STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF DESIGN STUDIO JURY IN SCHOOLS OF ARCHITECTURE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

An examination is a formal test of a person's knowledge or proficiency in a particular subject or skill. An often time, the approach of an examination is accompanied by examination phobia on students, which suggests that the examination period is not always a pleasant one. Architectural jury for design studio works is the equivalent of examination for written courses; hence, students perceive it with mixed feelings. Apart from being an examination, the jury also presents an opportunity for students to learn in an atmosphere that can either be jocular, antagonistic or reassuring. Despite the age long tradition of the jury evaluation system, there are few literatures that have assessed the perception of students towards its use and suitability as a means of performance measurement. The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perception of the jury system as an integral pedagogical process of evaluating design studio works. Data was collected through a survey of two purposively selected schools using a structured questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The respondents were students across the 3rd to 4th and 5th to 6th year of undergraduate and postgraduate study respectively. Data obtained was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings from the study would be useful in the development of national academic policies for Nigerian Schools of Architecture towards improving students' acceptance of the jury process as a tool for learning and assessment on one hand, and also to improve their performance in the jury on the other hand.

Keywords: architectural jury, design studio, students' perception, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Jury as a phenomenon seems to have a negative meaning as it refers to "a group of persons sworn to render a verdict or true answer on a question or questions officially submitted to them" (1). This contradicts the true purpose of the evaluation of design projects presented by the students, which is simply learning, reflecting, discussing ideas, and above all improving the performance of students. The terms Juries, reviews and critiques are used interchangeably in the schools of architecture. The system has remained the same, which is primarily the old Beaux-Arts mechanism except in a modern way. The students present their completed design work one after the other in front of a group of faculty, visiting professionals, their classmates, and passer-by who is interested.The jury practice started in the Ecole Des Beaux-Arts in Paris (School of Fine Arts). At the early years, students' projects were assessed privately by the tutors to the exclusion of other students. This system was later changed at the beginning of the 19th Century when the Ecole Des Beaux-Arts decided to permit students to be allowed in for the evaluation process; hence the implication of open assessment needed more attention. The design studio jury system is a traditional architectural learning assessment tool [1]. It is the final review of the work carried out by architecture students during the course of the semester or a project. At various stages during the semester, the students' evaluation is structured through a jury system for the purposes of critique of individual students designs, provide guidelines about the technical knowhow about the discipline, and initiate scholarly- or seminar-like exchanges, all intended to further the student's design skills. In Nigeria, the jury process begins with the display of students' proposals to resolve an assigned brief. The presentation formats are usually in 2-dimensional presentations and a 3-dimensional representation of any assigned design project. The 3-dimensional presentations are either in the form of a perspective or a model to the specified scale, or both as the case may be. The students may then be interviewed about their proposals, depending on the type of assessment. Some juries do not permit the presence of the design students; the proposals are then evaluated based on the students' ability to represent their thought processes. The jury panel is usually composed of faculty members for the major assessments; the students' peers are allowed to observe and are seldom invited to participate actively in the discussions that follow. The discussions may range from broad theoretical issues to minute details. These discussions may be supportive, hostile, or jocular.
In summary, while the critique process is designed to help students better understand what is expected of them, revealing the nature of their work and increase their abilities to make critical judgments, it is pertinent that the students also relate with this very objective hence the exercise could end in futility.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The crucial stages in the design of architectural projects are when the thought process of students is assessed. According to [2], design is about teaching the student a new way of seeing the world, teaching them a whole new vocabulary. The most essential part of the studio assessment is when design project is critiqued to enhance the students' evaluation process. However, the best type of critique at any stage of the project should be observed and properly implemented to have best control mechanisms on the design process. [3] observed that whenever critiques are issued at the final stage of design, the students display defensive behaviour towards learning, this does not lead to an effective influence over the students' design process. They went further to classify different critique methods that could be implemented in schools of Architecture for architectural design studios into nine, viz.: Individual Critique, Formative Critique, Summative Critique, Peer Critique, Group Critique, Public Critique, Written Critique, Seminars, and Panel Discussions [3]. The focus of this paper is about how students perceive their Panel Discussion mode of assessments.

The students' perception in the architecture design jury should be of great importance in schools of architecture in Nigeria and worldwide. The inadequacies in the jury system as a means of assessing students' performance as pointed out in articles previously mentioned has begun to increase the doubts the students may have about this system. The way students perceive the jury system should be taken more seriously as it affects the students' attitude and dedication toward the design studio as a course

directly. This paper seeks to investigate the students clinically and comprehensively. It seeks to identify problems and also proffer solutions which may in turn improve the jury system or even develop a more effective way of assessing students" performance in the design studio.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out through the use of questionnaires and focus-group interviews in two of the institutions in the south west (university of Lagos, Covenant University) that offer Architecture in Nigeria. The questionnaire consisted of three sections to identify the skills developed during juries and students perceptions on how their juries were assessed. The study sample was between 8 to 15 students each from 3rd and 4th year at each undergraduate school; and the 5th year and 6th year for the postgraduate school. The data obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively by the use of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Quantitative was employed to obtain using frequency and cross-tabulation. Factor analysis was carried out on the questionnaire to investigate the perception of students of design studio jury. The data gotten from the focus-group interview was analysed by writing down the different opinions of the respondents relating them to the factors derived from the factor analysis.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The results showed that there were 50.31% of students from university of Lagos and 49.69% of students from Covenant University with gender categorization of 71.83% of males and 28.17% females. In the age classification there were 20.13% of students between the ages of 16 and 19, 64.94% of students between the ages of 20 and 23, 10.39% of students between the ages of 24 and 27 and 4.55% of students who are 28 and above. This implies that most participants were between the ages of 20 and 23. There were 28.19% of students in 300 level, 42.95% of students in 400 level, 18.79% of students in MSc.1, 10.07% of students in MSc. 2. In Fig.1, some factors that Affect Students' Perception of Jury are (i) Fear of defense (iii) physical environmental setting, (iii) Grading standard,(iv) Adherence to mentor's instructions (v) gender/juror bias,(vii) personal preference, (vi) fear of the standard.

Table1: Factors That Affect Students' Perception of Jury

Factors	Variables	Component Loading
Factor1: **FEAR OF DEFENSE**	I prefer to defend my design project so i can get feedback	.730
	Prefer to receive a grade without a defense	.667
	Like the presence of other students during my jury	.650
	I usually breakdown when it's time for jury	.446
Factor2: **PHYSICAL/ ENVIRONMENTAL SETTINGS**	Jurors judge me based on my behavior	.774

	Jurors judge me based on my appearance	.735
	The environment affects my jury	.663
	Jurors judge me based on my abilities	.733
Factor3: **GRADING STANDARD**		
	Jurors judge me based on general standard	.672
	Students who design based on their understanding and thinking of the nature of the project are more likely to perform better at jury	.627
Factor4: ADHERENCE TO MENTOR'S INSTRUCTIONS		
	Students who design from the perspective of the studio mentor perform better during jury	.719
	Students who adhere to brief are more likely to have high grades during jury	.629
Factor5: GENDER/JUROR BIAS		.750
	Jurors are bias during jury	.480
	Jurors always favor males	.461
	Jurors always favor females	.443
Factor6: **PERSONAL PREFERENCE**		
	Jury should be in series	.699
	Prefer to defend before studio mentors	.646
Factor 7: **FEAR OF THE STANDARD**	Male jurors are more biased than female jurors	.704
	Jury grades are based on a criteria which is uniformly applied on all students	.595

In the study conducted by [4] on the difference in grading parameters in architectural schools, attention was drawn to disparity between how students were graded by the representatives of the professional bodies and the academia. The low scores awarded to the students by Nigerian Institute of Architects' representative suggested that the expectations of practicing architects from the students were different from the focus of the academia. This necessitates an expected standard from the academia for their product to be relevant for architectural praxis. The evidence of this study sets a bar and emphasized the need to be thorough with the necessary means of evaluation.

The jury is the basic medium where the learning process of the students about factors and element of design could be effectively evaluated. Conversely, students misconstrue the purpose of this exercise as they inordinately develop defensive mechanism to escape bombs of jurors' questions posed on them during Jury session. One can draw inference from such students' reactions as jury is popularly called "*defense"* exercises." During some sessions of the focus-interviews, a few students experientially stated that the essence of Jury is to communicate design intentions across to the Jurors at all cost. Hence, little attention has been given to need to improve their design techniques. Some other said that jury enfaced with little or no question is an indication of a successful jury. In this way, little attention was given to the feedback loop of the process. Another category confided that they have lost confidence in the assessment process as examined by the Jurors who were coincidentally those they looked up to for advice and courage.

In line with the above mentioned, students also feel that inadequate time were allotted for the jury exercise. This affects the elocution of their design intent. The fear of keeping the most important words

unsaid within the assigned time could make them feel marginalized and submerged. Therefore, students, not being able to communicate their design intent and process, perceived the jury critics and processes as not being effective and at worst unfair for design evaluations.

This investigation also revealed that the critical assessments of the jurors were not perceived as any kind of improvement within the learning process but as an avenue for *depression*. This was clearly stated that students, especially, a few ladies used to be emotionally affected by the critical comments made by Jurors on their works. The perceived it as a jeopardy and cannibalization on efforts of hours of rigorous work; as sometimes they resort to tears and eventually broken down in hopelessness.

Also, during the focus interview, students perceived their proficiency in presentation tools as a key factor that affects their confidence in the jury method of assessment. There are cases where students were permitted to either use Computer-Aided Design and Drafting (CADD) software or manual drafting for presentation. The students who expressed themselves manually felt their presentations were not well received by the Jurors due to some inadequate technicalities absent in manual drafting. This expressed a form of bias against design students as perceived it is hidden in the blind spot of the jury system.

Some students also saw themselves as being subject to the prejudice of some faculty members among the jurors. Other students feel that their evaluation is left to the plight of a juror that does not have a well-grounded knowledge on the brief in which design exercise is based upon. Hence, they perceived their evaluation was done without the appreciation of the rigours of their thought process and design end products. They believed the unilateral mode of assessment to be flawed because the whole of the grade is from the jurors only, and that is subjective. Therefore, students believed that another set of jurors who understudied the brief requirements would have assessed their designed projects differently.

The students also gave some appraisal s to the design jury process. The purportedly challenging critiques were also acknowledged to improve their ability to criticize and assess architectural projects. It helped them to discern and focus on issues of interest to the audience not just as a designer. It also helped the ability to organize their creative thoughts in the ways that attend to the rudiments of the profession. The students also acknowledged an improvement in their conversation skills, verbal presentation skills, confidence and overcoming presentation anxiety. Their most developed skill was the aspect of critical assessment of their design projects while overcoming their anxiety and frustration were left hanging.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- Students should be allowed to see the parameters upon which they would be graded few days before jury to enable them to do self-assessment in order to erase '*bias mentality*'
- Jurors need to be fair and unbiased to all students by entitling them to the same quantity and quality of jury comments
- Also, in order not to miss details of assessments, it is recommendable that if a juror cannot stay until the end, then another juror must be ready to take his or her place
- To reduce stress and jury examination phobia, it is also a systematic way to allow students to turn in all their works in the evening before the review (by 6:00 pm, for example).
- It is informative to make jury schedule be posted a day before the review, indicating time slots for presentations, introductory comments and juror introductions, equal presentation times for students, coffee and lunch breaks, and wrap-up discussions at the end of each review
- More importantly, definite analysis and components of the assessment parameters and grading patterns need to be made transparent to the students' i.e grades for attendance, jurors' grades, and coordinators/mentors grades as these entirely sums up to total assessments. In this way, students would not have any bias against the mentors and Jurors.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study submitted that part of the training required for architectural training is not only the ability to go through an effective design process but also, it is important to develop the ability to learn from criticisms and apply the relevant comments to improve on one's design works. More so, architectural design studio and architectural training as a whole is not just the end product, but also the process of design itself. Therefore, interim Juries should be carried out through the course of the semester to evenly distribute the marks across the pedagogic design process. This could increase the confidence of the students in the Jurors' mode of assessments and motivate students to achieve more; as there will be close monitoring of the students design process by their supervisors.Therefore, recommendation was also made by a student of the possibility of Jury organizers to help institute simultaneously a pre-jury sessions among the students; the essence is to cater for the emotionally sensitive ones or those with a low level of confidence. This would help them develop a level of confidence that would be able to match with the critique sessions in the final jury. Additionally, this study is notifying the academia to emphasize the evaluation criteria between the students and jurors to reduce subjectivity of assessments.

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