



EXPLORING FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW LEVEL OF PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION BY BUILDING GRADUATES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

A large number of universities and polytechnics are currently involved in education and training in the building programme. This results to production of large number of graduates who potentially can become professional builders after obtaining relevant experience and meeting the registration requirements. The number of licensed professional builders in Nigeria at the time of this study is 2,163. This is quite low when compared to the number of building graduates produced by various accredited institutions. This signify that a large proportion of building graduates do not pursue to become registered builders. The aim of this study was to explore the factors responsible for low level of professional registration by building graduates. A qualitative research approach was adopted because of the exploratory nature of the study. Data was collected through semi-structured interview. A total of sixteen building graduates with at least three years post-graduation experience were interviewed. The data collected was transcribed into text and analysed using thematic content analysis. Results indicate that there is a negative perception about the 'worth' of professional registration among building graduates. 'Financial factor' is also a major barrier to professional registration. Perceived 'poor management and leadership style' of the building professional association, 'poor government policy' and 'non-implementation of national building code are among the other factors that impede professional registration. The study concludes that perceived lack of tangible benefit and excessive financial commitment associated with the registration process are the main factors impeding professional registration among building graduates.

KEY WORDS: Building, Factors, Graduates, Professional, Registration

INTRODUCTION

The building construction sub-sector requires adequate and well trained professional builders for effective and efficient delivery of building projects. According to Ogunbiyi (2015), building practitioners have been misunderstood to an extent even by the built environment professionals and people in the society. However, Olatunji, Oke and Owoeye (2014) defined building professional as an academically trained specialist and statutorily registered and professionally responsible for Building Production Management, Construction and Maintenance of Buildings

for the use and protection of mankind and his assets. Bamisile (2004) added that the Builder is the professional at the centre of the physical buildings construction from the inception to the completion of the building. The relevance of the Builder is crucial, especially at the construction stage.

According to Fellows (2003), professionalism in the building industry involves exercising the body of unique knowledge into construction projects. Professionalism includes internalizing the core values and beliefs of the profession as

well as understanding the real meaning of the practice. Since knowledge alone is insufficient, professionalism seeks to clothe a given area with standard of excellence, to establish rules of conduct, to develop a sense of responsibility, to set criteria for recruitment and training, and to elevate it to a position of dignity and social standing in the society. A profession exists for the common good of the society (Benner, Sutphen & Leonard, 2010). Professional builders are expected to deliver quality and sound services or projects thereby increasing the knowledge and trust of the profession among clients, contractors and other stakeholders in the construction industry (Obiegbu, 2009).

There are two bodies that play major roles for registration of professional builders in Nigeria; the Nigerian Institute of Building (NIOB) and Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria (CORBON). The NIOB is a professional association for builders while CORBON is a government regulatory body that controls and regulates the practice of the Building profession in all its aspects and ramifications (Obiegbu, 2009). The registration process consists of two broad stages. A candidate must first attain the corporate membership of NIOB after passing the necessary examinations and interview. The prospective candidate need to obtain practice licence from CORBON after satisfying the stipulated requirements. A professional builder need to remain registered with CORBON throughout his professional career (Biodun, 2016; CORBON, 2017).

According to Olatunji, Oke and Owoeye (2014), NIOB like other professional bodies needs to be successful in the future and continued status amongst their peers, the level of building graduates registration needed to be examined. Leadership is very vital for success in any activity that involves collaboration in a group of people. There still exists difficulty in bridging the gap between professional activities. Obiegbu (2009) advised that NIOB should improve on their advocacy and efforts to encourage building graduates to participate in professional registration on time. In

addition, he suggested that NIOB should continue to increase sound interaction between students, building graduates and the association.

Professional registration is as a voluntary means of demonstrating one's professionalism, and involves being held to account by peers for the member's abilities and adherence to ethical standards. According to Biodun (2016), building profession in Nigeria is constantly being challenged with issues that ranges from the quality of graduates, professional registration matter, and battle of relevance in the society. Warren and Wilkinson (2008) stated that the building sector has relied strongly on the professional bodies in the built environment to maintain professional and educational standards among its members and to regulate the profession for the beneficence of its members and the public. There is a lack of clear communication between employers, professional associations and students in Built Environment courses. There is need for the industry, professional associations and academia to collectively understand the requirements in the market for the qualified professionals and to work collectively to ensure that entrants to the industry are fully informed and prepared to meet the expectations of their future employers (Warren & Wilkinson, 2008).

It is often said that there is strength in numbers in professional association. According to Elliot and Warren (2005); Zillante (2007), due to increased numbers of graduating students there is concern over the low numbers within the professional bodies. One of the greatest problems faced by associations is that most of the graduate practitioners do not become members of their professional body (Meintjes & Struweg, 2009). The role of employers in the process is also brought into question with the possibility that lead to low professional membership. Employers finding alternatives are no longer demanding employee membership of professional bodies (Fedoryshyn & Hintz, 2000). Olatunji, Oke and Agbiminen (2016) stated that in a developing nation like Nigeria

with a challenging economy, building practitioners tend to carry out some unethical practices just to make ends meet. Oliver, London and Everingham (2006) opines that little is known of what encourages and discourages ethical conduct.

Experiences by building graduates may overwhelm them, adversely affecting their ability to develop and register with their professional body. This may drive them to compromise their learned ethical values (Thomka, 2001). Dalibi, Kabir, Hassan, and Ibrahim (2017) stated that there are discouraging evidences that will continue to challenge the existence of the building profession due to inadequate numbers of registered professionals. They emphasised the need to increase the level of motivation, awareness, promote the highest standards of building students education, licensure and promote the interests of building profession to avoid sharp practices.

A Builder is a professional at the centre of the physical construction of buildings. A builder is an expertise in Building production management in the building industry. (Biodun, 2016). Despite the roles builders play in construction projects, they are the most misunderstood of all the experts engaged in the built environment. Perhaps this is why other persons are very often engaged on roles that are essentially those of professional builders. As such, it is very likely that this and many other reasons contributes to the low professional registration. Warren and Wilkinson (2008) also indicated that despite the growing number of graduates, it appears that new entrants to the profession are failing to become full members of the professional bodies. Therefore, there is the need to determine what is responsible for low level of professional registration by building graduates. Registration statistics obtained show that there are 2,163 registered builders in Nigeria (CORBON, 2017). This figure is considered to be very low when compared to the number of building graduates produced over the years from the various accredited institutions. The relatively small number of registered builders

does not avail the building profession enough leverage to adequately supply the needed personnel to handle the large number of building projects as well as other functions meant for registered builders. This situation requires measures that can boost the number of registered builders in order to meet the contemporary challenge. This study intends to explore why many building graduates who are eligible fail to pursue and become fully registered building professionals.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research approach was adopted due to the exploratory nature of the study, which is aimed at probing the reasons why a large proportion of eligible building graduates fail to pursue the track to become professionally registered builders. Interview was chosen as method for data collection. The target participants for the study were building graduates of universities and polytechnics with at least three years post-graduation experience, who are yet to register as professional builders. This is due to the fact that a minimum of three years post-graduation is required before full registration with CORBON as professional builder.

Sixteen participants were interviewed, which is in line with the suggestion of McKenzie and Crouch (2006) that less than twenty participants are sufficient to build, maintain and mitigate against some of the bias validity threats inherent in qualitative research. Furthermore, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) asserted that saturation may be reached with twelve participants in homogenous group. A study by Latham (2013) attained saturation with eleven participants. A total of twenty participants was proposed for the interview because of their heterogeneous attributes. However, the number was curtailed at sixteen after observing that no new perception is being expressed. In essence, saturation has already been attained. The demographic details of the participants is presented in Table 1. The participants were selected through convenience sampling. However, serious effort was made to ensure

Table 1: Participants Demographics

S/ N	Institution of graduation	Geo-Political Zone	Year of graduation	Current Engagement	Work Experience	Location
1	FUT Minna	North-Central	2012	Lecturer	3 years	Kaduna
2	FUT Minna	North-Central	2012	Lecturer	3 years	Kaduna
3	MAUTECH	North-West	2012	Site Representative	3 years	Bauchi
4	ABU	North-West	2010	Maintenance officer	3 years	Lokoja
5	ESUT	South-East	2012	Site Supervisor	4 years	Kaduna
6	NBP	North-West	2011	Site Representative	4 years	Abuja
7	AAU	South-South	2010	Site Representative	5 years	Abuja
8	FPO	North-Central	2011	Site Supervisor	5 years	Abuja
9	ATBU	North-East	2006	Site Representative	7 years	Abuja
10	TPI	South-West	2006	Site Manager	8 years	Abuja
11	ABU	North-West	2012	Site Representative	3 years	Abuja
12	OAU	South-West	2010	Site Manager	6 years	Abuja
13	UNIJOS	North-Central	2011	Site Supervisor	3 years	Delta
14	UNILAG	South-West	2010	Site Manager	6 years	Abuja
15	UNIJOS	North-Central	2011	Site Representative	3 years	Lagos
16	FPI	North-Central	2012	Site Supervisor	4 years	Abuja

that participants with diverse attributes such as institution and year of graduation, years of work experience, current engagement and location were included. This is in order to broaden the range of perception obtained from the interviews.

Data was collected using semi structured interview. Interaction with each of the participants lasted for about 25 to 30 minutes. An interview guide was developed to aid eliciting views and perceptions of the participants. The interview guide essentially consist of three key themes: 'general perception on professional registration', 'barriers to professional registration' and 'means of enhancing professional registration'. All the three themes are specifically as it applies to registration as a professional builder. Data obtained from the interactions were captured on a digital audio recorder, after obtaining permission from the participants. This is to ease reference during data analysis.

The most important aspect of the data analysis is to unearth the factors responsible for low level of professional registration among building graduates. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data. The method essential focus on extracting the main points highlighted by the interview participants and categorising them (Litoselliti, 2003). A transcript of the recorded interviews was prepared. Contents of the transcript were read thoroughly over and over. This process enabled extracting some vital points in relation to the three key themes, which are presented under the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis entails examining statements made by participants in relation to questions asked during the interview. One of the key issues is the perception of the participants on professional registration. Views expressed on this matter portray how the participants see

the need, usefulness and relevance of registering as a professional builder. The second issue examined relates to the barriers that tend to hinder professional registration. This essentially focus on the challenges and difficulties encountered, which may impede professional registration by the willing graduate. The third theme relates to suggestions made by the graduates on what needs to be done to enhance professional registration. Results about each of the three themes highlighted are presented and discussed in the following sub-sections.

General Perception of Participants on Professional Registration

The main focus of this theme is how building graduates see the importance and relevance of professional registration to their career and practice by registering with NIOB and obtaining licence from CORBON. Some of the graduates expressed perceived lack of relevance of professional registration. This view hold the notion that it is not necessary in order to practice the profession. A typical view as expressed by a participant is quote below:

"I don't need to be a member before I can be an effective practitioner"

The above view does not recognise the importance of professional registration for the purpose of practice. Some participants however hold a contrary view. They recognise that it is important to register in order to promote and safeguard the interest of those trained in the building discipline. Some participants suggested that professionalism was a reason to register with NIOB and CORBON. This has been stated in the following words:

"Why would I not belong to the association that is designed to safeguard the profession, promotes it, and providing educational opportunities?"

Another participant added:

"I feel that only being a registered member of CORBON do we give ourselves a voice in the future of our profession".

Another dimension explored is the perception of participants on the implication of building graduates practicing without the necessary professional registration. Many participants are of the view that the current situation in the build environment where non-professionals freely practice without any repercussion does not encourage professional registration. They cited examples of person not trained in any of the built environment professions are handing jobs that should ideally be done by professional builders. One of the participants made the following comment:

"I have not really seen any implication on me as a building practitioner even though I am yet to be a registered member of CORBON. I do not consider anything like implication on building graduates if other professionals outside the built environment such as lawyers, accountants, economist, etc. are supervising building projects without restriction or being punished for such act".

Another perception of the building graduates relates to the 'worth' of regarding professional registration in relation to the amount of money spent to undergo the process of obtaining practice licence. Participants with this view recognise the relevance of registration but do not see commensurate benefit in terms of the cost of registration. This view do not seem to appreciate any advantage one will derive by virtue of professional registration over those that are not registered. Such views are captured in the following quotations:

"I am not losing because I did not see the advantage of being a member".

"Benefits not worth the cost",

"It is a waste of money and time".

"I don't see what NIOB is doing for me",

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following points highlight the general perception of the participants on professional registration:

- i. Difference of perception on the relevance of registering with NIOB and CORBON
- ii. Lack of implication for practicing without professional registration.

- iii. Benefits of professional registration not worth the cost.

Barriers to Professional Registration

The second theme examined in the analysis of data is to determine the barriers that hinder building graduates from professional registration. This implies that a graduate have the willingness to register as a professional builder but faces certain challenges that hinder attaining the goal. The financial implication of professional registration was expressed by all the participants. The most cited barrier is financial constraint. This is not unconnected with the general economic situation in the country where most people's limited income is insufficient to cater for their many competing needs. Many participants indicated that their limited income vis-à-vis so many financial needs make it difficult to reserve and allocate money for professional registration. One of the participants says:

'So many problems to solve, and to decide on what to do, you have to draw your scale of preference on what to solve first. Since money that will make someone a registered member of CORBON is not a joke, it has been really very confusing and worrisome for me to commit myself because of the financial constrain to be honest'.

Financial constraint has its consequence on building graduates. It influences their decision to ignore or delay their professional registration. The financial burden was perhaps great for these respondents thereby limit their chances of professional registration. A closely related barrier also mentioned by the participants is the perceived 'high cost' of registration. In the words of the participants, the registration is "too costly" or "too expensive". While financial constraint can be viewed in terms of availability of funds in relation to many competing demands, cost may be viewed in terms of the 'value' or utility derivable from a product or service. Thus, when people talk about something being "too costly", it may be inferred that they do not believe the service received is not commensurate with the amount paid. A participant says "where is money to be spent on what is not important".

Another issue voiced out by many participants is the current NIOB policy with regard to payment annual dues by prospective applicants, particularly those with many years post-graduation. The current policy mandates applicants aspiring for corporate membership to pay backlog of annual dues as graduate members counting from the year they graduated. The financial implication could be high for candidates with several years of graduation. This pose a challenge for many graduates as captured in the view of a participant:

"Is paying all the backlog of money a punishment for not being a registered member of NIOB on time or a financial reward for the association? Such severe action against building graduates may continue to delay the professional registration if proper review that will accommodate building graduates are not in place to encourage them".

Many participants have also described lack of advantage in terms of 'opportunities' in the construction sector as a discouraging factor for professional registration. This view stress the prevalent practice in the country where employers are not necessarily giving preferences to registered professional over those that are non-registered practitioners. One of the expressions that highlights the situation is quoted here:

"Developers deliberately refused to engage qualified professionals to supervise building projects after receiving approvals from development control authorities. They preferred using quacks instead of professionals because of the difference in fee".

The 'perceived lack of advantage' offered by registration in terms of job opportunities could make many graduates to ignore the importance of becoming registered professionals. Despite some prevailing practices, it is not entirely true to say that professional registration does not offer any benefit. It is a requirement in many public organisations that promotion to certain ranks is tied to evidence of professional registration. Thus, graduate employees may stagnate at certain positions until they obtain professional

registration. Similarly, there are regulations which mandate that registered builders must be engaged to handle particular type of construction work. Although such provisions as contained in the Nigerian National Building Code, which is yet to get legal backing nationally, such requirements are enforceable in states that have domesticated the code into law. However, it is one thing to have the laws and it is another to have them complied with and enforced by relevant stakeholders. As one of the participants asserted:

“Due to non-implementation of Nigeria National Building Code, almost everybody in the built environment always claimed to be what they are not”.

The current efforts of NIOB and CORBON towards ensuring passage of the Building Code into law, as well as the push to ensure that professional builders are engaged appropriately, are steps in the right direction. This will build the confidence of building graduates on the relevance and benefit of professional registration. Government also has a crucial role to play with respect to issues dealing with total implementation of laws and penalty to defaulters.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following are the key barriers to professional registration by building graduates voiced out by the study participants:

- i. Financial constraint
- ii. High cost of registration.
- iii. NIOB policy of payment of backlog of annual dues.
- iv. Perceived lack of advantage
- v. Poor government policy and non-implementation of national building code.

Means of Enhancing Professional Registration

The third key issue on which the interview centred on is the perception of the participants on measures that could enhance professional registration. The reason for introducing this subject into the interaction is to obtain first hand suggestions on how some

of the earlier highlighted and other impediments to registration can be overcome. Many participants are of the view that the financial implication of registration should be considered. A downward review of the registration fees has been suggested. Some participants even cited example of registration fees charged by other professional associations and regulatory bodies, which are relatively lower to that charged by NIOB and CORBON. One of the comments made by a participant in this respect expresses this view:

“even if financial obligation on building graduates is the key resources that is keeping NIOB and CORBON, consideration should be given to finances at all levels for proper review to motivate graduates into professional registration”

Another participant added:

“Financial commitment should be reduced to the barest minimum to encourage and motivate building graduates’ professional registration.”

Based on previous discussion, it was obvious that financial implication is a key issue that influence building graduates professional registration from two points of view; ‘financial constraint’ on one hand and ‘perceived high cost’ on the other. The feasibility of reducing the registration fees by NIOB and CORBON is worth considering. As Murdoch and Hughes (2008) noted, the aim of every association should be to serve members, hence relevant things be put ahead of mere financial reward.

Another suggestion made by the participants is more assertive role by NIOB and CORBON to ensure that the rightful opportunities of registered builders are not encroached or taken over by quacks. This would motivate graduates to register so that they can take advantage of professional registration to gain more job opportunities. As discussed earlier, many participants have decried the prevailing situation where quackery dominates the construction sector in many parts of the country. A participant stated:

“NIOB and CORBON need to step up some motivating measures to encourage professional registration than to just sit back and watch some irregularities among the building practitioners. NIOB and CORBON need strategies to motivate and indirectly obligates all the building graduates to become fully registered professionals before practice”.

Another participant added to this view:

“My attitude, my perspective, my paradigm shift went from I am a follower to I am a leader. We expected CORBON to be leaders and to be at the forefront to fight quacks and if people see them not talking it serious, it is going to set a tone”.

Measures that clearly offer advantage for being professionally registered can really motivate building graduates to become registered builders. As Olanrewaju and Okedare (2014) stated, motivated persons put great efforts with his/her whole might, strength, vigour and commitment to a course, while unmotivated persons ignore and puts in less efforts and commitment.

The importance of communication in enhancing professional registration has also been stressed by some participants. They pointed out that relevant information should always be made available through various channels of communication. The need for maintaining a functional and regularly updated website by NIOB and CORBON has been suggested. There were complaints that attempt to obtain some vital information from the websites has not been successful. The following remark by a participant buttress the point:

“The website not very helpful, very poor website. I have attempted to look at the website, but it never reflects what I am looking for and it is not always updated. Let there be a proper, accurate and educating website with view to enhancing professional registration and standard way of practice”.

Prasad and Tata (2000) posited that communication strengthens connection

between people, strengthen cooperation, reinforce interdependency and help in having common focus when adequately harnessed by leaders. Hence, effective communication is important to goal-driven professional bodies and regulatory bodies. Communication has been described as the bedrock of effective collaboration and trust (Wong, Cheung, Yiu, & Pang, 2008) and can bring about effectiveness in professional membership delivery (Aulich, 2013).

Another suggestion or enhancing professional registration is increasing awareness among building students while still undergoing academic training. This will encourage the students to have better understanding of the profession as well as the importance of becoming registered builders after graduation. Few of the participants admitted that they have had little or no orientation on the relevant of professional registration. Although students learn about the roles and functions of NIOB and CORBON through some taught courses, it may not create sufficient awareness and motivation to students. One of the participants stated that:

“Lack of proper awareness and guidance by NIOB still stand as a major factor that prevail against the building profession most especially on the students.

Few participant was also of the view that relevant bodies need to make effort to promote and maintain ethical conduct among members. A participant has this view:

“In order to avoid ethical erosion in the building community, it is necessary and important to instruct, educate and above all, discipline and raise habits of good behaviour of building professionals on the field. Failure to do so will result ultimately in errors, misconduct and consequent disaster”.

Based on the foregoing discussion, ways of enhancing professional registration as suggested by the participants include:

- i. Appropriate review of cost of professional registration
- ii. Serious effort to end quackery in the construction sector

- iii. Effective communication and information
- iv. Effective orientation and awareness.
- v. Effective education and promotion of ethical/professional conduct.

CONCLUSION

This research question which this study sought to address was ‘what is responsible for low number of registered Builders despite the comparatively large number of building graduates?’ The paper explored factors responsible for low level of professional registration by conducting interviews with building graduates. The interactions centred on identifying the ‘general perception about professional registration’, barriers to professional registration’ and ‘ways of enhancing professional registration’.

The study concludes that there exist a negative perception on the relevance and benefit of professional registration among building graduates. There is a feeling that one can still practice whether or not registered and that professional registration does not confer any advantage. In addition, financial implication is the major factor that hinder professional registration. Graduates willing to register may be unable to do so due to financial constraint either as a result of their available income or many other competing needs. The cost of professional registration is also perceived to be “too high”. Furthermore, the continued use of quacks which prevails in the building construction sector on jobs that should be handled by registered builders demotivates building graduates from professional registration. The prevailing situation seems to result from lack of compliance and enforcement of standard practice or existing laws. Moreover, there is some knowledge and communication gap among building graduates on the importance, benefit as well as the processes of professional registration. In this regard, the study recommends the following measures as possible steps for enhancing professional registration:

- i. More enlightenment by NIOB and CORBON on the importance professional registration.
- ii. Possible downward review of the financial commitment of professional registration by NIOB and CORBON.
- iii. NIOB and CORBON should, in collaboration with other relevant professional bodies and government agencies, take measures to ensure compliance on the use of appropriate professionals in projects and sanction to violators.
- iv. NIOB and CORBON should also put more effort on effective communication, awareness and orientation on professional practice and ethical conduct.

The findings of this study provide useful insight for enhancing professional registration among building graduates. The findings however are limited due to the number of participants used in the study. There are thousands of building graduates that have not obtained professional registration in Nigeria. A better understanding of the subject matter would be obtained through conducting a survey that will cover large number of respondents. Findings of this study can be used in developing appropriate instrument for such further study.

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