The Effect of Teacher-Student Relationships On Student Creative Performances in Architectural Design Studio

Joyce Lodson¹, John Emmanuel Ogbeba²

¹ Department of Architecture, Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, Bauchi state, Nigeria, joycelodson@yahoo.com
² Department of Architecture, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Mersin 10, Turkey. john.ogbeba@emu.edu.tr


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*Corresponding author: Joyce Lodson, Department of Architecture, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Mersin 10, Turkey.
Email: john.ogbeba@emu.edu.tr

Abstract

The relationship between tutor and student is fundamental at all levels of education, right from elementary all the way up to the higher institution. Teachers and students spend a great deal of time together in the classroom and it is important that there be good interactions between them because of the effect these interactions have on the students’ performances. Within the architectural set-up, the design studio is the platform where students spend the highest percentage of their time and it is here that they also engage in intensive one-on-one sessions with their tutors. This paper has attempted to consider the types of tutor profiles most common in architectural studios and how these profiles impact on the tutors’ relationships with their students. The paper has also attempted to ascertain the effect of students-tutor’s relationships on students’ creativity in the design studio. At the end, the paper has been able to highlight various types of tutor profiles found among design tutors. These include among others, the forceful and assertive hegemonic overlord, the propagandist entertainer and the liminal servant. It has been found that the tutors relate in different ways with their students based on their profile and that there is indeed a relationship between how the tutors relate with their students and the student’s creative performances. For instance, tutors who are assertive and forceful often make their students feel repressed and unable to express themselves freely. This in turn suppresses the creative abilities of the students. The paper recommends that there be a well-structured educational system set in place so that architectural educators know what is required of them and how to go about fulfilling those requirements.

Keywords

Teacher, Student, Design Studio, Interaction, Creativity

1. Introduction

Teachers have always had an influential role to play in the lives of their students. From elementary schools up through to higher education levels, the teacher has a fundamental role in establishing a student’s educational foundation. Students spend a considerable amount of their life years within a classroom setting under various forms of teaching and different sets of tutors. For instance, it has been estimated that children spend approximately 5-7 hours a day with a teacher for almost 10 months (csun.edu). The same is true for the architecture student. A large percentage of his/her time is spent in the design studio either working on assigned projects or receiving critics from tutors. Considering the amount of time spent between teacher and students, it is important that there be good interactions between them so that both groups can enjoy the time spent together within the learning environments.

Learning environments bring together both students and teachers with various characteristics and temperaments. It is logical to assume that the temperament of a tutor might have an influence on his/her teaching methods and more
importantly on the way he/she relates with the students. The level and manner of the interactions might also influence the students’ level of performance within the classroom. For instance, Hamre & Pianta (2001) assert that students who relate well with their teachers have more confidence in exploring the classroom and school setting both academically and socially, and are better able to tackle academic challenges and work on social-emotional development.

One of the challenges of tutoring within the architectural education framework is that architecture teachers do not receive any formal educational training. A good number are practicing architects who come into the classroom armed only with knowledge gained from practical experiences and with memories of their experiences as students, or with the experiences they accumulate over the years in their teaching profession (Ashkan, 2016). They more or less learn on the job and the quality of their teaching is contingent on their experience, awareness, and talent (Goldschmidt, 2010). For many of them, also, no avenue exists to ascertain whether their teaching methods are actually producing the desired results in their students. This point was emphasized by Anthony (1991) who noted that because faculties do not receive or engage in any formal training in how to practice teaching, they remain unaware of their teaching style, teaching method, and the impact of their educational role on students’ development. Eigbenon (2013) meanwhile is of the opinion that despite there being some parallels in the general training which architects go through, there are no fixed standards when it comes to the teaching of architectural education. The result is that educators go about it in ways which are most convenient and appropriate for them, a practice which leads to a lack of adequacy in standards of teaching in arch-design studios today (Eigbenon, 2013).

Tutors play a very important role in architectural education, particularly in the design studio. This is because of the central role that design plays in architectural education. Within the design studio, students spend more one-on-one time with their tutors than in any other course. However, instances have shown that relationships are not always positive between students and their tutors. Negative student–tutor relationships have the potential to demotivate students and to lower their creative abilities from being maximally expressed.

This makes the study of teacher/student relationship in design studio very important seeing that this could have an impact on how students perform ultimately. By understanding different tutor profiles, one will be enabled to have a better understanding of how and why tutors behave and teach the way they do. It will also hopefully help tutors to make improved efforts at better interactions with their students since the goal of every tutor should be to contribute positively to the academic achievement of their students.

2. Materials and Methods
The aim of this research work is to examine the relationships between design tutors and students in the studio and the possible effects it has on students’ creativity. This will be achieved by answering the following questions:

1. What kinds of profiles or teaching styles are most common among tutors of architectural education?
2. Is there any relationship between tutor profiles and mode of interaction with students?
3. Is there any association between student-tutor relationships and students’ creative performances in the design studios?

Methodology
The methodology used for writing this paper is purely qualitative and is based on literature survey. This involves reviewing related literature from journals, articles, past research works and online sources in order to obtain relevant information about the topic.

3. Architectural Design Studio
The design studio plays a central role in the architectural educational process. Cuff (1991) describes the studio as the most important of the architectural student's academic educational experience while Boyer & Mitgang (1996) describe it as a model of student creativity in the learning process.

Within the design studio, students’ creative abilities are explored and developed and it is here that students learn how to cultivate and transform their creative thinking abilities into practical designs. According to Schon (1985), one of the outstanding features of the studio teaching method is its potential to be a model for the cultivation of abilities and to frame problems and address them with a creative sensibility. Students are encouraged within the setting of the architectural studio to learn how to handle design projects under varying conditions. In the words of Nicol & Pilling (2000), ‘the studio is a good example of situated learning, in which students learn from the situation as well as from
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working on more specifically content-related activities’. Due to its importance as the core course in architectural education, design studio naturally takes up a considerable amount of the architecture students’ time. Boyer & Mitgang, (1996) estimate that architectural students can potentially devote nine-tenths of their time to studio work.

4. Tutoring and the Crit Teaching Method

In architectural education, tutoring can take many different formats. According to Webster (2004) these different formats can be in form of group tutorials, individual tutorials, seminars, work-shops, visits to buildings, and ‘crits’ with invited external practitioners and academics.

The predominant teaching method used in schools of design all over the world is the crit teaching format. This method can be approached in two ways. The first involves a one on one interactive session between the student and his design tutor during which time the students’ design work is presented to the tutor for his assessment, comments and criticisms. This session might occur several times a week for the duration of the study program. Goldschmidt et al (2010), estimate that diligent students who do not miss classes may likely participate in some 250-350 one on one crits within a 5 year degree program.

The second method involves sessions with external jurors who are usually practicing architects or academicians from within or without the institution. Such sessions may take place once or twice within a semester. At these sessions, assessments are made of students’ projects and scores are given by the assessors which usually constitute part of the students’ final grades.

The crit teaching method is such an important and central part of the architectural educational system that it has become a standard for schools of architecture the world over. The common assumption is that since it has survived for so long and has produced innumerable architects over the years, it must be the best method for teaching architectural students.

The crit teaching format and the manner of tutor input in student design projects however conjures different feelings in architecture students. Some, especially young students coming newly into the architectural educational system, display eagerness to receive comments and suggestions from their teachers. For such students, the boldness and confidence they need to tackle their projects is largely dependent on the approval and positive remarks of their teachers. Other students welcome comments and constructive criticisms from their tutors with a sense of apprehension. Goldschmidt et al (2010) give possible reasons for this when they state that ‘most students, like full-fledged designers, have a strong sense of possession of their projects and may therefore dread the possibility that too much input by the teacher may lead to a compromised ownership of their projects.’

4.1 Historical Background of the One-on-One Crit Framework

Several authors of write-ups related to architectural education have explained the history of architectural education as one of an apprenticeship system wherein young people interested in becoming designers worked under a master tutor for several years in order to acquire relevant knowledge and skills. Having gained sufficient knowledge and being judged able to stand on their own, they left to begin their own practice. This system formed the basis for the first recognized architectural educational system which was launched in the Ecole des Beaux Arts in France in 1819 and later spread to other European countries and to North America as well. The design studio tradition evolved from this formal educational system and can be dated back to the period 1900-1914. Within the new framework, the master-apprentice system was replaced with the tutor-student system and this took place within a university setting. (Goldschmidt et al 2010; Ashkan, 2016; Eigbeonan, 2013; Ockman, 2012)

4.2 The Role of Teachers in Studio Design

Teaching is a process of transferring knowledge and professional skills from one person to another, in this instance, from teacher to student. Teachers play a significant role in the lives of their students because much of what they are able to transfer to their students is what the students will use to become established as professionals later in life. Webster (2004), in explaining the importance of the tutor states that ‘the tutor is seen by students as a living paradigm for the norms, values and behavior that students aspire to.’ This statement attests to the strong influence of the tutor on his students.

Architectural design teachers play a number of important roles. According to Brown and Yates (2002), they have the responsibility of developing the imaginative, conceptual and practical skills necessary for students to identify human needs and aspirations and to be able to meet or express these in space and form. Hassanpour et al (2013) also identify an important task of the design tutor which is ‘that of advancing the art of architecture in their own way, as well as
4.3 Design Tutor Profiles/Teaching Styles

The teacher, however, is more than just a carrier and imparter of knowledge. He/she is also an individual with a set of characteristics and personality traits which may influence his level of interaction with his students and also his ability to impart knowledge to his students. This explains why while some tutors have an open door policy with their students, others tend to discourage excessive interactions.

In a review of some related articles, Goldschmidt (2002) categorizes design teachers into three major profiles. These are: 1.) The Instructor as a Source of Expertise or Authority, 2.) The Instructor as a Facilitator, 3.) The Instructor as a Coach. In the first categorization, Goldshmidt et al (2002) present the instructor as one who sees himself/herself as the possessor of superior knowledge or information which he is required to confer to a person who doesn’t have that knowledge and who is looking up to him to supply. Such an instructor often has a dominant, assertive personality and is the least likely to ‘feel’ the student. He/she may even go to the extent of drawing for the student. The second categorization presents the instructor as a helper and guide who sees his role as that of nurturing and bringing the best out of the inherent potentials imbedded in the student. He is however presented as the least assertive of the three categories of tutors. In the final category, the instructor or ‘coach’ provides positive reinforcement and encouragement, and helps the student to assimilate better into the professional community and its culture. Such a tutor is able to make his student feel that he/she is an equal in the designing process by carrying the student along. According to Goldschmidt, the third category, which is the tutor as coach, appeared to be the strategy that produced the best results.

Meanwhile, in a research carried out by Webster (2004), findings obtained from students’ perceived opinions of their tutors revealed three distinct tutor profiles. Two of the profiles were those which the students observed in their tutors while the third tutor profile was not represented among the teachers but was rather suggested by the students as being ‘the ideal’ which they would like to see displayed by their tutors. The first character profile identified by Webster was the ‘entertainer’ tutor. This tutor type is seen by his students as ‘an architectural studio propagandist’ or ‘entertainer’ who promotes design education by relating his own life experiences and making historical references. He however does not do much to encourage interaction neither does he attempt to understand or connect with his students’ design ideas. Interaction between the students and their designer in such situations becomes that of ‘keeping the tutor happy so as to get good grades.’ The second character profile identified by Webster was the ‘hegemonic overlord’ who was often seen by his students as being overly coercive and who left his students feeling ‘bullied or humiliated, rather than helped because of his/her lack of understanding.’ Students coped with such overbearing instructors by closely following the tutors’ instructions sometimes to the point of losing their own individual design ideas. For such tutors, teaching is simply a one-way process of transferring knowledge, with no opportunity given to the student to inject their own learning ideas. Ramsden (1992) describes such learning as poor-quality or ‘surface’ learning. Webster then went on to suggest an ideal tutor profile; that of the ‘liminal servant.’ Such a tutor adopts a student-centered teaching approach whereby the student is assisted to manage and construct his or her own learning through critically reflective dialogue. Amongst the three teacher profiles identified by Webster in her research, the hegemonic overlord appears to be the most prevalent.

Ashkan (2016) has also identified four profiles which are applicable to tutors of architectural education. These are: 1.) Instructor as Expert/Master, 2.) Instructor as Formal Authority, 3.) Instructor as Facilitator and 4.) Instructor as Delegator. The first portrays the tutor as an expert or master who possesses knowledge, proficiency and some degree of power. He is a forceful influence on his students’ and often exerts his influence over their projects. The instructor as a formal authority is the one who is rigidly obsessed with standards. He strictly follows laid-down principles and procedures ensuring that design projects are completed according to proper guidelines. Ashkan explains that most teachers follow this second style and that it is the easiest teaching style which ensures that correct steps are followed to arrive at a logical design. The third teaching style is the ‘facilitator’ tutor. This tutor does not force his opinions, methods or principles on students but rather allows them to set the pace for their own learning process. In this teaching style, students discuss issues and solve problems together in the studio while their instructor acts as an encourager and guide. Ashkan asserts that with the facilitator style, the needs and goals of the students are the main priority and there is therefore a readiness on the part of the facilitator to search for different ways of helping the student which must not
necessarily be through taking instructions from the studio teacher. The last style which is the delegator is the tutor who encourages his students to be self-reliant and to see themselves as imaginative, creative and able to stand on their own. The delegator encourages his students to develop their capacities which might otherwise be inhibited by the other styles of teaching (Ashkan, 2016).

An interesting study carried out by Uluog’lu (2000) shows that design teachers vary in what they perceive to be the strongest factor in their academic work. Uluog’lu states that about 47% of the teachers saw their educational qualification as their greatest asset. Another 33% felt that their personality was most important while a remaining 16% favored their design expertise as the primary factor.

Table 1. Summary of Tutor Profiles and Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Instructor Profile Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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</table>
| **Goldschmidt (2002)** | Source of Expertise or Authority | - Dominant assertive personality  
- Least likely to ‘feel’ the student |
|                   | Facilitator (Helper)           | - Helps and guides the student  
- Least assertive of the tutor types |
|                   | Coach                          | - Provides positive reinforcement and encouragement to his students  
- Produces best results in his students |
| **Webster (2004)** | Entertainer                    | - More of a studio ‘propagandist’  
- Does not encourage interaction or make attempt to connect with his students’ design ideas |
|                   | Hegemonic Overlord             | - Overly coercive  
- Leaves students feeling bullied or humiliated  
- Is the most prevalent among the tutor types |
|                   | Liminal Servant                | - Adopts a student-centered learning approach  
- Assists student is to manage and construct his or her own learning |
| **Ashkan (2016)** | Expert/Master                  | - Forceful personality over his students  
- Exerts influence over students’ projects |
|                   | Formal Authority               | - Is rigidly obsessed with standards, laid-down principles and procedures  
- This style is followed by most teachers |
|                   | Facilitator                    | - Does not force his opinions, methods or principles on students  
- Allows students to set the pace for their own learning process |
|                   | Delegator                      | - Encourages his students to be self-reliant and to see themselves as imaginative, creative and able to stand on their own |
5. Student – Tutor Interactions: Effect on Students’ Creative Performances in the Design Studio

Within the framework of the design studio, communication between students and tutors is vitally important. Absence of proper communication, which can be explained as the inability of the tutor to commune with the student at his or her level of understanding can have drastic effects on the learning capacity and ultimate performance of the student.

The one-on-one interactive time spent between the student and his/her tutor within the design studio may very well be one of the most important learning sessions for a student of architecture. Schon (1985) supports this view when he suggests that the strategy used for teaching design in the design studio which requires students to continually reflect on their action, both alone and with design tutors, was critical in the development of students’ understanding and evaluation of their own practice and led to quality professional action. Students must interact and communicate with their tutors if they must produce designs which meet up with the requirements needed to pass a design course. Schon (1985) also lays emphasis on the importance of reflective dialogue with tutors in allowing students to understand both the quality of their action (emergent practice) and the degree of congruence between their espoused theory (what they say) and their theory in use (what they do).

Another important factor when talking about interactions between students and tutor is the tutors’ manner of teaching. In a review of related literature concerning effect of tutors on student performances, Sidawi (2012) states that in situations where the tutors see their students as empty containers who have no ideas of their own but who are solely dependent on them for any accumulation of knowledge, they may tend to be autocratic and repressive, and do little to encourage individuality or creativity. The implication of such tutor behavior, however, is that the student may feel repressed and unable to express himself freely. Thus the creative ability of the student might likely be suppressed.

Another point given by Sidawi is that many classrooms lack democracy, and students fear their teachers. Obviously, creativity cannot thrive in an atmosphere of fear and timidity. In an atmosphere of positive interactions between student and tutor however, a student can freely and confidently consult his tutor on any matter relating to his design without fear of being humiliated or of his ideas being dismissed. This is essential for initiating and sustaining creativity. (Johannessen & Olsen (2011); Casakin, 2007).

In another related research study carried out by Lueth, 2008 in which opinions of students concerning their tutors teaching approaches were sought, some of the responses indicated that the students desired their tutors to push them and make them feel excited rather than engaging in too much of teaching. The students felt that that would ginger them to respond by producing great works that the tutors could be proud of. The students also indicated some level of frustration with tutors who were not clear in what they wanted thereby making it hard for the students to know whether they were doing the right thing or not.

The process of communication in the design studio however comes with its own unique challenges. Just as in any normal human interaction, misunderstandings often arise while opinions and criticisms are being proffered. As Sidawi (2012) rightly says, ‘the design studio should not be considered as a safe haven as conflicts and miscommunications regarding design ideas are very likely to occur between students and tutors and amongst tutors themselves.

Sidawi then went on to say that tutors’ attitudes, behaviors, and ways of instruction have the potential to either hinder or initiate creativity in students. Some of the behaviors and attitudes which Sidawi identified as having the potential to hinder creativity in students included: lack of clarity and consistency on the part of tutors about their goals or objectives for the studio, the tendency for tutors to assert their viewpoints and personal feelings into the teaching practice, pointing out that an instructors’ subjective understanding of creativity could dampen students’ creative enthusiasm. Other negatives pointed out by Sidawi were power wielding of the tutor over the student because of his elevated position as ‘master’ and finally the current studio practice of rewarding students with the best looking projects.

Sidawi was however able to point out positive characteristics of design approach’s style and communication. These were the importance of social communication as a means of balancing stability and change so as to promote dynamism, creativity and innovation, and the fact that following the design approach style of design experts could initiate creativity. He also made the suggestion that designers should explore unfamiliar, unconventional design by attempting to perceive problems from unorthodox and innovative perspectives. Sidawi is of the opinion that the best groundbreaking designs are those that possess innovative and creative qualities. This section is not mandatory, but can be added to the manuscript if the discussion is unusually long or complex.
Table 2. Summary of Tutor – Student Interactions and the Resultant Effect on Students Creativity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor Behavior</th>
<th>Student’s Reaction</th>
<th>Effect on Students’ Creativity</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Interactions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Autocratic and repressive, doing</td>
<td>- Feels repressed and unable to</td>
<td>- Leads to suppression of</td>
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<tr>
<td>little to encourage individuality or creativity</td>
<td>express himself freely</td>
<td>creative ability</td>
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<td>- Power wielding, asserting their</td>
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<td>viewpoints and personal feelings into the teaching practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Feels repressed and unable to express himself freely</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Leads to suppression of creative ability</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Lack of democracy/fairness</td>
<td>- Makes student feel afraid of tutor</td>
<td>- Lowers creativity</td>
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<td>- Power wielding, asserting their</td>
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<td>viewpoints and personal feelings into the teaching practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>their goals or objectives for the studio</td>
<td>- Leads to frustration among students</td>
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| **Positive Interactions**                                                    |                                             |                                             |
| - Positively interacts with students,                                        | - Feels free and confident to consult      | - Creativity is initiated                    |
|   encourages students to develop                                               |   tutor without feeling humiliated or      |   and sustained                              |
|   their creativity                                                             |   dismissed                               |                                             |
| - Pushes student and makes them                                                | - Gingers positive response                | - Students respond by trying                 |
|   feel excited                                                                |   in students                             |   to produce great works                     |

6. Means of Generating Design Concept

Every student of architecture approaches a design problem based on three major tools. Sometimes without consciously paying attention to these mediums, the student actually employs the three of them in a forward and backward movement within the problem space. Viewing the student as system (for solving a design a design problem), we proposed the diagram below for understanding the different aspects of communication involved in conceptual development. Notice that the three tools are not arranged in levels of occurrence, this is because they can occur individually and also at the same time.

References


