

## **A CONTEMPLATION OF FACTORS MITIGATING AGAINST THE DEVELOPMENT OF FINE AND APPLIED ARTS EDUCATION IN SOME NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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### **Abstract**

The standard of teaching art as a course in Nigerian tertiary institutions seems to be experiencing some problems lately. The notion that students are generally not serious in academic endeavours may no longer be tenable. Employing descriptive research design in which the case study approach was adopted, this article looked at issues as they relate to art lecturers in the teaching of art in Universities in Nigeria. It also made inferences to some possible reasons why some faculty staff reneges in carrying out their primary assignment of teaching. Conclusion and recommendations made include a re-appraisal of professional ethics by the design and strict observance of a code of ethics for optimal service delivery. The introduction of a feedback mechanism by way of annual faculty staff evaluation by art students was also recommended. It is hoped that the code of ethics as well as the annual evaluation will check unethical practices by art lecturers and also enhance and promote the achievement of quality education in the fine and applied arts.

**Keywords: Unethical Practices, Teaching Art, Faculty Staff Evaluation, Art Lecturer, Code of Ethics**

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria, the teaching of fine and applied arts at the tertiary level is experiencing a myriad of problems some of which border on moral standards or principles of faculty staff. In other words, some of the problems centre on unethical practices by faculty staff. Generally, ethics refer to a standard of conduct. To this standard, are two aspects: The first involves the ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil and propriety from impropriety; the second involves the commitment to do what is right, good and proper (Donlevy and Keith, 2011: 1). In most human endeavours there are standards of conduct. For instance, in teaching, ethical issues means attention to avoiding actions or inactions that may cause students educational or emotional harm (Hill and Zinsmeister, 2011: 125). Thus, ethics can be likened to a moral compass that can be applied to a range of situations.

Unethical practices such as indecent relationship between lecturers and some of their students, poor supervision of special projects, and abdication of practical classes amongst others are not in consonance with the aspirations of the forebears of art in Nigeria. For example, members of the Zaria Art Society otherwise known as Zaria Rebels which was formed in 1958 at the Fine Arts Department, Ahmadu Bello University, did not only practice art but were equally professionals who lived respectable and honoured lives (Onobrakpeya, 1995). Notably, while some members of the Zaria Rebels ended up teaching art in some tertiary institutions in Nigeria, others went into professional practice. In so doing, the prejudice against art and artists held by parents changed. This further translated to parents encouraging and

supporting their children who were interested in studying art to do so (Onabrakpeya, 1995). Overtime, these forebears of contemporary Nigerian art have maintained their intent for art and have also mentored lots of subsequent Nigerian artists. It is perhaps important to ask if all art lecturers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria are following in the direction of these forebears. If not, how do art lecturers in art departments in Nigerian Universities consolidate on the aspirations of contemporary Nigerian art forebears?

Following from the foregoing, the focus in this paper is on practices by art lecturers as they impact on the teaching of art in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. To articulate this, two key issues will be examined. These are unethical practices by some lecturers of art as well as their probable causes and code of ethics for art lecturers. The intent in this article is not to bring down art academics in any way, but rather to bolster progressive attitudes towards the teaching of art by taking informed positions. In so doing, the drowning status of academic artists may be repositioned for greater heights, reminiscent of the position attained and retained by the forebears of academic artists in Nigeria.

Essentially, the research design employed in this study is descriptive which is oftentimes referred to as non-experimental. Specifically, the type of descriptive research used in this study is the case study design. A case study research design is geared to single out and study a given social unit, which could be individuals, groups of individuals, institutions or communities. These studies are usually motivated by peculiar problems emanating from an individual or group of individuals being studied. The case in this study are some unethical practices in the teaching of fine and applied arts in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The study used interview in data collection for providing relevant information.

### **The Primary Duties of Art Lecturers**

The primary task of an art lecturer in a tertiary institution is to guide, supervise and teach students, as well as conduct researches in areas of specialisation. Guiding students involves leading them on the use of material resources and equipment, guiding them in novel practices and techniques in the arts, as well as motivating them towards developing observational skills. Supervisory roles involves following the students in a step by step procedure and progress in accomplishing tasks, while proffering advice where and when necessary. The teaching role of lecturers include skills development, enhancing techniques, providing information on the historical, social, physical, psychological and intellectual aspects of the arts, amongst others. Another role is in the area of developing know-how on appreciation, criticism and entrepreneurial skills in the students. The objective of the foregoing is producing intellectually, artistically knowledgeable and skillful artist who will be positively productive and participating members of the society at large. In a summary of the roles of lecturers, Igwe as cited in Nwosu (2011: 131) noted that a lecturer has a commitment to students and by extension, the community, his employer as well as his profession.

The very nature of fine and applied arts splits its teaching into two facets. These are theory and practicum. While the theoretical aspects may be taught in regular classrooms, same may not be said of the practicum. For the practical classes, they could be held in studios or outdoors, as in the case of drawing and painting. Ethically, it is mandatory on art teachers to be punctual to classes whether theory or practicum, for this informs their primary assignments, which they are duly remunerated for.

### **Some Unethical Practices by Some Art Lecturers**

Observation has shown that some art lecturers abdicate practical classes like life drawing, life painting and outdoor painting and drawing solely to class representatives, commonly called class reps. A critical question arising from this is that a class rep may not be grounded in the objectives of the particular course he has been assigned to organise. In contrast, a lecturer who understands the objectives of a particular course and is also knowledgeable in pedagogical strategies for teaching that particular course would deliver such a course effectively. The presence of a lecturer in his lectures may also stimulate healthy academic interaction between the students and him. In this situation, varying perspectives to issues bordering on theories or practice are freely discussed with the lecturer providing a guide. In other words, such lecturers are readily available to assist students on a one-to-one basis. In so doing too, the identification of students with specific academic (theoretical or practical) deficiencies by the lecturer is easy. Relatedly, some lecturers do not spend the required number of hours assigned to lectures and some only attend classes half of the period in a semester.

The supervision of special projects is routinely part of art lecturers' academic schedule. However, projects supervision at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in some art departments in some Nigerian Universities is fraught with a number of unethical issues. Some of these are scheming by some art lecturers supervise "select" students and carry out special projects for some supervisees. Some art lecturers too have also made it somewhat formal for their supervisees to accompany project write-ups with gifts in cash or kind or both in order to fast track attention to such projects. Generally, the act of lecturers lobbying to supervise particular students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels negates moral conduct. Coaxing a supervisee to part with money in the course of supervising a special project is equally unethical. Also, a lecturer of art undertaking a student's special project constitutes some form of examination malpractice. More so, the assessment of such a special project may not be objective. Following from the foregoing, Nwosu (2011: 131) notes that as a matter of principle, no lecturer should be involved or condoned or connived with a student in examination malpractice.

Indecent relationships between some art lecturers and some of their students is another topical unethical issue that is rather commonplace in some art departments in some Nigerian Universities lately. Professionally, a lecturer of art in a university should have only academic dealings with the students. Some

art lecturers take undue advantage of their positions to engage in amorous affairs with their students. Following from such relationships is undue favouritism, especially on the part of the students concerned. There are instances where some students who date some art lecturers are unduly awarded grades not duly earned. The issue of some art lecturers dating some art students in some cases has also resulted to open quarrels amongst some art lecturers<sup>1</sup>. This creates acrimonious situations capable of setting back the teaching of art in the affected department. An art lecturer should be responsible for maintaining a professionally appropriate relationship with students.

The use of art students' creative piece(s) in whatever form amounts to plagiarism. This practice tends to be in vogue lately in some institutions. Specifically, it is a silently known fact that some art lecturers have illegally published art student's special projects, seminar papers or even class assignments in academic journals. Generally, it is not only unethical but also criminal to publish the work of another individual. In cases where such lecturers may have supervised such projects or made inputs in seminar papers and find such papers publishable, it is ethical to seek the inclusion of the name of such a supervisee or student as a co-author. In so doing, the student may not only be mentored but may also feel a sense of fulfilment from his resourcefulness. Similarly, the collection and sale or exhibition of students' artworks by some art lecturers is as immoral and criminal as the illegal publishing of a student's project write up, seminar paper or thesis.

Aside the unethical issues highlighted above, there are some others which may not be as rampant like those highlighted. For instance, some art lecturers drink alcohol and/or smoke in classes (especially practical classes). Such a situation may impinge on the teaching of art. Importantly too, drinking and/or smoking in practical classes is equally hazardous to the health of the students. This sets an undesirable social example for some students who may emulate their teachers.

At the postgraduate level, inadequate supervision, delay in reading and correcting students practical projects and write-ups, criticism without proffering suggestions, amongst others, are the bane of postgraduate students. Thus, a three-year programme may take the duration of four to six years or even more before completion, all because of the supervisor's attitude towards primary assignment.

#### **Some Anecdotal References on Unethical Practices by Faculty Staff**

The following are some anecdotal accounts on the unethical behaviour exhibited by some faculty staff in some tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Abigail Ominigho<sup>2</sup>, a three hundred level student of fine and applied arts in a Nigerian University, had gone home for the weekend only to inform her parents that she was contemplating opting out of her degree programme. Upon enquiry, her parents discovered that a lecturer in her department had requested for the sum of sixty thousand naira and sex from her in exchange for a "good" grade. Failure to yield, the lecturer had boasted she would fail the course. Similarly, some final

year students of fine and applied arts in a Nigerian University had written a letter to their Head of Department protesting an “A” score awarded to a female student, who was obviously weak in drawing. The case is still being investigated<sup>3</sup>. In a related development, Emeka Odinaka<sup>4</sup>, a final year fine art student, was invited to attend the opening of his lecturer’s art exhibition. To his chagrin, one of the sculptural pieces on display was his. Specifically, the piece was a class assignment he submitted to the same lecturer some months before the exhibition. He watched helplessly as his lecturer introduced this piece to guests. Furthermore, Muyiwa Afolabi<sup>5</sup>, a postgraduate student of fine and applied arts in a Nigerian University was asked by his lecturer cum project supervisor to procure two brand new tyres for the lecturer’s car before his project would be attended to. The foregoing is the state of affairs with regards to unethical practices by some faculty members in some Nigerian tertiary institutions. These practices have implications on the development of art in Nigeria as well as leave much to be desired on the part of some art lecturers. If left unchecked, they may redefine art practices as well as the status of artists and art lecturers in Nigeria.

#### **Possible reasons for some of the unethical practices by art lecturers**

For some lecturers teaching art at the University level is usually their very first attempt at formal teaching. In other words, such lecturers of art in some Universities are first time teachers. They are usually employed after faculty interviews to the first stage position in the academic hierarchy generally called junior lecturer and hold Bachelor of Arts or Master of fine arts degree<sup>6</sup>. Typically, they start their academic profession either as Graduate Assistants or Assistant Lecturers or Lecturers II as the case may be. The lecturers in the aforementioned cadre are meant to assist and not actually carry out intense academic teaching. As new teachers, an orientation programme by way of pedagogical content of art and a well-documented and explained code of ethics ought to be a starting point for them. But this may yet be lacking in many Universities in Nigeria offering Art. The importance of an orientation programme as well as a well explained code of ethics to newly employed junior lecturers is crucial. This is in the sense that the responsibilities of new lecturers boarder on activities that encourage learning, evaluating learning fairly and treating students respectfully (Hill and Zinsmeister, 2011: 125). Also, it has been argued by Keith-Spielgel *et al.*, in Hill and Zinsmeister 2011: 125 that, a functional code of ethics will prepare the newly employed lecturers to engage in behaviours that meet the responsibilities in ways expected by the students, institution and discipline. Notably too, such codes of ethics spell out all the aspects of moral behaviour expected of a teacher as well as penalties for violating any of the codes. Some faculties and departments in some Universities have well spelt out and documented ethical code of ethics for newly employed teachers. For example, in University of Melbourne, its code of ethics is well spelt out (University of Melbourne, 2007). Such faculty and/or departmental ethical codes are drawn based on the peculiarities of such

departments. It can be argued that most universities in Nigeria as well as some staff unions like Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have some form of codes or regulations (ASUU Unethical Practices, 2006). However, the scope covered by such codes as well as their potency is debatable. For instance, not all the lecturers in Nigerian universities are official members of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and whatever code of ethics set by the Union may not be binding on such non-members. More especially, as such a Union is not the employer. As a result, such regulations may not pass for strict code of ethics for lecturers.

In situations where academic institutions without well documented functional code of ethics for newly employed teachers, such teachers may have to rely on older professional colleagues for direction. While this seems all right on the surface level, the same may not be said of directional roles of all senior faculty staff. This is against the background that some older professional faculty members may have their predispositions, which may be ethically bankrupt.

Aside the absence of a functional code of ethics in some Nigerian Universities, some art lecturers may not have the prerequisite of being art teachers in the first instance. This group of artists termed “artist-teachers” is studio trained and prefers to produce art works for sale but, as a result of available teaching job opportunities in higher institutions, takes teaching as secondary (Akinbogun *et al.*, 2011: 121). The implication of the foregoing is a conflict of professional interest of the so-called artist-teachers. In this regard, such artist-teachers may naturally devote more time to production of artistic pieces for exhibitions and sale to the detriment of lecturing (Akinbogun *et al.*, 2011: 121).

Poor salary leading to corruption and greed on the part of some art lecturers is no more tenable as a reason for unethical practices like the demand or, in some cases, the extortion of gifts in cash or kind or both from art students by some art lecturers. The remuneration of lecturers in Nigerian public Universities has improved considerably since the regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo (Ifeanyi, 2007: 43). In situations where some senior faculty members abhor the teaching of undergraduate courses, such courses may be passed on to junior lecturers, who may not even be qualified to teach such courses. Also, such junior art lecturers may also not be well grounded in the objectives of such courses.

Additionally, the non-mentoring of junior faculty members by senior faculty members in areas of publications and exhibitions is commonplace in some art departments. Noting the role of publications in the promotion of art lecturers, this may be the reason for the “publish at all cost” attitude of lecturers. In so doing, professional ethics are hardly adhered to in the course of publishing, thus leading to plagiarism.

The religious disposition of some art lecturers in some cases has been allowed to creep into the teaching of art. For instance, given that mastering drawing and painting human anatomy is essential in drawing and

painting courses, not every religion may permit semi-nude models as well as the drawing and/or painting of them.

Given some possible reasons for some unethical issues amongst some art lecturers in some Universities in Nigeria, it is perhaps worthy to note that most unethical practices that affected students reported are usually not treated formally. Equally, a good number of victims of unethical practices will rather remain silent. The reasons for this may not be unconnected with the resolve of such victims of oppressive practices to graduate peacefully. The foregoing raises the issue of students' rights. Are the rights of students made known to them upon admission? Furthermore, in handling such unethical practices, how many really go through appropriate official channels where they exist? Some usually end up being "settled" at the offices of some heads of department. The implication from the foregoing is a persistence of all sorts of unethical practices by some lecturers of art. To check the situation, some suggestions are offered in the form of recommendations.

### **Conclusions / Recommendations**

Overtime, the teaching of art at the University level in Nigeria has recorded some unethical practices on the part of some art lecturers. These unethical issues have negative implications in the course of training future artists. To check this trend, the authors recommend that Universities offering art may adopt two key strategies. Firstly, such Universities must make orientation for newly employed art lecturers compulsory. In such orientations, a copy of functional code of ethics should be given to the new lecturers. More so, the content and implication of the code of ethics must be made clear to the new lecturers. Furthermore, because of the peculiarity of art, art faculties and even art departments can also fashion out their code of ethics (which may be an addition to that of the host institution) for her newly employed art lecturers. To achieve the effectiveness of such code of ethics, there must be some feedback mechanism or channel for art students to express such unethical practices. This takes us to the second strategy. The strategy is centred on the introduction of a compulsory yearly student based annual evaluation of faculty staff tagged Student Based Annual Evaluation of Faculty Staff (SBAEFS). Such an evaluation should be made compulsory for undergraduates and postgraduate art students and its existence made known to newly employed art lecturers at the time of employment. The design of the SBAEFS should be such that responding students are anonymous. This will protect the students from victimisation of any sort in the course of investigation. Also, in the SBAEFS, questions bordering on all unethical issues should be raised for every art lecturer for art students to provide answers to. Importantly too, the inputs from such SBAEFS may also be very useful whenever the need to review code of ethics arises, as such evaluation could provide insights to new trends of unethical practices. A suggested sample of the SBAEFS is shown in fig. 1 below.

There is no gainsaying that an evaluation, such as the SBAEFS, will not only serve as a watch but may keep art lecturers ethically upright in the execution of their professional tasks. This may breed ethically upright senior faculty members who will in turn mentor newly employed art lecturers. Following from the foregoing, art departments will be endowed with lecturers worthy in character and teaching. This, it is hoped will not only consolidate the aspirations of the forebears of contemporary Nigerian arts but also help to reverse the downing status of art lecturers occasioned by unethical engagements of some art lecturers in some Nigerian higher institutions.

**Fig. 1: Suggested outline of a SBAEFS designed by the Authors.**

<b>Year of Evaluation:</b>		<b>Level:</b>			
<b>Course Code:</b>		<b>Course Title:</b>			
<b>Lecturer in Charge:</b>					
<b>Area of evaluation</b>	<b>Score</b>				
	<b>Tick ✓</b>	<b>[1: Lowest, 5: Highest]</b>			
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>55</b>
1. Regular to class.					
2. Punctual for lectures.					
3. Stays through lectures.					
4. Well organized and prepared for lectures.					
5. Clear explanation of concepts.					
6. Use of effective teaching methods that enhances Understanding.					
7. Encourages question asking/inquiry.					
8. Available outside class period for consultation.					
9. Use of technology in teaching (where available).					
10. Motivates and challenges thought processes.					
11. Continually assesses students' progress (C/A).					
12. Informs students on C/A performances.					
13. Further comments: In particular, tell us if you have experienced or observed behaviour/s by the lecturer that breaches moral conduct.					



## Notes

1. Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Benin witnessed this situation between late 1990s and early 2000. The information was obtained from an interview in 1999 with some of the students and staff who were involved in the case.
2. The information was obtained from a personal interview with a staff of Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma in 2001. However, a pseudo name was used for the student's name in the text.
3. The information was obtained from a personal interview with a staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University in 2012. As at the time of the interview, the case was still under investigation.
4. The information was obtained from a phone interview in March, 2005 with the student whose work was exhibited. For the purpose of this study, a pseudo name was used for the student.
5. The information was obtained from a personal e-mail in September, 2012 from a postgraduate student of Visual Art. However, a pseudo name was used for the student's name in the text.
6. Formally, University lecturers are employed after adverts and interviews by University's administration. Before such interviews, Faculties and Departments make input by way of suitability of candidates before short-listing. Lately, cases exist where lecturers are "imposed" on departments without inputs from the Departments. In other words, such lecturers do not go through the official due processes of employment.

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