



Decolonising African Art Pedagogical Practice: Extrapolating the Context of Artistic Erudition in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

There is a global trend towards decolonising knowledge output, particularly on the African continent and, by extension, Nigeria in West Africa. This raises questions about the nature of Western educational philosophy, which is viewed as having an impact on individual growth, achievement, self-actualization, and society expectations. Still, this paradigm is unsuitable for the African environment, indicating an attempt to westernise the African art curriculum. Since the post-republican era in Nigeria, scholars have argued about the heterogeneity that comes with instruction communication and the incapacity of its environment to achieve human development and societal transformation. However, there is a paucity of research into the peculiarity of the African art education setting, which would allow for adequate absorption of what distinguishes African knowledge production from that of the West or Global North. This study provides a case study analysis of how practical art knowledge is distributed in Nigeria in order to obtain insight into how the curriculum material compares to other contexts around the world. This paper explores how practical art knowledge is taught in apprentice or internship settings, as well as formal college and university settings. According to the study, there is occasionally a gap between how art instruction is disseminated and the socioeconomic environment outside of school in Nigeria. The study reveals that there appears to be a lesser disconnect of these elements in western or northern contexts. Bearing this in mind, this paper argues that the decolonisation of pedagogical practice in the arts should be considered in the perspective of diverse requirements for artist in Nigeria and in Africa as the case applies. The comprehension of specific context of knowledge production in Nigeria stand a chance of providing a model for decolonising pedagogical practice in Nigeria.

Keywords Decolonising, Africa, Pedagogy, Extrapolating, Artistic, Erudition, Nigeria

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Introduction

In the 1950s, European ideology influenced the concept of decolonisation in African art, which was later led by African intellectuals. The African Counter movement peaked during the 1960s' independence decade' and has continued to accelerate with the goal of creating nationwide propensities and unique communal tradition that can uniquely mirror art, film, music, drama, and literature of the African people.

The ideological foundations vary depending on the location, ranging from Marxist to Pan-Africanist, Negritudist, or in vast post-colonies like Nigeria, encompassing a wide range (including those that were blatantly anti-ideological). Post-colonial Africans were particularly concerned about the decision to divest intellectual institutions associated with the late colonial era, such as universities, museums, and theatres (Kasfir, 1999). Beyond anti-colonial rhetoric, the very idea of a national culture raised different issues for the practicing artist and the academia. Despite major differences in artistic development across different African countries,

African nations developed the same urge at the period of self-governance to redesign their cultural heritage. This is necessary to rescue themselves from the dictate of British government, to navigate farther than the acumen of traditional and ethnic thinking in line of extensively displayed but contemporary in the form of the nation-state. African nations developed the same urge at the period of self-governance to redesign their cultural heritage. This is necessary to rescue themselves from the dictate of British government, to navigate farther than the acumen of traditional and ethnic thinking in line of extensively displayed but contemporary in the form of the nation-state (Kasfir 1999,167).

It is no more a news that African history has often been told from the outsider's

trajectories. These sects who underplay the features and visibility of originality in all that define the indigenous African identity are tagged the 'armchair investigators'. The Contemporary conversation on the theme of decolonising pedagogical practice, including research on African issues, is germane and beckons on researchers to ruminate on the colonial ideology and power manifestation that progressively infiltrate the creation of indigenous understanding of African nations, settlers and the community at large. Oguibe (2004, 6) comments that the Western researcher or the diaspora African scholars are prone to arrive into conclusion in their conversation about the portrayal of African histories without considering a background check to ascertain if this discourse resonate with the belief of the people whose experience are been interrogated. From the argument of Oguibe, my point of argument is that there is a need for a call to interrogate the nature of the Western educational ideological system and its inability to enhance individual achievement, attainment of perceived goals, and societal demands. A consistent thematic contestation among scholars since the advent of the post-republican era in Nigeria has been the heterogeneity engaged in communicating instruction and the inability of its context to achieve human development and societal transformation. This in itself metamorphosed into the necessity of raising the questions: What is African art pedagogical practice? What is problematic about the existing African art pedagogy? How can the African art education context be situated in order to extrapolate the context of artistic erudition in Nigeria? What sets African knowledge production apart from those in the west. Therefore, a thorough restructuring of the existing curriculum must be considered to effectively empower African scholars towards enhancing transformation and advancement in art pedagogical practice all over Africa. This will address the concern of Posnansky (1998: 6) Who point out that art instruction in most tertiary institution, especially universities in Africa operate a weak curriculum content and in some

cases, art is non-existence in some tertiary institution. In order to salvage this challenge, teaching strategies are required to solidify the discipline in an African milieu.

Art schools, Apprenticeship programs and Workshops in Nigeria

Several scholarly attempts have been put forward to consider the meaning of decolonisation with respect to university curriculum instruction (Heleta 2016, 2-3; Higgs 2016, 92; Le Grange 2016, 1-12; Luckett, 2016, 415–428). In spite of this, decolonisation has not received adequate theorisation as it is applicable to pedagogy in the African educational environment. Decolonisation ideology is an ongoing global and historical narrative about the cultural, economic, psychological, and pedagogical independence for Africans with the aspiration of achieving indigenous sovereignty over value system. A decolonized pedagogy is a powerful tool for deconstructing colonial influences on knowledge and education. A critical agitation of African pedagogy decolonisation in Nigeria is the continued domination of curriculum content with colonial reflections. There is a call for a rich, well-grounded, and a pronounced art historical engagement all across African continent to address the xenophobic and neo-colonial perception of certain scholars and curators in the west. This is targeted to address an African-focused art history which is continuous and revolutionary (Odiboh 2009, p.551). The Art history educational programmes, credo, and the execution initiative transmitted via the intervention of Aina Onabolu as far back as 1922 hinges on the footing of colonial mindset and operations. It was emphatically declared by the late Ben Enwonwu, a prolific contemporary Nigerian artist, that Africans must be eager to take control of their narrative to showcase the scrabble of their age and their access to self-actualisation (Ogbechie, 2005).

Ogbechie asserts that it is evident that Enwonwu was predictive of the future considering the western bias trajectory of African contemporary artistic forte that is woven around inconsequential attention on the concept that acceptable licit art must be in tandem with western ideology and rubrics. Credence is now being accorded to modern African art as it has been considered for art historian academic interrogation with specific attention directed towards contemporary African art. However, greater attention is still being paid to the precolonial art of the domineering Western world where accelerated progress in the modern art scape is experienced (Odiboh 2009, 452).

It is highly important to ascertain that the contribution of art schools, art workshops and the apprenticeship engagement has rapidly added to the development and the progress of art historical narrative and pedagogical forward movement in Nigeria.

Art Schools and Experimental Workshops: Its Influence in shaping Nigerian Contemporary Art Space

Contemporary Nigerian art conceived about a century ago by Aina Onabolu (1881-1963) has grown in an amazing manner. He commenced the teaching of art in several secondary schools across the western region when he came back from England in 1922 from the study of art. He did not only continue painting, he started teaching art in several secondary schools across the Western Region and orchestrated the art education programme received by Ben Enwonwu, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Uche Okeke, and others who contributed immensely to the growth and development of modern Nigerian arts. Art school coinage as well as the usage appears with multiple interpretations. From the interpretation of the uninformed, art schools depict institution of learning where art instruction is disseminated in art department in diverse sub-specializations in artistic engagement. The informed on the other hand believed that an art school is a category of intellectuals domiciled in the same art ideology. These artists interpreted their line of thought from diverse thematic representation or subject matters

with formidable and known elements that can easily tell that they are from the same art school (Iriwieri 2016, p.132).

Art School in modern Nigerian Arts implies the categories of artists with the same artistic stylistic tendencies. These schools are divided into two types: formal, often known as academic, and unstructured, also known as experimental or workshop school. From an art historical standpoint, this classification is plagued with misconceptions. College or formal training in art institutions does not automatically result in the establishment of an art school since an art school must meet a set of criteria that include working with a shared ideology, form, theme, style, and technique (Jegede as quoted in Iriwieri 2016,132). From the above view, the argument connects to Jegede's point of view that the determinant of art school leverage on common philosophy, ideology, stylistic tendency, form, thematic structure and technique that defines the art school identities. Therefore, art schools should not be reduced to a place known with the acquisition of various artistic knowledge, but rather targeted towards the innovation of distinct ideology in art. Art school's discovery and development in Nigeria is in transition due to an enabling artistic ambience which accommodate the ingenuity of art scholars and practitioners to experiment independently.

The foremost Art schools in Nigeria art practice cut across the following but not limited to the examples below. The academic school (formal) include **the Zaria School, Yaba Art School, Nsukka art School, Ife Art School, Auchi Art School, and a list of other developing art schools.** In furtherance of this discourse, Diogu as quoted in Iriwieri believes that the creation of art forms via structural newness is built on the fact below:

- a. An understanding of the people's indigenous art and design culture.
- b. Understanding of design methods or procedures.
- c. combining local technology expertise and understanding.

- d. Using scientific and creative methods or attitudes to innovate outdated equipment and materials (2016, p.132).

Experimental Art Schools

In Nigeria, art workshops were founded with the intention of fostering individual abilities and releasing artists from the monotony of formalism. From an ideological standpoint, art workshops could be seen as a genuine means of releasing Nigerian artists' stifled creativity. This was defined as an instrument for educating the youth about the arts and culture in order to foster the development of cognitive skills, character reformation, and cultural consciousness, as well as to allow them to freely contribute to the socioeconomic advancement of the country.

(Banjo 2013, pp.131-132). The emergence of Art workshops surfaced in Africa in the mid-20th century. These spread for the first time into Southern Africa and later to other parts of the continent. The Christian Missionaries, the Anglican, the Roman Catholic Churches, and some colonialists experimented with the art workshop. This experience thrived tremendously in Nigeria and accelerated the total acceptance of the European concepts of Christian evangelism mission all around Africa. These produced renowned African artists who trained the progenitors of modern African art culture. It was quite a platform of experimentation and the eagerness to probe into the manner of subduing the environment for the good of the society by engaging the artistic mastery of traditional Nigerian artists to foster novel religion and ignite the development of indigenous art and culture. Through the Euro-Christian evangelism mission in Africa, the art workshop initiative remains a convergence for artists training and re-training to enhance their skills. They explored new initiatives which attracted more patronages particularly from Europe (Willett 2002, pp. 220-238). **The informal art school, known as experimental or workshop include Ori-Olokun art workshop, Mbari art Workshop, Abayomi Barber Art School, Harmattan workshop Agbara-Ottor, OYASAF**

Workshop, and other emerging semi-formal art centres that clustered across several metropolises in Nigeria.

Ori Olokun experimental art workshop

People from a variety of backgrounds who felt artistic and decided to further their artistic abilities were the target audience for the Ori Olokun experimental art class. The environment required for artistic expression was supplied by this workshop. Collaborating in the workshop were those who were unable to attend higher education institutions. The participants have a solid foundation in a variety of artistic disciplines, including performing arts, pottery, painting, textiles, and sculpture. Their creations were shown in several major American cities as well as throughout Nigeria. The majority of the students who began their artistic careers in this program are now independent artists who serve as effective cultural ambassadors outside of Nigeria (Banjo 2013, p.132). Banjo goes on to explain his belief that this centre, which was situated in Aribidi, Ife, was an actualisation of the "town and gown policy" since it was easily accessible for the indigenous people to interact with members of the academic community. Solomon Wangboje oversaw the centre, and the professors were P. R. O. Ojo, Agbo Folarin, and Akinola Lasekan. Ademola Williams, Wale Olajide, Michael Agun, Rufus Orishayomi, Peter Badejo, Gbade Akintunde, James Adebayo, and Adeniyi Adeyemi are among the participants. African techniques, places, and concepts were mirrored in the themes that the participants worked on. In particular, Yoruba theatre, painting, ceramics, sculpture, textiles, design, photography, and music were thoroughly examined (Banjo 2013, p.132).

Mbari art Club

With the assistance of Ulli Beier, a professor at the University of Ibadan for African writers, artists, and musicians at Ibadan and Oshogbo in Nigeria, a group of young writers founded

the Mbari Art Club in 1961. The word "Mbari," which means "creation" in Igbo (Ibo), refers to the traditional painted mud houses of the area, which need to be renewed on a regular basis. The Ibadan club ran a theatre and art gallery and published works by Nigerian artists as well as *Black Orpheus*, a journal of African and African American literature (Ekemode, 2018). Yussuf (2021) stressed that the Mbari Mbayo Club of Osogbo was a multi-faceted organisation that brought together literary culture, visual arts, and performing arts to provide a place of leisure for the growing middle class in Osogbo. The young artists quickly developed a new and sophisticated art form by drawing on their traditions and current surroundings, and the social acceptance of the club—which offered a vibrant, local, and vocal audience—solved the issue of how to protect these artists from the easy tourist market (Yussuf 2021).

Abayomi Barber's Art school

The trainees of Abayomi Barber's School have only completed secondary school, and the school is built on a workshop experience. It differs from the usual African workshop school, such as Osogbo, which is the most well-known in Nigeria, in that it provides materials for students with little formal education to create masterpieces without the need for technical guidance or intervention. Rather, Barber employed a master-apprentice instruction approach. The "primitive" and "naïve" expressions that are typical of Osogbo and other workshop programs are not produced at his institution (Adepegba, 1996). The School's leader, Abayomi Barber, and his adherents reject Western clichés that associate African identity and authenticity with the bizarre, grotesque, and coarsely depicted. Western authors and reviewers have not given the School the blessing of a "African authentic" seal of approval, despite its mandate to portray African subjects, topics, portraits, and landscapes, especially of the Yoruba people. In Nigeria, however, Osogbo and similar workshop experiences have not been as effective as the Abayomi Barber School. Swimming against the tide of "primitivism," Barber and his followers command greater prices locally than other workshop schools. They have created a movement characterised by airy

conceptualisation, magical symbolism, and graphic realism (Odiboh 2005). The presumptions on the seeming non-naturalism of the genesis of African art were harshly criticised by Abayomi Barber (Odiboh 2003).

Art Apprenticeship Programmes in Nigeria

Apprenticeship system of education is in practice long before the advent of colonization in Africa, especially Nigeria. This was recognized as the only mode of training and skill acquisition for human development and traditional crafts promotion. Nigerian apprenticeship system is practiced with unregulated flexibility which is in tandem with other informal education sectors in many other African countries many years ago. Aidoo (2018) opine that this form of skill development training is practiced in various forms in different countries but there are some common features of traditional apprenticeship in West Africa.

Umoru-Oke (2017) explain from pottery point of discourse that apprenticeship can be approach from two typologies, the conservative and the liberal.

- **The Conservatives:** These individuals believed that the apprenticeship training system was a "closed door." where cultivating marijuana was restricted to family members or close relatives. For them, manufacturing pot is a family craft that no outsider can master or perform. Wives who are married into such households have the right to get training in addition to the female children of the engaged family.
- **The Liberal:** For this group, apprenticeship in ceramics was seen as a universal trade. They make learning possible for anyone who is interested. According to their opinion, the apprenticeship training system ought to be "open-ended," meaning it should not

be restricted by racial or tribal boundaries. In actuality, if someone is interested, this school of thinking won't be dogmatic about gender inequality. As a means of decolonising art historical pedagogy in Africa, this research highlights how art centres in Nigeria are establishing enabling spaces to enact knowledge outside of formal institutions, as per Umoru-Oke's liberal typology narrative above.

African Art Pedagogical Practice Decolonisation: Extrapolating Artistic Knowledge in Nigeria

Decolonising Curricula and Pedagogical practice in Africa is a focus of attention among African scholars, as well as the society (Arowosegbe 2016, Odiboh 2009, Mbembe 2016, Shay 2016, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, Nyamnjoh 2017). In light of colonial practices of power and dominance, current efforts to decolonise knowledge production in Africa suggest that the power dynamics between African higher education institutions and individuals have not changed significantly despite the continent's more than 60 years of freedom. The persistent dominance of non-African authors on African themes in prestigious academic journals is still evident, and legacies endure (Crawford *et al.* 2021, p. 23).

The colonized scholars have subjected themselves into western culture by adopting Eurocentric cultural ethic and value without recourse to African education value. Walter Mignolo believe that the idea of decolonization is still practicable within tertiary institution via workshops, seminars, student's mentoring strategies, collaborative and partnership drive among colleagues with the same mind-set (–2013: 137). Scholarly move for decolonization calls for a proactive need to fully call into order and confront the colonial situation (Fanon, 1961 [2004]: 2, The decolonisation that Fanon refers typified in earlier argument has political undertone than a mere decolonisation trajectory which is common recently in higher education

programme. The move to decolonise art pedagogical practice in Nigeria through artistic erudition requires the need to examine the dissemination of art historical knowledge in tertiary institutions and informal art training in Nigeria across centre for art and culture, galleries and workshops.

Nigerian Tertiary Environments and Art Knowledge

The dissemination of art historical knowledge in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is taught in Colleges of Education, Polytechnic and Universities where art is taken as course of study between 2-5 years of academic instruction. Art is often taught as Art history, Art Education, Fine Arts, Fine and Applied Arts, Visual Arts, Creative Arts, Industrial design, Glass technology, Fashion and textile design to mention but a few. The pedagogical approach engaged in these institutions include the following methods of instructions, lecture method, field trip, excursion to galleries, demonstration method, project or assignment method, seminar session, art workshop, art symposium and others. The curriculum contents in Nigerian tertiary institution focuses more on Eurocentric ideologies with noticeable disconnection from Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS). This establishes the narrative of Oguibe (2004; 6) who notes previously in this work that "the outsider, whether the Diaspora Negro discourse or the Western scholarship, often quickly establishes delineations without acknowledging the possibility that these may not be shared by those whose histories are at the centre of discourse."

The subject matters enforced on art learner in formal institution is not fully in tandem with what is needed for artistic proficiency and it is rather not sustainable to withstand post academic challenges in the society. There are several disconnections between the way in which art knowledge is taught in formal institution and the social-economic expectations in Nigerian society. The art educational pedagogy that can strive in present

day Nigeria is the one that establishes the ideology of town and gown.

Nigeria's Informal Art Distribution

Art historical pedagogy in Nigeria has dovetail into other less formal learning ambience where art is learnt within a welcoming environment devoid of rigorous curriculum bottle-necks. Art historians, in an attempt to salvage the problem of isolating the relevant pedagogical content from the curriculum in-use, established various art training platform where students, learners, art scholars, and art enthusiast can connect to learn and reflect over African art matters in a non-formal and informal environment. Diverse art entities filled this gap, these include Nike Universal Arts Studio, Ovumaroro Art Studio, Centre for Art and Culture, Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA), WyArt Foundation, and Omo Oba Yemisi Shyllon Art Museum. Art workshops exhibition, regular art training, symposium, internship and apprenticeship experience are the pedagogical approaches through which knowledge is produced and disseminated to participants. The engagement in this centres varies between 3 days to 6 months

Nike Centre for Art and Culture

This centre is an initiative of Nike Davies Okundaye, a custodian of old heritage that is well accepted in contemporary cities as a channel of projecting art historical trajectories. Through this art centre, Nike has organised workshops on traditional Nigerian textiles for audience in Nigeria and diaspora. She is known for batik of colourful pattern and design that depicts modernist reflections on traditional themes. Nkata (2018) posit that Nike Okundaye's works were embellished with elements such as; human-like resemblance, cultural materials rooted in traditional religion and beliefs. These paintings have positively impacted the lives of so many who came across her way all over the globe. She was introduced to the traditional weaving and dying methods used in Ogidi, her hometown in Western

Nigeria, where she demonstrates the indigenous African knowledge system. The artistic inspiration of Nike okundaye hinges on traditional apprenticeship methods of weaving and dying fabric which was almost going into extinction in Nigeria. Through her years of experiences, she enacted a cultural revival by building four art centres in different parts of Nigeria where less privileged women, widows, young mothers and the jobless Nigerians are taught Adire, weaving, painting and other cultural arts form without financial implication to master traditional arts and crafts of Yoruba. This population include those in Nigerian institutions and the Universities in diaspora to undergo 3-months training before their return to their academic pursuit. She preached women independence through Adire training by building a solid bedrock for women to gain respect in a patriarchal society. Nike's designs have been promoted through exhibitions and workshops in Nigeria.

Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos

This was established in 2007 by Bisi Silva (b.1962-d.2019) as a visual art centre providing opportunities for the discussion and intertwining narrative of modern Visual art presentation. In order to establish a new audience and trajectory, this centre makes use of photography, cinema, video, performance art, installations, and conceptual arts—all of which have been under-represented in Nigeria. Critical and intellectual artworks and cultural practices are promoted at the Centre for Contemporary art through exhibitions, workshop, lecture series, talks, video screening and curatorial practice in West Africa, especially Nigeria. The centre promotes art production, artists, writer in residence, curators, art historian and theorists. It works with artists, curators, writers, theorists, and national and international institutions to support and advance the professionalisation of art creation and curatorship in Nigeria and West Africa. The centre is an art space providing learning

opportunity to students, curators and visual artists to achieve their dream through their archival and library resources.

Women and Youth Art Foundation: Peju Layiwola, a professor of art and art history at the University of Lagos in Nigeria, founded the Women and Youth Art Foundation about twenty years ago. The Centre's artistic activities are used as a platform of empowering women and youths to restore essence of life to them without discrimination, religion, or age. Many women have been trained in local and urban communities by hosting series of free workshops where materials are provided to the participant, mostly focusing on print making, silk painting, Ankara jewellery, ceramics and painting.

Ovuomaroro Studio and Gallery: Prof. Bruce Onobrakpeya, a renowned printmaker from Nigeria who was born in 1932 and is unmatched in his output, inventiveness, and experimental spirit, is featured in the Ovuomaroro Studio and Gallery. The exhibition displays modern printmaking that plays with a range of methods, most notably plastographs and deep etchings.

The studio is located within the city centre in Lagos where artists, writer in residence, curators, art historian and student across tertiary institutions connect to the art centres for artistic mentoring. He graduated with a degree in painting from the now-defunct Nigerian College of Art, Science and Technology in Zaria, Nigeria (previously Ahmadu Bello University). Onobrakpeya's main artistic medium and true passion turned out to be printmaking. The art created at Ovuomaroro Studio and Gallery demonstrates a belief in humankind by delving further into Nigerian oral tradition and Urhobo mythology. Additionally, the studio produced works that confront environmental damage, political persecution, and injustice, all of which inspire creative responses. This school has contributed in no small measure to academic and professional art practice in Nigeria without sentiment and geographical barrier.

Conclusion

From the spectrum of understanding decolonisation of curriculum and pedagogical practice in Nigeria, it was found out through this research that there is a disconnect between the town and the gown. This suggest that the artistic training received in tertiary institutions in Nigeria does not holistically meet up with the expectation of the society. It is found out that there is at times a disconnect between the way in which art knowledge is taught and the social and economic environment outside of the school in Nigeria. It was also evident that the curriculum in use in formal school of learning needs reformation or restructuring to mirror dynamics of changes within Nigeria societies. It is also pointed out through this research that informal and non-formal at centres play major role in propagating African ideology, culture and concept that promote African interest. The context of individual artists' artistic practices and the many demands placed on artists in Nigeria and, by extension,

other parts of Africa must be considered when discussing the decolonisation of pedagogical practices in the arts. This paper suggests that collaborative strategies between the art organization in the community and the tertiary institutions of learning needs to be sustained. Understanding the specific context of artistic erudition in Nigeria may provide a model for decolonising pedagogical practice in Africa and perhaps in the global south.

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