



Sustaining Architectural Practice in Nigeria: The Role of Mentoring and Apprenticeship

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Abstract The architectural profession cum its practice in Nigeria seems to be dwindling and heading for a total crash in recent times based on the events and happenings that lately suggest that unless a drastic measure is taken, there may not be qualified architects in Nigeria soon. This challenge and setback can be resolved only if there is revamping of the ones lost mentoring system. This study examines the role of mentoring and apprenticeship in sustaining the practice of architecture in Nigeria. Methodology employed in this study is qualitative survey research which combines the use of questionnaires, interviews with professionally registered architect, non-registered architecture graduates, review of literature and the use of data from the Architects registration council of Nigeria (ARCON) and the Nigerian institute of Architects (NIA). Findings revealed that there is poor mentoring in Nigeria and several graduate architects shun apprenticeship and are therefore not registered or licensed to practice as architects thereby creating opportunities for quackery and intrusions of other professional into the practice of architecture. The study concluded that mentoring and apprenticeship was the way to go if the practice of architecture in Nigeria will be sustained for the next generation.

Keywords: architecture, apprenticeship, mentoring, practice, registered architect.

Introduction

The structure of architectural curriculum in universities and polytechnics in Nigeria today does not prepare students for the real world of architecture practice upon graduation. This is why it is important that mentoring and apprenticeships becomes nonnegotiable strategy in shaping the future of would-be architects to carry on the practice of architecture in Nigeria. In today's challenging and competitive professional business environment, the quality of employees output anchored on development through mentoring and apprenticeship has never been this important. Studies have shown that persons who are mentored display increased chances of career success due to the targeted training and development they acquired, this is because mentors acting as trusted and advisors, help to provide a sounding board for the daily challenges encountered on the job and provide alternative viewpoints on issues in terms of both problem identification and problem solving [1].

Among other benefits, mentoring transforms a student's experience and attitude during a seminal period of their career. Thus, mentoring is seen as bringing an individual seeking for initial guidance and direction (the mentee) with another individual who can provide this (the mentor) both working in partnership to achieve results. It is defined as a coalition of two people that creates a space for discussion and interaction which results in reflection, action and learning for both" [1; 2]. Across the globe, various professions embrace and encourage mentoring and apprenticeships by entrenching it in their professional code of conducts and regulation to enhance the quality of their professional output. In the practice of the architectural profession in Nigeria, as it is with Britain, Canada, and the United States of America (USA), one cannot transit from the classroom as a graduate of



architecture directly into practice without undergoing internship through mentoring and apprenticeship to be better equipped and certified as an architect.

The practice of architecture in Nigeria like what obtains in developed climes infers that one must move through a system of educational, regulatory, and professional spheres. Thus, there are three organizations that oversee the fields of architectural education and practice namely Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON), the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA), and the Association of Architectural Educators in Nigeria (AARCHES), although the later has not been given proper statutory role and prominence. However, only ARCON grants one the right to practice architecture and the right to use the title “architect” as part of its regulatory role [3]. As part of this training process, in addition to completion of formal degree programme from any accredited school of architecture, the completion of a two-year mandatory apprenticeship (also referred to as an internship) is required for architectural practice. Thus, the architectural apprenticeship takes place in the context of an established architectural firm and under the tutelage of licensed architects to provide access to professional practice examination (PPE), registration, licensure, title, and practice.

Today, it is on record and evidently clear that the profession of architecture in Nigeria is dwindling and experiencing a setback, apparently heading towards total collapse. This is because the current generation of interns (graduate architects) on one hand are not willing to go through the rigours of apprenticeship and mentoring process in their quest to get quick money and qualified practicing architects on the other hand are not available to mentor the young ones to avoid competition. It should be noted that it is through mentorship that the architects can support those entering the profession and it is the architects’ professional and ethical responsibility to transfer their wealth of knowledge and experience to the next generation of architects for the sustainability of the profession [4]. Therefore, this study examines the role of mentoring and apprenticeship and Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) in sustaining the practice of architecture in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The success or failure of any professional organization or field of study in various human endeavours including the continuous existence and sustenance of such discipline depends on the training and transference of years of accumulated knowledge of older professionals to the younger generation of professionals which is what mentoring is about. It is generally stated that successes without successors is failure indeed, thus this subject of apprenticeship and mentoring cannot be jettison if certain profession such as architecture in Nigeria and other nations of the world must continue to exist. Accordingly, mentoring is defined as characteristically a one-to-one relationship that exist between an experienced professional (mentor) and a less experience person (mentee) which is based on constructive comments, encouragement, openness, mutual trust, and respect including a willingness to learn and share [1]. Mentoring that is based on supportive relationships helps the mentee approach situations with confidence.

Today, it is no longer strange that employers require ‘work ready’ graduates to employ rather than just pure academic qualifications and the work-based learning evidenced in mentoring help to meet this requirement. As Hauschildt and Heinemann established, it is not merely competence that the apprentice acquires, but also a professional identity and individual motivation which is enhanced through the experience of actual workplace learning and work [5]. Apprenticeship is defined by [6] ‘as a process of learning an occupation through the direct experience of working in the actual context of that occupation where experts transfer their knowledge to novices’. Apprenticeship has been acknowledged to be a transforming and functional process of learning which also provides a context and a community of practice within which novices develop their abilities, discover, and form their unique identity. Thus, apprenticeship has been seen as associated with rites of passage, initiation, and learning to become an interdependent member of the community of practice [7; 8].

On the significance of architectural apprenticeship, history has it that some of the renowned and celebrated architects of all times were products of apprenticeship training whose entrance into the field of architecture revolutionized architectural practice. Accordingly, records showed that architects like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Frank Lloyd Wright had no formal education in architecture, but all had their architectural apprenticeship experiences under the mentorship of seasoned architects, for instance both Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe had their apprenticeship experience with Peter Behrens, while the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright served as an apprentice under Louis Sullivan [6]. This is why architectural



apprenticeship experience remains an integral part of architectural practice both in the United States, United Kingdom (UK) and Nigeria till date. In addition, architectural apprenticeship has remained useful non formal way for the promotion of innovative architectural production as well as a training tool and means of induction into architectural practice over the years.

However, on the dwindling rate of interest in architectural apprenticeship across the globe, some critics have observed and established that current practice shows that architectural apprenticeship have be turned into a source of cheap source of labour for greedy mentors with little impact on their mentees' professional growth and opportunities to be knowledgeable on all aspects of architectural practice [9]. The consequence of this is that there is a decrease in the number of architects completing apprenticeships and becoming licensed practitioners has severally decreased in the USA [10; 11]. The situation is similar and even worst in Nigeria today where there has been a total halt in the conduct of professional practice examination and registration of architects (PPE) due to the lingering crises between ARCON and NIA that have lasted over five years, despite the increase in the numbers of higher institutions running architecture programmes with its attendant increase population of graduate architects. Hence, the need to emphasize the reevaluation of the apprenticeship experience required a well-furnished professional learning and acculturation.

Similarly, on the goal and reasons for mentoring [9] summarize the goal into three by categories of beneficiary namely consistent successful delivery for clients, improvement of existing skills and growth of depth of experience for mentors while the mentees improve in their capacities through guided hands-on knowledge for mastering of approach to problem solving in the field of study. Additionally, mentoring has helped in increasing the productivity of mentees, increase in pay, increased satisfaction, and better commitment as well as translation of theoretical knowledge into practical experience required to grow in the chosen career [12].

However, it is important to state that a formal mentoring relationship must exist for mentoring to be effective. In this regard, six characteristics of formal mentoring programme are outlined to include the following: programme objectives; selection of participants; matching of mentors/mentees; training for mentors and mentees; guidelines for meeting; and goal-setting process [13]. Formal mentoring could be divided into the following types namely; one-on-one mentoring, peer mentoring, group mentoring, virtual mentoring, flash mentoring, sequential flash mentoring, speed mentoring and reverse mentoring [14;15].

However, for apprenticeship and mentoring to be successful and sustainable, the principles guiding the mentor mentee relationship must be maintained with the objectives of the programme in focus. Thus, any successful mentoring relationship is anchored on mutual trust and respect for each other, humility, openness and supportiveness, readiness to learn and readiness to share knowledge and productive feedback [1]. In addition, this relationship requires the mentor to possess some characteristics such as good interpersonal relationship qualities, listening ability, understanding the mentoring process, tolerance, and encouragement ability [16; 17].

Materials and Methods

Methodology employed in this study is qualitative survey research which combines the use of questionnaires, interviews with professionally registered architect, non-registered architecture graduates, review of literature and the use of data from the Architects registration council of Nigeria (ARCON) and the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA). 160 questionnaires were distributed to graduates of architecture with either diploma or degrees of over ten years across five Niger-Delta States of Nigeria and Abuja. The questionnaire which was grouped into sections contained information on personal data, qualification (diploma or degree in architecture), year of graduation, apprenticeship experience, attachment to mentors and professional registration status among other information. The study employed purposive and expert sampling method to locate respondents across the study areas. The data obtained were analyzed using simple statistics and the results are presented in tables and charts.

Results and Discussions

160 questionnaires were distributed to holders of either Higher National Diploma or degrees in architecture of over five years old which forms the basic requirements for registration as architects across five Niger-Delta States of Nigeria and Abuja. Therefore, purposive sampling techniques was employed in the administration of



the questionnaires. From the 160 questionnaires distributed, 125 were retrieved which represents 78.1%. This is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Administration.

City	Asaba	Benin City	Calabar	FCT Abuja	Port-Harcourt	Uyo	Yenagoa	Total	Percentage (%)
Number Distributed	20	18	38	16	25	25	18	160	100
Number Retrieved	15	15	30	12	18	20	15	125	78.1

Source: Author’s Fieldwork 2023

From section 1 of the questionnaires, out of the 125 respondents, 92 are male, while 33 are female. For highest qualification, 56 respondents are HND/BSc/B.Tech, holders, while 96 has MSc/M.Tech degrees in Architecture. On involvement in architectural practice, all 125 respondents are involved one way or another while none of the respondents is registered professionally. The implication here is that all the respondents are into architectural practice but are not recognized by law to practice. Only 22 respondents have provisional registration. Similarly, on the nature of employment/engagement, 40 respondents are in private firms/ organizations, 55 are in public or government establishments all three categories representing (76%) while 30 representing (24%) are self-employed (personal practice) as in figure 1.

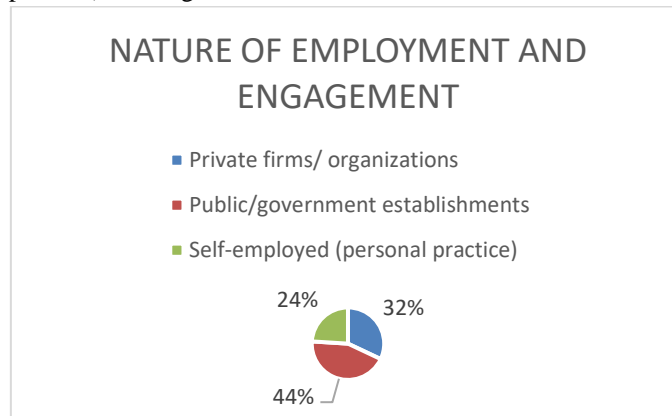


Figure 1: Pie chart showing nature of employment and engagement of respondents.

Source: Author’s Fieldwork 2023

On the number of years spent in office/practice in the various organizations and employment, 48 respondents representing (38%) have spent 10-14 years; 38 (30.4 %) have spent 5-9 years; 22 respondents (17.6%) have spent over 15 years while 17 (13.6%) have spent 1-4 years respectively as shown in Fig. 2. This implies that only about 13.6% have spent less than 5 years working in architecture-related areas of practice while about 86.4% have spent over 5 and 15 years in architectural practice respectively which is far more than the required period to undertake apprenticeship training, write the requisite professional examination and become licensed architects.

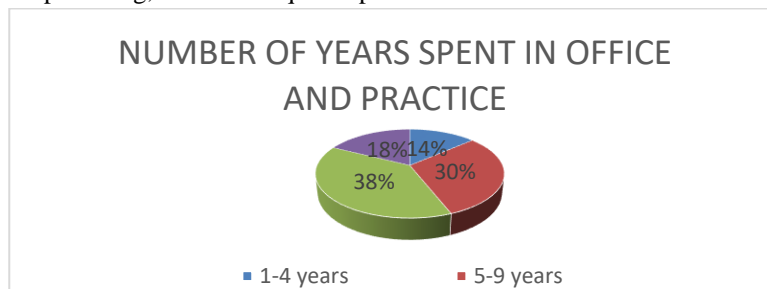


Figure 2: Pie chart showing number of years spent in office and practice by respondents.

Source: Author’s Fieldwork 2023

Furthermore, in Fig.3, the statistics on the number of respondents that have mentors and are apprentices are 48 representing 38% while 77 representing 62% respondents do not even have mentors or are apprentices. This implies that most of the respondents do not have mentors which will make it impossible for them to become professionally registered architects.



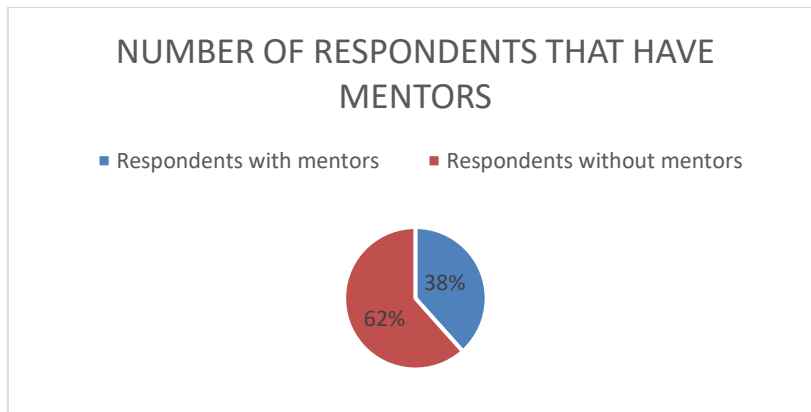


Figure 3: Pie chart showing number of respondents that have mentors.

Source: Author's Fieldwork 2023

On encouragement and advice by registered professional to get registered, 116 respondents (92.8%) have been encouraged to register by senior professional colleagues while 9 respondents (7.2%) have not received any encouragement as in Fig. 4. This implies that most of the respondents have received encouragement to register to become qualified professionals. So, the challenge is not that respondents have not received encouragement from the senior professionals, but the problem is the lack of willingness on the part of the respondents to become registered professionals.



Figure 4: Pie chart showing encouragement by registered professional for respondents to get registered.

Source: Author's Fieldwork 2023

However, on the intentions to get registered, 102 respondents (81.6%), do not intend to register, that is, they are not interested in becoming registered architects while 23 respondents (18.4%) intend to register. This shows that as revealed earlier, though the respondents have had the encouragement by senior professionals to get registered, a higher percentage of them do not intend to go through the registration process as shown in Fig.5.

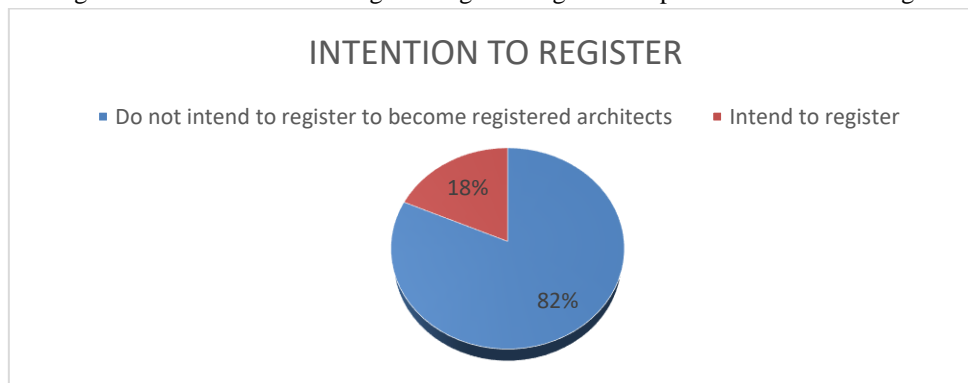


Figure 5: Pie chart showing respondents' intention to get registered.

Source: Author's Fieldwork 2023



In addition, the analysis on reasons for not being registered was carried out as seen in Fig. 6. Lack of finance is least with 10 respondents (4%); conflict within architecture body is next with 17 respondents (13.6%); lack of interest has 25 respondents (20%); too many procedures have 31 respondents (24.8%) and poor mentoring which has 42 respondents (33.6%).

From these statistics, though respondents have reasons for refusing to register as professionals, their reasons are closely linked with no sharp differences between them. However, lack of finance which one may think would be a serious hindrance ordinarily is the least with 4%. The reason with the highest respondents is poor mentoring with 33.6% which shows that even though mentoring exists, the quality is poor, and this can discourage intending junior professionals from getting registered.

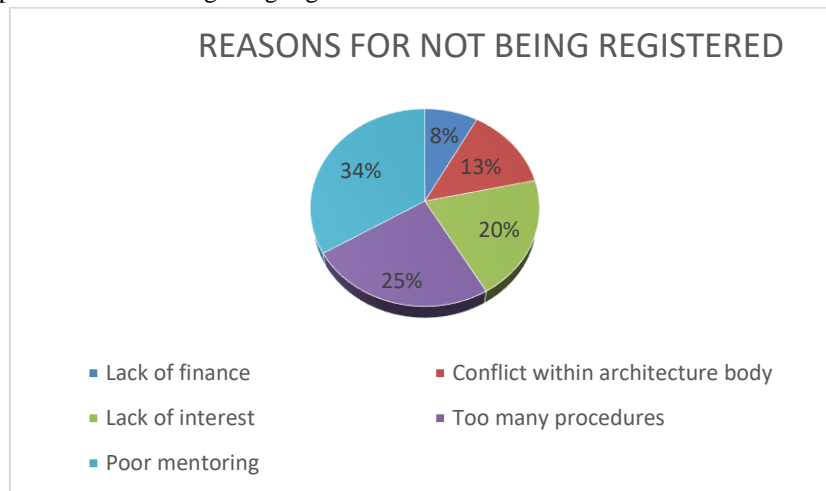


Figure 6: Pie chart showing reasons for not being registered professionally.

Source: Author's Fieldwork 2023

Discussion on Interview: the interview featured 30 respondents in all who were selected by expert and purposive sampling methods. 10 professionally registered architects who have practiced for over 15 years post-registration experience, with 3 in public offices and 7 in private practice with their firms and 20 trainee architects (those with degrees in architecture but not yet registered). The interview questions were basically on mentoring, apprenticeship, training, practice, relationship between mentors and trainees among others. The interviews responses were collated and analyses using content analysis with reoccurring issues selected as themes and presented thus:

* *Quality of mentoring and apprenticeship:* the interviewee who are core registered professionals expressed their disappointment as to the level of unwillingness and unserious attitude of most of the mentees they have come across. In their views, instead of becoming an apprentice to be mentored, most of the young upcoming professionals prefer to be hired as workers for money which according to the senior professionals was affecting the quality of apprenticeship. On the part of the young aspiring professionals, their views are that the senior colleagues were not being fair and sincere in their dealings with them stating that their welfare was not important to the mentors but to use them for their selfish interest. Overall, this poor relationship between mentors and mentees has adversely affected the quality of mentoring and apprenticeship which in turn affect the practice of architecture in Nigeria.

* *Procedures for registration:* The yet-to-register professionals interviewed opined that the procedures for registration to become fully registered architects was too cumbersome, difficult, and unfriendly. Their views were that the additional qualification to first degree was enough requisite to qualify one to be fully registered as against having a second/master's degree and still waiting for years before writing another qualifying examination which is currently the case. Most of them cited the instances of other built environment professional bodies such as engineering, surveying and town planning whose registration is simple.

* *Architectural practice:* The way and manner the practice of architecture in Nigeria is being operated was another source of concern to the senior professional. Their views were that the practice was a free-for-all affair in which persons without architectural backgrounds are engaged to carry out architectural services. This among other things encourages the younger unregistered architects to continue to



practice. Thus, their views were purely policy failure which allows contractors or their staff without the requisite architectural background to take up architectural jobs.

* *Conflict within the profession*: The interviewee also expressed their concerns over what they term internal conflict and rancor within the architectural profession which is weakening the practice and the professional body. They cited instances where ARCON and the NIA have been at longer heads with each other resulting in lingering court cases thereby paralyzing the professional and giving room for other built environment professions to thrive and even take over certain roles that are met for the architecture profession.

Conclusion

The study which focused on sustaining the practice of architecture in Nigeria has been thoroughly investigated and researched through the various methods discussed in the text. Although other variables were used in the analysis, it was met to enhance the main purpose of the paper being part of the processes involved to sustain architectural practice in Nigeria. The building construction industry which is headed by the architect needs a vibrant, healthy, and robust professional body like ARCON to drive the process and this can only become a possibility when the regulatory body encourages the younger generation of architects to become full registered members through a process of healthy mentoring and apprenticeship programme. The current trend of employer-employee relationships which does not provide the needed training for self-development should be discouraged while the old concept of mentor-mentee/apprenticeship relationship which help the mentee gain insight into the profession and step-by-step training process into becoming a licensed architect someday should be embraced and promoted.

As this study has shown, it is going to be a mirage trying to achieve sustainable architectural practice in Nigeria when mentoring is poor, and apprenticeship is not being embraced by the younger generation of would-be-architects. Today, the number of registered architects in Nigeria since the establishment of ARCON is less than 5000 for a population of over 200 million people in a country where there are about 40 architecture degree awarding universities and over 40 polytechnics awarding Diplomas in architecture annually. This number gives a sense of weakness in strength when compared with other professions in the building industry. The study has shown that only a well-structured and organized mentoring and apprenticeship programmed, encouragement coupled with reduced procedural requirements for registration can help sustain architectural practice in Nigeria.

The study therefore recommends the following:

- a) The Government through National Universities Commission (NUC) and National Commission for Polytechnic and Monotechnic, AARCHES, and ARCON should refine and overhaul the structure of the training curriculum to include mentoring and apprenticeship programmes for all tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
- b) Aspiring young architects should be encouraged to participate in the apprenticeship training under well experienced professionals by approving an apprenticeship stipend for participants like in the health ministry.
- c) Procedures for registration should be reduced to enhance registration interest.
- d) Laws against quackery should be enforced to stall non-registered architects from practicing which will force them to register professionally.

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