

ART EDUCATION FOR INDUSTRIAL RELEVANCE: THE NEED FOR GRAPHICS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTION

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Abstract

Art education plays a vital role in fostering creativity, visual literacy, and cultural awareness in contemporary society. Within tertiary institutions, graphics education has emerged as a significant component of visual arts training due to its close connection with communication, technology, and the creative industry. This paper examines the relevance of graphics education in tertiary institutions, highlighting its contributions to skill development, communication, entrepreneurship, and national development. Using literature review and conceptual analysis, the study discusses how graphics education equips students with visual communication skills, enhances creative thinking, supports digital innovation, and aligns art education with industry needs. The paper concludes that strengthening graphics education in tertiary institutions is essential for preparing students for careers in design, advertising, publishing, and the broader creative economy. Recommendations include curriculum innovation, integration of digital technologies, industry collaboration, and improved infrastructural support.

Keywords: Art Education, Graphics Education, Visual Communication, Tertiary Education, Graphic Design, Creative Skills

Introduction

Art education has long been recognized as an essential component of holistic education. It promotes creativity, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and visual communication skills among learners. In tertiary institutions, art education goes beyond basic creative expression and focuses on developing professional competencies that enable students to function effectively in the creative industries (Samira, 2024). Demystifying art education in contemporary society, Broudy (1977) in Akhogba (2018) explains the vital role of the arts in general education “Aesthetic experience is basic because it is a primary form of experience on which all cognition, judgment and action depend. It is the fundamental power of image making by the imagination. It furnishes the raw materials for concepts and ideals for creating a world of possibilities. Akhogba (2018) feels that all students can learn about art and gain confidence in their abilities to see and imagine. One significant area within visual arts education is graphics, which deals with the visual representation of ideas through images, typography, symbols, and layout. Ajayi and Luckay (2023) explain that Graphics education has become increasingly relevant in modern society due to the growth of digital communication, advertising, publishing, branding, and multimedia production. In contemporary educational systems, particularly in tertiary institutions, graphics serves as a bridge between artistic creativity and practical communication. It equips students with the ability to communicate messages visually in ways that are clear, engaging, and culturally meaningful. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, tertiary institutions play a crucial role in preparing students for careers in the creative economy. Graphics education contributes significantly to this preparation by providing skills applicable in various sectors such as advertising, digital media, printing, animation, publishing, and marketing. Despite its importance, the relevance of graphics in tertiary education is sometimes underestimated, especially in institutions where art programs face challenges such as limited resources, outdated curricula, and inadequate technological facilities.

This paper therefore examines the relevance of graphics in tertiary art education, emphasizing its role in communication, technological advancement, creative skill development, and economic empowerment.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on theories that explain the relationship between artistic skill development, entrepreneurship, marketing management, and participation in the creative economy. The framework integrates perspectives from Human Capital Theory, Creative Economy Theory, and Experiential Learning Theory to explain how graphic and artistic competencies acquired through education can translate into entrepreneurial opportunities and economic sustainability for visual artists.

i. Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory, largely associated with the work of Gary Becker, posits that education, training, and skill acquisition increase an individual's productivity and economic value (Pedro, 2014). According to this theory, investment in education leads to the development of competencies that enhance employability, innovation, and economic performance.

Within the context of this study, artistic and graphic skills acquired through art education represent forms of human capital that can be utilized in the creative industry. Skills such as visual communication, design thinking, illustration, typography, and digital design tools enhance the capacity of artists to participate in economic activities such as advertising, branding, printing, and digital media production. When these artistic competencies are complemented by entrepreneurial knowledge and marketing management strategies, visual artists are better positioned to convert their creative abilities into sustainable economic ventures. Thus, Human Capital Theory explains how the development of artistic skills contributes to the building of a functional creative economy.

ii. Creative Economy Theory

The Creative Economy provides another important theoretical foundation for this study. The concept was popularized by John Howkins, who emphasized that creativity, ideas, and intellectual capital are central drivers of economic growth in modern societies. According to Rasa (2011), the theory suggests that industries based on creativity, such as visual arts, graphic design, film, fashion, advertising, and digital media, contribute significantly to national development and employment generation. In this perspective, artistic skill development is not merely an academic pursuit but a productive resource capable of generating economic value.

Relating this theory to the present study, graphics and other visual art skills serve as the foundation for creative enterprises. Through entrepreneurship and effective marketing management, artists can transform creative ideas into products and services that meet societal and industrial needs. Therefore, Creative Economy Theory helps to explain the broader economic relevance of artistic skills and the role of entrepreneurship in converting artistic talent into viable economic activity.

iii. Experiential Learning Theory

The study is also supported by the Experiential Learning Theory, developed by David A. Kolb. Kendra (2026) explains that this theory emphasizes that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, where learners develop understanding by actively engaging in practical activities, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Art education, particularly in areas such as graphics and painting, is inherently practice-oriented. Students develop their artistic abilities through studio practice, design projects, experimentation with materials, and real-life creative tasks. These experiences help learners acquire not only technical skills but also problem-solving abilities, creativity, and innovation.

In relation to this study, experiential learning supports the development of entrepreneurial and marketing competencies among art students. Through practical exposure to design projects, exhibitions, and production processes, students learn how to apply their artistic knowledge in real-world contexts. This practical engagement encourages creativity, innovation, and business-oriented thinking, which are essential for sustaining careers within the creative economy.

The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive explanation of how artistic skills can contribute to economic sustainability within the creative sector. Human Capital Theory explains the importance of education and skill acquisition, Creative Economy Theory highlights the economic value of creativity, while Experiential Learning Theory emphasizes the practical process through which artistic competencies are developed. Together, these theoretical perspectives support the argument that effective art education, particularly in graphics and related visual arts should not only focus on aesthetic development but also incorporate entrepreneurship and marketing management principles. Such integration enables visual artists to transform their creative skills into productive enterprises, thereby contributing to the growth of the creative economy and sustainable livelihoods.

Concept of Art Education

Art education is a comprehensive pedagogical framework designed to cultivate creative potential and critical thinking through various artistic disciplines (California Learning Resource Network, 2025). It encompasses traditional art forms like painting, sculpture, and music, as well as digital art forms such as graphic design and animation. The primary aim of art education is to help students develop their creativity and aesthetic sensitivity, gain a greater knowledge and understanding of the arts and their role in society, and develop crucial cognitive abilities such as abstract reasoning and visual spatial intelligence (Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). Art education is not only about teaching students how to create art but also about helping them understand art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts.

Art education also refers to the systematic teaching and learning of artistic skills, knowledge, and appreciation within formal or informal educational settings. It involves the study of visual arts disciplines such as drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, and graphics. The goal of art education is not only to develop artistic

abilities but also to nurture creativity, imagination, and critical thinking. Dinham (2024) states that in tertiary education, art education focuses on professional training, research, and innovation in visual arts and design. Students are exposed to theoretical knowledge and practical studio experiences that prepare them for careers in the creative industry, education, and cultural preservation. Art education also contributes to societal development by encouraging cultural expression and preserving artistic heritage. Through visual representation, artists communicate ideas, values, and social issues, making art an important tool for social commentary and cultural identity.

Concept of Graphics

Graphics, often referred to as graphic design or graphic communication, is the art and practice of creating visual content to communicate information or ideas (Santori, 2024). It involves the use of elements such as typography, images, symbols, colors, and layouts to produce designs that effectively convey messages. Graphics encompasses both traditional and digital techniques. Yadav (2025), traditional graphics include printmaking, illustration, and manual layout design, while digital graphics involve computer-based tools such as digital illustration, motion graphics, and multimedia design.

The field of graphics is widely applied in various industries, including advertising, publishing, branding, web design, animation, packaging, and information design. In educational contexts, graphics serves as a medium through which students learn to combine creativity with communication and problem-solving skills.

Importance of Graphics in Tertiary Education

Graphics plays a significant role in tertiary education, particularly within art and design disciplines where visual communication is central to learning and professional practice. As a field of study, graphics equips students with the ability to translate ideas, information, and concepts into visual forms that are easily understood by diverse audiences (Maier, 2025). In higher education institutions, graphic studies expose students to principles such as typography, layout, illustration, and digital design, which are essential for effective visual communication. These competencies enable students to develop creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities that are necessary for both academic advancement and professional engagement in the creative industry.

Furthermore, the importance of graphics in tertiary education extends beyond artistic expression to include its practical relevance in contemporary technological and industrial environments. With the increasing reliance on digital media, advertising, branding, publishing, and multimedia communication, graphic skills have become indispensable in many sectors of the economy. Tertiary institutions therefore integrate graphics into their curricula to prepare students for careers in areas such as advertising, printing, animation, digital media production, and visual branding. Through exposure to modern tools and software, students acquire technical and entrepreneurial competencies that enhance their employability and capacity for self-reliance.

In addition, graphics education at the tertiary level contributes to the development of visual literacy and cultural expression within society. Students are trained to analyze and create visual messages that reflect social values, cultural identity, and contemporary issues. This process encourages innovation and creative experimentation while fostering an appreciation of design aesthetics and communication strategies. Consequently, the study of graphics in higher education not only strengthens the creative economy but also supports national development by producing skilled professionals capable of contributing meaningfully to visual communication, education, and cultural industries. The importance of Graphics and industrial-relevance in higher education are further explained as follows:

i. Development of Visual Communication Skills

One of the major contributions of graphics education is the development of visual communication skills. In an increasingly visual world, the ability to communicate ideas through images and design is highly valuable. Graphics education trains students to organize visual elements effectively to convey information clearly and attractively. Through projects involving poster design, book covers, logos, and digital illustrations, students learn how visual elements influence perception and interpretation. This skill is essential in fields such as advertising, marketing, journalism, and digital media.

ii. Enhancement of Creative Thinking

Graphics education encourages experimentation, imagination, and innovation. Students are exposed to various design challenges that require them to generate creative solutions. This process enhances problem-solving abilities and encourages flexible thinking. Creative thinking developed through graphics education is not limited to artistic practice alone; it also benefits other professional fields that require innovation and strategic communication.

iii. Integration of Technology in Art Education

Modern graphics education incorporates digital tools and software such as graphic design programs, digital illustration tools, and multimedia platforms. Artistic activities today are influenced by the new trend propelled by emerging technologies (Ajayi & Luckay, 2023). The new technologies have led to artistic innovations either by increasingly altering artistic media content or by evolving the creation of new media. These technologies enable

students to produce high-quality designs and adapt to the evolving demands of the creative industry. The integration of technology also aligns art education with contemporary professional practices, ensuring that graduates are equipped with relevant technical competencies.

iv. Preparation for the Creative Industry

Graphics education plays a significant role in preparing students for employment in the creative sector. Skills acquired through graphics training are applicable in many industries, including advertising agencies, printing firms, publishing houses, media organizations, and digital design studios. In addition, many graduates establish independent design businesses, contributing to entrepreneurship and the creative economy.

v. Contribution to Cultural Representation

Graphics also serves as a medium for cultural expression. Designers often incorporate indigenous symbols, motifs, and cultural narratives into their work, thereby promoting cultural identity and heritage. In tertiary institutions, students can explore cultural themes in their graphic designs, helping to preserve and reinterpret traditional visual languages in contemporary formats.

Graphics Education and Industrial Relevance

Graphics education plays a significant role in preparing students for participation in the creative and industrial sectors of the economy. In contemporary society, graphic design has evolved beyond traditional artistic expression to become a vital component of communication, branding, advertising, and digital media production (Maier, 2025). Industries such as advertising, publishing, printing, packaging, animation, and digital marketing rely heavily on graphic skills for effective visual communication and product promotion.

In the context of art education, graphics training equips students with practical competencies in areas such as typography, illustration, layout design, digital imaging, and visual communication strategies. These competencies are highly relevant to modern industries that depend on creative visual solutions to attract audiences and promote products and services. As a result, graphics education serves as a bridge between artistic creativity and industrial productivity. Furthermore, the integration of graphics into industrial processes supports entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities for graduates of art education programmes. Individuals trained in graphics can establish small-scale enterprises such as printing services, branding and logo design studios, advertising agencies, and digital content creation businesses. These ventures contribute to the growth of the creative economy by generating employment and fostering innovation.

Scholars in art education emphasize that aligning graphics education with industry expectations enhances the employability and entrepreneurial capacity of graduates. When tertiary institutions incorporate industry-relevant tools such as digital design software, printing technologies, and marketing-oriented design strategies into their curriculum, students are better prepared to meet the demands of contemporary creative industries (Santori, 2024). Therefore, the industrial relevance of graphics education underscores its importance in building a sustainable creative economy. By linking artistic skill development with entrepreneurial and marketing competencies, graphics education empowers students not only to produce aesthetically appealing works but also to transform their creative abilities into economically viable venture

Challenges Facing Graphics Education in Tertiary Institutions

Despite its importance, graphics education in many tertiary institutions faces several challenges. **Inadequate technological facilities is one**, as many institutions lack modern computers, design software, and printing equipment necessary for effective graphics training. **There is also the lacuna of limited funding**. Art departments often receive limited financial support, which affects the availability of materials and studio resources.

According to Samira (2024), **another challenge facing graphic education in tertiary education is outdated curriculum**. Some graphics programmes have not fully integrated modern digital practices, making it difficult for graduates to compete in the contemporary design industry. There also exists the issue of **shortage of skilled instructors**. In some institutions, there are insufficient lecturers with expertise in modern graphic design technologies. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving the quality and relevance of graphics education.

Conclusion

Graphics education plays an essential role in tertiary art education by integrating creativity with effective communication. It equips students with skills relevant to contemporary industries, fosters innovation, and contributes to cultural representation. As visual communication becomes increasingly central to modern society, the significance of graphics education continues to grow.

Strengthening graphics programs in tertiary institutions will not only enhance the quality of art education but also support the growth of the creative economy. By integrating modern technologies, updating curricula, and fostering industry collaboration, tertiary institutions can ensure that graphics education remains both relevant and impactful.

Recommendations

- i. Tertiary institutions should update graphics curricula to reflect contemporary design trends and digital technologies.
- ii. Government and educational authorities should provide adequate funding for art studios and digital design facilities.
- iii. Institutions should encourage collaboration between art departments and creative industry professionals.
- iv. Lecturers should engage in continuous professional development to keep pace with emerging design tools and techniques.
- v. Entrepreneurship training should be incorporated into graphics programs to prepare students for self-employment in the creative industry.

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