

Tapestry as an Entrepreneurship Venture for Niger-Delta Youths

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Abstract

Tapestry is one of the traditional weaving in most European countries. The technique is learnt and used to create interior decorations for homes, offices and religious temples or mosques (religious themes). The skill is still used in the present days although it is not as popular as decorative prints, batiks and tie-dye which every Tom, Dick and Harry can engage in. This paper examines tapestry as a viable tool for entrepreneurship if the skill and techniques are learnt. It is a profit oriented business, if the youths of Niger – Delta can be persuaded to learn the method of production. Their restless, youthful exuberance and other social ills of armed robberies, kidnapping and rape will surely be reduced to minimum. Materials needed are listed, the different knotting techniques and the characteristic inherent in tapestries are analysed. It is noted that any interested individual can excel in the tapestry enterprise. You must not be an artist before you can engage in the business. With hardwork, determination and patience, the individual will always make money enough for all his/her financial expenses or obligations to make life meaningful or worth living.

Keywords: Tapestry, Entrepreneurship, Rya knot, Warp, Weft, Cartoon.

1. Introduction

Tapestry weaving is a form of specialized weaver-controlled weaves that are created through the direct intervention of the weaver. It is also known as finger weaves because; at any given time the sheds or a portion of the shed is opened with the finger to weave forth and backward depending on the design. A particular colour area may be woven to a height on the warp at the right-hand side and later taken to the left-hand side to start another colour area. It does not allow the conventional manner of raising the harnesses of general looms, whereby all the warps in a harness are raised and lowered at the same time, thereby weaving or interlacing the warp yarns from selvedge to selvedge. According to wikipedia, free encyclopedia (2011), Tapestry (disambiguation) is a form of textile art in which the weft yarns are typically discontinuous; the artisan interlaces each coloured weft back and forth in its own pattern area. It is a plain weft-faced weave having the weft threads of different colours worked over portions of the warp to form the design. The free encyclopedia also states that Tapestry derives from old French *papissierie* from *Tapisser* meaning “to cover with heavy fabric, to carpet” in turn from *Tapis*, heavy fabric.

We were also informed by wikipedia, free encyclopedia (2011) Campbell (2007), Russell (2007), Held (1972) and Orman (1952) that kings and noblemen could roll up and transport tapestries from one residence to another. Tapestries were used in churches on special occasions. They were also draped on the walls of castles for insulation during winter, as well as for decorative display.

However, tapestries were used at least in Hellenistic times. Some samples of Greek Tapestries have been found preserved in the desert of Tarin Basin dating from the 3rd century BC. By the 16th century, the towns of Oudenaarde, Brussels, Geraardsbergen and Enghein had become the centre of European Tapestry production. However, Tapestries are still made at the factory of Gobelins and a few other older European workshops which also repair and restore old Tapestries. Most of the tapestries were made of wool, cotton, silk and rayon.

In the 19th century William Morris in London resurrected the art of tapestry-making in the medieval style at Merton Abbey. Morris and Co. made successful series of tapestries for home and ecclesiastical uses with figures based on cartoons by Edward Burne Jones.

In the 20th century the art of tapestry has enjoyed an exciting renaissance. This is traceable to the work of Jean Lurcat, a painter and designer who is credited with reviving the old Aubusson manufactory in France. According to Held (1972: 175) the titles of Lurcat’s major tapestries, *Liberty*, *man*, the *Apocalypse* – evolve the grandeur of their 17th and 18th century ancestors, but the forms are bold, fresh and inventive. Held further stated that all three of the great 17th century French tapestry works – Aubusson, Gobelins, and Beauvais – are still in operation. Campbell (2007: n.p) also states that the *Apocalypse* tapestry is the longest tapestry in the world.

The skillful acquisition of tapestry knowledge is enough for any business minded individual to venture into for profit-making purpose; which is also risk taking. Many authors or writers have defined an entrepreneur in diverse ways. However, Diakparomre (2009: 248) Allen (1991: 392) opine that an entrepreneur is a businessman who organizes or undertakes labour, capital and production materials for the purpose of making profit. While Frank H. and Knight (1967) and Peter Drucker (1970) believe that entrepreneurship is about taking risk, spending much time as well as capital on an uncertain venture. There is an adage that says “No venture, no success” so people should take bold steps to open up their minds for business so that we are not cut up in the web

of penury.

The objective of this paper is to examine skillful knowledge as a tool for entrepreneurship.

- To give a step-by-step production process of the skill.
- To identify materials used and their challenges.
- To discuss their usefulness in our society.

This paper intends to educate textile practitioners and textile studio artists who are not conversant with tapestry techniques and methods. It has been observed by the researcher that tapestry skills are not taught in most art schools because of the lack of knowledge. Hence most homes, offices, hotels and many tourist places in Nigeria do not have Tapestry woven fabrics for their interior wall decorations. Instead their decorative items are mainly sculpture pieces and paintings. It is not out of place, to bring into limelight the usefulness of this textile sculpture to Niger Delta youths so that they can exert their time and energy on projects for financial gains.

The individual must not be a textile designer before he/she can acquire the skill of tapestry production. But perhaps, the entrepreneur, as usual, must have some level of creativity and innovativeness. This helps him/her to excel within a short period of time. Where the individual does not have knowledge of drawing, he/she should learn it to a reasonable extent during the apprenticeship training before embarking on tapestry work. But where he or she cannot, then the option is to give or describe his/her idea or design to a painter, who will paint the design out in colours for the weaver to weave. After all, the ancient tapestry weavers got their designs from painters. The design is regarded as the cartoon for the weaving.

2. Characteristics of a Tapestry Weaving

- A tapestry work must be started with plain weave, in which other weaves are built.
- It must have open-slits which allow for straightness of the selvages. Open-slit is a technique used in tapestry to open-up some areas in the woven work. It gives it strength so that the fabric will not sag or cave-in as the woven work is normally heavy.
- It should have vertical or diagonal interlocking to form shapes of different colour areas.
- It must be finished with fanciful frills e.g. macramé knots, addition of colourful beads or other manipulated decorative process or should be well framed.

3. Material Needed for Tapestry

- Frame loom, paper and pencil (for cartoon), various coloured yarns, big tapestry needle, comb (wide toothed or traditional wooden) and a scissor. The verander of a house is enough space to start a tapestry work.

4. Procedure for Weaving

- Draw your design on paper. It is advisable for beginners to draw their designs according to the actual size of the tapestry. It is also necessary to start with a small project with a simple design. However small cartoons can be enlarged to the size of the actual design.



Fig 1: A cartoon

- You nail $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart at the top and bottom of the horizontal beams of the loom. Then warp the loom with a strong, taut cotton twine, starting from the left hand side to the right, moving from up to bottom vertically as shown below (Fig. 2). Make sure the warping is not too close or too open.



Fig 2: Frame loom

- Place your cartoon behind the loom, so that the individual can see through to create the pattern required. Actually, some designers, like the author of this paper, prefer to draw the cartoon on the warp yarns using permanent marker. With your weft yarn on your hand or needle (with weft yarn) start weaving using the plain weave technique.



Fig 3: Beginning to weave with traced-out cartoon on the warp yarns.

- Weave your plain weave over one and under one warp yarn or over two and under two warps yarns, turning the weft thread around the warp when you need to go back the other way.
- Finish all the area of a particular colour before changing the colour to another one. Each colour area may be interlocked either diagonally or vertically depending on the design.
- The diagonal lines are woven by decreasing or increasing the number of warp threads you include in each row. For example a pyramid that has seven warp threads at the base, will drop two warp threads off either side every couple of rows, so it will include five warp threads, then three and then one at the point of the pyramid.
- In every complete row, the weaver should beat down the weft threads using the wide toothed comb.
- Continue to weave and beat the weft yarns into the woven area of the fabric in an alternate manner of one under and one over pattern until the whole design is created.
- For three dimensionality of a tapestry work, tufting or Rya knotting must be used. Accordingly, the strands of cotton, wool or raffia are cut to the required sizes. Two warp yarns are involved in the formation of a tuft. The weft yarns are held on both hands with the use of the thumbs and the second

fingers. The right hand weft yarn is passed on top and under the warp yarn on its side, while the left hand with the weft yarn passes its own, on top and under the warp yarn on its side (Fig 4).



Fig 4: Rya-knot held on both hands, passing weft yarn on top and under the warp yarns.

The two ends are held together by the right hand and pulled tightly, making a knot (Fig 5).



Fig 5: The rya-knot is created by pulling the two ends very tight.

Two warp yarns are continuously used until the area is completed and pushed to the fell of the fabric (Fig 6).



Fig 6: The knot is pushed down to the fell of the fabric to meet the others already fixed.

On the next roll, one warp yarn is picked from the first knot and the second warp yarn is picked from the second knot to create another Rya knot technique. You may have a hidden lace-netting effect at the background in the formation of the raised surface. Occasionally, the weaver uses plain weave to bind the knotting technique. The weft yarns are taken and knotted continuously until the area of the pattern is covered just like the weaver below.



Fig 7(a) and (b): The weaver creating the rya knot technique

4. Materials Used for Tapestry Weaving

Materials used for tapestry are the same with other types of woven fabrics. Different types of coloured yarns of wool, cotton, rayon, jute and raffia are used to create different designs in tapestry. Canes, twines, ropes and other stiffeners are used for embellishment and creation of different environmental projections in them. For example, the art work titled “The titlemen” (Fig 9) is composed of wool yarns which are used to create the face of the man in front. The plain weave technique is manipulated to create the features of the face while the Rya knot is used to create the title caps and the fish is installed into the main work. In creation of the fish a fabric was cut into a fish shape painted and stuffed with foam to formulate a three dimensional form. The roots of the trees in a riverine environment were formulated with canes and with raffia strands used in plaiting the canes to give it spiral and tendril structure.



Fig 10: The Title men

The tapestry work below (Fig 11) is titled “Ancestral Conference” and it is based on the ugly situation Nigerians found themselves in 1996 when General Sani Abacha, a dictator, was strangulating the whole system in Nigeria. The whole system was in chaos, which called for many conferences, symposia and discussions in and out of the country. It is also believed by the artist that our ancestors were worried about the situation of the living hence the “conference” as projected by the tapestry work. It should be noted that most tapestries give information about our historical, political, cultural, social and religious activities of the past, present and future of the people’s way of life.



Fig 11: Ancestral conference

The usefulness of tapestries cannot be overlooked because they play the same role as paintings and sculpture pieces. Most tapestry works are for interior decorations of homes, offices, hotels, schools and even tourist places depending on the environment. Tapestries can also be used to decorate churches and mosques if such themes are religious incline.

The weaver working on the tapestry titled "freedom, are you really free?" Takes weaving as a hobby and has more interest in tapestry because of the financial gains derived from it. It is noteworthy to say that Miss Osaso Azino Ibagere has just completed her master postgraduate programme in Physical and Health Education at the University of Port Harcourt, River State. She is not an artist but an individual that has interest on indigenous hand crafted production of functional objects or materials. She developed more interest because she saw the financial benefits derived from tapestry works by the writer of this paper. She produces works ranging from small to medium tapestries. For example the small size of her works between 35cm to 50cm with an interesting traditional theme sells for about ₦30,000 which she can easily produce within one to two weeks. The medium size of her tapestry of about 54cm to 74cm sell for about ₦100,000 to ₦150,000 depending on the philosophical ideology of the design. Her involvement in tapestry weaving has helped to solve her financial problem, especially in payment of her school fees and other financial obligations. The finished artwork is trimmed, framed and presented below as Fig 12.



Fig 12: Title: Freedom, are you really free?

It is obvious therefore that any youth, male or female who is interested on psycho-motor skills can excel in tapestry weaving. With determination, hardwork and patience, tapestry knowledge will fetch the individual enough financial upliftment in the tapestry enterprise.

In conclusion, this paper has examined fully the history of tapestry from pre-historic to the present date. It has discussed in detail the step-by-step processes of the production of different tapestry works and some of the features necessary for its production to give an effective aesthetic appeal. The materials used are discussed, while some of the works are interpreted and analysed. However with the knowledge of tapestry production by the youths of Niger-Delta, majority of them would be entrepreneurs of different tapestry businesses and kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitutions and other social ailments causing pains, hatred and disaster to the environment and the people would be limited. Tapestry business is a good job opportunity for the youths of Niger- Delta using the African motifs to project and promote our cultural heritage.

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Biography

Dr Oghale Omojuwonvie Okpu hails from Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. She is a prolific and creative textile designer and a weaver since 1983. An Art Historian and Art critic since 2006. She is presently a senior lecturer and a former Head of Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria 2006/2007 academic session. She attended Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi and had O.N.D Fine Art 1977, she obtained B.A. Hons degree (First Class (Hons) in Fine and Industrial Arts, University of Benin 1983, MFA degree in textile in 1992 from University of Nigeria, Nsukka and finally had a Ph.D degree in Art History in 2006 from Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. She has many group exhibitions and paper publications to her credit. She is married with two children.

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