Deserted studio and culture in architecture schools: Issues of policy and implementation strategies

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Abstract

Architectural design studio engages students, teachers and other stakeholders in countless activities that results in the term 'studio culture'. Traditionally, the culture comprised of experiences, habits and patterns within the studio space. These unique learning environments have been observed to be deserted by students due to some factors that were either neglected or not properly positioned in the context of the schools' 'modus operandi'. This paper examined the attitudes of students towards design studio in schools of architecture. An in-depth investigation of studio culture, policy, implementation strategies and students' attitudes was carried out in lieu of deserted studio. It was tailored after the studio culture policies of four (4) selected schools in south-west Nigeria. Findings revealed that culture demystification, motivational factors and institutional policies are some of the factors responsible for deserted studio. The study showed commonalities and varied conceptual indices of the terms "studio culture" in each case. The study recommended specificity of sustainable studio culture policy, operation and implementation strategies for architecture schools in Nigeria as a way of curbing the menace of deserted studios.

Keywords: architecture, design studio, jury assessment, Nigeria.

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1. Introduction

Architecture plays a significant and undeniable role in the physical and socio-economic development of societies. Apart from its prime function of enhancing the aesthetic outlook of the environment and the functional efficiency/structural integrity of city structures, it is used to promote the national identity and pride of the society that produces it (Adewale & Adhuze, 2013).

Nomenclature
A
B
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The main thrust of architectural education therefore, is to contribute to attainment of a humane and responsive environment (Adedeji, Taiwo, Olotuah & Fadairo, 2012). The globalization of the profession makes it mandatory for schools of architecture to embrace the opportunities for necessary and visionary change so as to secure and guaranty the future of architectural education and practice of the profession. In like manner, the study of architecture globally is encapsulated in the habitué of architectural design studio, a domain, place or environment where learning, teaching, assessment and other activities of culture camaraderie (Aderonmu, 2013). take place. The design studio is at the heart of most industrial design curricula and is a place where students learn to visualise and represent aspects of a problem graphically and to think as a designer (Green & Bonollo, 2003).

However, it was observed that the architectural design studios that used to be the hallmark of design activities for the architecture student are being gradually deserted. Adeyemi, (2012) opined that deserted studios could be as a result of lack of vitality that characterized present-day studios. Despite the plurality of research findings on exemplar of the design studio in the education of professionals Green, & Bonollo, (2003), Maitland, (1991) there is paucity of academic research on menace of deserted studio and culture in architecture. This paper attempted to identify the factors responsible for the menace of deserted studio culture in four selected architectural schools in Nigeria and gave recommendations on policy initiatives and strategies to resuscitate studio culture in schools of architecture.

2. Design Studio Culture

The concept of studio-based work has been central to practice as well as education within traditional design disciplines such as architecture and industrial design for over a century (Fallman, 2007). It suggests that the design studio integrates multi-faceted phenomenon that are consciously or unconsciously synthesized into what can be described as a studio culture. According to Fallman, (2007) a design studio culture promotes creative and collaborate activities, and becomes a setting in which it is natural for people to interact with each other. On the other hand, Johnson, (2000) described studio culture as a mixture combining place, a group of people, and a fairly standardized process, all overseen by the faculty mentor in charge. Thus architectural design studio culture can be defined as the synthesis of the experiences, habits and patterns found within the architecture design studio (Aderonmu, 2013). AIAS (2002) captured the following as the memories that characterize the architectural design studio culture: 'late nights, exciting projects, extreme dedication, lasting friendships, long hours, punishing critiques, unpredictable events, a sense of community, and personal sacrifice all come to mind. These experiences are not usually written into the curriculum or even the design assignments, but they are likely the most memorable and influential. The experiences, habits, and patterns found within the architecture design studio make up what we have termed 'studio culture' (AIAS, 2002).

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2. Methodology

2.1. Research objectives

The design studio offers us a teaching model from a design discipline in which the functional and the structural, the social and the technical, must be successfully blended (Kuhn, 2001). The exemplary potential of design studio on student learning is crucial to the education of future professionals. This paper examined and documented the factors responsible for deserted studios in four selected schools of architecture in south west Nigeria. Since the education of future professionals has its premise in the design studio, the paper also suggested policies and strategies that can be implemented to ensure that the design studio culture and by extension, the profession does not go into extinction.

2.2. Research design and analysis

Data relevant to achieve the research objective were sourced mainly from the three major areas of architectural education: pedagogy, culture and environment in the selected schools. The four selected schools were: University of Lagos, Lagos (Unilag); Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, Osun State (OAU); Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Oyo State (Lautech); and Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State (CU). The basic unit of analysis comprised of architectural students, teachers and design studios in the four selected schools of architecture. Data was collected through the following methods: archival data from the schools of architecture as it relates to the institutional and studio policies; observation of activities of students in the design studio; participation in students' works presentations and jury critiques; and an in-depth, non-systematic group interviews with students and faculty members in the schools. During the group interviews, the loudest voice note of 'hi' (yes) and 'nah' (no) was used to evaluate the swing of the pendulum when issues related to respondents Perception of Architectural Design Studio Culture Myths were discussed.

3. Results and Discussions

Literature reviewed revealed that the design studio culture is pivotal to the training and education of the future professional. It was identified as the significant predictor of pedagogic practice in schools of architecture globally and in Nigeria as well. Studio culture can also be characterized by myths it perpetuates. These myths influence the mentality of students and promote certain behaviours and patterns. The myths associated with design studio culture evaluated in this study are: design ideas come in the late night hours; extreme dedication (personal and physical sacrifices) are attributes of architectural pedagogy; creativity in architecture is a solo, artistic struggle; sense of community (collaboration) promotes best ideas; and exciting design project briefs promotes design studio culture. The results and discussions are as follows:

3.2. Design ideas come in the late night hours

One of the trademark of design studio culture is architectural students spending long hours together. Majority of respondents in group interview sessions in each of the four selected schools agreed with this myth. The summary of their response is that "*best inspirations come within the hours because the quietness allows the mind to function optimally'.* The few dissenting voices opined that *'the night comes when no man works; it is too quiet and meant for sleep'.* Another dissenting voice is of the view that "the night hours *only work for those who are active at night and since I am not one of them, it does not work for me".* This suggests that most architecture students believed that the mind works optimally in the silence of the night. However, in some cases, institutional policy does not encourage this culture any longer. For instance, Covenant University institutional policy forbade

students being in the academic environment beyond 9:00 p.m. Furthermore, while the other institutions do not place restrictions on the interactive hours within the design studios, the general insecurity and cult activities within various higher institutions militates against this studio culture.

3.3. Extreme dedications are attributes of architectural pedagogy

The consensus of respondents on this variable in each of the four schools is that "*both your personal and physical well-being will be sacrificed in architecture. Take for example, you always rest for eight hours a day, but when you begin to study architecture, you begin to spend more money, eat less, rest-less and your relaxation time reduces more and more to six, five and so on".* A respondent, (Oluwadamilare, 300 Levels, CU) said that *"though, am not in support of it all, but it is equally essential for good grades".* This extreme dedication required to excel in the architectural programme made them to informally tag it as *'archi-torture'.* It can be inferred therefore that future architectural professionals still keep faith with extreme dedications as part of requirement for the design studio culture.

3.4. Creativity in architecture is a solo, artistic struggle

Majority of respondents agreed that *"architecture should be run with solo, undivided mind-set".* This notion supports the criticism of the design studio teaching model. For instance, Ehmann, (2005) criticized this model as teacher-centered that makes students take a passive approach to their learning by depending on the teacher for design ideas and wait for approval before making design decisions; while Bose, Pennypacker and Yahner (2006) believed it fosters greater student dependence on faculty for decision-making guidance. Participation in presentations and jury critiques in these schools revealed further the danger of solo efforts in design on one hand, and the over-dependence on faculty for design decisions on the other. In the former case, students with poor designs during critiques were denied any form of professional defence by their studio supervisors, claiming they never saw or were not part of such design initiatives, and so the students must be held responsible for their actions. In the latter case, faculty simply made defence of themselves in cases of poor design initiatives by claiming that the idea was solely that of the student. The implication of these denials by those responsible for architectural education is that it gradually erodes the teacher-student relationship advocated by the design studio teaching model, and may subsequently contribute to menace of deserted studios in the schools.

3.5. Sense of community (collaboration) promotes best ideas

The assertion among students in each of the four selected schools of architecture was that *"collaboration encourages teamwork and best ideas, since no man is an island".* This view is supported by Adeyemi, (2012) who described the entire studio atmosphere as hilarious…filled with music and all manner of jokes… he concluded that this atmosphere did a lot to reduce built-up tension and to prepare the architecture student against the worst that could come in the course of studies. This is a positive notion that should be enshrined in studio design policies of schools of architecture to promote design studio culture.

3.6. Exciting design project briefs promotes design studio culture

The design studio's environment is a unique environment and it is the core of architectural education. Conversely, architectural design brief is the core of activities within the design studio. Majority of respondents in the schools indicated that their active participation in the design studio is directly a function of how interesting the design brief is. The students advocate for design briefs that will not only task their creativities, but should be those that address the socio-economic issues of

national development and culturally relevant. Only then will the studio be a vital place for the students to meet, interact and share skills and information (Adeyemi, 2012).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study attempted to identify factors responsible for deserted studios in schools of architecture in Nigeria. The paper identified that architectural education transcends national boundaries and thus, should be given the global impetus that it demands. Furthermore, the paper identified that crucial to effective architectural education in schools, is the triad of the pedagogy, culture and environment as it relates to students, teachers and the design studio and policies in schools. Recommendations are made to address each of the triad of architectural education as follows:

- **Student:** The architecture student by virtue of his professional training (apprenticeship), are always found in practice as decision makers, client-advocates, opinion leaders, the informal heads of a micro-society and they set the model for behaviour patterns in the societies. This leadership role is acculturated in the dynamics of the design studio culture. To promote this culture therefore students must: maximize the benefits of working in the studio in the late night hours; be extremely dedicated to the rigours of architectural training; make independent design decisions while not neglecting the importance of teacher-student interactions; ultimately, learn a good sense of community that the studio provides.

- **Teachers:** Teachers must: encourage virtues of work ethics and desire for growth among students while particular side effects need to be contained and filtered away; think about curricular activities and engagements that transcend formal teaching and seamlessly penetrate into the after-hours realm (studio hours); foster collective work, sharing, and exchange of information, as well as mutual feedback and support.

- **Design studio culture and studio policies:** In order for creativity to exist, the design studio must be supportive and rewarding of creative endeavors; universities should consider creating studio ambience that stimulates learning engagement; amenities for collective living and prolonged stay in the school facility; and environments that cater around the clock to the needs and safety of the students. The studio culture policy in schools of architecture must be streamlined to address a cultured way of teaching, learning, and living, thus supporting the lifestyle of future designers.

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