

## THE CHALLENGES OF ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper discusses the problem of architectural education in Nigeria and traces it to the lukewarm attitude of the professional body and the perverting influences of the colonial curriculum thus making the teaching and practice of architecture highly unfocused and mechanical. It argues that the indigenous curriculum that emphasizes social, spiritual and moral values was not stressed. The paper observed that there is a missing ingredient in the education of architects to make them relevant to the present economic reality. To close this gap, the paper suggested an early diversification of the curriculum to reposition the graduate architect to regain his prime position in the building industry.*

### INTRODUCTION

Architectural education in Nigeria and the problem bedeviling it has been discussed at various fora and documented in many literatures. However, the focus and concern of those involved appear to be lob sided both in intent and purpose. A number of contributions by practitioners, architects educators, the professional body, and the press seem to have concentrated on the general objectives of the educational programme in Nigeria as stipulated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> national Development plan of 1975, which provide a general framework within which Architectural education in Nigeria is focused. This framework provided among others:

- i. Reforming the content of general education to make it responsive to the socio-economic needs of the country.
- ii. Consolidating and developing the nation's system of higher education in response to the economic manpower needs.
- iii. Rationalizing the financing of education with a view to making the educational system more adequate and efficient.
- iv. Making an impact in the area of technological education so as to meet the growing needs of the economy.

These frameworks also stress the importance of research opportunities appropriate to the development of national resources and technological skills in meeting emerging national demands. The training of an Architect is a rigorous process that equips the graduate with several skills and abilities that are very useful in many facets of life. These abilities can therefore be creatively deployed effectively to resolve situations that may confront the profession either individually or collectively. It is also in this vein that the national Universities Commission (NUC) published the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in July 1989 from which the curriculum contents and specific courses of schools of architecture in Nigeria are selected. There over a hundred different course titles from which each school of Architecture draws its programmes. The courses according to Olotuah (2002) are categorized into seven modules as follows:

- Architectural Design
- Arts and Drawing
- Historical and Theoretical studies
- Building Systems Technology
- Humanities and social Studies
- Environmental Control System
- Physical Sciences.

Within the general framework provided by the Nigerian National Universities Commission, major shifts have to be made towards emphasizing courses in humanities and social studies, historical and theoretical studies. While the professional body, the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA) agrees with MAS in principle, it vehemently opposes the abolition of the existing two-tier structure over a six-year period of architectural education by NUC with greater emphasis on Architectural design than other modules. Architectural education in Nigeria was designed to meet the challenges of modern architecture, which has shifted from its historical foundation of mere design of buildings to other economic and social problems of

urban and rural settlements. The present educational system for training Architects is plagued with an epidemic of gross impracticability. A relevant curricular for the training of architects must be clearly tailored on the ideas they must espouse, the competence they must possess, the professional qualifications they must bring to the task of performing all or most of the diverse activities necessary for the design and creation of the buildings and their environment is the object of this paper.

### ISSUES AND PROBLEMS OR ARCHITECTURAL CURRICULUM

Curriculum development is an absent of educational research at the macro level and is pivotal to other educational researches of the society. Education has been defined as the "free expression and transmission of the philosophy, culture and aspirations of a democratic society. It is the ever-changing complex system of ideas, precepts, concepts, processes and skills by which a society is established, conserved and furthered" (Agbebi, 1984). Education is responsible for the prevailing cultural, sociological, political and economic circumstances and influences in the society and can in turn be used to dictate the directions of these factors in the society. Before the present posture of relating education to productive work was conceived in Nigeria, the educational system did not take into account socio-cultural values. Instead, political and socio-economic interests were the major considerations. The school curriculum had little or no pastoral relationship to the society and the world of work a situation that led to "curriculum induced" aggression of the youths and the general malaise that was characterized by distaste and disrespect for manual work, local crafts and work in the industries. The youths were alienated from the environment with low level of creativity. A close analysis of the set up of schools reveals that the ghost of the colonial system still lingers and influences the architectural curriculum in our schools (Umenne, 1996). Also, most of the planning and curriculum designers in architectural schools were foreign educated trying to balance their works with experiences here in Nigeria. Architectural education in Nigeria is believed to be at a credibility crossroad. The students nowadays come to the university not to learn how to design but why to design and to find out whether or not Architecture can help resolve the problems and conflicts in contemporary society. Professional schools of Architecture assist students to know architecture, to develop necessary understanding and awareness and appreciate responsibilities related to public health, safety and welfare. It helps one to develop an intuitive spirit in building activities and makes one technically empowered to compose a convenient form that is objectively related to a given site and in the process sustain oneself economically. The economic environment therefore breeds academically sound but unproductive professionals because there is no immediate and actual application of the scientific and economic theories they learn in school. The present academic programme has not been life related as we have been made to believe. Or how do you appraise a situation of a graduate-architect who has been in school for over 20 years only to discover that he has learnt nothing about career or life and one third of his useful life gone. What has school done to him?

- a. It has taken him through the studios without a skill
- b. It has loaded him with knowledge without empowerment
- c. It has bored him with figures but without a future
- d. It has wearied him with points instead of facts.

Therefore Architectural curriculum should be designed to make every student become intelligently conscious of his environment and to know how to maximize his existence. The curriculum contents of most undergraduate schools of Architecture are structured to accommodate two compulsory long vacations for internship or student industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) of twelve (12) weeks each in the second and third year of study (depending on the university) and financed by Industrial training Fund (ITF) to enable students relate theory with practice. The aim of this exercise has been defeated, as some universities have restructured the programme to a single tier of six months to commence at the end of first semester of third year of study. By implication, students in their third year of study spend only one semester instead of two, thus reducing the minimum number of semesters meant to be spent on the Bachelor's degree programme and design studio. Architecture is studio based, implying that more than 40% of the required credits for the degrees are earned in the studio. This is informed by the centrality of the design studio to the entire architectural educational programme. The design studio is the hub and nucleus of the programme since all learning in architecture are geared towards imparting into students skills they require in proffering solutions to the problem of the built environment. This reduction in the number of studio hours clearly indicates that students will be half-baked and will not be prepared to face the reality and challenges of the profession in practice. The professional body of the profession should not fold its hands and watch this pervasive manipulation of the curriculum by the local coordinators of SIWES as this is detrimental to both the training of students and the practice of the profession. A reversal to status quo ante is most desirable at this time.

### THE TENETS OF THE INDIGENOUS CURRICULUM

Before the advent of foreign culture in Nigeria, there was no formal education. This was because the traditional social set up was such that the whole environment and all the activities in it were organized such that all adults were expected to be teachers. Today, with the country still predominantly rural and 52% of the population still illiterate, the system of informal education still lingers on in varying proportion in different areas. The relevance of the indigenous curriculum of Nigeria was stressed when Dabo (1990) made reference to this form of education. He said, "Traditional Nigerian education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, spiritual and moral values". The (informal) indigenous curriculum is designed for immediate induction into the society and preparation for adulthood. This shows that the indigenous is most relevant to the social, political, economic and cultural needs of the traditional society. As the society becomes more complex as a result of science and technology, it becomes pertinent to fashion out appropriate methods of transmission of our cultural values to the people. It is also in this light that formal foreign educational system should not be totally rejected but reconciled with our indigenous curriculum to bridge the gap already created by the present day national needs (Umenne, 1996). The colonialist who structured the curriculum to suit their narrow objectives of reading, writing and arithmetic introduced western education in Nigeria. The educational system did not take into consideration socio-cultural values, instead economic and political interests were the factors considered. The major educational achievement of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> National development plans (1962-1968, 1970-1974 and 1975-1980) was the realization and definition of the type of education basic to the Nigerian society which will wipe out illiteracy, poverty and diseases and make people recognize and realize the fundamental human rights, the equal opportunities for the steady development of individuals and the nation. The dynamic nature of the society has made these achievements irrelevant hence we need to emphasize the positive tenets of the indigenous curriculum that can meet our present and future needs.

### PROSPECTS FOR ARCHITECTURAL GROWTH IN NIGERIA

The growth of Architectural education in Nigeria in its fifty years of existence has witnessed the development of various ideas and philosophies by the different schools of architecture in their efforts to make architectural education deeply rooted in our educational system to meet our changing societal needs. However, as the society becomes more complex as a result of science and technology, it becomes necessary to review existing programmes and evolve modern methods of addressing architectural problems in our society whose nature and scope is widening day by day. Consequent upon this, the statutory regulatory body, the Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) in 1999 stresses the educational objectives for the development of school curricula, which are:

- i. To enlarge the scope of the training of architects without losing the focus of traditional roles of architects.
- ii. To encourage flexibility in curriculum development which can account for short and long term changes in the societal goals.
- iii. To encourage sub-professionals to aspire to professional status.
- iv. To keep architects abreast of development in architecture all through their career.

Strategic educational initiatives like this is not only timely but appropriate because the complacency shown by the professional body has led to a situation in which allied professions have seized the initiative to attempt a redefinition of the industry to the detriment of the architect. The dissolving professional boundaries, the challenge of competition in a global economy and the uncertainties of the technology of the future all present very real threats that should be neutralized through effective planning and strategic initiatives. Students are not exposed early to options in related fields of architecture. For instance, education through the arts is not thoroughly exploited. Alternative routes into the profession have to be explored in order to have real diversities otherwise we are going to wind up with an elite, unemployable and frustrated professional. It has become very evident that technology is no longer an optional aspect of architectural education and those firms and architects who wish to remain relevant and up to date must maintain a consistent level of research and development. Studies have shown that 30% of Nigerian Architects learn the use of Computer Aided Design (CAD) software during their course of architectural study. While CAD has dramatically increased the speed of and efficiency with which design is done, this revolution in the profession is coming at a price. It has compounded the cultural disparities between technophiles and technophobes. Students coming from different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds also appeared differentiated along digital and print media lines. Digital students prefer electronic access to design information and are more likely to be seen around computers terminals while print media students consult textbooks and are likely to be seen around books stacks in the library. Students who are new to CAD

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appeared techno-phobic and this is not healthy for the growth of architecture. Many students may be first architecture University entrants in their families, and their families and relations may have little to do with architecture or any related discipline. Population growth is one of the world's greatest concerns. There is the need to ensure the basic of people in rural and urban settlements: housing, drinking water, sanitation, education, transport, energy, health, etc. Since the introduction of the first school of architecture in Nigeria, there has been growth and development in many spheres of human endeavours. Many challenges are emerging for architectural education in the country's socio-economic circumstances. Nigeria urban settlements often densely populated show environmental deterioration particularly sharply. That is why available resources must be deployed most urgently, with planning used to reach solutions where the need of both man and the environment are balanced. The architect is faced with many of these urban problems. Also in the rural communities, there are problems of poor housing conditions in rural areas. Architectural education in Nigeria must be repositioned to tackle these problems by imparting into students the necessary skills required to address these current and emerging issues of the environment. That if architecture is to make its maximum contribution to public welfare, its programme contents must emphasized those concepts, perspectives and intellectual habits that will arouse the students creative domain and strengthen their interests, commitment and motivation to improve the environment. The curriculum must be designed to enable students imbibe intrinsic meaning and value of architecture. That the programme are tailored to give understanding and to encourage teamwork between architect-educators and practitioners so that no one will feel that others are encroaching into their duties. Also of serious concern is the inability of the profession to forge a common front, which is a consequence of the inability of the profession to be inclusive, cohesive, and united. This lack of unity has encouraged the invidious activities of colleagues in the industry. However, several opportunities abound to reverse the situation through the effective utilization of technological options and the globalization of international economy. Furthermore, the new national dispensation presents a window of opportunity to regain the initiative for reinventing the profession through the democratic process.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has specifically discussed architectural problems of schools of Architecture in Nigeria pointing out that the problems are multi-faceted ranging from the design of the curriculum within the context of Nigerian educational objectives. The paper looked at the historical development of architecture education in Nigeria right from inception and observed that it was pervasive and unfocused. The virtue of the indigenous curriculum was stressed as most relevant to our present needs. It points out that the incipient apathy of the members towards the collective affairs of the profession and the unhealthy tendencies towards individualism are serious weakness that must be checked. The paper suggests a diversification of the curriculum and proffers solutions towards the growth of Architectural education in Nigeria.

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