
USE OF BEADS IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION DESIGN INDUSTRY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE SOUTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF BENUE STATE

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Abstract

This research reports on the present-day use of traditional beads in the fashion design industry with special attention on sustainable development in the Benue South senatorial district of Benue State. Conventional furnaces were used in producing beads using bellows. Beads of different qualities including modern beads used for fashion purposes were produced and appreciated by people especially women while traditional beads used particularly by the Idoma ethnic nationality in Benue South Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria, which signifies royalty were also produced. The traditional beads were highly appreciated as being of the highest quality.

Keywords: Beads; Fashion Design; Furnace

1.0 Introduction

The term African Beads refers to beads locally produced by indigenous people of the African continent as well as Trade Beads that have traveled from other parts of the world and now circulate or were recently sourced from Africa (Bowen, 1981). Together, these beads have played enormous roles in the culture, fashion, economy, and artistic expression of the African people. Today, they are cherished by collectors, jewelry makers, and everyday people who just love Wearing African beads. African tribal beads and glass beads hold a special mythical significance as well. Beads and Bead making have a long history in Africa (Ibebabuchi, 2012). Beads have been made by indigenous Africans for thousands of years. In ancient times Egyptians, Greeks, and Indians established trading bases in East Africa, and eventually, the Arabs invaded in the eighth century and established trade routes with the wealthy kingdom of Ghana in modern-day Mauritania. The Arabs brought glass beads to the Niger Delta to trade for gold and slaves. European explorers and traders began to arrive in the 15th century and this was followed by a tremendous influx of beads during the colonial period. Today, the tradition of beads continues to be is still deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, and old trade beads are still used for internal commerce (James, 2017).

The modern production of beads is in some sense a family tradition where tools and techniques are passed from one generation to the next. Bead making is a labor-intensive process and since many beads are handmade, this leads to variability in the appearance of individual beads even within a single strand (Neil, 2002). Production of beads is distributed throughout many countries on the African continent however the Hausa people of West Africa are particularly known for dominating the bead trade where they travel extensively to locate beads in villages, modify many beads, and sell them to local and foreign merchants. African Beads are made from a diverse array of materials: Some of the oldest beads were made from natural materials such as stones, and clay, plant materials such as cylinder palm nuts and bamboo stems, animal materials such as ostrich eggshells, bones such as Batik Bone bead of Kenya, buffalo horn, and marine shells such as Ghana. These materials continue to be used today, Similarly, metal beads have been made from gold, bronze, and brass, especially in West African countries such as Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon, and Senegal. Silver has also been traditionally popular in Ethiopia (Lauren, 2017).

Finally, glass bead making is also an ancient tradition in Africa where it has been practiced for at least 1000 years. The two techniques for making glass beads that dominate in Africa are Powder glass bead making and *Bida* Glass bead making. The uses of beads in Africa are as varied as the materials used to make them. Beadwork is very popular in many African nations and is integrated into many art forms including clothing such as the stand-out collars of the *Maasai* tribe, headdresses and belts, wooden sculptures, small leather amulets, and a myriad of jewellery items where beads are regarded as items of wealth, power, and 'status. Because of their long history, beads play a role in many traditional rites and ceremonies such as coming-of-age, circumcision, marriage, burial, and local festivals (Tunde, 2017).

Beadwork is an ancient craft universally practiced among the various ethnic groups of Nigeria dating back to antiquity. *Nok* culture provides evidence of the early civilization in Nigeria with some evidence of its terra cotta figurine depicting human figures, wearing what are presumably strings of stones bead, around 'their necks, wrists waist, and ankles. Many ethnic groups that make up Nigeria have a strong attachment to the use of beads as an important part of their culture.

For the *Yoruba*, beads play a very significant role in many cultural events. They are a major feature during many traditional festivals during which devotees and participants decorate

their bodies with beads of different shapes, colors, and sizes. The Yoruba-speaking people occupy the South Western and north central Nigerian states such as Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ogun, Ekiti, Kwara, part of Kogi, and Lagos. They are major tribes in Nigeria. They have a rich cultural history that dates back to Oduduwa as their earliest progenitor. The Yoruba people are very jovial and respectful. They also love partying and enjoyment generally. They are not lazy people. Their traditional system revolves around *Ooni* of Ile-Ife and *Alaafin* of Oyo which are seen as the apex custodians of Yoruba culture. Ibebabuchi (2012) mentioned that Ile-Ife red beads were also discovered during an archeological excavation. It was mentioned by the author that the beads were discovered around *Wagadougoo*, in 1909 by Leo Frobeniums, a British archeologist who called the beads, the beads of illusions. Ile-Ife for a long time has been known as a famous city of bead makers. Beads have over the centuries served more than every Yoruba-speaking community as articles of jewellery. They have been used to express political history, religious beliefs, and social status.

The Yorubas are extremely glamorous in dressing, using a lot of beads as necklaces, earrings, and bracelets sometimes, they even use it to decorate their hair. Mostly the crowns, shoes, and walking sticks of *Obas* and *Kabiesies* are decorated with expensive beads to showcase royalty. However, in recent times, beads are being used in the fashion industry to showcase fashion and wealth or something trendy among both the old and the young in this generation. In most of South West coral beads are true signs of royalty. It adorns kings and members of the royal household. Nobles in many Yoruba kingdoms distinguish themselves with beads. The beads are of different varieties and come in various shapes, sizes, and colors, In most kingdoms, any man sent a bead by the king is automatically made a chief while coral beads sent by a king or prince to a young single girl make her his betrothed and she is bound by tradition to accept them. Also in many parts, commoners and royalties do not wear the same type or shape of beads. Coral beads have a strong presence in traditional marriages in South West Nigerian cultures. It is common to see a bride's hair adorned with beads while she wears some as necklaces. In some cultures, a beaded sleeveless blouse is worn by the bride. The grooms are not left out. Most cultures provide for a single long bead necklace dropping to the upper abdomen while others allow for more. In some kingdoms of Yoruba, the bead you wear with an accompanying staff of office tells your royal status.

Beads making in modern designing and fashion remain a big challenge in Nigeria and particularly in Benue South Senatorial District where no beads-making Centre exists currently. This research addresses the urgent need for a comprehensive study of modern fashion design using beads to complement our culture and add to the Gross Domestic Product.

2.0 Materials and Methods

The furnace utilizes manually operated traditional bellows. The furnace was built on the ground and operated while, sitting on the floor, with little provision of furniture 'in the furnace area, and hence an uncomfortable sitting position has to be assumed for the duration of the process. The setup furnace will utilize manually operated traditional bellows as illustrated in Fig. 1.

2.1 Construction of the Furnace

The furnace was constructed using the header and stretcher method and the sequence starting with the base for the furnace. Refractory concrete bricks were used to build most of the furnace structure. These were made up separately and built in all the usual shapes of wooden molds. The castable refractories were made with a combination of alumina and aluminum aggregates contain by hydraulic cement and one combined with water becomes strong and

begin to set in 30 minutes. Reinforcing bars were inserted into the surface of the furnace with cast material. These were of stainless steel to prevent corrosion. However, these bars were necessary when very large areas need extra support.



Fig.1 Construction of the Furnace

2.2 Production of Beads

Silicon sand was used as the raw material in producing different types of beads locally. This silicon sand is mixed with industrial sand and defluculant and different colorant and put into the furnace with the traditional method of bellows to produce heat for meltability. These materials were sourced from the Aja-Okuta in Kogi state as raw materials.

The furnace was built on the ground and operated manually while sitting on the floor with little provision of furniture in the furnace area and hence uncomfortable sitting position has to be assured for the duration of the process the set up furnace was utilized manually operated traditional bellows as illustrated below.

When the heat produced by the help of bellows melted the materials in the furnace the smith then pour the bloom into the molded molds and allow them to cool rapidly this takes about twenty to thirty minutes. The molds were constructed on a wooden watered structure with some strings at the Centre which produce holes when cast.

3.0 Result and Discussions

Figures 2 (a), (b), and (c) present the different kinds of quality beads produced in this research. Figure 2 (a) shows the modern beads used for fashion purposes while Fig 2 (b) and (c) show traditional beads used particularly by the Idoma ethnic nationality in Benue South Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria.

Quality beads were produced to standard. The beads signifies royalty and distinguished a royal father from his subjects as affirmed by Oba Adekunle Oyelude, he also noted that traditional and honorary chieftaincy title holders wear beads also as a sign of their status, bead was more used by monarchs. Every Nigerian son and daughter home and abroad know that apart, from the crown and horsetail, beads are another important element of traditional rulers. It is a mark that one occupies a higher traditional position. It separates the king from his subjects. Apart from the king, the prince and princess also have the right to wear, beads,' especially on their wrists to serve the same purpose of identification. According to findings by Nigerian Tribune, September 2017, beads are grouped into different categories according

to their quality. *Iyun* is said to be the choicest and most expensive of all the categories. This submission can be found in the Yoruba axiom which asserts: *Iyun* is described as the father of all beads. *Iyun* is deposited in the basement of the river before extraction. Digging for *Iyun* is said to be comparable to the search for gold. After it is successfully extracted, work then shifts to polishing it to reveal its colors of wine and red.



Fig 2. Produced Beads Designs

Conclusions

Traditional furnaces were used in producing beads using bellows. Different quality beads were produced. Modern beads used for fashion purposes were produced and appreciated by people around, especially women while traditional beads used particularly by the Idoma ethnic nationality in Benue South Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria, which signifies royalty were also produced. The traditional beads were highly appreciated as being of the highest quality.

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