africa, France, and Spain, who left drawings on the walls of their caves (Ganz, 2021; Black, 2014), as well as in the remarkable inscriptions, drawings, and markings found in some cities of the Greco-Roman world (Cyrus, 2022; Allison, 2015).

Medieval graffiti and street arts were, in turn, predominantly exemplified in the religious inscriptions, quotations, scratches on sculptures, and drawings found around religious centers that told the stories of outstanding religious figures, as well as in some popular literatures of the era circulated particularly in Britain and medieval Asian cities (Ross, 2016a).

Contemporary graffiti writing, however, emerged in the 1960s with the radical artistic activities of Darryl "Cornbread" McCray and his colleagues at the correctional facility in Philadelphia. This was followed in the early 1970s by the gang "tagging" art that emerged and gained popularity in New York (www.sprayplanet.com). By mid-1970s, graffiti "tagging" had grown to become a regular activity of street gangs across a number of Euro-American regions for a variety of purposes (Curry and Decker, 2020). Some of these radical writings even found their way into some art galleries; and, thus, paved way for graffiti writing to be gradually considered as an art form. Today, graffiti writing has achieved a monumental presence on the world stage and have exerted influence on popular culture, including music, film, television, and even fashion (Ross, 2015). The emergence of the Internet and graffiti blogs has aided their publicity across the world; thus, positioning graffiti writing as a global movement with shared "philosophies, techniques, and roots" (Ganz, 2021: 1).

The purpose of contemporary graffiti writing, apart from its ornamental function (Schacter, 2016), varies. Principally, they enable *self-expression* by the artists and to pass on important messages in a visual or even hip-hop music or children's games' formats, etc. These messages could fall into broad categories, including social or political commentary, or personal communications (Gottlieb, 2008). A few, however, seek to convey only the identities of the graffiti artists by expressing their stylized signatures or pseudonyms. In fact, graffiti has also become a means of selling, advertising, or promoting brands or anything that has connections with performing arts. Their installations at public places in urban areas as campaign tools have also been recognized in scholarship (Gottlieb, 2008). For Hess and Mulyana (2022), their purpose is also very much tied with mediation in the "interests of counter publics" (p. 1). In other words, graffiti can function to

support citizens' dissent and protest against all forms of marginalization or neglect. The extensive use of graffiti for the expression of emotions, counter-political views and renegotiation of ideological positions during the Egyptian revolution of 2011 is an illustration of their counter political potency (Aljazeera, 2021; Sharaf, 2015; Saber, 2014). Taylor's (2012) writeup also shows that a number of young adults engage in the trade today, not only to express a non-conforming social identity, but to gain recognition, high reputation, and the respect of the community.

Scholarly debates about the types, styles, nature, and legitimacy of graffiti writing are, however, still ongoing. In terms of format, graffiti could take on the form of drawing, painting, lettering and writing, or a combination of any of the four (Cyrus, 2022). Scholars are hardly in agreement on a unified graffiti typology arrangement. Literature evidence shows a wide range of categorization schemas, ranging from a three to four types categorizations, to an eight to ten and then twelve to eighteen types arrangements. Gottlieb (2008), however, provides a categorization order that is more systematic and relevant only for the technical interpretation of stylistic languages.

This paper, however, adopts the typological list provided by Ian (2021), whereby graffiti types are broadly reduced to eight, namely, *tags*, *throw-ups*, *blockbuster*, *wildstyle*, *stencil*, *heaven*, *piece*, and *3D graffiti*. Each category displays established technical and aesthetical elements that are meaningful and understandable to the graffiti art community and are expressive of specific graffiti art styles. Apart from its usefulness for understanding the borders of graffiti as an expressive art, the typological classifications, in varying ways, also problematize a number of other issues, such as the social functions and the legality of graffiti (Melbärde et al., 2022). Our attention is on the former, not on the latter. Thus, while the identification of the visual characteristics of each type and style is also highly significant in the critical analyses of graffiti subcultural practice, clarifying their social functions and acceptability within the broader political communities is of basic concern.

At the base of the legality consideration of graffiti practice is the distinction between graffiti as an art and graffiti as vandalism or subversive or anarchic practice (Zhou, 2022; Conklin, 2012). Curry and Decker's (2020) view is that graffiti writing is both a radical practice expressive of the need to gain attention and an expressive art form that is legitimate. These contradictory points of view have remained the constant in the debates about and appreciation of graffiti in the contemporary times. But, as argued by Gottlieb (2008), the writings and drawings that comprise graffiti today are more varied and sophisticated than one might expect, making it even more challenging for graffiti to be classified into a single category of vandalism or subversives. Ross (2016b) shared the same view. The author admits too that gang graffiti has since diminished and has been "predominantly

supplanted by art-related graffiti and street art" (p. 11). That notwithstanding, the treatment of graffiti negatively or positively has created a certain sense of ambiguity about the practice that may be difficult to wipe away instantly. While the sense of ambiguity holds the reason for understanding decades of misunderstanding that had existed between graffiti writers, citizens, and government with regards to the usage of urban spaces for self-expression by street artists, study (Safonov et al., 2022) shows that such ambiguity could be resolved contextually when graffiti writing meets up or fails to meet up with certain local expectations.

Safonov et al. (2022) findings in relation to the urban city of Saint-Petersburg, shows that graffiti writing sometimes considered as illegitimate could gain legitimacy on the basis of their representational values, surface of display and content of the graffiti in question. The authors' argument, therefore, tend to suggest that the logic of legitimacy or illegitimacy is no longer sacrosanct in the contemporary era in relation to graffiti writings and displays; the rule could change either way based on graffiti's ability to meet up with certain political, social, or cultural expectations. The concept of „space“ has remained another key consideration in the debates about graffiti (Christensen and Thor, 2017; Ehrenfeucht, 2014; Taş and Taş, 2014). A synonymous term found in scholarly researches is that of „city“ or „place“, whereby the city is conceived as the canvass of a new generation of street artists (Christensen and Thor, 2017; Evans, 2016; Conklin, 2012). In other words, though a few graffiti may be found in local communities where people's marginal life-styles and neglects have pushed them to adopt this form of art practice to express their anger, graffiti writing is today particularly prominent in major urban centers throughout the world. The common canvass targets include subways, billboards, street walls, surfaces in schools, prison walls, bridges, abandoned factories, toilet walls, and private residential spaces, just to mention a few.

The understanding of „space“ in relation to graffiti writing, however, differs in scholarship. Lesh (2022), for example, re-conceptualizes „space“ from its earlier meaning as „venues of writing“ to its understanding as „social relations spaces“ that graffiti writers make to happen. In this regard, the focus of analytical attention moves away from the physical texts and their messages to the community's social engagements, in different contexts, around (or within) the venues of graffiti writing. Hochman (2006: 200), in turn, ties the concept of space to the interpretative „in-between“ or the „Third Space“ in relation to graffiti writing. The Third Space comprises the „physical“ and „dialectical“ where the graffiti practice occurs. While the physical is the performative space where young people physically write to broaden the scope of educational environment, the dialectical is a reflective space, a unique space that belong to the youth and where the youth have a total control of its

pedagogical elements. It is neither a school nor a home, but it is the special interpretative relationship being fostered between graffiti writers and viewers. It is, however, a combination of both the physical and dialectical that „constitutes a fertile ground for educational projects and initiatives“ (Hochman, 2006: 200). Ehrenfeucht's (2014) concept of „private property“ provides another dimension of the meaning of „space“. In this regard, space could also be conceptualized as an arena of tension and contestation, informed by the reality of space ownership and control struggles across societies. Any attempts to circumscribe the rights of graffiti artists in utilizing private spaces could result in disputes and claims over property transgressions, resulting sometimes in a protracted anti-graffiti controversy and activism, which in turn could opened up new debates on the importance of street arts and broader galvanization of support to renegotiate with property owners for the placement or removal of graffiti from private property. Thus, in the history of graffiti space formations, the public space has, according to Ehrenfeucht (2014), remained an area of contestation between civil society, graffiti artists, and the state. How this tension is or has been mitigated also depends on the kind of approach adopted by either of the parties.

That said, the debates on graffiti and all aspects of the alternative art form have not reached any finality. They are still ongoing. They are also becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Within the academia itself, graffiti study is still being approached from a number of angles, including history and culture (Aguilar-Garcia, 2022), criminology (Md Sakip et al., 2016), commercial (Zhyhailo, 2022), political (Lennon, 2022; Hess and Mulyana, 2022), urbanization (Goba, 2019), linguistic (Moghaddam and Murray, 2022), religious (Allison, 2015), psychoanalytic (Myllylä, 2022), as well as tourism (Melbärde et al., 2022) and pedagogical (Hochman, 2006) perspectives, just to mention a few.

In spite of these broad and diverse approaches, the study of contemporary graffiti from the perspective of formal and informal education among youths is still relatively thin particularly in Africa, compared to researches carried out in other areas of graffiti study. This is where this paper makes another significant contribution to the body of knowledge already available, but from the Nigerian context. The pedagogical value of graffiti, it is argued, requires greater exploration, deep reflection and sustained application to assist teaching, on the one hand, and learning among young people, on the other.

GRAFFITI AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Education, as a social process of knowledge transfer and reception either within a school setting or at home, entails subjective or collective engagements in the act of

teaching and/or learning. Education becomes „civic“ when it is directed at the learning interest/right of the people resident in a particular place, town or city or geared towards the empowerment of a particular political community or sociocultural group (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s, 2008: 244). The variables for a successful civic education plan in context are, however, extensive and interrelated. They include the type of political regimes (democratic, hybrid, and authoritarian) available to the citizens, the curriculum and policy formulations put in place, and the concept of good citizenship which is tied with people’s personal experiences (Li, 2021). Strandbrink (2017), however, highlights the ambiguities that often strain standardized visions of civic education across democratic societies, in terms of the uneasy relationship between normative education expectations for liberal democracy (where education becomes cosmopolitan and tolerant) and statehood’s interest in reproducing educational prerogatives that prevailed in restricted cultural environments. Where the restricted cultural prerogatives prevail, the author argues, civic education becomes parochial and intolerant of difference and the educational regimes’ appropriated tools could become a resource for activism among young people. The link between education and graffiti has been carefully established by a number of authors (Xu, 2017; Avramidis and Drakopoulou, 2015/2012; Christen, 2010; Harris, 2006). The authors generally admit that graffiti proliferation in urban visual landscapes now offers “an alternative space where writers educate one another” (Avramidis and Drakopoulou, 2012: 1), enabling young adults to become critically aware of their education situation. As noted by Christen (2010), without such alternative artistic expressions, “many more urban kids would have become entangled in violence and crime”. Graffiti writing now provides them with “knowledge, skills, and values important for success in the mainstream” (p. 1). These authors, apart from problematizing the concept of public education, have provided inroads into the benefits of the complex and contested visual educational process that comprise learning outside schooling.

Also, the institutionalization of graffiti art as subcultural and entertainment practice in social settings of primary and higher education sectors through the allocation of writing spaces considered as legal, though not a global experience, is now also a recognizable practice in a number of countries and local regions, including Nigeria. How these institutionalized art practice actually contributes to reflections by members of school communities on social and academic life as well as their historico-political experiences remains an area of continuous investigation in scholarship (Al Lily and Alzahrani, 2015). Graffiti writing within the institutionalized setting has, however, been applied across a wide range of subject fields both in social and natural sciences, making the relationship between graffiti and formal education multidisciplinary.

That notwithstanding, the importance of graffiti art to civic education includes, its value as a liberating and emancipatory media subculture (Christen, 2010), its importance as „participatory art-based method“ for capacity building (Marovah and Mkwanzani, 2020); its value as a „cultural literacy art“ (Mangeya, 2018); and its interpretative value for viewers within the context of the „physical-dialogical“ interface (Hochman, 2006). Others are its multicultural methodology whereby graffiti sustain an interface between class, social distinctions, and communicative actions (Rodríguez-Valls et al., 2012); its ability to convey meanings “in specific cultural context” (Cassar and George, 2017); and the variations in the thematic focus they suggest for learning, just to mention a few (Figure 2).

Liberation and emancipation logic, in particular, problematizes the development of the agency capacity of young adults, especially their freedom and ability to think, negotiate and act with less constraints and in a way that brings them inner satisfaction and sociocultural commitments. Harris (2006), for example, locates the liberating potential of graffiti in the democratic spaces they create for open exchange of ideas, dialogue and negotiation among young adults on sociopolitical issues. Xu (2017), in turn, indicates the cognitive dimension. Beyond offering a way for children to express their inner world and reveal their real feelings, graffiti writing in children’s art education could, essentially, cultivate their imagination, affect their thinking habits, and explore their creative abilities. This, in the long run, could lead to increased academic success, deeper cultural awareness, and the development of life in the future. Xu (2017), therefore, recommends the need to create good graffiti environments in children’s art practices in schools, to introduce graffiti writing as the starting point of children’s art education, and for teachers, as mentors, to facilitate and guide graffiti training, as well as collaborate with their students to interpret their graffiti works with them. These recommendations, apparently, align well with Rogoff’s (2003) social constructivism, particularly her interactive and guided participation logics.

The exploration of the thematic trajectories of graffiti writing by Farnia (2014) and Ta’amneh (2021) from the Iranian and Jordanian contexts, respectively, is indicative of the kinds of values espoused by graffiti and that could help socialize young adults or reinforce already existing values, agency, and worldviews. Ta’amneh’s (2021) study of 207 written graffiti on the walls and desks of public secondary schools shows that displayed values fell into three thematic categories, namely, religious, political and emotional, with the emotional as the dominant theme. Farnia’s (2014) earlier study of 200 pieces of graffiti displayed on classroom walls suggests a broader thematic range, including religion, history, politics, love and hatred, poetry, presence, despair, complaint, and signature, among others. Corroborating the thematic dimension, Şad and Kutlu’s (2009) study of prospective

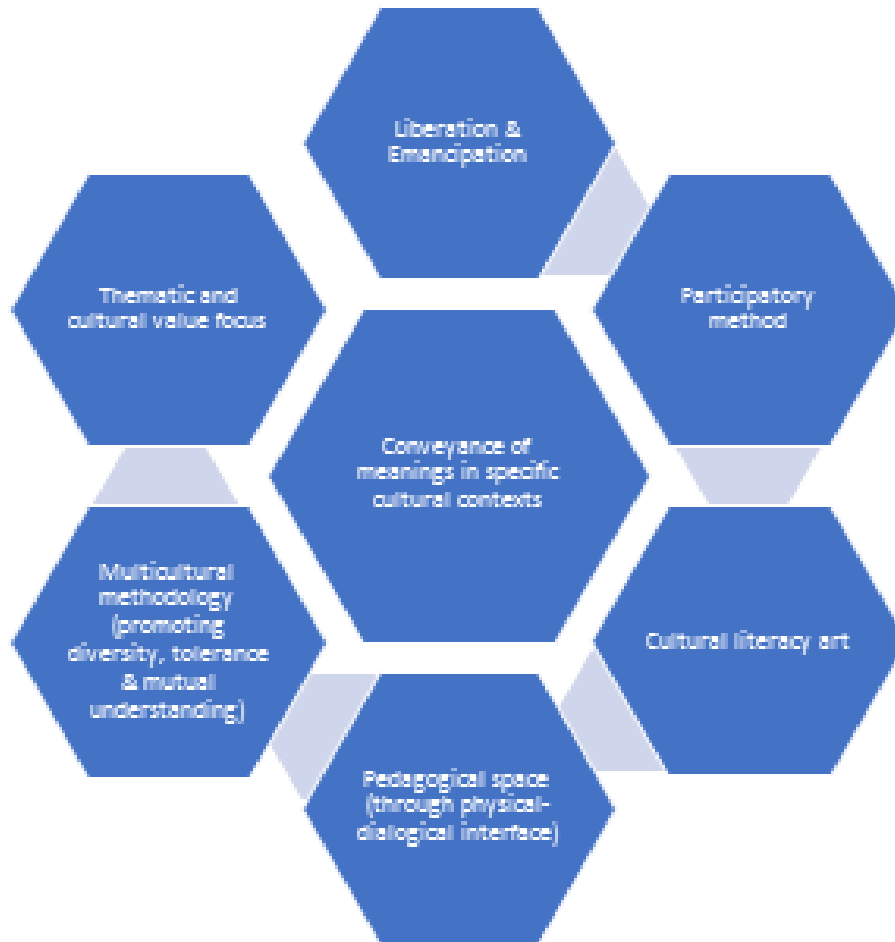


Figure 2. Importance of graffiti arts to civic education.
Source: Author

teachers" graffiti writings on lavatory and classroom walls reveals such additional themes as belongingness, homesickness, romance, humour, name and doodling.

The importance of new media to the use of graffiti for improved civic education is also recognized in scholarship. A number of authors (Kondakova and Shtifanova, 2022; Laffier and Bowman, 2021) have explored the use of diverse digital technologies to grow digital street arts and graffiti so as to advance learning, social movement of street art projects, and change in the urban environment. The shift towards signature graffiti subculture on virtual spaces and the configuration (or re-configuration) of vernacular networked learning is also gaining prominence and recognition in recent times. As argued by Avramidis and Drakopoulou (2015), this development problematizes "the role of technology in connecting and mediating various learning and communication practices" (p. 1). Important to both the academic and arts communities now is, therefore, how contemporary information and communication technologies have engendered new network capacities

for the promotion of connections or interpersonal interactions between graffiti writers, apprentices and mentors, and between graffiti communities and learning resources (Avramidis and Drakopoulou, 2015). In view of this development, the integration of digital technologies into pedagogical strategies that employ street arts of different kinds as well as the value of digital technologies to the growth of learning within digitally created artistic environments should no longer be ignored or taken with levity.

METHODS OF THE STUDY

Mixed methods approach that drew on the strengths of both theoretical and statistical data to address research objectives was adopted for the study. The adoption was informed by the different nature of the research objectives, some of which required qualitative responses and others quantitative. While qualitative strategy served as the dominant orientation of the study, quantitative strategy provided only complementary aid. In this regard, *oral interviews*, *documentary studies* and *survey* served as the chosen methods for the study. Samples were selected through

the *purposive* and *dimensional* processes of the *non-probability* sampling procedure. While the *purposive* element allowed the researchers to choose samples that would best meet the purpose of the study, the *dimensional* specified all the dimensions of interest in the study and ensured that most of them were represented by at least one respondent (Ihejirika and Omego, 2013). The *scope* of the chosen samples was, however, meant to take care of the various items to be addressed, rather than its representativeness (Ghosh and Chopra, 2003:307). For oral interview, a total of four respondents were chosen; two (Jesse Josh Goje, a prolific street artist based in Kaduna and Ernest Ibe, a professional artist domiciled in Lagos) to represent the graffiti art community; one from the academia (Dr. Efiog Eyefoki of the Department of Fine Arts of the University of Uyo) to represent the higher educational sector, and one from the Ministry of Education (Mrs. Okama Amos, Director of Schools in the ministry in Calabar) to represent the sector that coordinates and manages educational affairs in Nigeria. For the survey, 105 students from two secondary schools (Government Technical College, Mayne Avenue, Calabar South and Government Secondary School, State Housing, Calabar Municipality) were sampled to represent students' perspective in the study. The students surveyed were between the ages of 10 and 29 years. Out of the one hundred and five surveyed, 50 were male and 55 were female. Additional information was sourced from six published documents (that is online newspapers) on aspects of the topic. The importance of documentary study rested on its supplementary data provision to enable the authors make up for gaps in information obtained from oral interviews and survey. The questions for the interviews (oral and written) were decided on the basis of the needs of each of the conceptual variables (independent, dependent and contextual) and, accordingly, developed to respond to the demands of these variables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from empirical study are presented here in response to the objectives of this study, as outlined in the introductory section of the paper.

Presence of graffiti art form and their locations

Most of the interviewees acknowledged the presence of graffiti arts in Nigeria. Ernest Ibe and Jesse Goje specifically admitted that they practiced graffiti writing for expressive, recognition, reputation, and pecuniary purposes. Ibe, for example, noted that he has had a number of his graffiti published, including the "E No Balance" huge colour painting he made to represent issues of violent crises, particularly the killings in Southern Kaduna, as well as a piece he made for CAFOD Foundation to address the issue of religious tolerance. According to Ibe, "I grew up in my own area in Lagos. I see a Muslim girl and a Christian girl holding hands. So, you just get to know that there's a kind of communication; there's peace, harmony and understanding. This understanding needed to be passed across to Nigerians by leaving them with a long-lasting impression, as well as help the kids grow up with that mindset of collaboration and peacemaking" (Interview, 2022). That work, incidentally, stood out from among all

the paintings he had done between 2018 and 2021. Goje, in turn, stated that graffiti writing was one of his majors. He did a number of murals and graffiti installations for "I Create Africa" and for Kaduna State government at Murtala Square, Kaduna. He noted, "I have a lot of artistic works that I have done, government and private jobs, as well as freelancing for private residences. Mural, however, remains my main area. I do not just go and mess up walls; I do mostly commissioned jobs" (Interview, 2022). Some of Goje's artistic works had, incidentally, been displayed a few times on the pages of *Daily Trust*, a Nigerian national newspaper, as well as by the *Nigerian Television Authority* (NTA).

Empirical data further showed that, apart from Ibe and Goje, there were a number of other prominent graffiti writers as well as uprising ones spread across the country. These included Okunkpolor Osadolor (also known as "Osa Seven"), an established graffiti and mural artist in Lagos and the owner of *Kuma Nation* and *Art for a Cause* initiatives, used in popularizing graffiti art in Nigeria and volunteer-based community development, respectively. There was also Sarah Sanni, a self-taught female aerosol and mural artist that operates between Lagos and Ibadan and owner of *Cera Cerni's Hub*, used for training young artists. These artists "are doing very well and have covered large spaces" (Goje, Interview, 2022). A number of young people were also being trained and encouraged to join the graffiti art movement by the well-established ones and some were getting paid for showcasing their talents. Goje admitted training over 45 youths in Kaduna that were now good at the practice. Some of the graffiti artists were, however, in the trade just to make money, using the same art form to express political, environmental, and cultural considerations of governments or government agencies in exchange for a pay: "I personally got paid over 10million naira for the job at Murtala Square, the biggest ever paid job I received".

Again, respondents admitted that there were some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that were funding the artistic practice in Nigeria. These organizations gave grants to the established artists to enable them to give attention to those kids that wanted to learn the trade, "because the kids just want to be happy". The graffiti artists interviewed, however, warned that looking down on graffiti artists in Nigeria because they were seen as amateurs or people simply in need of cheap recognition and money, would never bring out the best in them or make them compete in an equal footing with their professional counterparts.

As to the specific locations of this art form in Nigeria, Lagos, Abuja, and Kaduna were mentioned by respondents as the most popular places. Calabar, Benin, and Uyo were also mentioned. Eyefoki, in particular, stated that graffiti writings could be located in public facilities generally - on the university campuses, hotels, restaurants, and on nursery or secondary school walls. Out of the 105 secondary school students surveyed,

Table 1. Knowledge and use of graffiti.

Measuring Variables	Yes (%)	No (%)	Do not Know (%)	Total
Heard of the word „graffiti“	52.4	41.9	5.7	100
Seen graffiti on any wall in Calabar	83.8	14.3	1.9	100
Used by teachers to teach in schools	74.3	20.9	4.8	100
Students“ preference of art works for lessons	88.6	5.7	5.7	100
Students“ preference of direct talk for lessons	28.6	64.8	6.6	100
Student“s use of art works to explain things	35.4	60	4.6	100

Source: Author.

83.8% acknowledged the presence of graffiti and street arts even in Calabar; 52.4% claimed they have only heard of the word „graffiti; only 41.9% have never heard of it, while 14.3% have never seen any on the streets in Calabar (Table 1).

Interviewees, however, differentiated among graffiti, murals, and street arts. While it could sometimes be difficult to differentiate between street arts and graffiti, as both could be done on street walls, interviewees agreed that graffiti, generally, were writings or inscriptions or images on the walls – streets, buildings, prisons, classrooms, cars, buses, trains, etc.; and murals were paintings and relief sculptures displayed indoors or on the walls of houses where people live. Street arts, in turn, could be on any public background and people could see them when they walk on the road. The messages communicated by these different *subgenres*, interviewees admitted, could be picked up by simply looking at the art works or through intuition and intellectual imagination. Eyefoki noted the incitement that came with such readings, “I am an artist. Sometimes I would give assignments to students and expect them to be able to decipher what a given drawing, sculpture or painting depicts. There’s joy always when the students get it right”.

Critically, the association of graffiti practice with commerce has already raised concerns within scholarship (Zhyhailo, 2022). It has generated contradictory positions, ranging from cooperation to condemnation. It has also raised concern as to whether graffiti practice is actually a genre of artistic expression or mere advertisement (Ibegbunam, 2012). Apart from the social dynamics graffiti presence on a legal wall fostered, the opposite idea was either that of the artists working out of personal love for painting or being hired to paint to earn a pay despite their natural love for painting.

Zhyhailo (2022), in particular, revealed not only the meaning of the dynamics of the monetization behaviour of the graffiti artists themselves, but also the possible tension that such commercialization attitude could bring to bear on the graffiti cultural industry itself. This paper, however, shares Zhyhailo’s view that the monetization of graffiti should not be condemned outright, but that the very interpretation of such behaviour should be based on

the degree of the writers’ interaction with business agents and political authorities. Again, the possibility of governments and funding agencies attempting to undermine the radical and civic empowerment tendencies of the alternative art practice through commerce and for purely sociopolitical gains should never be overlooked by the artists, as the fund providers might also intend to control, even indirectly, the aesthetic styles and editorial powers of the graffiti artists themselves. Graffiti artists should, therefore, remain mindful of the kind of closeness they sustain with political authorities or the kind of financial gift they enjoy from them, that is, if they must protect the integrity of their practice (Okon, 2017). Again, legal artistic painting must not always be seen as a free activity. Graffiti writers can demand for the rights to develop their work based on a decent pay or financial reimbursement. It is, therefore, important for people to change their thinking about graffiti practice as a free trade zone. We should also consider the right, capacity, and readiness of the artists to make a living out from the art practice.

The critical argument notwithstanding, the presence and locations of graffiti writings have been well established in this subsection, as empirical data have supported that graffiti arts were truly present in Nigeria and across a number of locations.

Specific writing style and format that dominate the artistic practice

The writing styles commonly identified by respondents included writing, painting, drawing, relief sculpture, engravings, lettering, graphic and relief graffiti. Findings further revealed that the most dominant styles in Nigeria were the lettering and painting styles. 38% of the students surveyed, however, identified painting, while another 38% picked drawing as their most preferred styles in schools and at home (Table 2). 41% of the students, however, indicated that graphics were the dominant styles often displayed on their classroom walls, while 38% showed the same for family homes (Table 2). Eyefoki, in contrast, preferred painting as the dominant style, because painting involved colours which were

Table 2. Preferences and types used in schools and homes.

Measuring variable	Students' art works preference in schools (%)	Children's art work preference at family homes (%)	Can you name anyone you have at home (%)	Can you name anyone you have in school (%)
Sculpture	14.3	1.9	0	0
Painting	38	28.6	14.3	12.4
Drawing	10.5	38	13	9.5
Ceramics	4.8	17.1	14.3	3.8
Graphics	28.6	9.5	38	41
Textiles	0	0	9.4	9.5
Do not know	3.8	4.9	11	23.8
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Author

sensually and emotionally impactful. He tied his choice of style to the question of „meaning” or „art-purpose”: “The particular meanings I seek to express through graffiti writing generally derive from the principle of art-purpose. Thus, the meanings expressed may be to showcase, amuse, symbolize, or advertise something for sale” (Interview, 2022). Goje, in turn, observed that the kind of graffiti one could see in a place like Kaduna was no longer the vandalism type; and only a few of the writing and lettering formats were on display. He identified his own personal style as “Afro Urban Art Fusion”. The style was defined by the bringing together of geometry, colours that had urban appeal, facial markings, and writeups that were truly African. This kind of format did not need too many words or a typical graph in it: “Basically, I express the African narratives for people to see the lines and know that this is where I came from and this is where we all started from” (Interview, 2022).

For Eyefoki, “the group of people expected to benefit most from my graffiti paintings were artists, businessmen, church goers and a cross-section of the public in and outside Uyo” (Interview, 2022). Goje, on the contrary, targets everyone. He has no specific group(s) in mind as the expected beneficiaries of his graffiti designs: “All humans should get messages, should be happy, should see colours, they should see designs that will make them reminisce, that will inspire them, which will trigger their own creativity and make them happy. My works basically heal all categories of people; I concentrate on the healing aspect” (Interview, 2022).

Interviewees also agreed that often approvals were required from the owners of surfaces anywhere in Nigeria to be able to put out any visual writing either on private walls or street walls. As a matter of fact, sociopolitical and legal arrangements in Nigeria required the adoption of this approach to avoid problems.

Regardless of their purposes or target audiences or even unique *Africanization* of graffiti, empirical data had, therefore, identified painting, drawing, graphics, and murals as the most dominant graffiti styles in Nigeria,

both within and outside schools. Lettering and writing formats were also there but their presence was relatively not so pronounced.

Usefulness of graffiti as a radical and subversive art form for educational purposes

Graffiti have, to some extent, been viewed as subversive art often used for radicalism and to challenge authorities. Interviewees, however, admitted that graffiti, though still subversive, were not necessarily used for vandalism or anarchism in the contemporary Nigeria. They have mostly been used positively to serve a number of sociocultural and politico-economic needs of communities. Eyefoki, in particular, argued that “although they were often used as a lighter mode of expressing some serious concerns by way of caricature or satire, they were also equally used objectively to teach about history, political and cultural considerations of a community”. He gave Fela Ransom Kuti’s musical score, “Na Baba kill Dele. If you add „Ngida”, na you sabi”, as a good example. Ibe and Goje also agreed that vandalism defined how graffiti started as an art form, bearing such messages as “fuck the police” or “fuck the government”. It was used then mostly by people who were not well educated or who found themselves at the margins to express how they were fed up with a particular thing or persons as well as demand for change: “They knew how to use words, signs and symbols to pass messages to their targets. And when such messages were well passed, the community benefited from it. But if the messages were that of chaos, the community risked being torn apart. It was this negative aspect that informed attacks on graffiti artists in certain regions” (Goje, Interview, 2022).

The respondents further affirmed that good graffiti arts often blended with the proper street arts to canvass for cultural preservation and progress. Goje for example, stated, “...graffiti writing has really changed. A lot of

works I did in the wake of the killings in Southern Kaduna, caused by the invasion of the Fulani bandits into the communities and the uncaring attitude of the state government, were really objective. But because the whole scenario was unnerving, I and my boys asked for permission to use available spaces and someone allowed us to use his wall where we created a piece to show the people's anger and pains and the need for government and stakeholders to do something" (Interview, 2022). Getting permission and understanding the need for „balance" to avoid problems, he argued, was allowed. How to create that balance between the need of the community and the commitment to challenge or make a bold statement in an objective way to avoid chaos, Goje noted, was left for each artist to decide. He added, "It was only when graffiti artists were not responsible and did not really have the right materials that they would just use one or two spray cans and mess up a place. They just wanted attention by writing their names or something stupid" (Goje, Interview, 2022). Goje argued further that such conducts should be discouraged by paying these uprising vandals (some of whom resent going to schools) to do something more productive and get involved fulltime in the practice of culture preservation.

Ibe, sharing the same thinking, indicated that graffiti writing, most often, belongs to the realm of the masses. The whole ideology of governance for years had been portrayed as a communicative movement from government to the people at the bottom. For Ibe, graffiti writing reverses the communication direction and flow, allowing the people from below to speak to people at the top on controversial issues. For him, no effective commitment to governance can exist without the masses. Graffiti writing provided one of the easiest ways for the Nigerian masses to connect with government and to provide feedbacks. He averred, "when you put graffiti writing into their game, it's going to change the game and it's going to leave them with lasting memory" (Ibe, Interview, 2022).

Ibe's view, ironically, aligned somewhat with Lesh's (2022) reading of graffiti spatiality as „social relations spaces" that enabled communities to engage among themselves and with leadership in contexts. Such graffiti-enabled engagements should not be seen simply as venue-based, but rather as issue-based, with opportunities for negotiations or renegotiations to create mutual understanding and progress on issues of importance to the communities. Respondents were also of the view that graffiti that sometimes appeared as subversive have the potential of being used for illustration, advertisement, and even announcement. The students surveyed indicated, for example, that most often their teachers used graffiti and other visual arts for illustration of lessons (76.2%), to advertise brands (5.7%), to teach history (5.7%), and to make announcements to students (3.8%). Only 8.6% of the students were not sure of how these visuals were

specifically used by their teachers. The frequency of use by their teachers ranged from „often" (32.4%), to „occasionally" (36.2%), „sparingly" (9.5%), and to „not used at all" (21.9%) (Table 3). Eyefoki, in particular, noted that graffiti that appeared subversive were useful for academic purposes because their coded/symbolic language forms were abstracted to veil the reality of life. For this reason, they could help students to think, not just ordinarily and superficially, but to look in-depth into whatever they saw. That was to say, graffiti could ginger students' philosophical acumen to easily decode what they saw in relation to their own or other people's life experience. Eyefoki averred, "those suffering from disability, for example, could use the braille, particularly in graphic lettering to relate with the knowledge and the social realities so expressed".

For Goje, the beauty and communicative value of these visual art forms should explain their importance and ginger their uses for social and educational purposes. Even within the informal family setting, Goje admitted, graffiti and other visual images on the walls - depending too, on the kind of messages, tradition and culture the intended graffiti represented - could ginger children to learn some basic moral principles, know and respect their culture, as well as serve them as historical memory aids. Survey data also corroborated the claim to usefulness of graffiti arts to the civic education of young people in Nigeria. 75.2% of the students noted that using graffiti drawings and other illustrations could simplify lessons and minimize difficulties in understanding what they were taught both in schools and at home. Only 15.3% were not sure of how valuable this potentially subversive art could be to their learning. Similarly, 80% strongly encouraged a compulsory use of graffiti for learning in schools; only 11.4% were in the negative. Also, 49.5% of the students acknowledged that their inability to connect with what they were taught by their teachers was because of the absence or inappropriate use of visuals (Table 4).

Respondents also agreed that graffiti writing and displays can encourage the youth to work hard and make a living, as well as help in building Nigeria, by knowing and doing the right thing. Goje, in particular, argued, "For crying out loud, my paintings on the walls pass messages strong enough to inspire and encourage the young ones to become better persons; even older ones have been inspired. I have trained, almost every year, many young ones all over North-East and North-West of Nigeria, some between the ages of 10 and 13, to make their life better and become professionals. Generally, training them to be the best, makes me super good, happy and fulfilled" (Interview, 2022).

Interviewees, generally, rejected the idea of graffiti being called „subversive". Osa Seven, however, admitted earlier to Clegg of *This Day* newspaper (26 October 2019), that pushing graffiti for acceptance as a form of art in Nigeria was hard. Yet, graffiti, just like any other art form or media, were important for civic education,

Table 3. Frequency, purpose and types of use.

Frequency of use by teachers	%	Purpose of use in class	%	Types of visual art used	%
Often	32.4	Illustrate a lesson	76.2	Drawings	44
Sparingly	9.5	Advertise a brand	5.7	Illustrations	56
Occasionally	36.2	Make announcement	3.8		
Not at all	21.9	Teach history	5.7		
		Do not know/Not sure	8.6		
Total	100		100		100

Source: Author

Table 4. Understanding lessons based on arts" use.

Measuring variable	Yes (%)	No (%)	Do not know (%)	Total
Non-use of visuals creates difficulty in understanding lessons	49.5	41	9.5	100
Using graffiti and visual arts can simplify lessons	75.2	9.5	15.3	100
Making visual art practice compulsory for schools is necessary	80	11.4	8.6	100

Source: Author.

precisely because they passed vital information, told our local Nigerian and African stories, enlightened and helped people to think and decide about issues. In this regard, graffiti would assist young people to resolve issues about culture, to treasure and preserve beautiful art pieces, as well as to respect and honour the artists themselves.

Critically, the interplay between literature and empirical data affirms that it is in the true spirit of graffiti to be provocative and to protest against exclusion and indignity of those in authority. But, as argued by Hochman (2006), we should also recognize that beyond their activist tendency, graffiti's presence on any wall generally could create opportunities for interpretation of youth-led educational experiences and harmonization of the ambivalence in the very act of interpretation of those experiences. One could access these opportunities, not consciously, but through curiosity about the meaning behind the images and the discursive dialectic within the broader graffiti community. In this regard, learning through graffiti could come, not only by viewing the images, but more importantly, by recognition of the viewers' true conditions in reference to the images. Thus, the interplay between graffiti's physical and dialectical for learning deserves the attention of educators and parents who were concerned with generating rich discussions with their students and children. That was because the interplay also suggested ways "in which education might manifest within another physical Third Spaces such as after-school programs or youth-led educational experiences outside the four walls of the classroom" (Hochman, 2006: 203) as well as issues and values that center around each graffiti art.

Empirical evidence has, therefore, established that, though subversive in nature, graffiti arts do also hold enormous learning and empowerment opportunities for young people both within and outside school settings. Graffiti could, for instance, enhance better reasoning and understanding of a subject field and/or life reality. Thus, an attempt made to ignore graffiti is still a choice made in denial of its educational significance.

Values graffiti writings express and how these can help address the challenges of education

Findings showed that graffiti writing held out a number of values to both formal and informal teaching and learning in the Nigerian context. Eyefoki streamlined these values to include illustrative, aesthetic, economic, and political values. Others were educational, historical, cultural, and sympathetic magic values. Sympathetic magic value, in particular, "is used by the occult to make contact with the ancestors". Since graffiti writings with sympathetic magic value expressions could be used to conceal what needs to be concealed, for example, class struggles among cultists, Eyefoki was of the view that such art forms could also become a means for the identification of criminals in schools and the society at large by security operatives. Graffiti artists in Nigeria also paint words meant to elicit certain moods in children and to place the country in a more positive light. Osa Seven, in an interview with Awodipe (2019) of *The Guardian*, for instance, noted, "We paint words that will inspire children, like joy, happiness, collaboration, and peace, words that will take hold in their subconscious. Also, we paint "a whole lot of

Table 5. Affiliation with art forms.

Measuring variable	Yes (%)	No (%)	Do not know (%)	Total
Do you love art works?	90.5	9.5	0	100
Do your parents love art works?	64.8	11.4	23.8	100
Do you practice drawings?	71.4	23.8	4.8	100
Has any artist been brought to teach you how to draw or write with colours?	11.4	69.5	19.1	100

Source: Author

vibrant, bright colours, which describe Nigerians as a people. We are a vibrant, resilient people and these colours describe who we are" (*The Guardian*, 30 October 2019). Osa's work, incidentally, "ranges from portraits of iconic characters to scenic images, brand designs, abstract art, and tribal art designs that appeal to the human emotions" (Bellanaija, 2017). Interviewees, generally, admitted that the value of graffiti writing should be of concern to those working in the ministries of education across Nigeria and other governmental agencies concerned with formal education in the country: "...they need to put more energy to respect graffiti artists and their talents all over the country, because they pass a lot of messages to the society, as well as offer encouragement to those at the margins of the society" (Ibe, Interview, 2022). Okama Amos of the Ministry of Education, however, highlighted three challenges facing the educational sector that the increasing appropriation of graffiti could help resolve. These included recognition of the important role art plays in education; the presence of teachers trained in art practices in schools to drive the practice; and encouraging regular interface of children/students with established graffiti artists. She noted that, though the ministry had a clearly spelt out policy in its curriculum for primary and secondary education in Nigeria that encourages the use of visual arts (without any specific on graffiti) for teaching and learning, the fidelity of head teachers to this guideline had always been a problem. The other was the absence of teachers well trained in art practices in these schools. She observed that teachers who studied arts most often shied away from teaching the subject. Thus, the lack of teachers with experience in visual art forms in these schools was now a fundamental problem. Again, a number of schools could hardly bring in established artists to interface with students and teachers because of the financial cost implications. Teachers, too, might not be motivated to discuss that with their head teachers knowing they might not get the necessary approval. Thus, recalcitrancy and bureaucracy in administration might also be a serious barrier.

One of the graffiti artists interviewed, however, admitted that he had been invited only a few times by the ministry of education and some NGOs in his area of domicile to speak on the importance of art works in general towards the education and formation of young

people. One interviewee claimed he had never been invited. Survey data also presented a different picture as 69.5% of the students admitted that no artist had ever been brought into their schools in the 2021/2022 session to teach them either how to draw or write with colours. Only 11.4% were in the affirmative; while 19.1% had no idea (Table 5). While the view of Amos partially agreed with the views of the students surveyed and one of the artists interviewed with regard to lack of opportunities for students to interface regularly with professional artists, her claim regarding a near total reluctance by teachers to engage with students in art education was somewhat contradicted by the students' perspective, which showed that graffiti and other visuals were occasionally used by their teachers to teach them (Table 3). Amos' claim, however, raised some fundamental issues earlier affirmed by Xu (2017) and worthy of note. These included the need for school authorities to continuously create good graffiti environments in children's art practices in schools, as well as develop the competencies required for teachers, as mentors and guides, to engage more meaningfully with students in graffiti training and interpretations. Additionally, Amos' suggestion of the need for continuous awakening as a way forward, through the creation of consciousness around the importance of graffiti and other visual forms to learning as well as the need for students' advisers and those in the counseling units of schools to help identify the art interests of students and encourage their uses to assist those students that learn better through these visual forms, should also be taken seriously.

Interviewees, nonetheless, strongly recommended the use of graffiti for education in family homes and schools in Nigeria. Eyefoki, for instance, noted "using this art form is important, because it is easier and clearer than other methods/approaches. Besides, it enhances flexibility". Additionally, "children are supposed to be made to think, rather than being always taught through the rigid formal method. Graphic artists, painters and even those in textiles would attest to the importance of pictorial arts to personal intuition and cognition even among young people" (Interview, 2022). Eyefoki added, "I have given a number of times paintings with a mixture of items to my students to test their ability in isolating and reasoning out what were actually needed for a particular assignment than the rest. It made me feel happy when they were able

to do what they were asked to do correctly” (Interview, 2022).

Ibe corroborated this position by noting that when graffiti writing had messages that addressed civic considerations, it could help to bridge the gap between hearing and seeing and could stem any form of misunderstanding in the class rooms that could possibly exist between teachers and students. Different students, he argued, had their different ways of grasping and understanding issues. There were those who understood easily through visual arts, and those who related better with direct teaching in the class. The educational system, he indicated, should be designed to take care of both perspectives, as well as introduce the study of visual arts as a major in school curriculums. Teachers too, he observed, needed to be taught on how to use these visuals for effective teaching and learning and, as mentors, to properly guide their students to decipher meanings contained in the visual texts.

Empirical evidence has, therefore, highlighted some of the values that graffiti writing could bring to bear on the learning and socialization of young adults within and outside schools, as well as how the appropriation of graffiti arts in schools and the integration of their uses into school curriculums could increasingly assist the appreciation of the educational value of this art form.

Contextual backgrounds to education in Nigeria that would make the adoption of graffiti writing for teaching necessary

Respondents also indicated that the Nigerian educational sector was facing a number of other challenges. One of such challenges was the existing gap between teachers’ approach to teaching and students’ ability to easily process what they were taught. Interviewees were also in agreement that the contextual backgrounds necessary for the adoption of graffiti writings in private homes, semi-private spaces and in schools were the „teacher-student” or „parent-child” or „master-apprentice” context, where those at the receiving ends were taught how to be able to identify real things from fake or correct things from wrong ones. For respondents, these contextual backgrounds make the adoption of graffiti for teaching necessary across all human societies. „Nsibidi”, a graffiti art work popularly known to and used by the *Ekpe* cultural group, for example, could help address the „teacher-student” or „master-apprentice” contextual issue. Eyefoki, again, noted that the teacher-student learning gap could be bridged if a class lesson begins by teaching the abstract principles first, and then follow up with the relevant elements of graffiti art. Regardless of the approach used, teachers generally could enhance students’ ability to easily process what they were taught by not only using visual aids, but also engaging with their students in the very process of reading these art forms and in a way that

makes meaning to them.

It is, therefore, important that those working in schools as well as parents at home understand more realistically the importance of such interactive environment for creating learning around the essential information often passed on through graffiti arts and also encourage the integration of this collaborative approach into any art education design they adopt for their young adults.

The findings notwithstanding, it must be noted that there was, generally, the challenge of connecting with more respondents, particularly those in the graffiti arts community in Nigeria, as they lacked recognizable presence in both national directories and online sources. This difficulty was, however, overcome through the insights gained from one of the artists interviewed. There was also the problem of easy access to the authorities at the Ministry of Education. This challenge was mitigated through persistent efforts and reminders.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper set out to investigate the relationship between contemporary graffiti and civic education of young people in Nigeria. Findings revealed that the effectiveness of civic education is dependent on the instructional methods used by teachers and/or parents. It was argued that the introduction of graffiti as a culturally situated pedagogical strategy into the process of civic education can offer a „new experience” to teaching and learning, which is different from traditional experiences characterized by direct conversations between teachers and students, one-directional instruction from teachers to students, or by abstract argumentations. The study further showed that graffiti writing is not necessarily a crime or subversive in Nigeria. While it may sometimes have an illegal spatiality, it generally has acceptable pedagogical value across different educational settings. Their significance and public acceptance, however, depended on several elements including where the art was created, the value, and the message behind the art.

Critically, this perspective has introduced a new media dimension to Rogoff’s educational and interactive setting to learning, through a collaborative production, reading and interpretation of graffiti and within specific sociocultural contexts. While graffiti provide artists with the freedom to express themselves, they also offer reflective spaces forged by and for young adults. Essentially, every art is distinct and artists have unique ways of displaying their arts on surfaces, what sets graffiti apart is their exceptionally activist and interpretative potency. They can be used to incite positive changes in societies as well as critically engage people (especially young adults) on a collaborative reflective and interpretative action concerning their educational, historical, political, and sociocultural conditions. The educational significance of graffiti, therefore, cuts across

a wide range of sociocultural value orientations and subject fields. If graffiti has historically been able to represent diverse ideologies, cultural values and other socio-political considerations across cultures and times, then they should bear a certain intrinsic substance that is pedagogical in nature. There is a risk that if contemporary graffiti become indulgent in their degradation as vandalistic or subversive, they could unwittingly become politically lame artistic enterprises whereby family homes, school educators and even activists' communities might not be able to use them as vehicles for the transformation of societies and empowerment of young adults. Contemporary graffiti, therefore, have to matter; they have to have some kind of sociopolitical aesthetic, cultural and educational stake and risk. They should no longer be eschewed or taken at face value.

The interface between graffiti writing and new media has now also introduced a new dimension into the understanding of the collaborative requirement for graffiti production, reading, and interpretation. The interaction can no longer be restricted only to the classrooms or family homes or even the traditional media environments; it is now something that can also be forged by graffiti artists and teachers within those virtual and social spaces that new media now enable.

In view of these findings, the following recommendations are made:

(1) A rethink of the way and manner we see and relate with graffiti arts and writers as creators of alternative art subcultures; (2) An increasing recognition of the importance of graffiti art to civic education; (3) An appropriate and extensive use of graffiti and other visual forms to teach children and students at home and in schools across all subject fields; (4) The need to train teachers in the experience of visual art designs and graffiti education as a step to overcoming some of the challenges associated with the usage of graffiti in schools; (5) The need to specifically integrate graffiti arts education into school curriculum reforms in Nigeria; and (6) An adoption of a collaborative approach to the critique and interpretation of graffiti arts produced and distributed by young adults, as well as an increasing reliance on the opportunities offered by new media to heighten interactivity and agency in the learning and teaching processes in public schools and family homes.

For future research, however, this paper suggests an increasing application of Rogoff's social constructivism theory to the understanding of issues relating to visual cultures, an exploration of the importance of new media to the development of graffiti arts for learning in Nigeria, as well as a study on the regulation of graffiti writing in Nigeria through national and state laws and policies to stem abuses.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest.

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