SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.675| ISI I.F. Value: 1.241| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2016 ISSN: 2455-7838(Online)
EPRA International Journal of Research and Development (IJRD)
Volume: 9 | Issue: 8 | August 2024 - Peer Reviewed Journal

UNTYING THE THREAD OF INNOVATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR NIGERIA'S TEXTILE ARTS

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra18126
DOI No: 10.36713/epra18126

ABSTRACT
Nigeria's textile arts scene is a vibrant tapestry of creativity, rich cultural heritage, and untapped potential. Textile arts is one of the solutions to the development of any nation. Despite its significance, the production faces numerous challenges that hinder innovation and growth. This article explores the obstacles and opportunities for innovation in textile arts in Nigeria, examining the current state, challenges, and prospects for future development. The study adopts multiple methods of research design such as literature review, case studies, expert interviews and discussions, observational studies to gather enough data with content analysis, and qualitative methods to analyze the data. Some challenges include lack of modernization and technology, brain drain and skills gap, lack of adequate raw materials, etc. In contrast, the ideas for innovation include, the revitalization of Adire and batik training programs and workshops, digital printing and design, etc. This will eventually lead to innovation for the nation's building helping the graduates to be self-employed and also employers of labour. Findings reveal that there are still opportunities for improvement in the sector if the right strategies are implemented.
KEYWORDS: *innovation, challenges, textile arts, prospects, textile industry.*

INTRODUCTION

The term "textile" is derived from the Latin word '*textillis'* which means 'woven fabric'. So the word "textile" encompasses materials used to make fabrics themselves. It is an art form using textile materials and fibers as its medium to produce decorative and artistic objects. It includes fiber art, knitwear, woven fabric, and embroidery, and it ranges from the representation of images and figures to abstract shapes and patterns.

Textile is very important to human sustenance and, the sociocultural and economic growth of any nation (Gompil, 2004), flourishing at both cottage and industrial levels. Even though textile industries are major employers of labor in the manufacturing sector which contribute immensely to the development of any nation (Owen, et. al. (2016; Business Day, 2016), is facing numerous challenges that have led to a decline in its contributions to foreign exchange earnings and generation of employment.

Textile arts in Nigeria such as *Adire*, *Ukara*, *Aso-oke*, *Akwete*, *Aniocha,* and Hausa weaving, embroidery, and applique (Onifade, 2018), are rich and diverse. But today, the industry is struggling to survive due to some factors causing their decline. These factors include; inadequate power supply, inconsistent government policies, smuggling of foreign textiles, and insecurity (Diogu et.al 2014; Textalks.com, 2024). Even with all the efforts to revive the sector through economic policy and monetary intervention, the industry remains hostile to the textile sector (Owen, et.al. 2016). The textile sector is fundamental to the nation's economic growth and development and also a cornerstone upon which the basis for viable industrialization is built (Murat and Yagmur (2018).

The Nigerian textile industry is a vibrant sector that has been woven into the fabric of the country's culture and heritage for centuries, ranging from the intricate patterns of *Adire* and Batik to the bold and vibrant colours of Ankara. Nigerian textiles are a testament to the creativity and ingenuity of the nation's artisans. There is a large local market in Nigeria of over 200 million, therefore making it more interesting to promote made-in-Nigeria textile goods. The textile industry in Nigeria encompasses the fabric value chain with a robust potential for development because of the readily available cotton as raw materials to be used.

Presently, the industry of Nigeria's textile arts has traditional craftsmanship and cultural significance whereby skills are passed down from one generation to the other within a specific cultural or community context to create handmade products among which is textiles. The skills are learned through, apprenticeship and mentorship. The cultural significance thus refers to meanings and traditions attached

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to these crafts within a particular culture or community which has probably a spiritual or symbolic implication. Mostly, they carry deep cultural meaning, connecting the people to their heritage and their forefathers.

Also, there is inadequate integration of new technologies, machinery, and production methods in the textile arts (Odey, et.al 2018) thereby resulting in, inefficient production processes, reduced competitiveness in the global market, and difficulties in meeting modern quality and safety standards due to some factors like limited awareness and understanding of new technologies, lack of access to funding, lack of sufficient education, among others. Most textile arts sectors are not registered nor licensed, therefore, they have limited access to government support and resources, and the growth in innovation and productivity will be limited.

In Nigeria today, most skilled workers and highly educated individuals have relocated out of Nigeria for greener pastures. Therefore, there is a loss of talent, expertise, and knowledge (Chinnah, 2018), and this results in a shortage of skilled workers in the textile sector. This also reduces Nigeria's economic growth, innovation, and productivity.

Ahmed (2017) reiterated that the lack of sufficient resources, facilities, and financial support for textile arts sectors hurts economic growth and development. For example, most textile industries that are in existence currently in Nigeria lack modern machinery and equipment to make adequate designs on the fabrics, the textile supply chain management lacks adequate transportation and logistics, and more also, there is a high cost of electricity supply, thereby making production to be difficult.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

The textile arts industry in Nigeria has a very long and rich history, but in recent years, it has faced various challenges. But better still, there are bright opportunities for its growth if the right steps are taken adequately. This will make the once vibrant industry in the years past become lively again and maintain stability. Little or less strategy has been made to revive the sector and put it back on its feet again. Records of the strategies to follow will be in the annals of Nigeria's textile arts histories which will eventually be of help to both the sector and the nation's economy at large, thereby making the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased with its vibrancy, production, and exportation. Fernando (2024) buttressed that the function of GDP is a comprehensive scorecard of a given country's economic health. This, in turn, will build entrepreneurial ideas in the hearts of every individual in Nigeria, building the spirit of innovation to become self-employed and also the employer of labour.

Also, production and sales of traditional textiles are declining due to intense competition from imported fabrics. This is leading to some other challenges facing the country in general. The few available ones have limited market access and poor distribution channels, and this is leading to high costs in production and low-profit margins. Because there is a loss of jobs and no hope of getting new ones makes majority of the skilled artisans migrate to other countries for better living and job opportunities. These and many others need to be addressed to revive and sustain the textile arts industry in Nigeria.

THE STUDY AND ITS AIM

The study is about unraveling the thread of innovation and bringing out the challenges and prospects of textile arts in Nigeria aiming at examining the current state of the textile arts industry both local and industrial. Nigeria's textiles are rich and it is woven into the heritage, and culture of Nigeria in general. The fabrics have bright colours and bold designs making the textiles to be unique in Nigeria and identifying the challenges facing the industry which include, inadequate infrastructure, funding, and technology with the objectives of exploring the prospects for innovation and growth in the industry and developing strategies for addressing the challenges and promoting sustainable development in the textile arts sector in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Textile production has played a major role in the Nigerian economy (Odey, et.al. 2018) and it has contributed immensely to the employment and growth of its economy by creating thousands and indirect jobs for Nigerians (Emeh, 2012 and Afuye, 2014), but after some time, the sector began to decline leading to the closure of the industry one after the other for various reasons.

Textile design is an applied art that centers on designing and making clothes and dresses for covering the body (Ganagana 2014; Sampson, 2016) and expressing people's identity (Onabrakpeya, 2009; Cyril-Egquare, 2013), while Chinnah, 2018, 2021) gave various classification of entrepreneurs among which is an innovative entrepreneur which introduces new goods and ideas, new technology and new methods to reorganize the enterprise for good with a certain level of economic development.

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The textile arts industry is believed to have had its problems since its inception around the 1920s when only the expatriates were taught the secrets of the techniques and technological workings and operations of the industry, keeping away the Nigerians from the rudiments and techniques of the workings (Alimi and Ahmed, 2017), thereby making the Nigerians crawl in achieving the desired goals in textile arts. All these researchers have yet to untie the threads of innovation.

METHODOLOGY

Multiple methods will be combined to validate findings, increase reliability, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This will provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of the challenges and prospects for textile arts in Nigeria, and identify strategies for untying the threads of innovation in the industry. Firstly, a comprehensive review of existing literature on textile arts and Nigeria's textile industry shall be used to identify gaps and trends. There will also be an in-depth analysis of art studios and textile art industries or companies to gain insight into innovation strategies and challenges. Unstructured interviews will be conducted with the experts in textile arts, innovation, and industry development to gather expert opinions and insights. The researcher will jot down notes while observing textile artists, designers, and industry stakeholders to gather data on textile art production, design, and innovation processes. There will be unstructured interviews and discussions with randomly selected textile artists and the textile industry about their products and marketing ideas to identify the trends and challenges while a qualitative method will be used to identify the insights from interviews and discussions conducted with the artists and industry for proper analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Untying the threads of innovation in Nigeria

Untying the threads is to disentangle the complex and intricate elements that comprise innovation that is, breaking or removing the bonds that hold the threads together, while the threads symbolize the strands that make up the fabric of innovation to create new ideas. The constraints limiting the flow of innovation and creativity need to be broken and separated to liberate the creative potential that drives innovation. In light of this, it requires a multi-faceted approach to untie the treads of innovation in Nigeria as some strategies are considered. The challenges must be addressed and an enabling environment must be created. The first is to understand the root cause of the stagnation such as funding, inadequate infrastructure, and skills gap. The use of technology in the textile industry sector will greatly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services (Udodi, 2013, Isioto, et.al, 2017). Encouragement should be given to reform policies that support innovation, entrepreneurship, and industrial development. Encouragement should be given for the use of modern machines, digital tools, e-commerce, and technology to enhance productivity (Diyaolu and Akarakiri (2018).

Fostering the culture of innovation is also paramount for industrial growth (Iwelunmor, (2020). Experimentation, risk-taking, and creativity of the textile arts be encouraged to support the development and implementation of new ideas. Innovative achievements should be recognized and celebrated, especially through awards given and funding opportunities to those who deserve it. Many are outside with a lot of good innovative achievements but yet to be recognized. These should be taken into consideration to serve as incentives to others. Both local and foreign investors need to be encouraged to support innovation and industrial growth.

Lack of reliable energy creating setbacks needs to be dealt with. Infrastructure must be developed, whereby access to reliable energy, water, and transportation networks should be improved. The implementation of these strategies will help Nigeria to untie the threads of innovation and unlock its full potential for economic growth and development, especially in Nigeria's textile arts.

There is also the need to foster a culture of continuous improvement that encourages and supports ongoing growth, development, and progress. This culture is built on the belief that there is room for improvement having it in mind that learning is a lifelong process. With this, employees' engagement and retention will be enhanced, their skills will be increased, the workforce will be more agile, creativity will be stimulated, the organization will be stronger, and long-term success and sustainability will be achieved.

Challenges of Textile Arts in Nigeria

Many factors are responsible for deterring the growth and development of the textile arts industry in Nigeria, among which are:

- *Inadequate raw materials:* Production became very low since there are low supply of raw materials to use. The major raw material needed in the textile arts industry among others is cotton (Diogu, et.al, 2014). The textile industry that could not get a ready and continuous supply of cotton will eventually close down due to a lack of raw materials. Importation of cotton from other countries then becomes too costly for the citizens to patronize. Therefore, low patronage leads to downsizing the workforce, and this also leads to unemployment.
- *Limited funding:* Textile production, be it local or industrial, is capital-intensive (Odey, et.al, 2018). Lack of securing adequate funding makes the industry suffer setbacks for smooth running. Most textile mills could not access bank loans for smooth

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running. Chinnah, 2021) buttressed this that few textile industries were given bail-out funds for operation. The fund if well utilized could be of help in their deficiency.

- *Inadequate infrastructure:* Some major infrastructure needed for the smooth running of the textile industry are good and adequate supply of electricity, water, and road access (Maiyaki, 2013). Electricity supply in Nigeria is a serious problem. There is a poor and epileptic power supply. The power sector has failed to provide adequate supply of energy to the industry. Water is also a challenge militating against the growth of the textile arts industry. Lack of electricity is affecting the water supply. Unless the power sector rises to the challenge, the problem of the textile arts industry will persist in this.
- *Insecurity:* The textile arts industry is also affected by the challenge of insecurity that has ravaged Nigeria (Eyinade et.al, 2022). No one is safe in any part of the country. Lack of security has made many workers leave their jobs, thereby leading to the closure of some plants.
- *Government policies:* Some of the government policies are not favorable to the textile industry. There was inconsistency in the government policies leading to the smuggling of textile wear into the country (Egenuka, 2022). This took place between the 1990s and 2000 when the government lifted the ban on the importation of textiles and the textile trade was fully liberalized during the regime of the then-military government led by Major General Sanni Abacha.
- As vast as the textile industry was in the early 1990s, it became sick at a time as there were crises almost everywhere in the sector. The environment became hostile to the industry, the industries were having one issue or the other, and thereby, there was closure of the industries one after the other. The workers were thrown out and became unemployed. The industry that had the largest number of employees of labor in the manufacturing sector and reducing poverty now become the sector that is critically sick and needs help lifting from the government (Inyang, 2016). This sector was a one-time giant, but now, a sleeping giant that could still wake up and become great again.
- Some of the moribund textile industries include NSF diamond Spinners, Aswani Textiles, Royal Spinners, Mayfair, Texlon, etc (Owen, et.al, 2016)Between the 1990s and early 2000, some factories closed down and workers of 100,000 were laid off (Olumide, 2015) due to unfriendly economic and political environment, smuggling and importation of textile wear among others.
- *Competition from foreign textiles:* Another major challenge faced by the Nigerian textile industry is the influx of foreign or imported textiles into the domestic market. These imported textiles most of the time have a competitive advantage over locally produced textiles (Aminu, 2018). This is making it difficult for Nigerian textile manufacturers to compete with them. This is possible due to the lower cost of production from foreign textiles, they have advanced technology and machinery making their products to be of higher quality. The quantities produced are vast making it cheaper, their government usually provides subsidies to their textile industries, thereby, it will be difficult for manufacturers in Nigeria to compete, and always attractive to consumers due to their perceived quality, design, and affordability. The competition from imported textiles has led to threats to Nigeria's cultural heritage and traditional textile industries, there is a decline in domestic textile production, in that, many of the local textile mills have closed down, leading to the loss of jobs and livelihoods.
- Lack of retraining the textile designers: The textile designers need to attend workshops, seminars or training and retraining programs in the relevant areas to be exposed to new techniques in textile designs. Many employers do not send their workers for these training programs thereby making them to be outdated in creating current designs that will catch the attention of the consumers. Onwuakpa (2023) buttressed this that since computer-aided design is very much a significant thing in this century, then, there is a need for continual updates of innovative and technical abilities by textile artists to key into the benefits of the available technologies.

Prospects of Nigeria's Textile Arts

The textile industry can generate revenue and sustain the economy of a nation. It is capable of contributing to human capacity development if the strategy is well implemented. Nigeria has a large population that could be of help to the manufacturing sector. Since there is a huge population, the consumers are readily available for the consumption of the products. The labor force, if well strategized, will make the production to be cheaper.

- *Digitalization and technology:* This refers to the integration of digital tools, systems, and platforms to transform and improve the textile arts industry in Nigeria, such as digital design and printing, e-commerce and online marketplaces, digital marketing and social media, automation and manufacturing technology, digital payment systems, online training and education, supply chain management, etc. The textile arts industry can increase productivity, and innovation, as well as reach new markets and customers.
- *Government initiatives and policy support:* The textile arts industry in Nigeria should embrace the government initiatives policy and support, though not yet successful, soon, it will revive the industry.

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- *Private sector investment and partnership:* There is a need for individuals and private organizations to collaborate with the textile industry which can equally include financial investment, joint ventures, market access, infrastructure development, etc. This involvement brings in enough capital, capability, and resources to revitalize the Nigerian textile industry and also promote economic growth and equally create job opportunities.
- *Education and skills development programs:* There should be initiatives aimed at training and retraining individuals to enhance their skills and competencies in the textile industry. The programs can include vocational training, workshops and seminars, apprenticeships, capacity buildings for artisans, online courses, internships, training programs for established professionals, etc. All these programs can improve productivity and increase innovation/
- *Cultural exchange and international collaborations:* The sharing of ideas is very important to promote cooperation, growth, and innovation in the textile industry. There should be best practices between individuals, organizations, and countries to promote mutual understanding, learning, and cooperation in the textile industry, involving international workshops and conferences, study tours and internships, international mentorship, research partnerships, etc. This can introduce new ideas and techniques, expand global market access, and also promote cultural understanding which enriches the textile industry.
- *E-commerce and online marketplaces:* Examples of online marketplaces include Jumia, Konga, Jiji Slot, PayPorte, and lots more. All these allow users to buy and sell products which can be useful for textile products for buyers and sellers at affordable prices.
- *Sustainable and eco-friendly practices:* Environmental responsibility and socially conscious methods are needed in the textile production process. The process is from sourcing raw materials to end-product disposal aiming at promoting social accountability which includes the usage of organic cotton, the usage of eco-friendly dyes and treatments, and reducing waste, pollution, and emissions through proper disposal and recycling.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's textile arts industry is poised for innovation and growth, despite the challenges. By embracing technology, education, and international collaboration, the industry can unlock its full potential. To revitalize the industry, it is essential to adopt sustainable and eco-friendly practices, invest in education and skills development, and leverage technology and innovation. Policymakers, private sector investors, and stakeholders must work together to create an enabling environment for innovation, and ensure the preservation of cultural heritage and promotion of sustainable development in Nigeria's textile arts sector. By addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities, Nigeria's textile arts industry can thrive, contributing to the country's economic growth, cultural preservation, and global recognition.

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