

Decolonizing the Curriculum: Synthesizing “Multiple Consciousness” into the Art History Curricula of Nigeria and Ghana

Abiodun Olasupo Akande
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo State, Nigeria

In its attempt to “decolonize” the curriculum, this paper should not be seen in the same light as the actions of Okot p Bitek, a Ugandan poet, who—after being made the director of the National Theatre of Senegal in 1967—promptly and unceremoniously replaced the British Council’s grand piano with a local drum set and declared that “our national instrument is not the piano—tinkle, tinkle, tinkle—but the drum—boom, boom, boom.”¹ Rather, this paper makes an attempt at decolonization from a position fairly similar to that of Chika Okeke-Agulu, who opines that the formation of contemporary African art is a synthesis of the political and cultural encounters of the African with the European.² Okeke-Agulu further argues that: “It is impossible to develop a historical perspective on modern and contemporary African art of the twentieth century and beyond without the sort of close examination of the political, discursive, and artistic transactions and translations that brought modern art from the margins of cultural practice during the colonial period to the very centre of debates about African artistic subjectivity and cultural identity in the years after the attainment of political sovereignty.”³

Having this at the back of our minds, this paper applies a similar theory of “multiple consciousness,” but this time around, to the decolonization of the art history curriculum for Bachelor’s degree students in universities in Nigeria and Ghana. The paper synthesizes ancient, traditional, and contemporary art history with germane events (social, political, economic, and cultural) that have contributed to the formation of present-day Ghanaian and

Nigerian art history. The paper also attempts a reordering of the learning experiences in the curriculum from the simple (history of indigenous African art) to the complex (history of other distant cultures), with the aim of making the curriculum learner centered. William Pinar⁴ defines curriculum as “the interdisciplinary study of educational experience.” It is important to point out that “educational experiences” as found in Pinar’s definition encompass more than the topics covered in a syllabus. Invariably, this means that the curriculum is a product of interdisciplinary study of educational experiences, a position that this paper advocates, in the process of decolonization.

Over the centuries, many African countries have been heavily bombarded with alien cultures, ranging from the invasion of African religions by missionaries to the unconscionable trans-Atlantic slave trade that forcibly removed and relocated many Africans from their homes to the Americas and other parts of the world. However, the most consequential of all forms of cultural incursion that took place in Africa was colonialism; it lasted for a long period and affected the entire existing order of African communities, altering and sometimes completely replacing the existing sociocultural order and institutions with foreign ones. In the end, colonialism left Africa a culturally mixed-up continent. Today, many African countries are attempting to retrace their history in order to develop a genuine and workable socioeconomic and cultural order. One such attempt is directed at redesigning a more indigenous art history curriculum, with, to the greatest extent possible, a reduced or adapted colonial influence.

The inherent colonial influence found in the curricula of Nigeria and Ghana sprang from the actions of the colonial masters, who fashioned the school curricula of these countries after a western model. Art history curricula were copied from the home countries of colonial masters and simply transposed to the colonies. Unfortunately, several reviews since then have not resulted in transformation of the Eurocentric learning experiences in the curricula. For the

most part, educational development of art history studies in Nigeria and Ghana was spearheaded by persons who themselves had received a European education. The introduction of art history into the Nigerian and Ghanaian school curricula was mostly achieved through the efforts of distinctive figures such as Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, Kenneth C. Murray, Ben Enwonwu, and others in Nigeria.⁵ Aina Onabolu, who was initially self-trained, later in life travelled to England to obtain a diploma in fine arts.⁶ According to C. C. Chukueggu,⁷ Akinola Lasekan, another pioneer of Nigerian art, obtained a diploma in building, arts and crafts in England. Ben Enwuonwu, yet another pioneer, was trained at Goldsmith College, London, Ruskin College, Oxford, and Slade School of Fine Arts, London. These people advocated for and accomplished the incorporation of art and art history in the curricula of Nigerian schools.

In Ghana, the case was not so different. According to Foster,⁸ what appeared like art first surfaced in the curriculum of Ghanaian education in the year 1908. It was tagged “hand-and-eye.” Hand-and-eye coordination was introductory to more technical subjects, such as architecture and engineering. In 1927, major progress was made in the inclusion of art in the curricula of Ghanaian schools when the art department of Achimota School was established.⁹ E. Meyerowitz, a talented white South African sculptor, designer, and ethnographer, was employed to teach arts and crafts at the Achimota School. After Meyerowitz’s death, his wife took over the advocacy for art studies in Ghana. In 1952, she initiated the establishment of an art department in the College of Science and Technology, Kumasi (now known as Kwame Nkurumah University of Science and Technology). She was joined by one Mr. Machendricks, another expatriate, and they both worked hard to transform the art department of the college into a first-class art institution.

Moreover, not only did the people who were instrumental in the inclusion of art in Nigerian and Ghanaian schools' curricula when institutions of higher learning in art and art history were being established have a Western background in their training, but the schools were also affiliated with either British or American universities. Available courses were therefore aligned with those of the foreign institutions with which these universities were affiliated. Another problem is that the very nature of the genre of art that is learned in formal schools is oriented toward European traditions, and this is very different from traditional African forms of art. It has therefore not been easy to totally dislodge the curricula from a Western art style. As a result, following independence and several consequent curriculum reviews, the inherent colonial influences are still strong in the art history curricula of Nigeria and Ghana.

Indigenous and foreign contents

This section of the paper assesses the indigenous and foreign contents in the extant Bachelor's degree art history curricula of the Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, and Kwame Nkrumah University, Ghana; this is with the intention of quantifying inherent learning experiences and identifying the relevance of courses in these curricula to the communities which they serve. The paper will subsequently present the design of a curriculum that can equip scholars of African art history with the gamut of knowledge that comprehensively encapsulates the events (Multiple Consciousness) that led to the formation of the history of African art and art history. The designed curriculum is targeted at equipping students and scholars from peripheral parts of the world and marginalized cultures, such as Africa, with a variety of historical and geographical backgrounds, to contribute positively to art historical researches and discussions from a more global perspective.

A Model (Fused) of Art History Curricula of the Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, and that of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Technology, Ghana

100 Level First and Second Semesters

Course Code	Course Title	Learning Experience
FIRST SEMESTER		
FINA 101	Life Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 103	Introduction to General Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 105	Basic Design I	Mostly European
FINA 107	Introduction to 2-Dimensional Art	Mostly European
FINA 111	Introduction to Art Education	Mostly European
FINA 121	Introduction to 3-Dimensional Art	Mostly European
FINA 141	Pre-20 th Century Nigerian Art	Indigenous
SECOND SEMESTER		
FINA 100	Landscape Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 102	Life Drawing II	Mostly European
FINA 104	Imaginative Composition in Painting	Mostly European
FINA 106	Basic Design II	Mostly European
FINA 112	Art in the Classroom	Mostly European
FINA 120	Sculptural Forms	Mostly European
FINA 142	20 th Century Nigeria Art	Indigenous

200 Level First and Second Semesters

Course Code	Course Title	Learning Experience
FIRST SEMESTER		
FINA 201	Figure Drawing (Anatomy)	Mostly European
FINA 203	Introduction to Perspective Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 205	Introduction of Colour and Forms	Mostly European
FINA 207	Painting Composition	Mostly European
FINA 221	Introduction to Sculptural Techniques	Mostly European
FINA 233	Art and Visual Perception	Mostly European
FINA 241	African Art General	Indigenous
SECOND SEMESTER		
FINA 202	Figure Drawing Studies	Mostly European
FINA 204	Object Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 208	Introduction to Figure Painting	Mostly European
FINA 218	Mosaic and Wall Decoration	Mostly European
FINA 220	Sculpture Composition	Mostly European
FINA 234	Art and Creativity	Mostly European
FINA 242	European Art General	Mostly European
INDE 208	Introduction to Ceramics and Glass Design	Mostly European

300 Level First and Second Semesters (ART HISTORY)

Course Code	Course Title	Learning Experience
FIRST SEMESTER		
FINA 301	Nude Figure Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 303	Landscape and Object Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 309	Landscape Painting with Figures	Mostly European
FINA 321	Relief Sculpture	Mostly European
FINA 341	Art Criticism	Mostly European
FINA 345	Art of the Orient	Mostly European
FINA 347	Research Method	Mostly European
FINA 361	Contemporary Nigerian Art	Mostly European
SECOND SEMESTER		
FINA 302	Clothed Figure Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 304	Landscape and Object Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 334	Art Education General	Mostly European
FINA 342	Introduction to Curatorial Studies	Mostly European
FINA 344	European Art 20 th Century	Mostly European
FINA 346	Oceanic and Pre-Columbian Art	Mostly European
GENS 302	Art Promotion and Entrepreneurship	Indigenous
FINA 362	Field Trip	Mostly European

400 Level First and Second Semesters (ART HISTORY)

Course Code	Course Title	Learning Experience
FIRST SEMESTER		
FINA 401	Figure Drawing Portraiture	Mostly European
FINA 441	Research Project I	Fundamental
FINA 443	Women in African Art	Indigenous
FINA 445	Islamic Art	Indigenous
FINA 447	Issues in African Art (Selected Topics)	Indigenous
FINA 449	Philosophy of African Art	Indigenous
SECOND SEMESTER		
FINA 402	Figure Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 440	Art Criticism	Fundamental
FINA 442	Field Trip II	Fundamental
FINA 444	Contemporary African Art	Indigenous
FINA 446	Final Research Project II	Fundamental
FINA 448	Contemporary Trends in Art History	Mixed Knowledge

Summary of course content (extant curricula)

The content of extant art history curricula of Nigeria and Ghana

Courses with Mostly European Learning Experiences:	43	75.44%
Courses with Indigenous Learning Experiences:	9	15.79%
Courses with Fundamental Learning Experiences	4	7.02%
<u>Mixed Knowledge (European and African) Experiences</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1.75%</u>
Total Number of Courses Offered:	57	100.00%

The suggested curriculum

Sources

The bulk of the newly injected courses comprise topical scholarly issues (ancient and contemporary sociocultural, political, and economic experiences of Africans)¹⁰ that midwived the birth of modern African art. Other sources are courses that are fundamental to the study of art history (some are already in the extant art history curricula of Nigeria and Ghana); in addition, courses are culled from topical issues raised by recent art-historical books, discussions and research by experts in the field of art, art history, visual studies, and even archaeology; and courses derived from old and recent Master's and PhD dissertations in Nigerian and Ghanaian universities, especially universities abroad.

Target users

The suggested curriculum was designed to serve for Bachelor's degree students in universities in the four British-colonized West African countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Gambia. There already exists an examination body (West African Examination Council) that jointly coordinates the secondary school examinations in five countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, and Liberia). It is pertinent to observe that the fine art syllabus of the secondary schools in these countries is jointly operated. The drafted

curriculum is therefore continued and advanced studies of the topics already in the syllabus of secondary schools.

The Curriculum Design (Bachelor’s Degree Program)

100 Level First and Second Semesters

Course Code	Course Title	Learning Experiences
FINA 111	Introduction to Life Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 112	Introduction to General Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 113	Introduction to Basic Design I	Mostly European
FINA 114	Introduction to Aesthetic Theories I	Fundamental
FINA 115	Introduction to Painting (Still Life and Nature)	Mostly European
FINA 116	Introduction to 3-Dimensional Art	Mostly European
FINA 117	Introduction to Art Historical Methods I	Fundamental
FINA 118	Local Arts and Crafts of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia	Indigenous
SECOND SEMESTER		
FINA 121	Life Drawing II	Mostly European
FINA 122	General Drawing II	Mostly European
FINA 123	Basic Design II	Mostly European
FINA 124	Theories and Methods of Art History II	Fundamental
FINA 125	Compositions in Painting	Mostly European
FINA 126	Introduction to Sculpture	Mostly European
FINA 127	Ancient Nigerian, Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean, and Gambian Art Cultures (Pre-20th Century)	Indigenous

200 Level First and Second Semesters

Course Code	Course Title	Learning Experiences
FIRST SEMESTER		
FINA 211	Figure Drawing (Anatomy)	Mostly European
FINA 212	Outdoor Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 213	Introduction to Textile Designs	Mostly European
FINA 214	Theories and Methods of Art History III	Fundamental
FINA 215	Advanced Composition in Painting	Mostly European

FINA 216	Introduction to Sculptural Techniques	Mostly European
FINA 127	Overview of Sub-Saharan African Art I	Indigenous
SECOND SEMESTER		
FINA 221	Figure Drawing (Studies)	Mostly European
FINA 222	Advanced Drawing (Experiments with Themes and Media)	Mostly European
FINA 223	Introduction to Graphic Designs	Mostly European
FINA 224	Aesthetic Theories and Philosophy of African Art I	Indigenous
FINA 225	Landscape Painting	Mostly European
FINA 226	Introduction to Ceramics and Glass Design	Mostly European
FINA 227	Worldviews in Traditional African Societies	Indigenous
FINA 228	Traditional Artists in African Societies	Indigenous

300 Level First and Second Semesters (ART HISTORY)

Course Code	Course Title	Learning Experiences
FIRST SEMESTER		
FINA 311	Nude Figure Drawing/Anatomical Studies	Mostly European
FINA 312	General Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 313	Museum Studies	Fundamental
FINA 314	Aesthetic Theories and Philosophy of African Art II	Indigenous
FINA 315	Art of the Orient	Other Worlds
FINA 316	European Art	Mostly European
FINA 317	Sub-Saharan African Art II	Indigenous
FINA 318	20th Century Nigerian, Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean, and Gambian Art	Indigenous
SECOND SEMESTER (300 Level)		
FINA 321	Clothed Figure Drawing	Mostly European
FINA 322	Curatorial Studies	Fundamental
FINA 323	African Art	Indigenous
FINA 324	Modern European Art (20th Century to the Present)	Mostly European
FINA 325	Oceanic and Pre-Columbian Art	Other Worlds
FINA 326	Islamic Art	General
FINA 327	Art and Religion in Traditional African Society	Indigenous
FINA 328	Field Trip (Reputable European or American Museum)	Mostly European

400 Level First and Second Semesters (ART HISTORY)

Course Code	Course Title	Learning Experiences
FIRST SEMESTER		
FINA 411	Development of Western Art in West Africa	Indigenous
FINA 412	Research Project I	Fundamental
FINA 413	Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and African Art	Indigenous
FINA 414	Elements of Traditional Art in Contemporary Art	Indigenous
FINA 415	Contemporary Art in Europe and America	Mostly European
FINA 416	African Art in the Diaspora	Indigenous
SECOND SEMESTER		
FINA 421	Peopling and Migration in Africa	Indigenous
FINA 422	Final Research Project II	Fundamental
FINA 423	Colonialism and African Art	Indigenous
FINA 424	Field Trip (West African Country)	Indigenous
FINA 425	Contemporary African Art	Indigenous
FINA 426	Advanced Criticism and Theories of Art History	Fundamental
FINA 427	Workshop Centres and the Resuscitation of Traditional African Art	Indigenous

Summary of course content (designed curriculum)

Courses with Mostly European Learning Experiences:	27	45.76%
Courses with Indigenous Learning Experiences	20	33.90%
Courses with Fundamental Learning Experiences:	9	15.25%
<u>General Learning Experiences and Other Worlds</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>5.09%</u>
Total Number of Courses Offered:	59	100.00%

Discussion

The proposed curriculum includes more local and relevant experiences in the form of courses.

The indigenous learning experience has been increased from nine in the old curriculum to twenty in the suggested curriculum. European learning experience has also been deemphasized by reducing its course quantity from forty-three in the old curriculum to

twenty-seven in the suggested one. Learning experiences have also been sequentially ordered so that one serves as a prerequisite to another. Local art histories and art practices as contained in FINA 118, FINA 127, FINA 224, and FINA 227, with which the students are familiar, are the first to be introduced to students (Years 1 and 2) so that learning can be done from the “known” to the “unknown,” thus making indigenous art-history experiences count as prerequisites to art histories of Europe and other foreign regions.

Topical issues and application of acquired fundamental knowledge of history are put in Year 4 (final year). Here we have courses on the experiences (religion, trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, migration, etc.) that contributed to the formation of African art history (FINA 413, FINA 414, FINA 415, FINA 416, FINA 423 FINA 425, and FINA 427); these are concentrated in the final year.

One example of such courses on topical issues is FINA 425 (Contemporary African Art). The content of the course is intended to take students through a survey of groups and individuals who have, through the years after colonialism, attempted to reflect traditional African art consciousness in their art. Such individuals and groups resisted the total neglect of African art forms in favor of Western ones. They rather adapted forms from African arts and crafts into their Western-oriented art forms and media, thus marrying the two. The Zaria Rebels is a typical example of such a group of artists. Members were Uche Okeke, Bruce Onobrakperrya, Yusuf Grillo, Demas Nwoko, William Olaosebikan, Oseloka Osadebe, Okechukwu Odita, I. M. Omagie, F. N. Ekeada, Simon Okeke, and Ogbonnaya Nwagbara.¹¹ These young men were art students at the Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria, from 1958 to 1960. Once they came to the realization that the curriculum of art was fully Western-oriented, and that all their teachers were whites and their college was affiliated with Goldsmith College, London,¹² they,

of their own volition, started to incorporate African forms into their work in a process they referred to as “natural synthesis.” How these artists managed to reflect “Africanness” in their works, despite the colonial political imbroglio, is of interest in this course. It is also the intention of this course to see how individuals such as Ahmed Shibrain¹³ and El-Salahi¹⁴ of Sudan have adapted local experiences and Arabic calligraphy for their art. These artists resisted potential political subjugation, if not physically, in their minds; they have survived within a situation over which they have no power. By so doing, they elevated traditional art forms of Africa, and brought them to the same level of excellence as Western art and thought. Furthermore, the course intends to delve into the efforts of E. Meyerowitz, a talented white South African sculptor, designer, and ethnographer, who was employed to teach arts and crafts in Ghana; he revolutionized the approach to the teaching of art and crafts in the country.

Another example of such courses on topical issues in West African art history is FINA 427 (Workshop Centres and the Resuscitation of Traditional African Art). This course will exemplify the colonial period experience in the history of African art. At some points in the history of African art, when it was beginning to gain favorable attention around the world and it was observed that traditional art in the African contemporary setting was dying out as a result of the introduction of Western art, efforts were made by governments, individuals, religious bodies, and others to resuscitate traditional African art (though such efforts did not affect the curricula of formal art institutions). This initiative led to the establishment of informal art schools, sometimes called workshops.¹⁵ Some such workshops were the Cyrene Mission Art School of the Church of England in Rhodesia (1936) and the Dahomey (now Benin Republic) Art Workshop of the Catholic Missions in the late 1940s. In Nigeria, the Catholic Missions founded the Oye-Ekiti Art Workshop in Oye-Ekiti in 1947, the Mbari

Mbayo Art Workshop in Osogbo in the 1960s,¹⁶ and, in Zaire, the Desfosses Art School in 1944, to mention just a few. From these workshops emerged a genre of art that stands in a class of its own. Although the organizers and students claim their art derived inspiration from local and traditional arts, this is not so; the work of some of the students appears midway between traditional and European art styles.

Conclusion

Indeed, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the colonial master to draw a suitable curriculum for Ghana and Nigeria during the colonization era; this is because, at that time, little was known about the art of the many conglomerating independent communities that were forcibly brought together for the purpose of administration. At that time, the countries were still undergoing formation to become entities and nations. This can be corroborated by the fact that many of the topical events that form a quality part of the suggested curriculum took place between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (and are still ongoing), periods that fall within and beyond the colonial period. This paper posits that the annihilation of the colonial experience in Africa is practically impossible, as the colonial experience itself is a major contributor to the formation of what today is contemporary African history. It is not, therefore, important to attempt a total decolonization but to harness the lessons from the colonial experience for the realization of the identity and betterment of Africa.

Notes

¹ Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, *Contemporary African Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 166.

² Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Contemporary Art Practice in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 3.

³ Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism*.

⁴ William F. Pinar, *What Is Curriculum Theory?* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

- ⁵ O. Oloidi, “Hindrances to the Implantation of Modern Nigerian Art in the Colonial Period,” *Kurio, Journal of the Ona Group of Artists* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University, 1989), 20–24.
- ⁶ Oloidi, “Hindrances to the Implantation of Modern Nigerian Art,” 21–23.
- ⁷ C. C. Chukueggu, “The Origin and Development of Formal Art Schools in Nigeria,” *African Research Review: An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal* 4, no. 2 (2010): 503.
- ⁸ P. Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 42–46.
- ⁹ K. Edusei, “An Overview of Visual Art Education in Ghanaian Schools,” *Journal of Science and Technology* 24, no. 2 (2004): 117.
- ¹⁰ Topical issues are harnessed from the commonalities in the scholarly writings of African art history by Meyerowitz, Cordwell, Franz Boaz, Henry Drewal, Ulli Beier, William Fagg, Margaret Plass, Thomson Faris, Kevin Carroll, Roy Sieber, Thurstan Shaw, Sidney Littlefield, Osa Egonwa, Ekpo Eyo, Rowland Abiodun, Babatunde Lawal, Moyo Okediji, Bolaji Campbell, and many others.
- ¹¹ Don Akatakpo, “Bruce Onabrakpeya: Epitome of Dreams and Realities of the Zarian Art Society,” in *The Zarian Art Society: A New Consciousness*, ed. P. C. Dike and Pat Oyelola (Lagos: National Gallery of Art, 1998).
- ¹² P. C. Dike and Pat Oyelola, eds., “Introduction,” in *The Zarian Art Society: A New Consciousness* (Lagos: National Gallery of Art, 1998).
- ¹³ D. Williams, “A Sudanese Calligraphy: A Contemporary Interpretation of Mohammedan Art,” *Transition* 3, no. 9 (1963): 19–20.
- ¹⁴ Ulli Beier, “Ibrahim Salahi,” *Black Orpheus* 10 (1961): 48–50.
- ¹⁵ M. W. Mount, *African Art: The Years since 1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 31.
- ¹⁶ Ulli Beier, ed., *Thirty Years of Oshogbo Art* (Bayreuth, Germany: Iwalewa Haus, 1991).