



Art For Mental Health and Economic Growth: Innovations and Strategies for Sustainable Well-Being

Seyi-Gbangbayau Paul Sonayon

Department of Art and Design, The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Nigeria

Author email: paul.seyi-gbangbayau@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng

Introduction

Art has long served as a medium for self-expression, reflection, and healing. In recent years, it has gained prominence not only as a therapeutic intervention for mental health but also as a driver of economic growth through the creative industry. This study investigates how art can be strategically utilised to address mental health challenges while fostering economic development. Specifically, the goal is to evaluate the psychological benefits of art therapy and analyse its capacity to generate employment and income within the creative economy.

Materials and methods

The study employed a mixed-method approach. The first phase involved an extensive literature review on the psychological impacts of art therapy, focusing on its ability to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and emotional distress. The second phase included a studio-based experimental component. A group of participants experiencing emotional challenges was engaged in structured, guided art-making sessions using various media such as drawing, painting, sculpture and digital art. Their mental health status was assessed both before and after the intervention through standardised self-reporting art tools. The scope of the study covered both the therapeutic and economic dimensions of art practice, examining its impact across mental wellness and socio-economic empowerment. This study combined practical studio sessions with theoretical research to better understand art's role in mental health and economic growth.

Results and discussion

The findings revealed a marked improvement in the participants' emotional state following their involvement in creative activities. Specifically, the results showed significant reductions in self-reported levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, as well as improvements in mood and mental clarity. Participants reported reduced anxiety and stress, improved mood, and greater self-confidence after engaging in art activities. From an economic perspective, the study observed that structured art therapy programs could serve as platforms for skills development, income generation, and community engagement. The results also pointed to an increased awareness among participants of the potential to monetise creative talents, contributing to individual empowerment and community-based economic growth. The discussion emphasises that art-based interventions are not only effective in enhancing mental well-being but are also viable tools for social entrepreneurship and job creation. This dual outcome underlines the importance of integrating creative practices into public health strategies and national development plans, particularly in underserved or vulnerable communities.

Conclusions

The study concludes that art offers a powerful, holistic approach to addressing mental health challenges while simultaneously supporting economic development. By integrating art therapy into health systems and recognizing the creative economy as a viable sector, policymakers can foster societal well-being and inclusive growth. It is recommended that governments should support art therapy as part of public mental health programs and invest in the creative economy to create jobs. Future research should explore interdisciplinary collaborations between health professionals and artists to enhance the efficacy and reach of art-based interventions.

Keywords: Art, Therapy, Mental Health, Well-Being, Creative Economy