

Professional Art Aspiration and the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) Saga

Dr Onyema Emeni

Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

Abstract

The discourse on Professional Art Aspiration and the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) Saga though robust has hardly considered alternatives in attempts to locate a meeting point for the professional. The point to ponder is that research which creates new knowledge is not the same in all disciplines in the University system. The creative arts fall into disciplines where sole focus on research is distant. Its products rather help in the creation of new knowledge based disciplines, where sole focus on research based disciplines, therefore this paper set out to look at the contending issues that under gird the directive of the National Universities Commission (N.U.C) as regards mandatory attainment of the Doctor of Philosophy Degrees, and re-echoes Sir. Joshua Reynolds often quoted resentment to such demands that “art dies in the arid excesses of reasoning”. Hence the National Universities Commission (N.U.C’s) position requires reconsideration. I dwelled on the implementation of the idea of the new university and its imperative that tertiary education teachers earn a Ph.D to be relevant in such institutions. The idea of pursuing a Ph.D is not bad in its self. What my worry has been and remains is the way it is being pursued in Nigeria. What is happening in the universities currently appear untidy. And I think that if we are to make progress academically, a new orientation is needed in pursuing the Ph.D degree. What is then needed is studio doctoral that discuss relevant theories that help art practice. Even degrees in Art History and Art Education can be distractions. This is because they presuppose that one is an art historian, when in fact the candidate who earned the degree lacks requisite founding in the discipline. I look forward to a proper studio Ph.D whose ramifications in its development and maturity is guided and not to leave universities to structure what they want in the name of Ph.D

Introduction

The Nigerian education sub-sector has passed through various stages and managers who have enunciated policies from amalgamation in 1914, to the present. Thus, from a generalized focus of such policies, Nigeria has grown to pursue specialized policies. It is such development that has given birth to the National Universities Commission (NUC) which solely is focused on University education. It is no gainsaying, the fact that colonial education in Nigeria, the footage of western influence was not laid with bricks of either Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) degree nor does this suggest that there were no Ph.Ds since then, with University of Ibadan as a University College affiliated to the University of London a formal tertiary education in Nigeria debuted. The University as an institution is valued for its research focus beyond other contributions associated with it in any society. Regarding the contributions of the University to Society Ken Friedman documents these four challenges of the higher education thus: From the most ancient to the newest, all Universities face four challenges that have been at the core of higher education for the past five thousand years. These are:

- * Creating new Knowledge.
- * Preserving existing Knowledge.
- * Training Specialists and
- * Educating Citizens.

These challenges present an inherent dialectical tension. He further comments with regard to the first that:

“The requirements of new knowledge demand a foundation in earlier knowledge while pushing the boundaries of what is known. This means negotiating a delicate series of forces that draw the past into the future. At some moments, the need for preservation emphasizes the past, and love of the past often involves a tendency to preserve the past intact. At other times the need for new knowledge can overwhelm the past, and those who move forward sometimes care little for what we have known as societies and individuals.

Some pertinent points which Friedman raises are that in the first place the place of the University, first and foremost is to create new knowledge. The process of creating new knowledge generates a dialectical tension between the past needs of the presents. When the needs of the present overrun the preservation of the past, significant problems of preservation are encountered. This is where the thesis of this paper emanates. The first point to ponder is that research which creates new knowledge is not the same in all disciplines in the University

System. The creative arts fall into disciplines where sole focus on research is distant. Its products rather help in the creation of new knowledge as they are the focus of other research based disciplines.

Recently in Nigeria, following the ideal of the New University in the U.K in 1992 initiated Ph.D programmes for visual arts. This in the pursuit of creating new knowledge not consistent with visual arts practice lost sight of antecedents in history regarding the particular nature of visual art practice. Nigeria through the N.U.C has been demanding an implementation of the New University ideal in practice in the UK.

This paper therefore sets out to look at the contending issues that under gird this directive of the National Universities Commission (N.U.C) the position of this paper reechoes Sir Joshua Reynolds often quoted resentment to such demands that “art dies in the arid excesses of reasoning.” Hence the NUC’s position requires reconsideration.

Education in Nigeria and technical/art education particularly has witnessed, no doubt, a commendable progression. With “just a handful in the sixties, there are now over one hundred fine arts departments in our Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education...” (Oshinowo, 2008) attests to the fact that the Nigerian State is a huge academic success considering the quality of intellectuals emerging from our tertiary institutions in the space of barely half a century, most of these, usually taught by indigenous Nigerian Lecturers in our academic citadels. This calls for commendation to the pioneer and serving indigenous Nigerian Lecturers whose passion for imparting knowledge, commitment to building a virile nation and dedication, though may not have had specialized Degrees, such as Doctorial Philosophy (Ph.D) and Professorial attainment at the onset, as there were fewer Nigerian lecturers with, such but passion, knowledge, dedication to duty and desire to affect our world positively have made the likes of University of Benin, Ahmadu Bello University, Auchi Polytechnic and Yaba College of Technology tower among browsers around the world.

Critics watching the recent development in policy thrust of the Nigerian University Commission (N.U.C) are worried, perhaps, for the lack of purpose of the present legislation of University lecturers’ qualification requirement especially on the studio artists. Oloidi (2008), surmise that the present imposition of Ph.D degree by the national University Commission on the Creative, studio artists is a misadventure and called on African States to collectively reject such draconian policies for the growth of the profession. He concludes that studio art teachers have been acquiring PhD Degrees for ages but without being forced to do so.

Some countries have such temptation and eventually aborted their plans to compel lecturers of Visual Arts to acquire Ph.D Degree and today, the United State of America has it going well for them and though the U.K has this policy in place, it is not the best, because they are having lots of problems with it.

The thought is, we should not just copy without recourse to what any nation around the world is doing but our policy makers especially the N.U.C in this context should also weigh the terminal implications of whatever policy instrument we may choose to explore.

Origin of Art in the Academy

I begin with what is generally regarded as a universal given regarding the origin of the art academy. The art academy was formalized during the renaissance period. During the period artists were eager to demonstrate that art was as noble as the liberal arts classed as;

- * The trivium consisting of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic and
- * Quadrivium consisting of music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy.

Fine art then came to be known as the mechanical or servile arts that offered practical technology (Beardesley, 1966). The above pursuit of the renaissance artists structured courses for any one who wished to become an artist in what was then known as the Bogarte system. Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455 AD) in Goldwater recommended that “the sculptor and the painter should also be trained in all these liberal arts: Grammar, Geometry, Philosophy, Medicine, Astronomy, Perspective, History, Anatomy, Theory of Design and Arithmetic.” The recommendation above was designed to equip the would-be artist with general knowledge to help him/her to serve the community and equally be in a good position to rationalize thoughts invested in a work of art. We were to find in Leonardo da Vinci an articulate artist who constructed and developed many early theories in technology; as rudimentary as technology was said to be then. The training in art took thus form until the art academy started in France during the neo classical period. The art academy it is known up till recent times until the academy was admitted into a university setting in Canada in the early 1950s was a school set aside on its own. It is responsible for institutions like Slade School of Art or The Goldsmith School of Art, both institutions that Ben Enwonwu attended. Many such schools are spread all over Europe. However in recent times they have been affiliated to universities. The peculiar demand of an art school in a university, which is recent has its multiple problems.

New Policies and their Impacts

Recently in the United Kingdom its polytechnics were converted into universities, in a new policy tertiary education was redesigned to play its role to society in a proper sense. What is this proper sense? Tertiary

levels of knowledge are knowledge generating institutions. The knowledge they generate is usually through research activities that expectedly should produce new knowledge. New knowledge applied to societal needs then become useful as it offers society improved options for human growth or the growth of civilizations. This expectation in itself is definitely not a bad idea. Before 1890 when the idea of the new university which the above reconstitution of the university's role in civilization researches did not make great impact on communities. The above idea which the new university encapsulates is responsible for the turns in the Nigerian educational system. Recall that it was muted that polytechnics be converted to universities. The idea raised many uncertainties. While many people were happy other imagined what the situation was going to end up in. Some polytechnics had indeed begun sorting themselves within the new role they were to play as universities. I recall that it was a period of great confusion before the thought was put on hold. The suspension brought relief to all stake holders. The important lesson from that policy pronouncement and reversal is that our managers of education jump to innovations without considering its pros and cons.

In Europe I think that the UK is the only nation that went that far. In the Americas where the fine art programme was introduced into the university system for the first time it has run a few options such as B.A., B.F.A., M.F.A. and at a time experimented with D.F.A. Eventually it settled for the following B.A or B.F.A and M.F.A. It then defines the M.F.A as a terminal degree in the making of art and equivalent to the Ph.D. This distinction is important. The Ph.D as a theoretical degree remains a research degree and the highest degree awarded in the university structure. This is because it provides new knowledge usually applied to human conditions for the advancement of humanity. The work of art on the other hand is servile. But that servile reality has not placed it at a disadvantage to the Ph.D, that was one of the reasons the D.F.A was abrogated. The logic is that when you become a master at something what else can one become in the true sense of the word. Ideally to earn a Ph.D in painting in the true sense to the word would mean for the painter to provide theory on his or her painting. It is like a dancer dancing and watching him or herself and theorising on his or her dance. That dance definitely would be a difficult one. Thus in the Americas Ph.D degree holders convoke standing up at the same time with M.F.A holders. But studio art teachers who desire to earn the Ph.D to enhance their theoretical base are enrolled for studio theory and not Ph.D in painting or sculpture the way it is in the UK.

Nigeria universities have largely adopted the model of the UK in the programmes so far and they appear to lack some understanding in its operational modes. The adoption of that stance in Nigeria is a response to the demands of the new university which was earlier adopted in the UK. In the UK where it has been in operation it has faced great challenges and critical appraisals and revaluations. And they remain on going. The adoption of the Ph.D fiat has left many lecturers to abandon the studio for degree in art history and art education until recently when the studio programme began in some universities like the Delta State University Abraka. Before the start of studio Ph.Ds, to study such studio supplementary courses like art history and art education just to earn a Ph.D to qualify to teach in the university remains unbalanced. There is a way that directive has diminished that quality of learning in the tertiary institutions. The fiat that the university was placed also effects the polytechnics. My summation is that the distractions they propose for a meaningful studio learning and engagement is a mere placebo. It has diminished the quality of the studio. As placebo, earning a Ph.D has not improved the quality of output by the tertiary education teacher. This accounts for the downward trends in the standard of artists being produced in recent times.

In my assessment I have not blamed the university authorities. I place the blame squarely at the door step of the artist. Many of us explain having to earn a Ph.D on the fact that the authorities demand it. But I am convinced that secretly we all want to answer "Doc" like other academics who we share the university or polytechnic with. It is a genuine dream that has remained a dream achieved but which has not improved the need that made the idea an idea within the context of the new university. Even in the UK from the reviews so far positive results have not been posted with the innovation.

I am not by this paper trying to dissuade or ask for a stop to the P.h.D ambition or agenda. But I know that there are alternatives to updating artists and making them global performers that are useful to their community and the world at large. Artist workshops that are so active in Europe, America, Asia, South Africa and recently Agbara-Otor are such avenues. Another is the advanced institutions for postgraduate programmes like the Jan van Eyck Academy Maastricht in Holland and Pasadena in the USA. They admit candidates for rigorous art practice backed with exciting exchanges of ideas like the workshops. They do not give the Ph.D but by admitting MFA holders to their postgraduate research programmes and what they have turned out over the years I have seen it along with artist workshop residencies as great avenues that improve artists' capabilities to be valuable artists. The tertiary education teacher's mandate is to produce artists who can be value to society. Just the way also the theories constructed from the Ph.D is expected to uplift society.

Recently Mr. Tony Okpe became a Professor of Sculpture; at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria He has the MFA degree only. It then means that Ahmadu Bello University Zaria has learnt some wisdom. Beyond that wisdom are the qualities of individuals there. Professor Tony Okpe is one artist that has featured in many artist residences in Europe and America along with Jerry Buhari. Is it possible that these avenues provided them

with experience to articulate pertinent issues that relate to the studio in academic papers along with exhibiting their works? A pull of these energies was able to convince their universities to promote them? In recent times we encounter artists with Ph.D who have earned the degree and still cannot offer the world and their community the kind of knowledge and information from practice that enriches practice. My humble submission is for us to rethink various institutional pressures that place extra burden on those who have chosen to be artists. Rather they should be encouraged to participate in workshops that enrich studio knowledge. Even with the Ph.D in studio it is important that any artist worth the call to teach should be encouraged to participate in artist's residencies and workshops. They are great avenues of studio knowledge which those we train need to become global performers.

Conclusion

I have dwelled on the implementation of the idea of the new university and its imperative that tertiary education teachers earn a Ph.D to be relevant in such institutions. The idea of pursuing a Ph.D is not bad in its self. What my worry has been and remains is the way it is being pursued in Nigeria. In the UK where the initiative came from there are standard regulatory bodies that have consistently monitored, evaluated progress and offer alternative to practice. Such bodies as Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). The researcher training Initiative (RTI) are examples. In Nigeria the only relevant bodies are the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). I am not sure that both bodies have harmonized focus regarding the issues of standards. What is happening in the universities currently appear untidy. And I think that if we are to make progress academically, looking at the value of theory sketched previously in the opening of this paper, a new orientation is needed in pursuing the Ph.D degree. In Nigeria, degrees that are not studio specific will remain non studio degrees. What is then needed is studio doctoral that discuss relevant theories that help art practice. Even degrees in art history and art education can be distractions. This is because they presuppose that one is an art historian, when in fact the candidate who earned the degree lacks requisite founding in the discipline. At least South African nations are already calling regional conference on how to solve the problem. And this is encouraging and I think Nigeria and West African states should be doing same. This is with a view to keep to tracks. What is happening in Nigeria where in some instance the candidate is asked to do other masters to earn a Ph.D makes non issue of the original studio which is the focus of an individual. In some universities currently advanced practice are taught as if the recipient of knowledge had not mastered the rudiments of the discipline previously. But the Ph.D is training on how to generate new knowledge and not skill advancement programme. By this paper I look forward to a proper studio Ph.D whose ramifications, in its development and maturity is guided and not to leave universities to structure what they want in the name of Ph.D.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- During, David (2000). "Design in the U.K.: Some Reflections on the Emerging Ph.D.," Key Paper on Doctoral Education in Design, Foundation for the Future.
- Elkins, James (2009). "Artists with Ph.Ds: On the New Doctoral Degree in Studio Art" Washington DC: New Academia Publishing.
- Ken Friedman (2002), "Exploring Effective Curricula Practices in Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education": Conference Proceeding at the Center for Learning and Teaching in Art and Design. The Royal Institute of British Architects.
- Kolade, Oshinowo (2008). "Oshinowo Takes us Down Memory Lane," Abuja, Nigeria, Atmosphere, A Publication of the National Gallery of Art.
- Ku bier, G. (1982). "The Shape of Time Remarks on History of Things." New Heaven and London, Yale University Press.
- Newbury, D. (2002). "Education the Design Researcher: Reflections on the Development of Postgraduate Curriculum," National Education Forum of the Southern Africa (DESFA); Invited Keynote at the Design, Research and Development Conference, "The 5th National Education Forum of the Southern Africa.
- Ola, Olodi (2008). "A waiting Prospecting: Visual Arts and Economy in Africa," Abuja- Nigeria. A Keynote Paper: Africa Regional Summit on Visual Arts. (ARESIVA), National Gallery of Art.
- Ugiomoh, Frank (2003) "The Studio in the Humanities: Defining Disciplinary Boundaries' Wangboje Memorial Essays. Eds. Stella Issues in Creative Arts and Education in Nigeria.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Academic conference: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

