

## Techniques of Pottery Production in Kenyan Prisons

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to assess techniques of pottery production used by inmates in Kenyan prisons. Pottery techniques used in Kenyan prisons lack standardization. Descriptive research design guided the study. The study areas were Lang'ata and Kisii women prisons with a population of 30 inmates. Saturated sampling technique was used to pick all the 30 inmates who engaged in pottery. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings indicated that coiling technique was the most used. The findings found out that inmate potters with post-secondary education could apply more than one technique in their pottery work unlike other inmate potters. Thus, the findings show that education increases inmate potters' ability to apply various techniques. The study recommended the use of modern technology and expose inmates to more integrated techniques of pottery production.

**Keywords:** Pottery, Techniques, Education, Production, Inmates

### INTRODUCTION

A study by Court (2017) on pathways to path maker in United Kingdom revealed that Odondo's best known vessels are hand-built, using coiling technique and many of the vessels she creates are reminiscent of human form. Lindahl and Pikirayi (2010) emphasizes that from the potters' point of view change towards pulling technique as opposed to coiling technique in pots discovered at Zvongom be in South Africa has advantages such as the use of less clay to make a pot, which minimizes the work of digging and transport. The above studies were not done in Kenya as is the case with the current study. Lindahl and Pikirayi's study concentrated on coiling and throwing techniques only while Court's study looked at coil technique only, unlike the current study that covered various techniques of pottery production. Forming techniques used in pottery production in prisons in Kenya was an issue this paper looked into.

### Statement of the Problem

In spite of creative expressions that pottery offers and the technological advancement in pottery production in most parts of the world, literature on pottery in prisons in Kenya is notably scarce. Techniques in pottery produced in Kenyan prisons are inefficient and lack diversification. It is upon these that the researcher was inspired to investigate techniques

of pottery production among inmates in Kenya.

### Research Question

Which pottery techniques are used in pottery production among inmates in prisons in Kenya?

### Objective of the Study

Establish the techniques used in pottery production among inmates in prisons in Kenya.

The study was done only in prisons that engage in pottery. Kenya has 118 prisons out of which 18 are women prisons (Kenya Prisons Report, 2017). Out of the 18 women prison only 3 engage in pottery. Kakamega, Lang'ata and Kisii. Kakamega was used for piloting because it had the least number of inmate potters.

This study was guided by Vygotsky's Art and Creativity Theory as informed by Lindqvist (2003). The major tenet of this theory is that creativity is the foundation of art and it helps people advance within society by releasing aspects that are not expressed in everyday life. Vygotsky regarded the psychology of art as a theory of the social techniques of emotion. His analysis reflects the artistic process. When the artist creates his art, he gives realistic material an aesthetic form, which touches upon the emotions of the readers and makes them interpret the work of art and bring it to life by using their imagination. An artist works with forms and techniques that have been developed

historically and “turned into” art. The connection between art and life is a complex one, essentially, the aesthetic emotion, brought about by art, creates new and complex actions depending on the aesthetic form of the work of art. Vygotsky concluded at an early stage in his book *Psychology of art* that our consciousness is the unit which links emotion with meaning. Art is the antithesis of everyday life and the opposite of morality. Art releases aspects that are not expressed in everyday life, and it is important tool in the struggle for human existence. Vygotsky developed his view on the creative consciousness process, the relation between emotion and thought and the role of imagination. He discussed the issues of reproduction and creativity as two aspects that relate to the entire scope of human activity. Vygotsky claimed that all human beings, even small children, are creative and that creativity is the foundation of art as well as for science and technology. The creative ability called imagination is the basis of every creative action: “It manifests itself in all aspects of our cultural life, making scientific and technical creativity possible”. Reproduction on the other hand, means that people repeat certain behavioral patterns that were created and shaped much earlier such as found in art. Creativity is essential to the existence of humanity and society and it is not only a question of artistic creativity, but also something that is necessary for the process of consciousness.

This theory has important implications for art in prison and may help further goals of art and creativity. The theory was used in this study to show how pottery offers a fertile ground in fostering creativity among inmates. The theory was applied in the study by using pottery as a trigger to inmates’ creative potentials, allowing flow and realization of their creative ability and thus enhancing positive self-esteem. Art and creativity in this study is understood in terms of abilities that are involved in creative expression in production of artistic pottery work.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Geronimo (2018) study carried out among different communities in Philippines indicated that the potters who had formed an identity of being patient learned the process of forming technique through simultaneous watching and careful observation, hence they retained fundamental steps and tools to honor the heritage that was given to them. The current study done in prison specifically looked at

various techniques of forming in pottery production unlike Geronimo’s study.

Arthur (2013) posits that pottery production is a learned skill transmitted to the select group of Gamo girls and women in the caste group. Girls raised within the potter household begin to learn how to produce pottery when they are 6-13 years old. The learning process starts with informal instruction, which usually last for three years or until the daughter is married. Similarly, Kaneko (2013) observed that potters start shaping clay into pot form in front of their daughters, and pass it to them. The girls then continue from where their mothers stopped and make pots by themselves using specific hands and fingers movement patterns similar to that of their mothers. In the above studies, the mothers guide the daughters on pottery making at different stages. In the current study, inmates were taught pottery making by illustrators in a confined prison set up.

The male potters of Isukha potters who are well conversant with the work at the potter’s wheel are more often than not unfamiliar with hand molding techniques (Langenkamp, 2000). Langenkamp’s study was carried out among different pottery groups while the present study focused on prisons. The present study looked at how inmates use pottery techniques to creatively produce works that would assist them not only in prison but also once released back to society.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive research design and the target population comprised 30 inmate potters as respondents. The researcher purposively selected Lang’ata and Kisii prisons since these facilities engage in pottery production. Purposive sampling was used to select 30 inmate potters. Data collection instruments used were; questionnaire and observation checklist. Reliability of the instruments was determined through a pilot study and validity was conducted through a panel of experts who assisted in validation of the questionnaire.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Quantitative method of analysis was employed in the study. The method helped to determine the appropriate percentages that were used in data analysis. It also provided figures for specific information.

Data presentation was done in form of tables, figures and frequency distribution. The objective sought to find out the pottery techniques used in

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prisons in Kenya. The study looked at pottery techniques that were used in order of preference.

The study looked at pottery techniques inmate potters preferred to use.

**Table1.** Pottery techniques inmates' preferred in production

Pottery Technique N=64	f	%
Pinch	9	34.6
Coil	21	80.8
Slab	6	23.1
Ball	8	30.8
Molding	20	76.9
Throwing	0	00.0

From the findings in Table 1, majority of the inmate potters 21 (80.8%) indicated that they preferred coil technique. Similarly, 20 (76.9%) of the inmates indicated that they prefer in molding technique. The other techniques were preferred by few inmates with only six (23.1%) inmate potters indicating that they preferred slab technique, eight (30.8%) indicated that they preferred ball while nine (34.6%) indicated that they preferred pinch technique. The fact that majority of inmates preferred coil and molding techniques to the other alternatives shows they are the most popularly used. The findings concur with Court (2017) who found out that Odundo's best known vessels which are elegant with aesthetic appeal are hand-built, using coiling technique-a practice thousands of years

old and found worldwide. A similar view is supported by Adebowale (2014) who remarked that coil is one of the most widespread traditional pottery building techniques still used in traditional cultures and was widely used by earliest potters. Throwing technique was least preferred, this could be attributed to lack of wheels in Kisii prison had no wheels and dilapidated wheels at Lang'ata prison as revealed in the figure 1 below, a the factor that may have contributed to throwing technique being least preferred. It can be concluded that coil technique is the most practiced technique among potters all over the world.



**Figure1.** The Dilapidated Pottery Wheel in Lang'ata Prison

The study further sought to find out the number of techniques inmates could apply based on age.

**Table2.** Number of Techniques that Inmates could apply based on Age

Age	18 - 29 years		30 - 49 years		50 - 59 years		Total	
Number of Techniques	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0	0.00
1	2	28.57	2	14.30	5	83.30	9	33.30
2	2	28.57	1	7.10	1	16.70	4	14.80
3	3	42.86	5	35.70	0	0.00	8	29.70
4	0	0.00	6	42.90	0	0.00	6	22.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The findings from Table 11 reveals that majority of the potter inmates aged between 18-29 years could only apply 1 or 2 techniques four (57.1%) with the other three (42.9%) being able to apply only 3 techniques. Similarly, majority of inmates aged 50-59 years five (83.3%) could only apply 1 technique with the other one (16.7%) able to apply 2 techniques. However, the inmate potters who could apply more techniques were aged 30-49 years where majority six (42.9%) could apply 4 techniques while another five (35.7%) could apply 3 techniques with only two (14.3%) being able to apply 1 technique. This shows that older and younger inmates experienced difficulty in

applying more techniques while those in the active age of 30-49 years were capable of applying many techniques in pottery work.

The findings agree with Arthur (2013) who posits that pottery production is a learned skill transmitted to the select group. The learning process starts with informal instruction, which usually last for three years or until the daughter is married. A further view shared by Majuk, Erim, Ajor (2010) who opines that indigenous pottery as a domestic art has for many years been a preserve of the elderly. On the other hand, Jaseera (2017) puts across the argument that there is no specific age to learn pottery.

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This was not the case in prisons where the older inmates were not able to apply more than one technique and they were not the most active in pottery production. Therefore the long lengths of incarceration was serving its intended purpose as the results showed that those who have been in prison for long period were better equipped with several techniques. It can be concluded that education and more duration of

time is prerequisite in learning and perfecting forming techniques of pottery production, also that confinement affects production as one advance in age.

The researcher also sought to establish whether level of education of inmate potters had a bearing on their uptake of pottery techniques. The findings were cross tabulated and presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Number of Techniques that Inmate can apply in relation to level of Education

Education Level Number of Techniques	Post-secondary		Secondary		Primary		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	0	0	3	27.3	5	45.5	8	29.6
2	1	20	3	27.3	2	18.2	6	22.2
3	1	20	4	36.4	3	27.3	8	29.6
4	3	60	1	9.1	1	9.1	5	18.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

From the findings, inmate potters with post-secondary education as their highest level of education could apply more than 1 technique in their pottery work. Specifically, 1(20%) of the inmates could apply 2 techniques, another 20% could apply 3 techniques while 3(60%) of inmate potters with post-secondary education could apply 4 techniques. However, majority of inmate potters with primary education five (45.5%) could only apply 1 technique well with another two (18.2%) only able to apply 2 techniques. Similarly, majority of inmate potters with secondary education six (54.5%) could cumulatively apply only 1 or 2 techniques in their pottery work. Thus, the findings show that education differentiates potters' ability to apply various techniques. The observation is shared by Edusah (2011) who posits that indigenous pottery industry over the years has engaged the hands of women, mostly illiterates, who acquired the skills by learning from their parents. It can be concluded that education contributes to skills acquisition. The various processes in forming technique require time for mastery of skills.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for the promotion of traditional pottery production techniques using modern technology for sustainability of pottery making in prisons. The study found out that inmates those in the active age of 30-49 years were capable of applying many techniques in their pottery work. Therefore there is need to utilize inmates' creative potentials and energy in pottery production since majority of inmates falls under this age group when they are most productive. In terms of education, inmates with post-secondary education had less difficulty

engaging in techniques of pottery production. This suggests that education increases inmate potters' ability to apply various techniques. The study recommends increase in productivity, efficiency and modernization of techniques of production to meet modern demand.

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