

## Artist-teachers, Teacher-artists and the Challenges of Higher Degrees in Nigerian University Education – A view from within

Akinbogun T. L; Femi Kayode; Ogunduyile S. R and Ogunlade B. A

Department of Industrial Design, Federal University of Technology,  
P.M.B. 704, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria.

**Corresponding Author: Femi Kayode**

---

### Abstract

*The challenges facing the teaching of art and the strategies put in place for the implementation of a dynamic art curriculum at tertiary level have been a major concern of art educators in Nigeria for a long time. In an attempt to reinvigorate the visual arts curriculum and to maintain appreciable standards, the Pan African Circle of Artists in conjunction with the Art Republic of Delta State University held a conference in Abraka, Nigeria. In the conference, delegates delved extensively into the challenges of teaching and learning Fine Arts in tertiary institutions in Nigeria as well as the primary motives behind the pursuit of a doctoral degree in Fine Arts. The contentions as to whether the studio trained artists with a terminal MFA degree who found themselves in the teaching of art at higher institutions need to go further to acquire a doctoral degree were the major issues discussed. Although the conference was to look into all aspects of art teaching, but the discussions tilted strongly toward resolving the differences between those with MFA who felt that the attainment of Ph.D degree was not necessary and should not be used in their promotion to higher levels and those with Ph.D who felt uncomfortable with the stand of those who had no Ph.D but would want to become Professors in the nearest future. The paper establishes that there are two types of practitioners in the art education career; that is, the "Artist-teacher" and the "Teacher-artist" and that it depends on where one belongs. The paper provides a clear distinction between the practitioners as well as highlighting the challenges facing art teaching in Nigerian universities.*

---

**Keywords:** Artist-teachers, Teacher-artists, PhD, 'publish or perish', promotion

---

### INTRODUCTION

University education generally right from its inception is dynamic and has been evolving. The Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia (2005) noted that the university as an organizational form was a European phenomenon, while other analogous institutions existed in other cultures in the form of religious schools. The first universities were established in the High Middle Ages, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards and were closely linked to the church (Encarta Encyclopedia, *ibid*). It added that first spectacular changes in the objectives of the universities was in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of professional society and the growth of modern state stimulated the demand of university graduates (Encarta Encyclopedia *ibid*). From there onward, universities diversified from its initial function, which was centred on the study of ancient philosophy. Nigeria did not enjoy the landmark until after 1945. At this time the developed nations were still grappling with how to regain their political and economic aspirations which had been battered by the Second World War. This led to demands for expansion in higher education to provide the necessary manpower. (Encarta Encyclopedia *ibid*). The first indigenous Nigerian tertiary institution came up shortly after 1945, when university education the world over were expanding to embrace a wider range

of disciplines. Thus, the first generation of Nigerian universities where Fine arts were taught emerged in the early 60s and had Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) program as one of its highest educational degree in studio art. Although the degree was terminal but was adequate at that period and could take teachers of art in the universities to the topmost position of Professors. Today, the need to meet up with demands of modern society and the urge for higher degree is taking a dramatic and aggressive dimension. In a newly reformed university education in Nigeria which gave birth to specialized Universities of Technology and Universities of Agriculture, there is a restructuring in the curricular of Art programs. The programs have been made to focus more on functional aspects of Fine Arts necessitating the adoption of new nomenclatures such as industrial design, industrial arts, product design and applied arts as currently used in many parts of the world. This restructuring requires that art teachers obtain doctoral degrees to be at par with their counterparts in other disciplines. Any negotiation for waiver by art teachers or their professional bodies is usually frowned at by the larger university body, which sees such request as attempt to avoid academic rigor that is a strong part of the doctoral degrees. More often than not, the Fine art-related departments are in the minority in such academic environment. When

decisions are made in such institutions, the uniqueness of art related programs are not considered. General rules as they relate to promotions are applied. Examples could be taken from the Universities of Technology and Agriculture where art exhibitions are not rated as equal to paper publications. The arguments often raised by professors from other disciplines have been that they have all been exhibiting fishes, snails, and other products which were not created by them. Therefore, it became obvious that exhibitions of creative art works have no significant impact on staff promotion. Consequently, artists-teachers who want to earn an M.F.A. as terminal degree in their field become stagnant since they cannot earn promotion. For this reason, it becomes imperative to seek a way out. Many of them pursue doctorate degrees in other disciplines in order to meet promotion criteria. The very convenient disciplines these artists normally embrace are: Art education, Art history, Religion Studies and anthropology. It is pertinent to reiterate that some of the founding fathers of Art in Nigerian universities, such as Professor J. B. Akolo had to travel overseas to earn a doctoral degree outside the studio arts, before being made a professor. However his promotion was backdated to precede the year of graduation. This trend was not limited to the field of Fine Arts alone, it happened in Architecture when the veteran Architect, Professor E. A. Adeyemi went abroad to obtain a doctorate degree in Architecture shortly before becoming a Professor.

#### **Contextual Meanings of 'Artist-teachers' and 'Teacher-artists'**

In order to have a deeper understanding of the contextual meaning of 'artist-teacher' and 'teacher-artists' as used in this paper, it is important to examine their roles in the learning and teaching of Art in Nigerian Universities. Artist-teachers are studio trained artists, who, normally, would have preferred to be producing artworks for clients or for sales but as a result the available job opportunities in higher institutions decided to take to teaching as secondary. The 'artists-teachers' in Nigerian universities do obtain Bachelor of Arts Honors and in order to be properly grounded in studio practices, go further to obtain the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) which is a terminal degree in Nigeria. The MFA degree was initially considered to be adequate for those who teach such courses as ceramics, textiles, painting, sculpture and graphics which are practical based. The MFA and MA degrees were the highest degree programs available in Nigerian Universities until the mid 80s. Since there were no doctoral programs in art, those with MFA were given adequate academic recognition as they were exhibiting their art works for money and teaching in higher institutions. These advantages encouraged many with BA Honors in art to enroll for the MFA programs. In the 80s, other academic disciplines

such as Art History, Art Philosophy, Art Education, and Anthropology which had gained ground in other parts of the world soon found their ways into the art curricula of Nigerian universities. Those with MA degree who have been considered to be more grounded in research methodologies soon took advantage of the new programs to obtain doctorate degrees.

However, as a result of many factors, the initial set of Artists-teachers found it difficult to go in for the Ph.D programs. Such factors have been attributed to their inadequate exposures to research techniques and academic presentations as well as the fact that MFA degrees were terminal and not acceptable directly for admission into the Ph.D. programs. An MFA degree holder will have to re-enroll and obtain another MA or M Tech degree before he could move further. In order to get to the peak of academic level, various arguments have been brought forward in favor of the MFA holders. Oguibe (2004) described the MFA degree holders as art masters who are expected to make good apprentices of the young aspiring artists put in their care. The artists-teachers were expected to exhibit their art works regularly in grandeur with adequate documentation and to show off their creative and teaching potentials. These qualities have been displayed by a number of well to do artists-teacher, such as El Anatsui, late Gani Odutokun, and Udechukwu who were able to provide such training to many young artists.

Teacher-artists are identified as art teachers with adequate research background to propound theories and to teach art courses as well as the theory of studio practices. Their university teaching positions are structured along the theory line; therefore they are expected to show should scholarship when it comes to verbalization and teaching of art processes. The teacher artists often acquire MA degrees in Art philosophy, Art psychology, Art education, and Art history and are expected to earn doctorate degrees so as to be imbued more with the spirit of combining educational theories and artistic skills necessary for growth as envisaged by Mello (2000). This is not to say that artists-teachers are lower in status when compared with the teacher artists, they are complementary practitioners in the field of art and teaching. However, both categories of teachers have to exhibit the skills and desire to teach what they know. As expected of all teachers in Art and Design departments in Nigerian university system, they are to impart practical as well as the theoretical knowledge in their students.

The establishment of Art and Design degree awarding institutions in Nigeria had its base in the cultural policy of Nigeria as expatiated by Aig-Imoukhuede in the 1991 National Education Policy. Section 3.3 of the policy states:

- *The policy shall promote an educational system that motivates and stimulates creativity and draws largely on our tradition and values namely: respect for humanity and human dignity for legitimate authority and the dignity of labor and respect for positive Nigerian moral and religious values.*

While section 6.1.6 gave the go ahead to the Nigeria nation to establish institutions and programs for preservation, presentation, promotion and development of literacy, performing and visual arts. The visual arts in this sense embraced all aspects of arts. In order to provide appropriate education at all levels, several institutions were established. The institutions have their objectives tailored to suit the needs of their environments. Between 1960 and 2009, Nigerian had 65 degree awarding institutions. (Joint Admission Matriculation Board brochure of 2008-2009). The following is the breakdown:

- 16 conventional Federal Universities
- 5 Federal Universities of Technology
- 3 Universities of Agriculture
- 15 conventional state Universities
- 4 State Universities of Technology
- 6 private Universities and
- 16 Other degree awarding institutions.

In pursuance of the policy (section 6.1.6), government established and approved considerable number of art departments in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The list below shows the names of universities offering Fine art/Industrial design/Creative arts, duration and the type of degree awarded. The first fourteen out of the nineteen institutions on the list are identified in Ogunduyile (1999:4) and modified in table 1

From the table, it is obvious that there are many levels and nomenclatures used in Nigerian Universities. The content and philosophy of the institutions also differ from one institution to the other. The institutions offering the Bachelor of Arts degree considers students with the art backgrounds and the duration of the course is four years. Those with Bachelor of Education (Fine and Applied Arts) prepare students for the teaching profession as most of the course contents embrace teaching methodologies needed to teach at the primary and secondary school levels. The duration of the course is four years. The institutions where Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Technology degrees are awarded, students with science background are considered with five year duration. Most of the institutions mentioned above have mounted higher degree programs.

Table 1: The list below shows of universities offering Fine art/Industrial design/Creative arts, duration and the type of degree awarded.

University	Programme	Type of Degree	Course Duration
Amadu Bello University, Zaria	Industrial Design/Fine Art	B.A., B. Sc	4 years
O.A.U. Ile Ife	Fine Art/Fine Art Ed.	B.A., B. Ed	4 years
University of Maiduguri	Creative Arts	B. Ed	4 years
University of Benin	Fine/Applied Art	B.A.	4 years
Federal University of Technology, Akure	Industrial Design	B. Tech	5 years
Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	Industrial Design	B. Tech	5 years
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology	Fine Art	B. Tech	5 years
Delta State University, Abraka	Fine/Applied Arts	B.A.	4 years
University of Uyo	Fine Arts/F.A. Education	B.A., B. Ed	4 years
Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka	Fine/Applied Arts	B.A.	4 years
Imo State University	Fine/Applied Arts	B.A.	4 years
University of Nigeria, Nnsukka	Fine Arts	B.A.	4 years
Edo State University, Ekpoma	Fine/Applied Arts	B. Ed	4 years
Abia State University, Uturu	Fine/Applied Arts	B. Ed	4 years
University of Lagos	Creative Arts	B. A.	4 years
University of Port Harcourt	Creative Arts	B. A.	4 years
Federal University of Technology, Yola	Industrial Design	B Tech	5 years
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye	Fine Art	B. Sc.	5 years
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu Ode	Fine/Applied Arts	B. Ed	4 years

(Source: Journal of Industrial Design and Technology, 1999)

### **History of Art and Design Programs in Nigerian Universities**

It has earlier been stated that Nigerian Universities have various art and design programs, it is therefore necessary to add that the curricula in these institutions could be viewed from two perspectives; the curricula of conventional art departments of the first generation universities which were established as far back as 1960 with emphasis on students having art background and not science at secondary level, and that of the new generation universities where science subjects such as chemistry, physics, and mathematics are prerequisite for admission into art and design programs. The first generation universities with art programs include Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. These three Universities and two others - University of Ibadan and University of Benin became the fountain from which other art departments drew. (Akolo 1982, Ogunduyile, 1999) The art and design programs offered in the first generation universities as described by Ogunduyile (1999) laid emphasis on the production of objects which were admired for their beauties without much consideration for functionality and the industrial processes required in mass production. The art and design programs in the few second generation universities – University of Maiduguri, University of Benin, Delta State University, Abraka, University of Uyo, University of Lagos, University of Port Harcourt, Abia State University and Olabisi Onabanjo University were not to differ significantly from those of the first generation Universities. Emphasis was also laid on Art subjects- English Language, Fine Art and three other art subjects.

The industrial Design program commenced fully with the establishment of Universities of Technology. The philosophy behind its establishment was to enhance the development of the Nigeria nation to move from a consumer nation to technological oriented one. The industrial design program was therefore expected to teach product design, mass production processes and to bring about improvement in local crafts so as to make its recipients self reliant. In order to do this more effectively, the Universities of Technology considered it very important to admit only students with science and technology background. Subjects such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and any other two science subjects are considered important. Those with fine art background are considered to have added advantage. Students admitted into these universities take general courses in the 100 level while fine art and designs are gradually introduced to them at the 200l. The objectives of art and design program in the Universities of Technology are similar in that they all sought, among others to:

- Provide students with appropriate training and intellect in the acquisition of skills and

technological proficiency necessary for effective translation of creative designs to finished products;

- Raise the level of aesthetic and cultural awareness in the students; and
- Guide students to use their creative skills to enhance and add breath to the quality of living. (The Federal University of Technology Academic Calendar, 2005).

The philosophy of the new Universities of Technology as seen from the above objectives, require artist-teachers who are well grounded in both studio practice and research methodologies. The teacher-artists through their training often embraced both studio practice and research and are often willing to go beyond the MA program. While the artist-teacher whose trainings were studio oriented often feel that their practice degree MFA should be adequate to take them to the peak of university teaching career.

### **Challenges Facing Art and Design Higher Degree Program in the Federal University of Technology, Akure**

One of the notable characteristics of the fine art and industrial design curriculum is that, each art and design school in Nigeria is unique in the goals of their program. The curricula are organized and developed to be relevant to different cultural, societal and national necessities. Nigeria has a rich cultural heritage which all the universities are expected to utilize in conformity with technological advancement. The fine art and industrial design programs have been made to play down on 'art for art sake' but restructured towards the direction of practical and utilitarian ends, which could be of immense benefit to individuals and the nation. It is therefore apparent that the types of degrees awarded as reflected in previous chart university offerings are designed from all perspectives to enhance the philosophy of artistic creativity in a technological age.

The Federal University of Technology Akure, offers PhD in industrial design. The program explores varieties of research works in the areas of ceramics, textiles and graphics at both practical and theoretical levels. It uses the practical research in arts and design as basis for theoretical framework of all researches conducted in these various options. The nomenclature of the PhD. degree is made according to the areas of specialization. The acquisition of PhD is based on independent work, scholarship and most importantly relevant to technology of self reliance. The Master of Technology (M.Tech.) and the PhD degrees in industrial design run for not less than three and eight academic semesters respectively. Furthermore, the higher degrees in industrial design in FUTA combine science with art and design practice. This emphasis

gives and offers a new approach to design production that is scientifically artistic. In short, as a result of integrating science with art, the doctorate degree in FUTA focuses on concept building, material resource, and practical skills and production orientation through independent research work. The scientific and technological proficiency required to embark on the program necessitates that candidates intending to enroll in the department must be well grounded in science subjects. Generally industrial design education, like any in any other visual arts has its bearings and relevance in aesthetics, values, human needs, and lifestyles, social and as well as cultural norms.

### **Challenges for the Artist-teachers and Teacher-artists in the Nigerian Universities**

The requirement for the acquisition of a teaching certificate in the teaching of art seems to be a recent development in Nigerian educational system. Larmola (2004) noted that when the law on basic education in the arts was first being drafted in the early nineteen-nineties, attention was focused on the art teachers' formal qualifications. However, before this period, it was observed that great masters of art who taught art in schools did not possess teacher's certificate. Walter Gropius who taught in Bauhaus School of Design in 1919 was an Architect, designer and craftsman. He founded the Bauhaus School of Design to synthesize technology, craftsmanship, design and art. (Microsoft Encarta Web Dictionary, 2004). Others without art training certifications were Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee who were inventors and art teachers in various art schools. Another German who did not hold a teaching qualification was Wagen Wilhelm. However, Bohm-Duchem and Cook (1991) noted that after Wilhelm had gotten his silversmith certification from a drawing academy in Germany went to Bauhaus to take up the job of an Art Instructor. It is appreciated that these artists had broader background or training since they were art philosophers and critics. Their philosophies were reflected in their art and design practice.

Presently in Nigeria, for art teachers to reach the peak in academic, he or she has to face many challenges and cross many hurdles. One of these is the 'publish' or 'perish' syndrome. What this translates to is that if there is no required number of publications in reputable local and international journals, then, there is no promotion. Another academic exercise that has currently been introduced into the visual arts, and which is putting artist-teachers and teacher-artists on their toes is "get a PhD" sagacity. But as a matter of opinion, a lot of questions, which require rational answers, need be asked as to the issue of relevance and purpose. Also close to that is that whether the journey to acquiring higher degrees is artificially frustrating or not. Notwithstanding, artists and designers who are visionary in the academics see

every demand of the job as a challenge. At the moment, force and choice seem to combine together to proliferate the rush for enrolment into a PhD. program. The increase in the number of those pursuing doctorate degrees has its sound reason in compliance with the 'rules of the game' as set up by the universities. If you have to be in the game you have to master the rules of the game. Beyond learning the rules of the game, one has to know how to apply the rules accordingly. In other words, most university authorities are now mandating a doctorate degree for assessment, appointments and promotions into certain cadre of the academics. In a particular instance, to become a Reader (or even Senior Lecturer) without a PhD. may be practically impossible in most universities nowadays (example from FUTA). Therefore, failure to comply with the dictate of the times is failure to make upward progress. In which case, defaulters of the rules of the game are usually declared academically unproductive and are consequently forced out of their jobs.

### **A Review of the Pan African Circle of Artists (PACA) Conference**

With a view to meeting the challenges facing art education at higher educational institutions, various professional organizations such as Society of Nigerian Artists, (SNA) The National Society of Education in Art and Design (NSEAD), Pan African Circle of Artists, Art Republic and a host of others have been meeting on regular basis to study mutually important matters. However the 2004 gathering of artists and industrial designers organized by PACA unveiled some burning issues that bother on professional status and mobility of teachers with various higher degree certificates. The meeting brought about a type of polarization and call for a review of what members described as obnoxious policies of the universities and government toward visual art teachers in higher institutions without PhD. The issue of 'No PhD No promotion beyond the status of lecturer one was condemned significantly. Yusuff (1986) blamed the Nigerian government for lacking the political will to put visual arts in its proper position and not considering it as a priority. In an attempt to reduce the level of polarization between members with PhD and those with MFA, the conference observed the strong symbiotic relationship that exist between theory and practice in the field and suggested that both have important roles to play in the development of art education.

The conference also wanted the parameters used in evaluating the MFA programs in Nigerian Universities to be reviewed to take care of the observed deficiencies. At the end of the conference, PACA issued a communiqué which embraced the following:

- The National Universities Commission (NUC) should, as a matter of priority, commission studies that would aid the

- proper location, review and upgrading of the studio discipline in our institutions;
- The Society of Nigeria Artists (SNA) in collaboration with relevant Ministries, parastatals and non-governmental organizations should establish, as a matter of priority, an artist's regulation/registration council to regulate the teaching, learning, and dissemination of the visual arts in Nigeria;
  - Universities should encourage the pursuance of higher degrees directly related to the specific/particular area of the faculty specialization. The situation where academic staffs acquire PhDs in other (irrelevant) areas, not on their own volition but for the sole purpose of promotion, should be discouraged as an absurdity; and
  - If the gains of the visual art discipline are to be fully realized as a potent medium for national development, art must be made a compulsory subject in the primary and secondary school systems.

#### CONCLUSION

Teacher-artists and artist-teachers are viewed from two perspectives in this paper. The former is professionally a teacher with a teaching certificate. His concern is to impact knowledge in students of art since he is assumed to be well grounded in teaching methodologies of the subject matter. Whereas the latter is primarily an artist, who under normal condition, would have gone headlong into the production of art works for clients but found his way back to the classroom to impact knowledge. He may not have gone through the teacher training programs. There are quite a number of teachers, who, because of their knowledge in art, teach the subject. It is however realized that they dwell more on the theoretical aspects of the subject matter. The artist-teacher tends to solve the theoretical aspects of their teaching when they are on the job.

It is noted that more of those in the artist-teacher category in Nigeria often preferred to pursue the studio MFA program which is a terminal degree. The teacher-artist in the other hand, because of their reading and writing, often found it easier to face the challenges of pursuing higher degree programs. Now that the Nigerian Universities Commission is insisting that all teaching staff must be Ph.D holders, one could understand the reasons why those with terminal degrees in the studio areas are ready to counter any call that would undermine their MFA degrees. Their rejecting the call might have been based on the precedence that had earlier been set in some universities in Nigeria and abroad where teaching staff with MFA degree had been promoted to professorial cadres.

The various universities in Nigeria have been insisting that all teaching staff, irrespective of their programs must enroll and obtain doctorate degrees. A staff who failed to meet the requirements but aspire to rise to the position of professors is often frustrated as he would not be promoted beyond the position of Senior Lecturer.

It is the opinion of this paper that the parameters for evaluating those with MFA degrees, which are studio based, be reviewed to consider long years of teaching experiences and participations in local and international art exhibitions.

The paper supports that art teaching should be supported maximally with teachers who are motivated to take up the challenges of obtaining doctorate degrees as it obtains in other fields. This would bring an end to the 'drop out' stigma often attached to art and art profession in Nigeria.

#### REFERENCES

- Aig-Imoukhuede F., (Ed) (1991): A handbook of Nigerian Culture. Department of culture, Federal Ministry of Information and culture, Lagos. Pp 169 & 171
- Akolo, J.B., (1982) "Evaluation of Art and Crafts Programme in the Fourth and Fifth Years of Teachers Colleges in the Ten States of Nigeria". Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. Indiana University
- Bohm-Duchem, M., and Cook, J. (1991): *Understanding Modern Art*, Everett, F., (eds), England, Osborne Publishing Ltd. Pp 51.
- Federal University of Technology, Akure, Academic Calendar, 2005 - 2007
- Larmola, Y., (2004): "Children Art Education-Progress and problems", file://A:\Children's Art Education - Progress and Problems.htm
- Mello, R., (2000): "Exploring the Artist's Pedagogy (Teaching and learning in the visual Arts)", file://A:\Teaching%20and%20learning%20in%20the%20visual%20Arts.htm
- Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, (2004)
- Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia, (2005) "Education. Higher" Microsoft Corporation
- Monash University Course Guide (2000) "Faculty of Art and Design", Monash University Australia
- Oguibe, O. (2004): "Keynote address to the Conference on Re-interrogating the Visual Arts curriculum in Nigerian Universities and Colleges". Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State.

Ogunduyile, S.R., (1999): “The concept of Industrial Design in Nigerian Universities” in Journal of Industrial Design and Technology (Jindest). Vol. 1 No 1 Pp 4.

Pan African Circle of Artists (PACA) (2004): “A communiqué on Conference on Re-interrogating of the Visual Arts curriculum and standards in Nigeria Universities and other Institutions”, Nsukka, University of Nigeria.

University Matriculation Examination Brochure 2004/2005 Academic sessions. Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, Lagos.

Yusuff, S. (1986), “Art and the Modern Man –The Nigerian Environment”. A paper presented at the symposium organized by the Association of Fine Art Students of the L Lagos State College of Science and Technology, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1986