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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Difference in grading parameters in architectural schools and its impact on the competency rating of future professionals



Oluwole A. Alagbe¹, Adedapo Adewunmi Oluwatayo*,
Peter A. Aderonmu², Gbenga M. Alalade³

Department of Architecture, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Architectural education in Nigeria is divided into at two-tier training system of four and two years for undergraduate and postgraduate study, respectively. After the completion of postgraduate study, a student is deemed competent to take the professional practice examination. Success in this examination qualifies a student to be registered as an architect. The competency rating of future professionals in architectural schools in Nigeria is determined through a jury system of scoring based on predetermined grading parameters. However, the grading parameters adopted by assessing authorities (academic professors and practitioners representing the professional body) differ. The difference in the grading parameters employed by the two approved assessing authorities in Nigeria was investigated in this study. Covenant University in Nigeria was used as a case study. The grading parameters and scores for the 2013 academic session were compared to determine similarities and differences, which might have affected the competency rating of students. Descriptive statistics was employed to analyze the data obtained. Results showed a significant difference in scoring by the two authorities. This difference had a significant consequence on the competency rating of students. © 2015 Higher Education Press Limited Company. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +2348032487108.

E-mail addresses: oluwole.alagbe@covenantuniversity.edu.ng (O.A. Alagbe),
dapo.oluwatayo@covenantuniversity.edu.ng (A.A. Oluwatayo), peter.aderonmu@covenantuniversity.edu.ng (P.A. Aderonmu),
gbenga.alalade@covenantuniversity.edu.ng (G.M. Alalade).

¹Tel.: +2348054577730.

²Tel.: +2348140993901.

³Tel.: +2348059648599.

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1. Introduction

Architecture has played a substantial role in the development of the built environment, a view alluded to by *Martha Thorne*, Executive Director of the Pritzker Prize, who believes that architecture exists to create the physical environment in which people live (*Shah, 2012*). *Adewale and Adhuzé (2014)* observed that architecture enhances the esthetic quality of the environment and the functional efficiency/structural integrity of city structures. They further noted that architecture is utilized to promote national identity and the pride of the society that produces it. These statements imply that architects play a significant role in sustainable community development. As a professional, an architect is described as an agent of social change and an advocate for systems and ecological thinking (*Glyphis, 2001*). As a result, architects are responsible for creating the community of which they are a part or with which they work (*Chansomsak and Vale, 2009*). The professional role of architects dovetails into the realm of the study of other professions and professionals in the built industry. In other words, architects are generalists who, out of necessity, must have areas of specialization (*Glyphis, 2001*).

As a field of learning, architecture maintains a unique and enviable position in the sense that it is both an art and a science. As a discipline, architecture encompasses knowledge in all vast areas of human endeavor, ranging from psychology, economics, management, politics, and sociology to other areas. This special attribute bestows on architects the essential role of leaders in the building industry. Consequently, an architect has to be knowledgeable in every sphere of learning, must have a vision, and must be able to facilitate the work of other professionals. This understanding has to be infused into the architectural education of students (future professionals) because the quality and safety of the built environment depend on their expertise and competency. The goal of architectural education must therefore be aimed at cultivating in students not only the values and attitudes but also the knowledge, skills, and understanding required for a successful professional practice. *Yorgancioglu (2013)* advocated that the emphasis of architectural education must be on the personal development of students as much as on their professional development. She argued that aside from the ultimate goal of preparing students for the architectural profession, architectural education must also facilitate their development as open-minded, socially responsive, and creative individuals who can think and act in a critical and reflective manner. The quality of architectural education in architectural schools is therefore crucial to the training of future professionals and to the sustenance of the profession.

The core of architectural education is the design studio. In recent years, calls have been made for the establishment of more reliable assessment criteria (*Webster, 2007*). A future professional is certified fit for the profession after he has successfully completed his master's degree program. The degree program is assessed on the basis of certain grading parameters, which jurors rarely reveal to students. Jurors [a set from the accrediting professional institution of the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA) and a set from the academia] often have different grading parameters; this difference is assumed to affect the competency rating of future professionals.

Despite the importance of assessment in certifying the competency rating of future professionals, only a few studies have addressed the impact of different grading parameters on competency rating. Several studio assessments have been alleged to focus on the product, ignoring the process and vice versa. At other times, students even allege that they do not know the criteria used in assessing their design studio. Most studies have focused on assessment and grading (*Andersen and Cozart, 2014*). *De la Harpe and Peterson (2008)* described a model that encompasses a broad set of indicators to guide and inform the assessment of architecture, art, and design studios. *Ehmann (2005)* argued that assessment remains squarely focused on the design or creative outcome rather than on the process of producing the creative outcome. *Rust et al. (2003)* observed that the continued emphasis on the explicit articulation of assessment criteria and standards is insufficient to develop a shared understanding of “useful knowledge” between staff and students and therefore reveals the necessity of socialization processes for tacit knowledge transfer to occur. However, insignificant attention has been given to the differences in grading parameters across architectural schools, particularly in Nigeria, and their effect on determining the competency rating of future professionals.

In view of the above, this study investigates the effect of different grading (assessment) parameters on the competency rating of future professionals. Such an investigation is performed by suggesting the relevance of having standardized grading parameters as a basis for a unified system of assessment for the competency rating of future professionals across all architectural schools in Nigeria.

2. Literature review

2.1. Architectural design studio: core of architectural education

Architectural education is different from other disciplines because it is anchored on apprenticeship (*Alagbe et al., 2014a*). The bulk of architectural education (apprenticeship) revolves around the practice and interaction in the architectural design studio. The importance of the design studio to architectural education has been underscored in literature by various scholars (*Oh et al., 2013*). For instance, the design studio lies at the heart of architectural education (*Adeyemi, 2012*). It is the pivot and gathering point of all knowledge and skills acquired throughout the architectural curriculum (*Mostafa and Mostafa, 2010*); it is home to many architecture students because it is where they actually spend most of their time to work, study, eat, and even sleep (*Adeyemi, 2012*). Within the walls of the design studio, future professionals learn the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and understanding required for the practice of the profession. Architectural education in all architectural schools in Nigeria is structured in line with the Roman architect Vitruvius' principles of good architecture in his treatise on architecture, *De Architectura*, which emphasizes *firmatis* (durability/structural integrity), *utilitas* (utility/functionality), and *venustatis* (beauty/esthetics). As a result, the pivotal courses in Nigerian architectural schools are centered on these principles. The training aspects of these principles are by

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