

## RESEARCH PAPER

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# A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL EDUCATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS ON ARCHITECTURE IN GHANA

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### ABSTRACT

*The National Commission on Culture was established in 1999 with the mandate to promote “national culture”. The Commission as part of its roles developed the 2004 National Cultural Policy. One aspect of the policy worth consideration is cultural education which is expected to positively impact on public architecture. This study aimed to assess the extent of the policy’s achievements in respect of cultural education and its impact on architecture, after nearly 18 years of its existence. The study adopted the narrative qualitative research methodology. Non-probabilistic sampling techniques namely; purposive and snowball were used to sample 30 key respondents from Accra, Kumasi and Tamale to arrive at the findings of the study. The study revealed that the policy has not achieved much of its objectives regarding architectural development. The study also revealed that the general architectural landscape shows little or no programmed attempt at incorporating culture into national architecture. This is attributed to the absence of effective cultural education and consciousness of the citizenry, lack of effective dissemination of the policy to the implementing stakeholders including architects, artists, educators etc., lack of funding and power of enforcement. The study puts forward six recommendations for policy direction aimed at addressing the challenges that militate against the achievement of Ghana’s National Cultural Policy objective on architecture.*

**Keywords:** architecture, consciousness, cultural policy, education, Ghana, impact

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ghana recognizes the important role culture plays in all facets of national development. In the bid to present, preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the country, the National Commission on Culture was established in 1999 with the mandate to promote a “national culture” (National Commission on Culture, 2004). The Commission in 2004 developed a cultural policy as a blueprint aimed at incorporating Ghanaian culture into all national development programmes. One aspect of the policy worth considering for assessment is cultural education and its impact on architecture. According to the Commission the state will employ both formal and informal approaches to educate the citizenry on the culture of the country (National Commission on Culture, 2004).

The policy adopted a three-fold strategy for the implementation of its programmes including: provision of formal education in schools, educating creative and talented individuals to produce artists/artistes, artisans, administrators, etc and lastly, provision of public education, workshops, public fora, publications etc. for public officials and the general public (National Commission on Culture, 2004). More specific to this study, section four, chapter five of the policy, which takes its roots from the third strategy, states that:

*“Architects, Planners and Designers of Civil Works and Engineers shall be encouraged through workshops and seminars to incorporate indigenous ideas and aesthetics in the design of settlements, public facilities and buildings to give Ghanaian cities, towns and villages a distinct character” (The Cultural Policy of Ghana, 2004).*

Indigenous ideas and aesthetics are important cultural heritages that create meaning and identity in architecture and therefore must be preserved (UNESCO, 2006). The policy

clearly spells out the role indigenous ideas and aesthetics are expected to play in the creation of identity and meaning in Ghanaian public spaces, particularly in architecture, which hinges on cultural education and consciousness of the citizenry. A look through the contemporary architectural landscape in Ghana shows that the idea of creating national identity and meaning in architecture through indigenous ideas and aesthetics in architecture has not received the needed attention by the state and the general public. This outlook on the architectural landscape is believed to be engineered by lack of effective cultural education and consciousness of the citizenry. The study aims to assess the extent of the policy’s achievements in respect of the impact of cultural education and consciousness on Ghanaian architectural development, after 18 years of its existence.

The role of architecture in the study of culture and history, and the creation of national identity and consciousness call for the need to investigate whether Ghana is indeed on the path of preserving its cultural heritage through architecture.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Cultural Education in Ghana**

Generally, culture has an important role to play in educational reforms, but Ghana and many colonised countries in Africa have not been successful in these reforms due to the many challenges that confront them (Dei, 2005; 2004). These challenges emerged from the cultural imperialism that has bedevilled the continent over the years due to colonization (Ofori-Attah, 2006; Pinto, 2019). Ghana’s cultural policy, however, stresses on the role of cultural education towards achieving its objective in architectural development (National Commission on Culture, 2004).

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Ghana can only achieve this objective of promoting its culture in architecture by being conscious and deliberate in spending resources to educate the citizenry on its culture without depending on foreign donors. Like many other developing countries, Ghana has over the years enjoyed the support of international organizations in the provision of research funds aimed at increasing accessibility to education. International aid organizations who often provide these supports for such countries have instituted a structure for worldwide educational policies designed to influence the policies of beneficiary countries (Yamada, 2005; Husen, *et al.*, 2012). The framework engineered by these international financial aid organizations often promote corporate economic interests and overlook individual socio-cultural interest and needs. Generally, in all evaluations of these aids the role of local cultural contexts is often ignored in the analysis of the achievements (MDG Monitor, 2007).

It is asserted by Agbemabiese (2009) that Ghanaian societies prior to colonisation had remarkable history of educational tradition where indigenous ethnic groups used cultural education and ideas to plan and build their communities and also convey traditional and linguistic identity (Dei, 2004; Nwomonoh, 1998). Traditional or informal education developed skills for men and women; prepared the youth to respond to all kinds of problems found in their communities, and initiated development programmes for the society. This statement is reiterated by Mandela (1994), Nyerere (1968), and Van Sertina (1990), that before the arrival of colonialism, all life opportunities including educational systems were more realistic, tailored and attached to the life of the people.

It is obvious that the era where cultural education was central to the planning and management of communities achieved more realistic objectives (Agbodeka, 1998;

Adinku, 2004), and therefore, culture must be the basis upon which all national policies and programmes are formulated today for maximum results. However, Hagan (2009), argued that Ghana's education has not been formulated based on the cultural consciousness, philosophies, ideals and values that the policy seeks to promote. As a result, most Ghanaians do not have the capacity to understand and appreciate their culture. Effective cultural education is, therefore, needed to create the cultural consciousness in the citizenry in order to translate it into architecture programmes. The national cultural policy states that Ghana's culture is dynamic and shows the Ghanaian attitude to interact between traditional values and the demands of modern technology within the contemporary global cultural environment (National Commission on Culture, 2004). However, practically making Ghana's culture the basis for designing its public architectural project has not featured much in the development agenda of the country. It is noted that citizens of developed nations understand and appreciate their individual and collective identity through effective cultural education and this generally reflects in their architectural landscape.

### **Architecture and Culture**

Architecture is a product of culture that emerges from the interaction between people and places through time with constant development. It is a resource of great value to the society from cultural, political, environmental, social and economic points of view (Ettehad, *et al* 2014). Architecture is one important product of humankind that preserves and sustains culture. It therefore, serves as the best medium through which national identities could be preserved in this 21st century where globalization is threatening identities of nations (Psarrou, 2014). Again, architecture is one form of material culture that preserves history and illustrates the

general development of societies (Arthur, 2004; Houston, 1998). Architecture constructed for public use is expected to bear some degree of the society's perception of beauty and elegance, and meanings they associate with their spaces. Most monumental public buildings serve as the soul of the society who construct them, and therefore a lot of energy goes in to capture the total meaning of the life of the people (Mbe, 2012). Le Corbusier (1931) illustrates the critical importance of architecture by relating it to the moral and spiritual state of the people who use them. He believes that architecture belongs to happy people, and happy people own architecture. A good architecture is the one that effectively combines form and function, taking into consideration the cultural and spiritual sensibilities of its users (Onofrei, 2005). As postulated by Gormley (2009), a good architectural design contributes to the daily life and well-being of a society as a whole. Architecture is central to the study of all human material culture. Since prehistory the study of humanity has been centered on their creation, particularly architecture, since it usually encapsulates the total identity and worldviews of the society. From the study of the cave culture through the Egyptian culture, to the present age, architecture has been the pivot around which history and archaeological findings revolve.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study employed the qualitative research approach, (see Maggs-Rapport, 2001; Silverman, 2005 and Kumar 2011) and the narrative research design (Andrews, et al. 2008; Barthes and Duisit, 1975; Wolgemuth and Agosto, 2019; Moen, 2006; Elçi and Devran, 2014) for the data collection and interpretation. In-depth interviews were conducted in three cities of the country

namely; Accra, Kumasi and Tamale. These cities were selected based on their distinct cultural attributes and geographical location and representation. Respondents were selected using the non-probabilistic sampling methods namely; purposive and snow-ball sampling techniques (Creswell, 2014). Due to the technical nature of the topic the respondents were purposefully selected from architects, educationist, cultural workers and artists who are knowledgeable in cultural education and its impact on architecture. The respondents were reached, first through their offices after which they assisted in identifying other potential subjects.

In-depth interviews with semi-structured interview guides, were used to interview 30 respondents. Voices of respondents were obtained using audio tape recordings. Also, field notes and observations were used alongside the interviews for the primary data collection. Secondary data sources from the World Wide Web and libraries of faculties of Art and Built Environment and the Prempeh II Library of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) were collected for the study. The interview transcripts were processed, analysed and interpreted using Creswell (2014) six-step logical procedure. Verbatim accounts of participants were used to support some of the findings. Also, respondents' posture and facial expressions were employed to give meaning to their responses using observation (Urquhart, 2015).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The following sections present findings and discussions of the study under two sub-themes namely; Cultural Education and impact on Architecture and Challenges in the Policy implementation in respect to architecture.

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## Cultural education and impact on architecture

Cultural education in Ghana can be viewed from two main perspectives, namely: the informal and formal. The basic objective of all forms of education in every society is to meet the respective society's socio-cultural, economic and political needs, and in the African context, Ghana is no exception (Agbemabiese, 2009). Ghana's formal education, unfortunately has been shaped along the Western model of education for over a century now (Hagan, 2009; Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEaC), 1975). This wrong alignment of educational structure has thrown away the cultural identity of the Ghanaian, making them superimpose foreign culture over their native culture (Ofori-Attah, 2006; Brummett *et al.* 2000; Pinto, 2019). This situation has had a negative impact on the cultural development of the Ghanaian people which reflects in the overemphasis on foreign designs on the architectural landscape of the country. A respondent shared his frustrations in response to this matter as follows:

*"You see we look at our culture and we see the devil due to the cultural imperialism we inherited. Perhaps, our architecture is like this because most of us don't know about our culture and all we know is the Western culture. I think it starts from school, we don't inculcate our culture in our people and so everything is foreign and we grow to love everything foreign, particularly our architecture".*

It was observed by Agbemabiese (2009), that colonial education alongside the cultural imperialism has more than corrupted the thinking and sensibilities of the African and left them with abnormal complexes which de-Africanized and alienated them from the needs of their environment. The result of this is the masses' penchant taste for foreign architecture and the general lack of sense of identity and meaning in the

countries architecture. This is what Hagan (2009), described as "cultural deficit in our educational system".

The 2004 cultural policy clearly outlines the role of the State in promoting cultural ideals and philosophies in the public architectural landscape. The idea of promoting culture through architecture must first and foremost be done through public architecture, because buildings that are constructed for public use often bear the measure of the society's perception of beauty and elegance as well as meanings associated with their spaces (Leach, 2005). Most monumental public buildings serve as the soul of the society who constructed them; hence a lot of energy goes in to capture the total meaning of the life of the people (Mbe, 2012). Because architecture is said to be the manifestation and expression of culture it must recognize and respond to the cultural needs and values of the society which created them (Kenney, 1994). Ruskin (1849) argued that architectural design must be able to integrate the cultural characters that are specific to both the client and the general community in order to effectively address the challenges posed into a solution that represents and evokes the cultural traits of the society. The successful combination of these factors make architectural designs assume the status of cultural artifacts that embody the civilization of the time. In this analysis, it may be postulated that buildings which fail to incorporate the essence of their time and place may be viewed as buildings, while those that do capture the cultural narrative of the society are viewed as architecture. If Ghana's national architecture is to be judged by this proposition, then it could be concluded that many of these buildings that Ghanaians take pride in may not be considered as architecture.

Cultural education must be well integrated into school curriculum to affect the orientation and consciousness of the citizenry, particularly

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architects and artists. This assertion was the view of many of the key respondents who believed that Ghana's architectural landscape lacked creativity because it does not reference Ghanaian culture and identity. This, they blame on lack of effective cultural education and consciousness of the Ghanaian people. Cultural education has direct benefit to the society, particularly architecture. It helps the people to understand, appreciate and enjoy their culture and its reflections in architecture. A society with good cultural education makes effective decisions in materials selection and designs of their buildings and incorporate the environmental and cultural contexts into their architecture. History provides us with many examples of societies who had strong cultural influence on their architecture and how the architecture has stood the test of time and also influenced civilizations. The ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, the Greeks, Romans, the Byzantine, Ottoman and all civilizations that have emerged show positive effects of culture on architecture through their buildings. These civilizations truly understood and appreciated their culture and deliberately showcased them in their buildings. For example, a respondent cited the Egyptian pyramid as an example of buildings that epitomise the history and culture of its people as follows:

*"Buildings help to preserve the culture of a people. If you look at the Egyptian pyramids, they have carried a certain culture to us who were not there when those buildings were built. But now, because of those structures we can tell which people lived in those times and the kind of believe system they practiced."*

Cultural education empowers the citizenry to be responsible for all their actions. Effective cultural education has the power to influence the way people build in so many ways, because the materials, the layouts, designs and the ornamentations that go into a building have their own socio-cultural meanings that have been created over time. From the interviews

conducted, there was a general call to educate the citizenry about the importance of culture in architecture to engender creativity. Some of their comments were as follows:

*"I think there should be a movement to educate, promote and appreciate our own culture and intentionally promote our own brand, the Ghanaian brand in our architecture for identity". "The lack of appreciation of the elements of our culture in architecture must be relooked at to infuse culture into all that we do. We need to educate more on the importance of the cultural symbols in architecture and concerted effort must be made to teach the culture of Ghana and West Africa in our schools. Also, we need to educate at all levels our culture and its relations with architecture, it is key to creativity".*

It is obvious from the above conversations that Ghana's architectural landscape lacks the cultural underpinnings that must propel creativity and identity in architectural design. The architecture scene is a mirror of the state of the citizens' appreciations of culture and lack of cultural consciousness fuelled by the absence of effective cultural education in the country. When respondents were asked whether Ghana's public buildings reflected the national culture, some responses were:

*"I will say no. Because there are so many new buildings I have personally criticized. They do not show sensitivity to cultural and environmental circumstances. They say now we are in the age of globalization but there is a saying that you think globally and act locally. You acting locally will show your responsiveness to the cultural milieu"*

*"We have done very poorly as a country in preserving our culture in architecture. Even recently when we were changing our parliament house see how the culture that was in that building was just taken away. Let's look at the national theatre, what does it represent, what does it*

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*“speak to us. I think now we have been captured by the global environment and we have not been able to create an identity for ourselves”.*

### **Challenges in the Policy Implementation with Respect to Architecture**

Even though some attempts have been made to recognise the role of culture in Ghana’s architectural development in the cultural policy, not much has been achieved. The study revealed that there are some pertinent issues militating against the implementation of the national cultural policy with respect to architecture. One key factor is funding. It is obvious that the financial muscle of the Commission is woefully weak and therefore, it does not have the resources to coordinate and monitor all the institutions and agencies’ compliance to the policy. The fact that funding is a major problem in the implementation of the cultural policy in general and architecture specifically, for example, was echoed by an official from the National Commission on Culture. He said:

*“We should have done so many dissemination workshops. There are about sixteen areas. Mobility of people, science and technology, health, tourism etc. Efforts have been made to carry out some dissemination programmes through seminars and workshops but the problem is that there are so many bottlenecks, and funding is a major issue”*

In addition to lack of funding, there is also the lack of collaboration between autonomous institutions who also have some roles to play in the scheme of implementation of the cultural policy with respect to architecture. In other jurisdictions, institutional collaboration has been given serious attention. For example, in the Netherlands, provinces and municipalities collaborate to ensure the effective implementation of their cultural

policy. They stress that all the three tiers of government pursue their own independent cultural policy with their own funding inflows and therefore, collaboration prevented division and bureaucracy and promoted consistency and effective use of accessible funds. Funds inflows were well coordinated and therefore its appropriation was effectively managed. This seemed to be an effective way of providing a strong and wide-ranging level of funds for purposeful use (UNESCO, 2015). In Ghana, the situation of fragmentation exists and we have not been able to collaborate to harness the resources into a common goal. For example, an official from the National Commission on Culture revealed that all the 35 ministries in Ghana have their own policies and independently implement them without any reference to the cultural policy in general and architecture in particular.

Another challenge with the policy implementation is the lack of dissemination strategies. The study revealed that many people from the stakeholder groups involved in the implementation, such as the Ghana Institute of Architects, the Artists Associations, Educators and Cultural groups were not aware of the existence of the policy. For example, out of the 30 expert key stakeholders that were interviewed, only 5, presenting 16.6% were aware of the existence of the policy. An interview with some officials from the National Commission on Culture admitted that even though they have embarked on some policy dissemination workshops, they have not done enough. A respondent remarked as follows:

*“We have to embark on policy dissemination workshops by inviting our stakeholders to come and have a percussive view of the policy, in terms of its implementation, which I will admit we have not done much.”*

Again, the power of the Commission to enforce the provisions enshrined in the policy was revealed to be lacking since it does not have

any prosecutorial mandate. Another thing that militates against the implementation of the policy regarding architecture is the seemingly fluid nature of the section of the policy that touches on architecture. The statement: *“to incorporate indigenous ideas and aesthetics in the design of settlements, public facilities and buildings to give Ghanaian cities, towns and villages a distinct character”*, is not detailed enough and therefore makes its enforcement very difficult. There must, therefore, be well spelt out details of what the policy seeks to achieve in architecture.

## CONCLUSION

The 2004 national cultural policy that was developed by the National Commission on Culture originally aimed at making culture the driving force for all national development programmes including architecture. It places strong emphasis on the use of indigenous ideas and philosophies on the development of national architecture and spaces. The study, however, revealed that not much has been achieved in this regard and that the general architectural landscape shows little or no programmed attempt at incorporating culture into national architecture. Generally, the study shows that there is lack of cultural education and consciousness among the citizenry and that has negatively affected architectural development in the country. Many of the respondents believed Ghana's architecture is ordinary and lacks the cultural relevance in design. The general reason given for the display of lack of cultural context in Ghana's architectural landscape is the absence of effective cultural education in the country. Cultural education develops the individual's understanding, appreciation, interest, sensitivity and love for their culture which directly affects the attitude and response of people to their environment.

Other reasons given for the failure to implement the policy by architects and other stakeholders in the architectural industry is the lack of awareness of the public on the policy due to the absence of dissemination programmes by the Commission. Generally, the position of the Commission to enforce the provisions enshrined in the policy from the onset appears to be problematic. This is because the Commission does not have the constitutional powers to enforce these provisions in the policy by prosecuting offenders. Again, the financial muscle of the Commission is woefully weak and therefore does not have the resources to coordinate and monitor other institutions with regard to incorporating culture into architecture.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the above observations and findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Cultural education must be well integrated into the curriculum of our schools to affect the orientation and consciousness of the citizenry, particularly artists and architects, to develop the citizens' appreciation of their cultural uniqueness to engender creativity in architecture.
2. The National Commission on Culture must collaborate with all state institutions who also have some roles to play in the scheme of implementation of the cultural policy regarding architectural development to ensure effective use of funds and also avoid duplication of activities.
3. The Commission must engineer some practical strategies aimed at disseminating the content of the policy to the general public, particularly the direct stakeholders who as a result of

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- their professional practice would need to know and employ them in their practice.
4. The National Commission on Culture must be empowered by a constitutional instrument to enforce these provisions in the policy.
  5. The state must provide adequate funds for the Commission for its operations. Again, the Commission must also be proactive in its fund mobilisation through collaboration with corporate organizations.
  6. The Commission must collaborate with the Ghana Institute of Architects, the Artist Associations and other stakeholders to formulate an architectural policy aimed at designing unique architecture that are rooted in the Ghanaian cultural context.

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