

Full Length Research Paper

A study of the verbal technical presentation proficiency requirements for architects in Nigeria

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This paper attempts to examine the adequacy of verbal proficiency of both architects in practice and architecture graduates in terms of technical presentation; a requirement that has become critical in the competitive world of architectural practice. In this regard, a survey was carried out which involved issuance of structured questionnaires to architecture graduates and architects in practice to guide this study. The research questions were designed to obtain responses which would help ascertain efficacy of current training and policy practices and how they test the verbal presentation skills of architects in Nigeria. The data were analyzed and findings deduced from the results. The study made recommendations based on the findings which should prove important to both the regulatory bodies for the study of architecture in Nigeria (National Board for Technical Education, NBTE, and National Universities Commission, NUC), the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA), Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) and policy makers in government.

Key words: Architecture, verbal proficiency, training, regulatory bodies, policy.

INTRODUCTION

The target of schools of architecture worldwide in the training of architects is to successfully create visual solutions for design problems. Generally therefore, their curricula are structured such that the problems and challenges that emerge in the society do not prove insurmountable to them. In addition to this training however, current trends have thrown up even more challenges to the architects especially the need for sufficient skills in public speaking which obviously require lucid technical writing and clear speech. Barresi (2008) states that the global economy and politics require that a successful architect should express himself or herself effectively through writing and speech in order to communicate his ideas and proposals effectively. It is important therefore for architects to be able to write with "impact" and to speak with "conviction". In bidding or competing for design projects today, a key determinant of success or failure is the architect's ability to convey to the

jury, the finest points of his design and its viability. This clearly illustrates how critical presentation skills are in the training of architects for future success. In Nigeria, in the face of the challenges thrown up by the global economic meltdown which has depressed the world economy since 2006 (O'Quinn, 2009) and a prevalent unemployment rate of 19.70% (NBS, 2010), every advantage needs to be seized by professionals in the workforce and verbal / technical communication skills will give the architect a competitive edge. In today's competitive professional market, it is not enough for an architect to package a good, functional design; this has to be followed up with a convincing and professional presentation to the client or to a jury. Turner (2003) asserts that the aim of education is to put people in touch with, and train them to appreciate, the cultural and moral achievements of mankind, while providing them with the skills necessary to take their place in society and to seek further knowledge. The complete architect should be versatile and develop all of his human interactive skills effectively which he should put into practical use. Architectural training therefore must as a matter of necessity go beyond routine presentation of schemes but must strive at imparting skill

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in public speaking techniques and technical presentations. Indeed in recognition of the need for architects to continue evolving to cope with emerging challenges, the Nigerian Institute of Architects in its "Principles of Professional Competence", requires among other things that members shall continuously improve their knowledge skill and professional abilities through Continuing Professional Development Program (CPDP) (NIA, 2009). Daroda and Rwuaan (2006) further identify good communication and business skills as very critical among the qualities which make a great architect. Recognizing the importance and relevance of the issues raised, this study aims to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the training received in schools of architecture and professional bodies in equipping architects with good presentation skills and suggests reviews as may be necessary based on the study results.

Statement of the problem

The acquisition of education and attendant skills is considered successful if, among other things, there is effective „utilization“ of those skills. However, it has become a recurring theme that architectural education and practice as currently structured is inadequate going by emerging trends. In the course of his training, what the architect should receive should go beyond provision of information to facilitating and equipping the trainee for real world challenges (Haddad, 2003). At a time of severe economic recession, the architect has to be able to aggressively take on the market and create his own employment; a challenge for which being technically competent alone might not suffice. The World Bank (2005) gives the troubling statistics that one out of every five adults in Nigeria is unemployed and only one out of every 10 university graduates gets a job. This alarming trend is attributed by Kayode (2009) to a "skill gap" which he simply describes as a shortage in performance. Put in another way, a skill gap is the required performance minus the present performance. This gap for the architect includes in large part his lack of verbal and presentation skills putting him at a distinct disadvantage in a world where proper marketing and eloquence can go a long way. The problem brings about the question: are Nigerian architects today sufficiently equipped by their training in verbal technical presentation skills to complement the technical proficiency they possess as graduates?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual issues: Verbal presentation, speaking skills and the psychology of persuasion

The role of effective communication in achieving set goals and meeting targets cannot be overemphasized today. Being able to deliver a clear, understandable

message to the listener has become the trigger that sets a whole series of activities and leads to actualization of the intended goals. Hogan (2000) argues that quite often the only difference between success and failure in life is the ability to communicate with empathy, clarity and positive intention. In effect, among the final results of good communication is effective „persuasion“. Persuasion refers to the process by means of which one party purposefully secures a change of behavior, mental and/or physical, on the part of another party by employing appeals to both feelings and intellect (Bewes, 2002). History is replete with powerful speakers whose ability to communicate verbally has had monumental effects in politics, business and societal behaviors. Of note are such powerful speakers as Cicero, John F. Kennedy, Mao Tse Tung, and Martin Luther King. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2000) describes verbal presentation or public speaking as the process of speaking to a group of people in a structured, deliberate manner intended to inform, influence, or entertain the listeners. Carnegie (1997) analyzes that any verbal address, presentation or speech to an audience is approached based on the intended „goal“ of such a speech. In line with this, he posits that speeches can be broadened into "speeches of conviction" and "speeches of actuation". In a „speech of conviction“, the speaker is attempting to convince the listener to believe as the speaker does while a „speech of actuation“ should move the members of the audience to take the desired action that the speaker has proposed: buy the product, sign the petition, go on strike, or adopt the plan presented. The bottom-line is that they have to be sufficiently persuaded. Despite the identified importance of public speaking, it remains one of the untapped fields of most technical professions and societies. Indeed, Keok (2008) postulates that studies show that among the greatest fears amid Americans is the fear of public speaking. Even the fear of death came in the third position. Fear of public speaking has been considered normal for every speaker even in their native language. The first philosopher of note to break down the process of persuasion was Aristotle. He determined that there are three components necessary to effective persuasion:

- (1) Logos – which is the application of a logical argument.
- (2) Ethos – which is basically the integrity of the messenger.
- (3) Pathos – which is the emotional connection that drives the action.

All of these basically have to do with how the human brain processes the information given out by the speaker and the effectiveness of its delivery. Maggian (2002) suggests that achieving good abilities in public verbal communication requires overcoming any apprehensions over audience expectations, sole attention and social anxiety. Overcoming these requires a combination of

Table 1. The seven super triggers.

S/N	Trigger	Effect
1	The Friendship Trigger	We are more easily influenced by people we like, and the best way to activate friendship is through similarity, connections and common interests.
2	The Authority Trigger	We respond with unthinking, automatic compliance to those we believe have authority, credibility and power. This trigger works because we assume the person in position of authority has done the evaluation work for you.
3	The Consistency Trigger	Our internal guidance system compels us to be consistent in the way we see ourselves and the peers we admire (e for example, voting along party lines).
4	The Reciprocity Trigger	One of the strongest, most universal internal triggers is the law of giving and receiving, or quid pro quo. Reciprocity is the desire to give back to someone who has given us a gift (for example, free samples).
5	The Contrast Trigger	Framing a proposition so it appears more desirable than an alternative. Always present the most onerous approach first, followed by what you really want (for example, a salesperson presents you with a very expensive suit, then the next, slightly less expensive suit seems more reasonable).
6	The Reason Why Trigger	The brain looks for shortcuts to doing mental work. When you present a valid reason to accept a proposition, you achieve compliance.
7	The Hope Trigger	This is one of the strongest persuaders, underlying all others. Once we perceive an opportunity to satisfy our hopes, we seldom rely on rational, cognitive thought or logic before we act (for example: gambling, lotteries).

Source: Granger (2008): The 7 Triggers to Yes.

several factors which have to do with individual personalities and societal values. However, in order to deliver lasting verbal messages or presentations, he further lists the following factors as key: (i) understanding the purpose of the presentation, (ii) keeping the message clear and concise, (iii) preparation, (iv) vivid delivery of the message, and (v) understanding what you want to achieve. Research on the brain during decision-making reveals that people respond to persuasive attempts either analytically or automatically. Graham (1999) explains that those who respond analytically use a reasoned evaluative approach to come to a decision, but this requires enormous mental energy. The brain uses up reserves of glucose and calories whenever it evaluates, therefore because it is human nature to conserve energy, most of us would not respond with the extra effort required to be analytical and respond instead automatically depending on visual and sound judgments. This fact is very important to the success of any speech which intends to ultimately influence a group of people whether in a design jury or a critical audience. Granger

(2009) identifies seven “Super Triggers” that each of us can use to enhance our persuasiveness and achieve our goals. He lists these seven triggers as shown in Table 1.

In addition to this, Suter (1989) identifies the ingredients of an effective speech from its preparatory

stage down to its delivery. In Table 2, they identify five major stages which guide the success of a speech. These stages require the speaker to “access, analyze, research, organize and deliver the presentation”.

Technical presentations and architects' communication skills

In the course of professional services provided by architects, a formal presentation to clients, end-users, jury or a deciding body will be required. Usually the architect uses the design drawings, models, visual aids, slides and various other tools to explain his concepts and ideas. A confident well delivered presentation will create confidence and belief in the project and elicit a positive reaction from the audience. Emmit (1999) asserts that generally, architects do not have very good verbal communication skills. He adds further that the building industry generally has a poor reputation for the manner in which its individuals communicate even with one another. Apart from basic presentations of design schemes, the architect being the leader of the building team must have verbal communication skills strong enough to be able to co-ordinate, interpret and resolve queries between the team members who come from different backgrounds such as consultants, contractors, suppliers, investors and

Table 2. Stages of delivery of a successful speech.

Stage	Action
Assess	Consider the occasion: How long will the talks last? Will you be the keynote speaker or one of many? Has your audience heard you before and what is their impression of you and your organization? Is this talk one of many or a single presentation?
	Find a topic: Generally speaking, the topic of your talk is already apparent to you. You want to speak before a community group to change a policy. Communication scholar Joseph DeVito recommends that your topic be worthwhile, appropriate, culturally sensitive and limited in scope.
	Clarify your speaking goal: What is the purpose of your talk? Have you been invited to share your expertise on a topic? Will you be celebrating a special occasion or presenting an award? Do you seek to motivate your audience to make a change? Or are you merely talking to entertain?
Analyze	Develop your central idea or thesis: Can you get your point across in thirty seconds or less? Audience members expect that you will be able to give them the bottom line and to make it accurate, brief, and clear.
	Determine demographic, psychographic and situational characteristics of your audience: Just as a gardener must tend to the individual needs of each plant, a speaker must know his/her audience well. Learn all that you can about your audience in order to meet the needs of your speaking occasion.
	Interact with your audience during your talk: All speakers seek to converse with their audience members in order to reach them. As you are delivering your talk, consider adopting a heightened conversational tone.
Research	Get feedback following your talk: If you are enrolled in a public speaking course, you will receive expert feedback from your instructor who is trained to do just this. Much like a referee or judge sees a performance differently than do the fans, your instructor will be looking at elements of your presentation that many audience members may or may not notice. Your audience members can give you some useful information as well, particularly about how well you adapted your talk to their particular needs.
	Develop your expertise: You want to be perceived by your audience as an expert in your subject. Experience, knowledge, and integrity are keys to developing your expertise.
	Work with other experts to boost your credibility: Even the most expert of us recognizes that there are many perspectives and ways to look at a topic. Good speakers ensure that they are up-to-date and aware of what other experts are doing in their field.
	Assess the credibility of resources: As you know, there are many of people who pretend to be experts on subjects for which they know little. In addition, some misrepresent the facts or fabricate evidence.
Organize	Work with reference librarians: Reference librarians are experts in finding resources, particularly in accessing subscription databases and hard-to-find publications. They make research easy.
	Find evidence to back up your claims: Evidence gives credence to your arguments. When making a claim, you can expert your audience to be thinking, "What evidence do you have to support that assertion?"
	Choosing a pattern of organization: A well organized speech typically includes three clear parts: a beginning, middle and an end. You can use to develop the middle section of your speech, sometimes called the body or the discussion.
	Starting your talk: Be creative. In the introduction to your speech, gain your listeners' attention and then focus their attention on your central idea by making a clear statement of your thesis and a preview of your main ideas. The introduction is also a time to develop rapport with your audience and establish your credibility.
Deliver	Ending your talk: As you conclude the speech, provide a summary that recaps the main ideas of your speech. Then, end in a dramatic fashion to give your conclusion a sense of finality.
	Developing visual aids: Visual aids provide support for your talk. Visuals can organize the entire presentation, providing a visual roadmap for the audience, and/or illustrate a point that you are trying to make. In some cases, a picture is worth 1,000 words.
	Select a mode of delivery: Will your talk be delivered extemporaneously, as a manuscript, memorized or without preparation?
	Demonstrate dynamism: How will you capture and maintain the attention and interest of your audience?
Deliver	Manage your nervousness: Nervousness is both natural and normal. Once you expect and accept it, you will then be able to control and manage this apprehension.
	Interact with your audience: How will you adapt your talk to your audience during the presentation? How will you handle questions and answers?
	Use visual aids: For some, seeing is believing. How will you show your audience your main points? Will you use a computer-generated presentation like Power Point?
	Dress for success: The key to a successful appearance is to dress in such a way that no one notices what you are wearing.

Source: Suter (1989).

of course the client. For a technical presentation, the architect might even discover that his design is only as good as his presentation. Having understood how the human mind works and the extent a good speech can go towards the acceptance of a design scheme by a client or

a jury, the architect requires thorough training in this regard. Verbal presentations are essential to focus the mind of the critic on those aspects of the design that formed objectives of the project and to highlight what the architect finds most important. Baressi suggests that for

Question 1. What are the skills improvement course adjustments required in training curricular to develop good verbal presentation abilities in architects?

S/N	Item	X	SD	Remarks
1	Improvement of overall curriculum course objectives and contents to emphasize verbal presentation techniques	3.63	1.10	Accepted
2	Introduction of English for technical students as a major course	4.39	0.91	Accepted
3	Review of studio design program to include compulsory oral presentation at all levels	4.16	0.98	Accepted
4	Including continuous training for lecturers in sales and marketing	3.78	1.35	Accepted
5	presentations Inclusion of courses on human psychology and sociology	3.56	1.36	Accepted
6	Introduction of special courses in persuasive speaking	3.51	1.28	Accepted
7	Using literature as a pre-requisite for undergraduate admissions	3.40	1.22	Not Accepted
8	Increasing credit load for language courses	3.56	1.36	Accepted

Question 2: What are the recommended policy inputs needed to improve the verbal presentation skills of architects in practice?

S/N	Item	X	SD	Remarks
9	Introduction of Speaking and Presentation skills as a subject in the PPE (professional practice exams) for architects by the Nigerian Institute of Architects	4.15	1.06	Accepted
10	Including compulsory presentation of designs by visual aids and oral delivery as part of the due process regime for advertised projects	3.95	1.18	Accepted
11	Including a written certification of competence in verbal presentation from referees as part of submissions for PPE exams	3.66	1.11	Accepted
12	Introduction of a specialized quarterly session for technical presentation techniques by ARCON for all registered firms	3.63	1.21	Accepted
13	Giving official recognition to Ass. Of Arch. Educators (AARCHES) to empower them to train academics better	4.01	1.13	Accepted

effective results, the architect should explain the design in a systematic and self-evident way and develop a point by point sequence from the intention to the means employed in fulfilling those intentions and move from the overall to the detail, from context to core, from the whole to the parts, from the diagram to the real thing and then look back at the whole. Clearly therefore the technical presentation by the architect should emphasize:

- (i) The architect's attitude to architecture.
- (ii) A statement about the particular institution for which the design is provided. It is essential that a full understanding is developed about these institutions and developing a leading idea from that understanding.
- (iii) A statement consciously developing the requirements of the design project. Also a detailed explanation of how the architect set about fulfilling his aims and objectives: what were the design procedures, what was the system for resolving the various issues and contradictions? It is important to remember that everything said must be visible in the drawing. Finally it is important to show how all intentions have been realized in the design. Architects require verbal communication skills for wide range of categories in their day to day activities whether they are business related communication like profile of firm,

correspondences, feasibility reports, etc., or marketing related communication like websites, brochures, drawing and visual presentation, etc. Even from his professional office, the following diagram shows the team members that an architect has to communicate with during the entire building cycle.

Research questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were developed. Question 1 was administered to educators and graduate architects, while Question 2 was administered to architects in practice:

- a. What are the skills improvement course adjustments required in training curricular to develop good verbal presentation abilities in architects?
- b. What is the recommended policy inputs needed to improve the verbal presentation skills of architects in practice?

Data requirement and method of collection

Collection of data was performed by means of a structured questionnaire instrument and direct

observation where applicable. The respondents were broken into 3 categories which included academicians (architectural educators), professional architects in practice and graduate architects. Data required for the study included the academic qualification and professional status of respondents, their unemployment and employment status, level of verbal presentation abilities, personal assessment of suitability of training curricular as well as job perceptions and preferences. Secondary data were collected from research reports and other published materials. The study was carried out in four schools of architecture namely: the departments of architecture in Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Kaduna Polytechnic and Kaduna State Polytechnic. Also, 30 architectural firms in Abuja, Kaduna and Kano were issued questionnaires.

The responses were analyzed using mean statistics. A 5 point likert scale was used with a score of 3.50 and above showing acceptance of the proposed suggestions and a mean score of 3.49 and below considered not acceptable.

Question 1 shows the mean ratings of respondents on extent of presentation skills of architecture students as contained in their curricula. The responses from respondents (lecturers and students of architecture) in Question 1 revealed an overwhelming acceptance of the need to make adjustments as contained in all items of the instrument except the introduction of literature courses as a pre-requisite for admission. There is also strong acceptance for items 2 and 3 showing a strong need for these two suggested items while item 6 had the lowest acceptance with a mean of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 1.28.

Data in Question 2 show an acceptance of all the recommendations in the administered instrument by the respondents and reveal a strong support for same.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study were organized in line with the research questions with the major theme of these findings being an urgent need for improved technical presentation skills among architects. The findings reveal a consensus among educators, graduate architects and architects in practice that adjustments are required in schools of architecture and professional monitoring bodies to see that the training regime includes as a matter of necessity, subjects and measures which require that proficiency in verbal presentation techniques remains a basic requirement for practice of architecture in Nigeria. Clearly, the results will offer good information for the National Universities Commission, National Board for Technical Education, Nigerian Institute of Architects, ARCON and Nigerian policy makers. It has confirmed the need for substantial correction of the training for Nigerian architects and the need to make architectural education both relevant and effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

1. A major review of the training curricular of universities and polytechnics is required to include the teaching of technical speaking skills for architecture and allied professions. This requires intervention by the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE).
2. The regulatory body for architectural practice in Nigeria (ARCON and NIA) must ensure that passing professional examinations and registration is subject to proven ability and skills, and verbal presentation techniques
3. The due process regime by the Bureau for Public Procurement should allocate high ranking scores for well presented proposals as part of the bidding process for advertised projects.

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